

BOOK REVIEWS

Sermons for a New Vision

by K.P. Aleaz, Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1994

162 pp., paper, Rs 65.00 (India).

This is a collection of forty-seven sermons preached by the author in Bishop's College and churches in Calcutta. As Bishop's College is celebrating its 175th anniversary in 1995 this book is a timely tribute to the type of theological thinking that is being developed in the College for the last two or more decades, since it became Church of North India College, in 1970.

These sermons are organized into three sections: 1. An Emerging Indian perspective, 2. The Person and Function of Jesus, 3. Our Praxis. The first part provides the theological perspective of these sermons: Looking at Jesus Christ and theology from the context of Indian religious pluralism. The sermons are short, and could be delivered within 10 to 15 minutes. The newness of the topics, the fresh approach and original interpretations with clarity and coherence make these sermons enlightening and edifying. For instance, look at some of the titles: 'Bible, the Indian Christian *Pramana*'; 'Jesus the Chit and the Dalits'; 'Jesus is *Atman*, the source of Life'; 'From Christomonism to Theopluralism'; 'The Indian Signs of Jesus'; 'Jesus and the Harmony of Religions'. The "New Vision" mentioned in the title of the book is justified by the contents. Listen to a 1993 sermon: "The Gospel of God manifesting in Indian religious pluralism after the demolition of the Babri Masjid is that the gospel cannot be tied down to any particular historical manifestation of God, no matter whether it is Ram or Jesus even though historical manifestation can be pointers to this gospel.... From Ramomonism or christomonism (conceiving Ram or Christ as the Absolute) we have to grow to *theopluralism*. The Gospel of God for India today is *Theopluralism* (plurality of God). Theopluralism which goes beyond theocentrism signifies the glorious and diverse ways in which God is manifesting His/Her message of good news for different groups of people, and these are not contradictory but complementary to one another.... This one theos can have plurality of message for us in terms of our particular perspective and the particular aspect of God we consider" (p. 29). Dr. Aleaz's students will immediately recognize this piece as central to his vision, as well as the readers of his other works, *The Harmony of Religions* and the *Gospel of Indian Culture*. Those who want to take such an open approach to Indian religious situation will find this book as a valuable resource for their preaching as well as personal reflection.

The major characteristic of all the sermons is the middle path it takes between extremes. Everything is viewed in its unity. Dualism is altogether rejected, unity is emphasized at every corner. The preacher, for instance, says, 'Affirmations of God do not mean negation of the world. Christian affirmation of God is also affirmation of the world of God.... Divinity was united to humanity. God was united to the world. And so history is important. World life is important'. (p. 117). This balancing of opposites does not prevent him from taking sides. "But what shall we do when and where there is conflict between the State and the people's movements? Shall we support the civil authority over against the people? No.

Not at all. It is such a support to civil authority which contradicts our obedience to God because obedience to God in Jesus means to be one with people. In such a context we shall always support the people and shall try our level best to replace the State with people's rule even if that involves hardship and persecution." (p. 118).

Dr. Aleaz however, in some of his sermons tends to distinguish between the historical Christ and universal Christ, social Gospel and Gospel. "The number who understands salvation exclusively in terms of humanization is increasing in India and we have the liberation theology in the third world countries to back their one-sided emphasis" he writes. (p. 65). Obviously he is not against liberation theology, but he feels that their emphasis is "one-sided" and it needs to be corrected by the ideal of "renunciation and spiritual realization". One wonders whether this kind of balancing will not steal away the needed "spirituality of combat" in countries like India where neutrality means support to the *status quo* which dehumanizes.

Nevertheless, these sermons will help us to get away from the rut of traditional narrow minded communalistic church sermons to a new kind of sermons with openness to the pluralistic context of India. The sermons delivered at different seasons of the church calendar like Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, will help the pastors and students in their preparation of appropriate sermons for the whole liturgical year. An index of biblical references is recommended for future editions. Certainly this book will add a new dimension to Indian pulpit.

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Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?

by Sita Ram Goel

New Delhi: Voice of India, second enlarged edition, 1994, pp. xi+250.

