

Missionaries in India : An Appraisal of Arun Shourie's Book

I The New Mood

Critics of Christianity are no more burnt at stakes. They are not only let free, but even invited to impart advice and admonition to conclaves of catholic bishops and scholars. Such was the case of the renowned Indian Journalist Arun Shourie who, despite his declared differences with Christian sentiments on such sensitive issues as Secularism, Reservations and Minority Rights,¹ was graciously invited by the Commission for Proclamation and Communication, an official body of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), to be the star speaker at a plenary session of its six-day Consultation on *Paths of Mission in India Today* at Pune in January 1994. The lecture and the subsequent discussion, he informs us, provided the scaffolding for his controversial book *Missionaries in India Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas*.² In the heat of controversy, I am afraid, the book has not received from the Christian side the positive attention it deserves. This paper is an attempt to make up for it.

Shourie at the above consultation was listened to, in his own words, "with unwavering attention" (xi) and, though he knew the listeners did not agree with him on several issues, he chose to conclude the book with the following tribute :

They were courteous and the very models of dignity and decorum throughout. I left feeling I had been

1. See Arun Shourie, *A Secular Agenda*, New Delhi, ASA Publications, 1993; Idem, *Indian Controversies : Essays on Religion in Politics*, New Delhi, ASA Publications, 1993.
2. New Delhi, ASA Publications, 1994. In this paper numbers within brackets upto Part III refer to the pages of the above book.

among friends. If only we could learn at least this one thing from them; if we could only learn how to disagree. How much better off our country would be. (242)

The above scene, to be sure, is a measure of the new mood that has taken hold of the Catholic Church. Heretics once condemned are being sought after for rare insights into Jesus' concerns. In Catholic seminaries other religions are being taught by adherents of the religions concerned. The Churches, including those affiliated to the World Council of Churches, have (at least officially) committed themselves to the promotion of Dialogue which means, more than speaking, readiness to listen and to be critiqued. It is this new spirit of mature willingness to be challenged that accounts for the rapt attention Shourie's tirade against Christianity elicited at Pune.

But old habits die hard. The immediate Christian response in general to Shourie's book has been reminiscent of the old thirst for the blood of the heretics. Abetting the Christian reaction have been the verdicts of such 'secular' writers as Mani Shankar Aiyar and Khuswant Singh who to the delight of angry Christians have described the book as a 'mission of hate' and an act of 'eating missionaries'.³

To anyone, however, who cares to read the book more than once, and that too through the eyes of the author, it is a veritable masterpiece, a literary repast. It sparkles with much wit and, of course, a little venom, it is consistent from beginning to end and spiced with savoury quotes from two stalwarts of Indian nationhood, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. Quite exciting is the way he fields (in the book at least) questions from bishops and prelates. Incidentally, it is somewhat humiliating to be shown by him that

3. Mani Shankar Aiyar, "Mission of Hate, Arun Shourie and the Christian Evangelists", *Sunday* 26 June 1994; Khushwant Singh, "Eating Missionaries", *The Week*, June 12, 1994.

the questions Christians raise in dialogue fora since the days of Gandhiji have not really changed (237-41). Astounding is the alacrity with which he silences (in the book) a bishop's claim to his 'right to speak' with a powerful quote from the Father of the nation :

The duty of taking the spiritual message is performed by the messenger becoming a fit vehicle by prayer and fasting. Conceived as a right it may easily become an imposition on unwilling parties... In the spiritual sphere there is no such thing as right. (238)

Shourie, one should remember, is first and foremost a political philosopher. He stamps every page of his book with a plea for a new direction in Indian politics. The beauty of it all is that he bases his plea mostly on the two Background Papers⁴ that were distributed for discussion at the Pune Consultation and which, I assume, he probably happened to see for the first time after he came to the Consultation.

It is again a measure of the new mood of openness in the Catholic Church that these draft documents, meant for thorough discussion by an informed group of church leaders, were placed at the hands of a known critic. Incidentally, this gesture is in sharp contrast to the strict secrecy that marks the deliberations of certain organisations associated with the present Hindu revival. Shourie's subsequent examination of these papers, for the purpose of writing the book, can be shown to be not at all superficial. In fact, his reading is so thorough that he could indulge in some pun over an unfortunate oversight in the proofreading

4. These two Background Papers are printed as Annexures I and II at the end of Shourie's book under discussion. Shourie had worked exclusively on the basis of these draft papers ignoring the final Statement of the Consultation which is now available at Ishvani Kendra, P. Box 3, Pune-411 014.

Why such vilification? To promote the 'principal business' of conversion for which enormous amount of money and personnel is expended. Conversion is the 'inevitable consequence' of the Christian (also Islamic and Marxist) premise that there is only one Truth revealed to only one person (Jesus, Mohommed, Marx), only one Book and only one authority for interpretation - the Church, the Maulvi and the Communist Party. No holiness outside - "the poor Buddha, with all his compassion, cannot be a St. Francis" (13) and Gandhiji, in the words of a Polish visitor to him could be as great as St. Francis *only* if he became a Catholic! (12).

