

“EXTRA VEDOS NULLA SALUS”

Observations on Religious Plurality from the Perspective of Resistant Hinduism

by Richard Fox Young

Whatever may be alleged to the contrary – and much indeed has been claimed that contradicts what follows – Hinduism’s recognition of religious plurality is a concession that was granted with evident reluctance at a relatively late stage (we do not know precisely when) in the course of that religion’s historical development. As recently as the sixteenth century, when the Vedāntic doxographer MADHUSŪDANA SARASVATĪ composed the *Prasthānabheda*, a treatise which harmonized the six philosophical schools (*darśanas*) in such a way that five of them were hierarchically subordinated to ŚĀṆKARA’S *Advaita* (Nondualism), it was still possible to exclude religions of non-Indian origin from serious consideration, despite the existence of Islam and Christianity in India for centuries by that time. The text records the consternation of an imaginary interlocutor, who asks how the *Prasthānabheda* can justify this omission. MADHUSŪDANA’S retort is succinct and uncompromising: *mleccha* (barbarian, non-Hindu)¹ religions are irrelevant to orthodox Hindus “because they are heretical” (lit., “outside the Veda”, *vedabāhyatvāt*) and “inefficacious with respect to the goals human endeavor” (*puruṣārthānupayogāt*). Only Hinduism in its diverse subgroups, then, is a *mokṣadharma*, a religion that leads to deliverance. So exclusive did this pronouncement seem to PAUL DEUSSEN, the German Indologist who translated this text, that he bracketed an editorial interjection: *extra Vedos nulla salus* (1906:46).

MADHUSŪDANA’S stance toward religions of non-Indian origin is symptomatic of a traditional stream of orthodoxy that continues even now to influence certain Hindu circles. We must recognize that intellectually-minded Hindus do not always interact with other religions in a uniformly positive manner, otherwise we will oversimplify the ways in which Hindus theoretically resolve dilemmas that are generated by religious plurality. Moreover, our pastoral advice to believers engaged in dialogue will misrepresent the range of attitudes, from accommodation to resistance, fostered by these various theologies of religion.

RELIGIOUS PLURALITY IN PREMODERN INDIA

Hindus are nowadays reputed to be eclectic where matters of religion are concerned. This has not always been the case; nor is it exaggerated to say that this congenial notion, while sometimes accurate with respect to individu-

¹ Coming from the verbal root *mlecch*, to stammer or babble, *mleccha* connotes social inferiority based on linguistic ineptitude (cf. Latin *barbarus* and Skt. *barbara*). *Mlecchas*, then, are foreigners who do not speak Sanskrit (for a thorough discussion, see HALBFASS, 1981:195–221).

als, has assumed the proportions of a myth to which Indians and Occidentals alike have become accustomed.

It is seldom recognized that Hinduism came to grips with the reality of religious pluralism only after a gradual and arduous process that concluded in the early modern period (beginning not long before, or coincident with, the advent of European colonialism). Until then, a number of factors prevented Hindus from seeing beyond their own religion and others of Indian origin, such as Buddhism and Jainism. Among the social impediments that militated against relations with religions *qua* religions, were prohibitions sanctioned by *Dharmaśāstras* (quasi-religious lawbooks) limiting contact at any level with *mlecchas*. The *Viṣṇudharmasūtra* (64.15) and the *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra* (6.41) unequivocally warn Hindus against speaking with non-Hindus and prohibit them from learning foreign languages, both prerequisites for dialogue. Contact there had to have been, as the record of Hindu expansion into Southeast Asia indicates and as does the assimilation of Babylonian and Persian astronomy into *siddhāntic* (scientific) literature in ancient times. However, it must be understood in this connection that Hindus are able to distinguish between levels of truth, between knowledge which may be adopted and that which may not. Secular knowledge (*laukikavidyā*) concerns mundane truth, science especially but also other fields of human concern. Divine knowledge (*alaukikavidyā*), on the contrary, is Hinduism's exclusive domain and should not be acquired apart from the Veda, *Śruti* (revelation) and *Smṛti* (traditionally authoritative scriptures). It appears, then, that *Dharmaśāstric* sanctions against relations with *mlecchas* (and Christians, a fortiori, are *mlecchas*) were observed most scrupulously at the *alaukika* level but were less functional where *laukika* matters were involved. A *mleccha* who could fire a better pot or predicted eclipses more accurately might be consulted seriously, but odds were against the reception of a *mleccha* who propagated doctrines that deviated from the Vedas.