As the title of this book suggests, it raises in its pages important and fundamental questions regarding Christian faith and missionary methods in India. No religion other than Hinduism can be Indian and any attempt to make Indians change their traditional religion is doing violence to India's cultural heritage; the best thing Christians can do for India is to stop all their missionary enterprises. This is the basic theme of the book and for that purpose, the author Sri Sita Ram Goel, has compiled a good number of materials collected from the monthly, *Hinduism Today*, published by the Saiva Siddhanta Church, which has its international headquarters in Hawaii, USA, (not India!) and the private correspondence between Swami Devananda Saraswati and Father Bede Griffiths of Saccidananda Ashram, Tamil Nadu; it also contains a correspondence between Sri Ram Swarup and Bede Griffiths. It further has eight appendices altogether spread in two different sections. Three appendices in Section IV are review articles by Sri Ram Swarup on the *Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, edited by John Hick and Paul Knitter, on *Seven Hundred Plans to Evangelize the World: The Rise of a Global Evangelization Movement*, by David B. Barrett and James W. Reapsome, and his critical responses to Hindu Christian dialogues. Appendices in the Section V include lists of Christian Ashrams in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, foreign funds

received by Christian organizations in 1986; reviews on *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, edited by David Barrett, *Mission Handbook: North American Ministries Overseas*, edited by Samuel Wilson and John Siewert; and a reply to a debate over his reviews in *The Times of India*, in 1988. The book has a bibliography which looks like the bibliography of any Christian theological book and a helpful index. The articles by Sri Ram Swarup form the backbone of the book in terms of scholarship. The first six chapters of the book are expansion of the Preface written by Sri Sita Ram Goel for the earlier edition of this book plus a critique of the works of Robert De Nobili, Jules Monchanin, Henry Le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda) and Bede Griffiths. The book is mainly attacking Catholic missions and particularly the indigenization/inculturation attempts. The author makes it clear that the Protestants are not better in their fraudulent missionary methods and he just spares them as his immediate attention is to the camouflaged attempts of the missionaries to present Christianity in Indian religious and cultural forms. The author is most critical against the Christian efforts to relate Advaitic spirituality and Christian faith. Except Brahmabandhav all other Christians evaluated are foreign missionaries. A full chapter is devoted to describe the opportunistic attempts of Brahmabandhav (Ch. 4) and his efforts to outdo his one time friend, Vivekananda. The attempt of the author seems to be systematically demolishing everything Christian theologians in India are holding dear to their theology, that is an Indian appropriation of Christian faith. To the author this is illegitimate and swindlery. Christian faith is foreign and cannot be made Indian. To a Christian, faith is more than culture and a critique of culture. To accept a faith reasonable and meaningful as well as to experience it in a way most significant to him or her is a fundamental right of any person, and communication of it or sharing of what one believes to be truth is all the more important. The author would defend the right of people in other countries to reject Christianity but would deny that in India. The author himself is a person who has undergone different conversions in his life, from Marxism (see back flap) to the treasurership of the Abhishiktananda Society (p. x) and finally to his present position about the truth of Hinduism. However he is unwilling to give his fellow Indians chance to undergo similar experience and discover the truth for themselves. (or Would he rather prefer to make sure that they never hear any thing different from what he at present believes to be true?). To him Hinduism is a brahminical religion. Any one who wants to do something with Hindu practices, (for example establish an ashrama or practise sannyasa etc.), has to get permission from traditional Hindu authorities, the Brahmin priests or acharyas, a system of priestcraft which he so vehemently criticizes in Christianity. Before one takes up the new dharma, Hindu faith and practices he or she has to present a certificate of apostasy from the concerned Church authority. The caste psychology is at work here. To change one's caste is the greatest adharma. Christians are doing that through their missionary work. It is an *asurika* belief system. The concept of tolerance found in the teaching of *sarva-dharma-samabhava* is not ancient enough and cannot be extended to prophetic creeds (p. 80n). In spite of such sectarian interpretations of Hinduism (the author is critical of Ramakrishna Mission, p. 123) and obnoxious characterization of Christianity, the book is helpful to Christians to evaluate themselves with a critical eye.