However eloquent learned theologians may wax on the new dimensions of 'mission' as do the documents *Ad Gentes* and *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council, in confidential deliberations among the Christians the primary meaning of mission is conversion. In this Shourie's suspicion is confirmed by one of the Background Papers of the Pune Consultation. Wishing to take stock of the "Trends and Issues in Evangelization in India" the Paper goes straight to the question of 'numerical conversion' - how it has declined or is being kept up in different regions of India (15, text 245). The chase after numbers, the vendor mentality has led the missionaries to the illiterate and most vulnerable segments of Indian humanity, and by the admission of noted missionaries like R. M. Clark and Stephen Fuchs and by Pune Background Papers' own admission the end product of the conversion thrust has been of very doubtful quality. Fr. Fuchs felt that "satisfied with the financial help and social protection they asked for and partly obtained from the missionaries, the Balahis (converts) wanted nothing more", least of all "a change of heart and of their ways of living" (27). The Pune Paper laments that the dalits are forsaking Christianity both in search of better socio-economic benefits and also on account of being "dcubly isolated after their conversion" (22, text 245).

Swami Vivekananda and Gandhiji foresaw and approved of such defection and reconversion. The same trend in chase after numbers and superficial conversions, the Pune Paper according to Shourie seems to suggest, continues in the sensational charismatic gatherings at and under Potta (leadership). The organisers of the Pune consultation express deep concern for the quality of conversions which "created in many cases a state of dependency which further undermined their ability to stand on their feet and assert their human dignity and fundamental rights" (22). Again, "it is a disturbing slur in the Indian Church that *Cast difference* and rivalries still go on, and at times even increase" (30). Jurisdictional possessiveness in the form of "rite conflicts" seem(s) to be a major scandal."

All this chase after numerical conversions betrays the gradual and progressive bureaucratization of the Church. In the words of the Pune Paper, "the danger has become acute in our Church which is over-institutional, activist and result-oriented." Again, "in spite of the theology of the People of God, in the old churches (also in the young ones) the style of exercising authority seems to be pre-Vatican. Many Bishops function as bureaucrats" (36, text 250). Reliance on numbers spells doom for Indian Christianity. "Where Jesus walked on water", observes Shourie "the Church, in its zeal to convert larger and larger numbers, has taken to writing on water" (34). The Pune Paper is quoted here: "Preoccupation with administration diminishes the quality of Christian witness; as a consequence many church institutions appear to the public as centres of power, money and prestige" (33, text 247).

What shall we do now, asks Shourie. In answer, he would first recommend once again the five-fold advice of Gandhiji to the missionaries of his times and then add two more pieces of advice of his own.

First, give up conversion altogether as "it is the deadliest poison that ever sapped the fountain of truth". Second,

direct your conversion efforts to those who can understand your message and not to the illiterate and downtrodden. Third, let the non-Indian missionaries return to their own countries and attend to the moral and social evils there. Fourth, compliment and complement the faith of the Indian People, do not destroy it. Fifth, live the life of Jesus. Shourie is convinced, as several Indian Christian theologians like the late Sebastian Kappen were and are, that between the politics of the Church and the praxis of Jesus there is a yawning gap (19). The two pieces of advice from Shourie are : One, refrain from working in the unsettled areas like the Northeast; second, as you claim to use reason and evidence for gaining converts, permit all conversions to be scrutinised by competent government and other agencies.

Chapter four under the title *The Wages of Calumny* is one of the most thorough demolitions I have seen of the Christian disavowal of idolatry. Here he argues rather convincingly, with words from Swami Vivekananda and Gandhiji, that in practice Christians, especially Catholics, and Muslims are also idol-worshippers, but that "idol worship is a condition of our being", and that sense objects such as pictures, trees, water and statues (idols) act as 'entry point' from which to develop reverence for the invisible source of all life. He lets Swami Vivekananda ask :

You may take the most learned man you have and ask him to think of spirit as spirit; he cannot. You may imagine spirit, he may imagine spirit. It is impossible to think of spirit without training. Can you think of spirit as spirit? (51)

Those who deliberated at the Pune Consultation are not at all startled by the issues raised in the first part of Shourie's book because it was precisely to discuss these issues that they in the first place came together. Secondly, the very fact that he discovers these issues in the Consultation's Background Papers proves that the participants were seized of the problems before his book was published. Even

the unguarded remarks on the fall in numerical conversions and on the poor quality of conversions obtained have to be viewed in the context of a sincere search on the part of a committed group of leaders for a fresh understanding of their responsibility towards the people of India. Hence the blunt articulation of the problems and dilemmas before them. Some would charge Shourie with breach of confidentiality. How could he, they ask, quote from draft documents which were meant for discussion and not for publication?

In the first part of the book Shourie does make some valid points which have been squarely faced by Christian commentators of the book. Their main displeasure, as we said, has been with the second part of the book to which we now turn.

B. Division of Labour

After mounting a theologically formidable critique of the end result of Christian mission in India in general and on the Christian disavowal of idolatry in particular, Shourie seeks in the next four chapters support from history. Here he falls an easy prey to the enticement of a single theory which, like the dialectical materialism of the Marxists, would explain all reality, in this case the whole Indo-British confrontation. After proving his theory he proceeds to raise some tendentious questions (in chapter 7) which, as we shall see, betray the mischief in his mind.