As for specifically religious or philosophical factors militating against recognition of religious plurality, reference has already been made to MADHUSŪDANA'S flat refusal to discuss *mleccha* doctrines even in passing. The same author in a different text, the *Vedāntakālpalikā*, even went so far as to claim that men of other faiths do not desire salvation (MURTY, 1959:51). Included in that category were not only Jains and Buddhists, but also groups usually considered orthodox, such as Vaiśeṣikas, Naiyāyikas and Vaiṣṇavas. Presumption was altogether against *mleccha* religions, and the reason why can be partly discerned by referring to *Mīmāṃsā*, the classical *darśana* specializing in Vedic exegesis and to which Vedāntic authorities in particular are indebted. Without entering into detail here, the cardinal tenet of *Mīmāṃsā* is the dogma that the Vedas are eternal (*nitya*) and unoriginated from a personal source, whether human or divine (*apauruṣeya*).

KUMĀRILA BHATṬA, a classical *Mīmāṃsā* apologist who applied these dogmas to the Buddhist canon, exemplifies the extent to which this *darśana* could obstruct interreligious dialogue. In the *Tantravārttika* he maintains that *dharma* ("duty" along with a wide range of derivate meanings) can only be

apprehended by means of the Vedas. Yet Hinduism recognized the value of traditional teachings, *Smṛti*. Many scriptures claim to be *Smṛti*, including some written by Buddhists. The question arises whether or not they, too, are authoritative. KUMĀRILA cautions that these so-called *Smṛtis* contradict the Vedas on a number of points, and are therefore unacceptable to orthodox Hindus. Besides, the Buddha was not a brahmin and usurped brahminical prerogatives when he began to propagate a new Dharma. What little truth the Buddha conveyed does not redeem the whole, which KUMĀRILA dismisses as “milk placed in a vessel of dog skin”. Once the Vedas and authenticated *Smṛtis* are studied, why look farther afield?

If Buddhist scriptures are objectionable on this basis, the Bible, Koran and other allegedly revealed texts are relegated, *a fortiori*, to an inconsequential status: limited truth overwhelmingly adulterated with falsehoods. Finally, one should bear in mind that KUMĀRILA'S position was by no means idiosyncratic; his stand was acknowledged by all leading Vedāntic authorities, including RĀMĀNUJA and ŚĀṆKARA, the latter of whom is widely – and mistakenly – thought to have provided the philosophic foundation for Hindu tolerance of other religions (e. g., see PUHAKKA, 1976:50–61).² Having himself reviewed the *Mīmāṃsā* position, K. S. MURTY warns that “modern exponents of Hinduism” assert that all religions are true “only on their own authority and do not represent the orthodox Hindu tradition” (1959:219). Indeed, in the premodern period, when Hindus were still subject to a pervasive and – from the interreligious point of view – stifling Hinducentric bias, it was hardly possible for them to think about other religions *qua* religions, much less whether or not they can all be true.³

For reasons not yet entirely explicable, the force of these social and philosophical sanctions began to diminish – but never entirely to disappear – during a period of indefinite length before the advent of European colonialism. In another place I have tentatively traced this unprecedented but still relative openness to the successful outcome of a longstanding effort on the

² Among leading classical authorities, only the Naiyāyika JAYANTA BHATTA systematically reflected upon the possibility that other Indian traditions (*āgamas*) are authoritative in matters of religion (see HALBFASS, 1981:416–18 and WEZLER, 1976:329ff.). One can only conjecture whether or not JAYANTA would have treated religions of non-Indian origin as cordially as he did Jainism and Buddhism.