Christians have to confess wrongs they have been doing to Indian religion and culture by picturing it as demonic while they themselves have been not better. As Sri Ram Swarup writes, the Voice of India "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" (p. 176). This is a quite legitimate concern and the people of India have many things to be proud of which many other nations do not have. As an Indian Christian I want to be part of that heritage, not essentially of a brahminic heritage, but an Indian heritage consisting of its various cultural streams, dalits, tribals etc. Indian Christians have a responsibility to redefine mission as God's mission to people to make them true humans worthy of the purpose of their creation and not annihilation of culture and religion of people. We certainly need more clarity in this regard. I recommend two books which would throw certain light in this area of Christian relationship to culture and religion: *One Christ—Many Religions* by S.J. Samartha and *Dimensions of Indian Religion* by K.P. Aleaz (reviewed in our earlier issues).

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Hinduism. The Eternal Tradition (Sanatana Dharma)

by David Frawley (*Vamadeva Shastri*)

New Delhi: Voice of India, 1995, pp. 262.

This book is written to "express" Hindu tradition to "modern mind" (p. 2). It is written by one 'who is Hindu in religion though not by birth' (pp.3-4). But we must note that religious conversion is not favoured by the book (pp. 68-69). In the first part of the book Hinduism is presented as "the Universal Dharma". Hinduism is interpreted as a conscious formulation of universal tradition of self-knowledge (p. 13). 'Hinduism is like a great Mother and the other religions are like her children' (p. 21). As Sanatana Dharma it recognises the great laws of Nature and consciousness (pp. 20-22). Hinduism is a spiritual tradition open as a universal meditation path and not an exclusive belief system (p. 35). Dharma represents the natural law of Truth and its universal and eternal principles (p. 41). Dharma transcends an Absolutist stand point (p. 47); it recognises the value of faith, but rejects belief systems (p. 49). It does not divide humanity into believers and non-believers; but differentiates human behaviours into dharmic and adharmic actions, actions which further the Truth and those which promote ignorance and illusion (p. 51). Hinduism is an organised religion in the sense that it contains systematic teachings for all manner of temperaments and all stages of life (p. 62). 'Hinduism as a religion sees the validity of all aspects of human spiritual aspiration, from the use of simple images to the most exalted formless meditational approaches' (pp. 63, 71, 72). The merits of Hinduism over against other religions is asserted in the book (pp. 76-94). Idolatry is justified (pp. 95-107).

The second part (pp. 111-239) of the book is devoted to question answers, again in the same line to project the merits of Hinduism. Some appendices are given as part III (pp. 243-252), prominent among which is the "Code of Sanatana

Dharma" (245-250). The book also provides a Glossary of Sanskrit Terms (pp. 253-255) as well as an Index (pp. 256-262).

The book in over all analysis provides only an over-simplified version of Hinduism; perhaps intended for lay people and not scholars. The richness of Hinduism in its historical development, and philosophical depth is missing in the book. We hope that "Voice of India" in future would bring out books on Hinduism which have clarity of thought as well as depth of scholarship so that all of us Indians can be proud of our glorious religious heritage.

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Arun Shourie And His Christian Critic

New Delhi: Voice of India, 1995, pp. 65, Rs. 20.00.

The Introduction to the book is written by Sita Ram Goel. He give a brief introduction to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India (CBCI) and Arun Shourie's invitation to it to give Hindu assessment of the work of missionaries on 5th January, 1995. His address was to be published by the CBCI. Shourie sent his mss. to them.

Meanwhile Shourie enlarged the materials into a book form and published it in 1994 entitled *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas*. This book raised a controversy between the secretary of CBCI, Fr. Kanjamala and Arun Shourie for the former had charged the latter for lifting CBCI seminar materials in his book and suggested his name be included as co-author with some revision to the book in the next print. Arun replies and justifies what he has done. Matters did not settle here, Shourie's book was traduced in news papers and church publications and Fr. Kanjamala was one of the traducers.

Prajna Bharati, Hyderabad gave opportunities to Fr. Kanjamala and Arun Shourie to give their opinions on a public platform on the subject (the book) *Missionaries in India*. In this public platform Fr. Kanjamala spoke first and Shourie responded to him. The present book is the report of their discourses.