The theory or thesis, as we said above, is that a conversion team consisting of administrators, missionaries and Indologists was at work aiming at the subversion of Hinduism and Hindustan. Several Christians like me are very critical of the evil outcome of British Colonialism (for that matter, of all colonialism). We tend to think that the Christian religion was often manipulated by greedy colonial rulers to perpetuate their rule in India and elsewhere. No, says Shourie. The overall objective was the vanquishing

of Hinduism and "to do so the most effective weapon will of course be the enlargement, consolidation and indefinite prolongation of British Rule" (58). He would have the readers believe that whatever be the differences among the three groups, Christianization of India was the uppermost goal of this compact conversion team. In fact he would have considered it an *ex post* construction (60, 130) had he not some solid documents to support his contention. What are those documents? He lists here about 9 documents from the three members of the conversion team :

- (i) Thomas Macaulay's *Minutes* (1835).
- (ii) Charles Trevelyan's Chapter on "The Political Tendency of the Different Systems of Education in Use in India" (1853).
- (iii) Charles Trevelyan's address to the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle-on-Tyre (1881).
- (iv) Richard Temple's address to the Baptist Missionary Society in London (1883).
- (v) Wilberforce's speech in the House of Commons (1813).
- (vi) Petition to Queen Victoria from the native Christians of Tirunelveli (1853).
- (vii) Petition to British Parliament's Select Committee from Protestant missionaries resident in Calcutta (1890).
- (viii) Excerpts from the writings of Friedrich Max Mueller (1866, 1873, 1874).
- (ix) Monier - William's *Modern India and the Indians* (1878).

The first four are from administrators, the next three from missionaries and missionary-inspired Indian Christians, and the final two from Indologists. Do these documents prove Shourie's thesis? Not so certainly, simply because they had purposes other than collaboration of his thesis.

A honest historian describes the context before transcribing a discourse. What are the contexts in which these documents emerged? A careful perusal points to purposes other than the replacement of Hinduism with Christianity.

Let us briefly comment on them one by one. Let us also remember that the administrators and Indologists mentioned here were not exactly exemplary Christians.

1. In the *Minutes* Macaulay gives expression to his vision for India: just as the people of England were civilized through knowledge of Greek and Latin, just as the Russians were civilized through the languages of Western Europe, so too the Indians of his days could through the medium of English language be transformed "in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect". Nay more, he ridiculed the proposal of certain Orientalists to retain Indian languages, especially Sanskrit, as the medium of instruction. Nirad Chaudhuri reports a meeting between Macaulay and Max Mueller which was made abrupt on account of their differences on the question of medium of education for Indians.⁶ Secondly, Macaulay like most of his contemporaries was convinced that human social behaviour was intimately correlated to the religion of the people concerned. The Marxist suggestion that religion itself was conditioned by the socio-economic interests of the dominant class was yet to come. Even after Marx came and went, Max Weber could harp on the old theme in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904).

No wonder, therefore, Macaulay, Trevelyan and Temple, all administrators, attributed the social evils they perceived in the Indian public life to the religion they adhered to. One single name, "Hinduism", for the diverse religious practices and beliefs of the people was certainly

6. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life and Work of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friederich Max Mueller*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 181 ff.

an invention of the Western mind, and such name was not in vogue at the time of Macaulay. When, for example, in his 1839 essay on Gladstone he speaks of 'Hindoo mythology' (64) he simply means Indian mythology. At the time of Macaulay and even much later Hinduism often meant for British officials not a specific religion, but merely 'Indianism' the Indian way of life, belief and worship. The Haj pilgrims to Mecca from India were approvingly classified as 'Hindu Muslims'. Revolting against certain policies of Christian missionaries some native Christians of Tirunelveli (to whose 1853 Petition to Queen Victoria we shall return shortly) founded in 1858 the 'Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus'.

2. Shourie often gives us the text but not the context. In the case of Charles Trevelyan, however, he does give the context, namely the debate among Britishers whether the people of India should be educated at all. In the long excerpt here Trevelyan is concerned about the future of India. He was convinced that :

No efforts of policy can prevent the natives from ultimately regaining their independence. But there are two ways of arriving at this point. One of these is through the medium of revolution; the other, through that of reform. In one, the forward movement is sudden and violent; in the other, it is gradual and peaceable. One must end in a complete alienation of mind and separation of interests between ourselves and the natives; the other in a permanent alliance, founded on mutual benefit and good will. (71-72)

For that a prolonged process of education is necessary ".....a century would scarcely suffice to prepare the people for self-government on the European model" (72), the only model Trevelyan was familiar with and which corrupt Indian Politicians are presently profiting from. He wanted to see that at "the gradual withdrawal of it (British administration) as the people become fit to govern themselves" (76),

"power will pass from a dominant caste to the people themselves" (79) - a dream almost impossible to realize in the context of the present caste politics in India. He concludes the chapter with an appeal to the British rulers to invest one million sterling for the education of the Indian people. Shourie is out to prove a thesis; so he had to suppress the context of Trevelyan's tract.

3. Again, the speeches of Trevelyan and Richard Temple before the assemblies of two academic / missionary societies in London in the 1880s should not be detached from their contexts. It was a time when the so-called 'evangelical awakening' was sweeping across England, privately organized Protestant missionary societies were mushrooming everywhere and missionary enthusiasm was serving the cause of British commerce and colonial rule. The Christianity they preached was not often the religion of Jesus. To sell their version of Christianity they had to stress the ignorance and moral degradation in which the people of India were perceived to be living, as if enlightened Indians did not know of the immorality that pervaded the private and public life of English People in England and in India. While addressing assemblies of such enthusiastic academic missionaries administrators like Trevelyan and Temple had to extol the virtues of Christianity and run down the native religions of the people. But Trevelyan, for one, was bold in telling the assembly that "evangelisation of India must not be measured by the annual number of declared conversions" but by the formation of Indians like Ramaya Ayankar of Tanjavur who, still remaining a Hindu, on account of their 'personal integrity' could be entrusted with 'responsible administrative operation' (89). The sole project of demolishing Hinduism would leave no space for Ramaya Ayankars! In the same way Temple speaks of the character formation of the people of Northeast: they are poor but industrious, never given to excessive drinking (101).