³ Here it is instructive to note that the premodern Hindu did not refer to himself as a “Hindu”, a word which came into Western usage via a Persian corruption of “Indus”, but rather as an *ārya*, a term connoting racial origin rather than religious affiliation. Neither was there a word corresponding to “Hinduism”, for Hindus knew of nothing else from which to distinguish their religion. *Hindu* and *hindudharma* first occur in Bengal in late seventeenth-century Vaiṣṇava texts, where they function as terms that differentiate sociologically but not ideologically between Hindus and Hinduism and Muslims and Islam (O’CONNELL, 1973:343–44). *Hindutva* (lit. “Hindu-ness”) and *Sanātana Dharma* (the Eternal Religion), two of the expressions most commonly used by Hindus nowadays, are both of recent origin, were first used on a wide scale by reform movements (especially the Ārya Samāj), and were popularized, particularly the latter, by a foreigner, the nineteenth-century theosophist ANNIE BESANT (HALBFASS, 1981:398).

part of certain minorities, particularly Jains and Tantrists, to distinguish their doctrines and cultic practices from others by means of the term *dharma* (YOUNG, 1980: 87–95). “Religion” has not always been connoted by this word. According to traditional usage, it is closely connected with *vidhi*, an injunction, prescribed action or duty. Its basic sense is prescriptive, not descriptive. However, in order to establish their separate identity, Jains began to refer to their prescribed cultic behavior, their theology and philosophy, in toto, as the *Jainadharma*. The word *dharma* then approximates the Western understanding of *thrēskeia*, religion. *Dharma* no longer referred only to what had to be done and what had to be believed in order to carry out those injunctions, but also, in a descriptive and almost anthropological sense, to Jainism itself, its praxis and credo (hereafter, *Dharma* qua religion is not italicized). *Dharma* appears then to have been assimilated into Hinduism, which was also beginning to see the value of denominating itself. In any event, the transformation of *dharma* into *Dharma* was virtually complete by the early nineteenth century when Christianity became a leading contender in the Indian religious context, and by then it was natural for pandits to refer to Christianity as the *Khr̥ṣṭadharma*.⁴

Not geographical isolation but centripetal forces of their own making drew Hindus toward one center and deflected them from others. The religious universe of many Hindus continues to be Hinducentric. How could it be otherwise when for centuries premodern Hindu authors, whether writing in Sanskrit or in regional languages, consistently declined even to cursorily discuss the doctrines of non-Indian religions, though they had access to them? Hindu apologists were content to repeat ad infinitum the arguments of their predecessors against long-dispersed Jain and Buddhist adversaries. In this connection it is worthwhile to take note of the often heard accusation that the Syrian Christians in South India never made significant inroads among their Hindu neighbors. This distressing failure has been attributed to their reluctance to evangelize and to their fear of being absorbed into the larger community (NEILL, 1976: 52). Perhaps this was so, but Hindus at that juncture were unprepared to acknowledge Christianity as an authentic *Dharma* vis-à-vis their own. Even the adaptive Jesuit ROBERTO DE NOBILI fared no better; for, despite his erudition, his brahmin partners-in-dialogue were more interested in ascertaining whether by their standards he was a true *sannyāsī* than in whether his theology contributed to theirs. When Hindus finally awakened to the reality of religious pluralism, their strength had

⁴ The *Mahānirvāṇatantra*, speculation about the date of which varies widely, uses *dharma* in the broad sense of “religion” (see 14.117, 187, 189). It also takes for granted the possibility that non-Hindus can convert to its tantric formulation of *Dharma* – an idea previously unthinkable. For these and other reasons, J. D. M. DERRETT thinks this treatise was composed late in the eighteenth century when Christianity had already penetrated throughout Bengal, where the text originated (1968:146). If this was indeed the case, it would be additional evidence that the concept of religious plurality did not develop organically in Hinduism.

already been dissipated by internecine rivalry. It was too late to challenge Christianity effectively.

Consequently, Christianity established itself throughout much of India during the early nineteenth century without encountering significant doctrinal opposition from Hindus. Quite to the contrary, certain residents of the cosmopolitan centers, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, had become dissatisfied with traditional Hinduism, which they blamed for the national malaise, and were therefore receptive to imported ideologies. RAM MOHUN ROY (1772–1833), KESHUB CHANDRA SEN (1838–1884), BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI (1838–1894), VIVEKANANDA (1862–1902) AUROBINDO GHOSE (1872–1950), M. K. GANDHI (1867–1947), S. RADHAKRISHNAN (1888–1975) and a host of other neo-Hindus drew their ideas of religious, ethical, social and political values not from their native religion but from outside, and often from Christianity – although this exchange is sometimes mistakenly called modernization rather than Westernization (HACKER, 1978: 607). This alliance, uneasy originally, is now second nature to certain Hindus who have in large part broken with tradition, half assimilating Western ideologies or Christianity instead.