Fr. Kanjamala expresses that Shourie's goal of writing the book is to protect the integrity of the nation, but in doing so he presents Christian missionaries as a threat to national integrity, as such Fr. Kanjamala assumes a hidden agenda in this book, which Fr. has not specified. Fr. Kanjamala shows that the book has materials from two different periods, namely Pre-Independent Colonial period and the Post-colonial Post-Independent period. He agrees to the fact that some of the missionary activities of the colonial pre-Independent period were wrong and says that their activity was a "folk dance of evangelization" associated with an "idea of conquest"—which is not there now. Missionaries' activities have changed now and have become more conscientious (pp. 18-20).

Fr. Kanjamala does not agree with the charge that missionaries' activities were primarily and exclusively meant for conversion (p. 16). He opines that the conversion from among the S.T., S.C. and other backward communities as a protest movement and gives the example of Ambedkar embracing Buddhism, but he acknowledges that the characteristics of caste system still prevail in Christian churches (p. 21). He refutes the charge that Christian missionaries

have unsettled North East India and points out to other reasons as seen in Punjab and Kashmir.

Fr. Kanjamala acknowledges that though there is possibility of salvation in other religions, Christian missionary work would continue to show God's love to the people specially to those who are less fortunate and in this process if any one is attracted to join the band he/she would be welcomed. Before closing his discourse he gives a brief report of services by Christian community to the nation in the form of education and health care and finally gives thanks to Shourie for challenging Christian missionary activities that would help in rectifying their mistakes and to move collectively for the creation of a new India, a new community.

In response to Fr. Kanjamala Shourie agrees with him as far as missionary activities are concerned with social development programmes. He acknowledges that missionary activities quickened the Hindu reformers to set their house in order. He denies that he has himself said that Christian missionaries main motive is to convert people, rather he points out that it is said by missionaries to Mahatma Gandhi. He recognizes that Christians are more humanized and that it is because of this India did not get converted even when Christian activities were there under British empire.

What Shourie is wild about is the missionaries' attitudes of despising the faith of the native people (pp. 29, 39, 45), practice of clandestine baptism (p. 34) and false claim that conversion to Christianity changes social status of people and he points out that social discrimination still exists in churches in India. On present day Christian assertion that all religions leads to salvation, Shourie asks, 'then what is the justification for conversion' and he advises Christians to be more like Jesus. He further says that Christianity has lost its foundational beliefs because of the progress of science and that the Church in India is not able to accept the critical studies of the Bible developed by biblical scholarship.

In his discourse Shourie expresses that tribals in India have deliberately been hewn out of Hindu fold by the British device of census and shows relief that Ambedkar did not become a Christian. He also shows that caste issue has lost its practical value with the rise of modernization in India. Finally Shourie ridicules the exclusive expressions of Christians in serving humanity and in closing he graciously acknowledges that he could speak all these only to a Christian community and to none, though there is a reversal of political power in the country. In the question answer chapters each has re-asserted what one has previously spoken.

The proper title of the book should have been 'A Debate Between Fr. Kanjamala and Arun Shourie on Missionaries in India: A Book by Shourie'. From the literary point of view Fr. Kanjamala's language is simple, sober and courteous and receives applause only twice while Shourie's language is aggressive sometime bordering on discourtesy, yet he receives as many as twelve applauses, this perhaps indicates to the reversal of political power in the country which Shourie refers to in his discourse. Shourie's argument that the tribals are part of Hinduism is an information to tribal readers. The way he whitewashes the caste issue is interesting.

Though Fr. Kanjamala has points of disagreement with what are said in the book he accepts the utility of the book in the sense that it would help Indian

Christians to rectify past mistakes and bring all together collectively to move towards the creation of a new India, a new humanity.

In fact the concern of Shourie's book, as he himself declares is to protect the integrity of the nation. But in his discourse, however, he does not offer any suggestion concerning how to achieve this goal. Some tirades against Christians who form about 3% percent of the total population of India will be of little help to achieve his declared goal. The present book however, will help Christians of all groups to re-evaluate their activities and this very fact makes the book worth reading for Christians.

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