Relevant here is the point Temple makes when he declares :

The fact that so many tens of thousands of natives who do not profess Christianity, nevertheless, without the slightest hesitation, entrust their children to the Christian missionaries, while all the time there are Government schools open to them, speaks volumes for the confidence our missionaries have inspired amongst the masses of the people. (101-102)

Does Temple point to Arun Shourie whose family chose Christian institutions for their education - he and his brother St. Stephen's College, his wife, mother-in-law and sisters-in-law Loreto Convent and his sister Jesus and Mary convent at Delhi? (3).

4. Now we come to the missionary partners of the conversion team. The speech of Wilberforce to the House of Commons in 1813, of course, has to be understood in the context of the evangelical awakening whose expressions in India we critiqued above. One word about what the native Christians of Tirunelveli had to tell the British queen. Historians of South India know the abject condition to which these people were subjected to by the caste system and how they, thanks to the civilising influence of Christian faith and education, have risen to such heights of leadership that Christianity even at the world level feels indebted to them. For what purpose does Shourie include here the 1853 memorial of the Tirunelveli Christians? To argue that they had no right to improve their conditions by embracing Christianity? Or to prove that by becoming Christians they were 'denationalized'? Shourie's intention is not clear to the reader. The Christians of Tirunelveli in 1853 certainly had the right to express their sense of freedom from the old religion and its inhuman social structures. Secondly, they considered it their duty to thank the British administration for "the vast number of boys and girls, children of Christian, Heathen,

Mohammedan and Roman Catholic parents, learning gratuitously both in Tamil and English, at the expense of English missions" (119). All this not to de-Indianise them but to further the Indian vision contained in the ancient Tamil proverbs which the memorial roughly translates as 'Instruction is indeed the opening of sightless eyeballs' and 'The father who gives no education to his child is guilty of a crime!' (119). Shourie says nothing (perhaps knows nothing) about the subsequent history of the Tirunelveli Christians when they repeatedly challenged and opposed the missionaries on various issues, while remaining committed Christians.

In brief, the memorial of the Tirunelveli Christians does not provide much proof for Shourie's thesis. What about the 1850 petition to the British Government from the Protestant missionaries resident in Calcutta?

Here the missionaries are complaining to the British government in London on two fronts: one, against the grants made by the East India Company to the temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri and the other the need to reform the inhuman and unhygienic practices associated with the annual festival at Puri. Here again the choice of this particular memorial is not a fortunate one for Shourie's purpose, because it makes a serious dent on his thesis by showing that the British officials of the East India Company, whose servants Macaulay, Trevelyan, Temple and the like were, did not cooperate with the missionaries in allegedly destroying Hinduism; on the contrary, despite petitions from the missionaries they continued to fund the rath yatra of Lord Jagannath and tolerated the squalor and misery that resulted from a festival of such magnitude. Nay more, there were British officials, like Charles Buller whom Shourie quotes (129-30) and who contradicted the missionaries on the extent of abuses at the time of the Yatra. Moreover, the fact that the officials did not see any 'inconsistency', as the memorial in question alleges, in 'endowing at one and the same time schools and colleges for the intellectual and

moral improvement of the people and a large idolatrous establishment (the temple of Puri) which tends to perpetuate their intellectual and moral debasement' shows that there was no definite policy on the part of the British towards Hinduism. Much less a conspiracy with the missionaries to 'vanquish' Hinduism!

5. In chapter seven Shourie takes two Indologists Friederich Max Mueller (1823-1900) and Monier-Williams (1819-1899) to task for their complicity in the subversive conspiracy with Government officials and Christian missionaries against Hinduism. Max Mueller gave his whole life to the study of ancient religious texts of India, producing as he did the first Sanskrit edition of the Rg Veda in Europe, and the fifty-volume collection of the *Sacred Books of the East* which placed for the first time before an English-speaking public rare materials from the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the like. All in all, Mueller's massive publications earned for India untold admiration all over the world. His special fields of study were Philology and Comparative Religion, the latter being the *bete noire* of Christianity at that time. In fact, his incursions into Comparative Religion were, as we shall see, resented and ridiculed by contemporary missionaries. Monier-Williams, the second occupant of the Boden Chair of Sanskrit at Oxford University was primarily a philologist and the magnificent outcome of his hard labour was the *Sanskrit - English Dictionary*. Max Mueller never visited India, while Monier-Williams, born in India, ended his career in India with sincere esteem for the Indian languages and complained of lack of interest on the part of Christian missionaries to learn the languages of Hindu and Muslim Scriptures.

For want of space I shall mostly confine myself here to Shourie's comments on Max Mueller's alleged contempt for Hinduism and his commendation of Christianity.

He reproduces here only those texts that could be shown to portray a negative attitude on Max Mueller's part

towards Hinduism. In point of fact, one could cite many more texts from Max Mueller which could prove the very opposite of what Shourie wants to establish.