Westward-turning Hindus constitute what is now commonly called, especially in Christian parlance since PAUL DEVANANDAN's time, "renascent" Hinduism. Were one to judge from the quantity of literature on this subject, one might think renascent Hinduism had superseded all other varieties of intellectual response to Christianity. This misapprehension is reinforced by our tendency to favor "renaissances", whatever they may be, and to look askance at forces that hinder them, as if they would compel Hinduism to retreat into a Dark Ages tantamount to our own. I therefore deliberately juxtapose "renascent" with "resistant" Hinduism in the hope of demonstrating that the Hindu response to Christianity and religious pluralism has indeed been multiform; furthermore, so that the discord sometimes evident in interreligious relations today will be understood in relation to doctrines that are central to orthodox Hinduism, for resistant Hinduism is orthodox.

CHRISTIANITY'S PLACE IN HINDU SCHEMES OF DHARMA

We now begin to scrutinize more thoroughly resistant Hinduism's diverse interpretations of religious plurality by taking as our point of reference a particular Hindu-Christian confrontation that occurred almost simultaneously in three geographical regions of early nineteenth-century North India. What I designate here as the *Mataparikṣā* Controversy derives its name from the title of a Sanskrit treatise first published in 1839 by a Scottish Indologist, JOHN MUIR (1810–1882), whose portentous – or pretentious – purpose was to demonstrate Christianity's truth and Hinduism's errors. The *Mataparikṣā* (An Examination of Religions) was based upon the rationalistic Paleyan apologetics of the last century, buttressed by MUIR's formidable knowledge of original Sanskrit texts. Other reference points could have been selected: for one, the early eighteenth-century correspondence between Malabarian brahmins and BARTOLOMAEUS ZIEGENBALG (1682–1719), a Lutheran missionary stationed at

Tranquebar, and, for another, a series of acrimonious public debates in Bombay during the 1830s between Hindus and another outstanding missionary apologist, JOHN WILSON (1804–1875) (for detailed summaries of both, see YOUNG, 1980: 16:27). The *Mataparikṣā* Controversy is focused upon here because it is the earliest instance of Christian dogmas systematically critiqued from an orthodox Hindu point of view, fitted into an overall theory of religious plurality, to which there is access through documents in an Indian rather than European language. And not just any regional language – few at that time were adequate for this kind of argumentation – but Sanskrit, the traditional medium of discourse for Hindu theologians and philosophers. MUIR addressed his audience in their own sacred cadences, utilizing terminology that missionary predecessors had appropriated from classical Sanskrit (see YOUNG, 1979: 205ff., or 1980: 30–59). Despite his sophisticated hermeneutics, MUIR antagonized three orthodox Hindu pandits, who responded with their own apologetical treatises, also in Sanskrit. Christianity's origin and function in each pandit's scheme of Dharma is analyzed below in chronological sequence.⁵

The Mataparikṣāśikṣā (a lesson for [the author of] the Mataparikṣā)

First to defend Hinduism against MUIR's aspersions was a Maharashtrian named SUBĀJĪ BĀPU, a progressive *jyotiṣa* (astronomer) living in Malwa (now part of Madhya Pradesh), who enjoyed British patronage as the author of several treatises introducing Copernican astronomy and modern physical science to Central India where Purāṇic pseudoscience still prevailed. An ardent modernizer where *laukika* matters were concerned, SUBĀJĪ took offense when MUIR attempted to discredit Hinduism's *alaukika* verities. From his British patrons he was willing to learn science but not religion, as we see in the following translated extracts, written in 1839:

A) Worship him, the universal *Ātman*, true Lord, who is honored as the “Buddha” in Buddhism, “Jina” in the Jain scripture, known by the name “Christ” in Christianity and as “Allah” in Islam, and by the names “Arka”, “Prathameśa”, “Śakti”, “Gīrīśa”, “Śrī” and so forth in the [Vedas], various *Tantras* and *Purāṇas*.