The highly complex nature of Max Mueller's attitude towards both Christianity and Hinduism is oversimplified by Shourie. The six excerpts he reproduces in some length here are from :

- (i) Max Mueller's letter to his wife (1866)
- (ii) his lecture on Missions (lay sermon in Westminster Abbey, December 1873)
- (iii) his inaugural address to the Aryan Section of the International Congress of Orientalists (London, September 1874)
- (iv) *Christ and Other Masters* (March 1858)
- (v) *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature* (1860)
- (vi) *Letters to the Duke of Argyll* (1868, 1875)

It is true that in his 1866 letter to his wife he does speak of his 'one object of my life' which was the publication of the *Rg Veda* and that in doing so he had aimed at 'uprooting all that has sprung from it during the last 3000 years' (133). The key to understand the above statement is the following point he made in his 1874 address to the Congress of Orientalists (quoted also by Shourie): the publication of the Veda by European scholars including himself had helped to show the natives what the Veda really was and made them see the folly of their way (135). The folly he has in mind here is, to quote him from his 1873 lecture on Missions, 'the claim of divine inspiration in favour of their Vedas' (134). For Max Mueller no scripture, neither Hindu nor Christian, could claim pure divine origin. They are all culturally conditioned. As we shall see shortly, it is the 'sacred soil of the human heart' that matters and not Scriptures, not even the Vedas which he toiled hard to translate and edit. It would therefore be quite unrealistic (and

uncharitable) to interpret the letter to his wife to mean that his sole objective in life was to uproot the 3000 year-old Hinduism. His sole objective was to bring to light the real Rg Veda so that the Hindu faith may be purified of the distortions that have obscured it over the last 3000 years. In order to know the mind of Max Mueller (whether he was really an advocate or adversary of the Christian religion) one should read a larger portion from his address to the Congress of Orientalists than is given by Shourie :

I feel convinced, however, that the time will come when those who at present profess to be most disquieted by our studies will be the most grateful for our support; for having shown by evidence which cannot be contraverted, that all religions spring from the same sacred soil - the human heart; that all are quickened by the same divine spirit - the still small voice; and that, though the outward forms of religion may change - may wither and decay, yet, as long as man is what he is, and what he has been, he will postulate again and again the Infinite as the very condition of the Finite - he will yearn for something which the world cannot give; he will feel his weakness and dependence, and in that weakness and dependence discover the deepest sources of his hope and trust and strength.

A patient study of the sacred scriptures of the world is what is wanted at present more than anything else, in order to clear our own ideas of the origin, the nature, the purposes of religion. There can be no science of one religion, but there can be a science of many. We have learnt already one lesson, that behind the helpless expressions which language has devised, whether in the East or in the West, for uttering the unutterable - be it Dyaushpita or Ahuramazda, be it Jehova or Allah, be it the All or the Nothing, be it the First Cause or Our Father in heaven - there is the same

intention, the same striving, the same stammering, the same faith. Other lessons will follow, till in the end we shall be able to restore that ancient bond which unites not only the East with the West, but all the members of the human family, and may learn to understand what a Persian poet meant when he wrote many centuries ago (I quote from Mr. Conway's 'Sacred Anthology'): 'Diversity of worship has divided the human race into seventy - two nations. From among all their dogmas I have selected one-the Love of God.'

Is this a protagonist of Christian superiority and uniqueness as Shourie would like to portray Max Mueller to be? Is he not rather for the rejection of the Christianity of his times? What else is the meaning of his following prescription in the 1873 lay sermon in Westminster Abbey?

If Christianity is to retain its hold in Europe and America, if it is to conquer in the Holy War of the future, it must throw off its heavy armour, the helmet of brass and the coat of mail, and face the world like David, with his staff, his stones and his sling. We want less of creeds, but more of trust; less of solemnity, but more of genial honesty; less of doctrine, but more of love. (in Shourie P. 146)

It is easy to misinterpret the above prescription of Max Mueller. He does not at all wish for a war in the name of religions. As a matter of fact he was so frightened at the prospect of a war under Bismarck in the name of "Aryan" Germans that he came forward to disown or substantially modify his Aryan Theory from the 1870's onwards! All that he is saying here is that in the event of a competition ('war') between religions for the minds and hearts of men Christian religion can win only by allowing itself to be simplified like

7. Excerpts of the above address included in Rev. Dr. Caldwell, *The Relation of Christianity to Hinduism*. London, SPG, 1874, here pp. 33-34.

David. And as the basis of such a *simplified Christianity of the future* he points not to the Bible but to a Persian poet!

If, however, while indulging in cultural contrast he points to the darker side of Hinduism and the brighter side of Christianity, it only, as Shourie himself admits, 'testifies to the intellectual climate of the day' (159), or as in the case of Monier Williams, 'in his premises and fundamental beliefs, in his hopes, in what he regarded as the ultimate aim he was typical' and not 'evil-intentioned or diabolical' (157).

Let it be made clear here that the Christianity whose cause Max Mueller championed was not at all the Christianity the missionaries wanted to spread. One random example would be Robert Caldwell, an SPG missionary in Tirunelveli for 50 years (1841-1891), who in his lecture on foreign missions at the Church Congress held at Brighton in October 1874 pours scorn and ridicule over Max Mueller's above-quoted observation, uttered a month earlier at the Westminster Abbey, that behind all religions 'there is the same intention, the same striving, the same stammering, the same faith'. Caldwell retorted :

As for the alternative divinity mentioned by the professor (Max Mueller) with so much apparent respect, "the Nothing" - whether the Nothing of the Buddhists or the Nothing of the atheists - it differs in nothing, as far as I can see, from nothing, except in being dignified with a capital N; and certainly whatever else may be said in praise of Nothing by those who are believers of Nothing, they will scarcely venture to say that it claims their love.⁸

This certainly is not a case of cooperation and conspiracy between the Orientalists and the missionaries! Their relationship was much more complex than one of simple cooperation to subvert Hinduism. Nay more, speaking of

8, Caldwell, op. cit., p. 37.

Caldwell, he was all for Brahminic values and Brahminic traditions such as wearing the tuft of hair on the head (kudumi in Tamil);⁹ he would certainly oppose the proposal of Monier-Williams to 'encircle, undermine and storm' Brahminism (Shourie 156). All in all, Shourie has regrettably oversimplified the objectives of Orientalism.

At the end of Chapter seven (160) he gives us a faint glimpse into the motive behind his thesis about the 'joint endeavour' of officials, missionaries and scholars. The Indian intellectuals, he says, wear spectacles whose one lens has been 'fabricated by the Marxists and secularists' and the other lens by 'missionary-imperialist scholarship'. He is unhappy that not many Indian intellectuals are coming forward to expose the conspiracy of the West against Hinduism. By implication, he would welcome "an Indian or Hindu scholar maintaining that the over-riding object of his work was, and that of every colleague's work must be, to ensure that Hinduism win the Holy War between the religions, that its dominion be established the world over" (160). If Macaulay, Trevelyan, Temple, Wilberforce, Max Mueller and Monier-Williams did it, why not we too? Historical wrongs must be avenged. The Indian market must be flooded with literature on the ignominies that the West heaped on India in the past. If this is the motive of Shourie, he is certainly inviting disintegration of India. The religious and ethnic pluralism of the Indian reality cannot be wished away. He is free to declare that "I believe that the essence of the Indian people is their inner quest, that this quest is and the means by which it is pursued are *Hindu first and foremost* (2, emphasis added). But what about the sentiments of people of other faiths? Should their past wrongs be unearthed again and again? The brilliant mind of Shourie is out here for a mischief.

9. See my article 'Caldwell's use of the Aryan Theory: The Case of the *Kudumi* in Kanchikattil Francis (ed), Church in context: Essays in Honour of Mathias Mundaden CMI, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1996, pp. 83-99.

C. Changes and Dilemmas

Having caught a glimpse into the mischievous intent of Shourie in raking up old history, one becomes doubly cautious about what he is going to say in the remaining chapters of the book on the operational *changes* in missionary method and the resulting *dilemmas*. Though his interpretation of the changes is influenced by his prejudiced reading of history, with regard to certain dilemmas Christianity, especially the Catholic Church, is facing today, one must acknowledge that he has given them one of the most powerful expressions in recent times. One is struck by the depth and the lucidity with which he has grasped them.

Before we go into the dilemmas let me comment briefly on the list of operational changes in Christian missions as he perceives them.

He claims to detect a shrewd gameplan behind the much publicised changes in Christianity in general and in the post-Vatican II Catholic Church in particular: despite official declarations to the contrary, the same goal (numerical conversions) continues, the same means (vilification of Hindu religion, educational and medical services with an eye for conversions) promoted, and the same groups (dalits and tribals) targeted. To these the Pune Consultation, as Shourie sees it, was wishing to add two more groups, namely *women* and *environment*, thus revealing a Communist-modeled exercise in 'issue-hunting' 'to keep the organization fit and fat' and thus 'show that the organization is still for the downtrodden' (221-2). One cannot, of course, expect Shourie to believe in the power of God to call the Churches to repentance and open them up to the "signs of the times"-an expression often found on the lips of the revolutionary modern pope John XXIII. Nor can we expect Shourie to appreciate the spiritual basis of the Christian social praxis ("as long as you did it to these *least ones* you did it to me"-Matt. 25) which finds expression in the continuing concern

of the Churches for the weaker sections (dalits, women and the like) of the Indian humanity.

No wonder, he ridicules Liberation Theology to his heart's content (201), ignoring the wide ranging structural changes this theology is effecting in the traditional Latin American societies through a new method in the 'pedagogy of the oppressed'. No wonder, he sees nothing but hypocrisy in the recommendation of the Pune meet to 'ascertain that our expressions do not offend the self-understanding and self-respect of others' (200).

From suspicion to frontal attack : he smells conspiracy by the missionaries to destabilise and sever the Northeast Indian States from the Union. He underestimates both the complexity of the ground situation in the region and the enormity of the services, cultural and economic, Christian missionaries have rendered to the people there. I wonder whether he appreciates the fact that it is the Christian missionaries who gave these people their written languages. In response to his charges we would recommend for his perusal a recent appraisal by a non-Christian scholar, J. J. Roy Burman, in *Tribal Situation in North-East India*, edited by Sarthak Sengupta, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi, 1994. Burman does not accept the argument that these people became Christians due to material incentives - "the empirical evidences provide little support" for that explanation. He even takes on Max Weber's hypothesis that Protestant ethics leads to the rise of capitalism. He demonstrates that Christianity, in the Northeast at any rate, has been one of the main agencies preventing the rise of capitalism! The last conclusion of Burman about these people's dislike for capitalism may not be to the liking of Shourie! He even adduces the report of a team appointed by the World Bank, in connection with the Sardar Sarovar project, to prove the continuing conspiracy of the West 'to cleave away this target group from Hindu society' (198). But as a matter of fact, the excerpt quoted from the Report speaks rather emphati-

cally of the bond in religious matters between the Northeast and the rest of India, a fact that Shourie wants the reader to remember. The argument from the World Bank Report is a forced one.

Shourie's articulation of the *dilemmas*, we said, deserve our appreciation. It is to these that we return now.

He rightly identifies the first dilemma or what he calls 'the one source of many dilemmas', namely

how is one to combine the acknowledgement that salvation is possible in each religion (as Vatican II is thought to be teaching) with the claim on which missionary work is wholly dependent, the claim that Christianity is the only religion through which souls can be saved? (220)

This first dilemma, contends Shourie, has thrown the whole Christian theology out of gear. It also reveals many a fissure within. An 'unsettled theology' (219) is staring in your face. No consistency in the arguments in favour of dialogue. Ambiguities, according to Shourie, abound in the Pune papers.

One ambiguity is the paternalistic condescension on the part of Christians in granting salvation to 'those who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ and his Church' (216). What about Gandhiji, wonders Shourie, who knew the Church only too well to become a Christian? Yet another ambiguity is the appeal to the self-emptying gesture of Christ on the cross (217) as an argument in support of Dialogue. So, quips Shourie, the centrality of Christ still remains the motive. It means conversion to Christ is central to all openness to people of other faiths! In fact, the most cruel and crucial aspect of this first dilemma is that the interrelationship between the need for evangelization and the growing appreciation for other religions is still not at all made clear by the official Church

(219). The non-solution of this dilemma is giving rise to tensions between not only the old and new theologies, but also, as the Pune Paper puts it, 'between bishops and missionaries, between old priests and young priests, between Rome and local Church' (214).

Further, this dilemma engenders disorientation and dries up all motivation in persons committed to conversion work. No wonder, feels Shourie, ten to fifteen percent of priests and nuns are deserting their chosen state of life and many priests want to go to rich countries and/or have fat bank accounts (text 270). The above intimate information is found in the Pune Paper. In short, the openness to other religions has landed the Churches in real quicksand. People are beginning to wonder if 'the traditional Hindu position and the position of the Church (in the matter of attitude to other faiths) have come closer' (213). Gandhiji had been telling us that Religion is one and different religions are branches thereof (10).

Among the other dilemmas confronting the Churches Shourie points out mainly two: Social involvement and Localisation (Indigenisation of Christianity).

As for Christianity's renewed determination to uplift the poor and the needy, the oppressed and the marginalised Shourie, as we said above, fails totally to recognize the spiritual basis of such determination. Secondly, he refuses to admit that the return of the Church to Jesus-which he advocates (19) - consists precisely in caring for the very same category of people for whom Jesus cared. Thirdly, most uncharitably on his part, he sees Christianity's social involvement as a case of issue-hunting to keep the organization (churches) fit and fat (221-2).

On localisation ('going native') his blunt question is: Is such indigenisation or inculturation possible at all given, first of all, the theologically universal and administratively centralised nature of the Christian churches? In his words,

is it not true that "financially, ideologically or, if you prefer, 'spiritually', and organizationally too, the promotions of Indian personnel to higher posts notwithstanding, the Church has remained tied to the Church in Rome, and to Churches elsewhere"? (224). He knows, and everyone in India knows, that the Christian leaders, not only Catholic bishops and prelates, make frequent begging tours to the West. He is not surprised to learn from the Pune Papers that given Indian Christianity's financial bondage to the West Rome is on the lookout for possible aberrations in the name of indigenisation as it did happen in April 1991 when Cardinal Josef Tomko in Rome "accused India as an epicentre of new heresies" (225 text 249).

Furthermore, Shourie is shocked at the new turn Christianity's interest in inculturation is seen to be taking. The Pune Paper reads "It is clear that inculturation of the Church does not mean adopting archaic forms of cultural expressions of a dominant culture. On the contrary, a greater urgency is felt in inculturating the Church in the 'little traditions' of the marginalised sections of our society" (227). To what these "archaic forms of cultural expressions of a dominant culture" refer, asks Shourie, if not to Brahminic Hinduism? The same Brahminism which the West was determined "to undermine, encircle and finally storm"? (156, 228). What is "genuinely human" in the "little traditions" to which inculturation should be directed? Their crude animism which Christianity once condemned? In short, he finds in the above reference to dominant culture and little traditions a shrewd strategy to divide the people of India still further (227-8). He is not convinced of the sincerity of Christianity in the matter of inculturation. In order to convince him Christianity must undergo five 'litmus' tests (229-230).

1. Will it undertake and disseminate an honest accounting of the calumnies it heaped on India and on Hinduism?

2. Will the Churches acquaint the Christians in India with the results of scholarly work on their two central claims: the veracity of the Bible and the infallibility of the Pope?
6. Will the Churches inform their 'flock' of the consequences the current debate - on creation, evolution, division between man and other forms of life, between mind and matter - has for the basic premises of Christianity?
4. Will the hesitant opening to other faiths "give way to a wholehearted acceptance of the fact that reality is indeed multilayered (also 42), that there are many ways to perceiving it", to reaching God?
5. Will Christianity give up conversion altogether?

The final chapter of the book is a brief recapitulation of the question - response session at Pune. It is a sparkling display of wit and venom. We already referred to the deft way in which he silences a bishop's claim to the 'right to speak'. Unfortunately, however, in his response to bishop Patrick D'Souza's question as to why despite all efforts all of India had not become Christian Shourie lets his whole thesis about the *division of labour* between State, Church and Scholarship collapse to the ground. What else do the following words of his mean?

But by the time Christian missionary work took roots here, notions about what the State could or could not do had changed - in England most of all. Non-Christians therefore had greater protection under the law *under British rule* than in Muslim times. The compulsion to convert was accordingly less (234).

III. What Shourie Missed

We have thus far tried to comment, chapter by chapter, on almost the whole book of Shourie. There are, of course,

several things about the Pune Consultation which he missed and on which he has not expressed his mind. Here by way of conclusion I shall dwell briefly on only one aspect of the Consultation which he had sadly missed and which is of utmost importance to understand Indian Christianity today.

He failed to hear the cry from the depth of the heart of the Catholic Church for a new vision, for a new agenda. He failed to take note of the painful struggle the Church was going through to break out of the old. It is indeed a pity and a tragedy that he chose to use the occasion to harp on a past which those assembled at Pune had come to leave behind as a bad dream.

More precisely, the struggle at Pune was for a fresh understanding of the Church, for a new "ecclesiology" as the Consultation felt that the old ecclesiology "may be ill equipped to cope with" the present developments in the world (74). (Please note that in this concluding section of the Paper the numbers within brackets refer to the paragraphs of the Background Paper printed as Annexure II in Shourie's book).

"Needed", says the Pune Paper, "is also a renewed ecclesiology" (115). Startling is the wish that "the Church in India has to die" (75)! "There is a general resistance", declares the same document, "against institutional churches and establishments; they should give way to a Church of prophetic dynamism" (115). The Church, after all, is primarily a movement set in motion by the prophet Jesus, and the Pune Consultation felt that "we ought to be sensitive to the ever repeated criticism (namely), the apparent contrast between Jesus' person and the Christian Church" (92). Shourie could have sensed, if he wanted, from the Papers given to him some of the reasons for this yearning for a new ecclesiology.

1. Unlike in the past, the concerns of Christians, the Catholic Church feels, should be more and more people-

centred. In the past Christians generally began all religious reflections either with texts from the Bible or with the teaching of the official Church. The former until recently was a typical Protestant practice while the latter was found more in the Catholic tradition. But today "we start (from) where people are (1) and "we want to analyse our total life-situation as people of one nation with a rich and complex variety of peoples and religions, cultures and traditions, economic, political and social structures... We are convinced that together with our sisters and brothers of other faiths and ideologies we are to play an active part in the search and struggle to realise what the Constituent Assembly of India solemnly resolved in the Preamble of our Constitution" (1 and 2).

Christians cannot, therefore, be unconcerned about the fate of over 350 million Indians, practically the majority of scheduled castes and tribes, who do not have enough to live a decent human life (14). Christians have to express their anguish over the fact that the textile industry in India, for example, is seeking "far more profit in the production of synthetic cloth for the middle and upper classes than in making cotton cloth available to the poor" (15). In terms of shelter, the poor families are living in one room tenements, drainage pipes or on the pavements of the big cities (16). Half of some Indian cities are slums. As for health care, the rich get preferential treatment. On the literacy and employment fronts the same sad story, with half of the people of India above the age of 5 still remaining illiterate (18).

This readiness to hearken to the needs of the world was expressed in strong words in several sections (articles 1, 4, 34, 39, 44) of the document of Vatican II called *The Church in the Modern World* (1965). It was again succinctly summed up in the 1968 Uppsala statement of the World Council of Churches: "The World sets the agenda for the Church"! The socio-economic and politico-cultural reality of

India calls for a *new form of Church life*, new bonds of unity transcending Church and religious boundaries. For this, the Pune meet felt, the old ecclesiology is not of much help (74). The Indian context is all important for Indian Christians. "There is a growing conviction that the context determines the paths of mission (the task of Christians). This search is a sign of the growing maturity of the Church and its determination to become a truly local church" (49). This is the true meaning of the present Christian quest for *contextualization* which Shourie sees as a gimmick and an exercise in 'issue hunting' to keep the organisation fit and fat.

2. For Indian Christians today the values of the Gospel and the ideals of our Constitution go together. They help in prioritizing their responsibility towards India (26). The ideals of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, enshrined in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution, are also the values of the Gospel. It is the Gospel of Jesus that provided the original goals for the French Revolution at the beginning of the modern era (118). The same should happen to India in its struggle for a new social order. The ambiguous role religions, including Christianity, have played in the lives of the Indian people needs to be challenged today. "Religious texts often have been utilized to legitimize social inequalities and discriminations: Hindu Scriptures give sanction to the caste system; the Bible is quoted for the subordination of women in the social sphere. A fuller understanding of our Christian faith and (of the meaning of Church)... is needed if our Christian message is meant to be relevant to modern India" (73).

All this is not without struggle and confusion on the part of Christianity (52) as it emerges out of a period of colonial paternalism. The leaders at Pune expected Shourie to empathise with their identification with the future of modern India.

3. Another significant reason for the call for a new ecclesiology is the present day Indian Christianity's radical openness to other faiths and religions. Though Shourie, as we pointed out above, has articulated powerfully the dilemmas involved in this openness, he has regrettably failed to appreciate the theological reasons for such "a courageous open perception and recognition" (60) of other religions. I can do no better than quote from the Background Paper given to Shourie :

While in the past, Christian existence in the multi-religious context of India has been generally characterized by exclusion and isolation, it is practically impossible for us to be contemporary Christians without taking into account the questions asked of us and the claims made by the members of other faiths with whom we live and share a common destiny. This calls for a new vision, a turning away from exclusive introversion to a courageous open perception and recognition of others as others. (60)

It will be part of our theological reflection that this faith in Jesus Christ does not separate us from followers of other religions but links us to them in a new way. Through him we come to a deeper understanding of their vision of God and world, and, at the same time, they will help us to come to deeper insights in the mystery of Jesus' person and mission. (62)

Dialogue is both a mode of being and way of life. It is a sharing and a process of mutual enrichment; it is a paradox of rootedness and openness; commitment to one's ideals and open appreciation and acceptance of others, it implies limitations and perfections, pain and joy; it is a process of listening to and discovering the other, in whom the Spirit has also worked wonders. (64)