B) Everyone's religion teaches that there is some world-creator. All people worship and consequently attain him. Everywhere God grants scriptures for the sake of the human intellect. [However,] no one who has not understood them in due order by means of a *guru* is released.

C) In the Kali Age (the fourth and most degenerate stage of the Hindu time cycle), whosoever spurn their respective scriptures are sinners, even though they be brahmins and the like, for everyone's native religion is always conducive to felicity.

D) It is not said that men who follow other religions are competent for the Vedic *mārga*. This is why [Viṣṇu] would be displeased when someone spurns his native religion.

E) When men who dwell in various quarters are going to a certain city, in no way whatsoever would they reach that place by travelling on the very same path. Likewise, those men, whom the all-creator made to possess different qualifications (*adhikāra*) and

⁵ The Sanskrit originals to which the following translations correspond are available in YOUNG, 1980: 258–266.

put into different situations, would be unable to attain God by means of any single path.

F) Listen you disciples of Christ! . . . one should not revile another person's religion. Moreover, one should not spurn one's own religion. . . . For each person his native religion is best; the same religion might be perilous for another person. Now, therefore, praise be to those who worship (Viṣṇu) according to their native religion without reviling others.

Do these passages coincide with the ill-defined formulations of the Hindu approach to religious plurality, often heard nowadays especially in connection with neo-Hinduism, that all religions are equal, one, true and the same?⁶

According to these extracts, the first formulation, all religions are equal, is meaningful only in the limited sense that all Dharmas are paths or approaches (*mārgas*) leading toward divine reality. All revealed scriptures, whether the Bible, Veda, Koran, or the Jain and Buddhist canons, derive from the same source (in SUBĀJĪ's case, *Bhagavān*, or Viṣṇu). It does not follow, however, that they are equal and interchangeable in terms of meaning, truth and value; for each one corresponds to the competency and qualifications of a particular group, nation or race, which themselves are by no means identical. The common denominator between religions is that they all lead toward God. But some fall short of their goal because, unlike Hinduism, they do not have trained preceptors (*gurus*) to point the way and thereby actualize the salvific potential that is in them all. The corollary is that God looks askance at conversion because exchanging one Dharma for another contradicts our created nature, which Viṣṇu, as preserver of the universe, is charged with overseeing.

To say that all religions are one also misrepresents SUBĀJĪ's position. Space does not permit even a cursory description of the pandit's arguments against Christianity. Let it suffice that he judged it to be different from Hinduism and false as well (see YOUNG, 1980: 163–94). A more exact formulation is that religions are identical with respect to purpose. Each one is "conducive to felicity" (*śreyaskāra*), but the Sanskrit is ambiguous, meaning either mundane felicity or salvation. SUBĀJĪ does not deny that religions are mutually contradictory, but rather affirms that the differences between them correspond to disparities in human nature. Hence the Hindu law of religious traffic, that all roads, no matter where they commence, converge at the same destination – or at least come close. As visitors to Calcutta know, only one bridge, the Howrah, spans the Hooghly, but another, unfinished, extends partway over the river. Other religions stand in the same relation to Hinduism: it alone conveys believers all the way across *saṃsāra*, the transmigratory world.

Nor can one say without qualification that all religions are true. SUBĀJĪ considered differences between Dharmas to be real rather than apparent. Vedic truth is self-verifying (*svataḥprāmāṇya*), whereas biblical teaching must be tested against the Veda before its veracity can be confirmed. Christianity

⁶ For aspects of the following analysis I am indebted to an article by A. SHARMA, 1979: 59ff.

is a roundabout route to the truth in its absolute purity. More confusing still – at least to those who are accustomed to think that a thesis and its antithesis cannot both be true – is that Viṣṇu contradicts himself, not from perversity or partiality but out of concern for our competence in grasping abstruse truths, when speaking to Hindus on the one hand and when addressing Christians on the other. It would be mistaken, then, to confuse the truth itself with the paths leading to it.

Lastly, it cannot be that religions are the same. SUBĀJĪ ruled out the possibility that they are identical either in terms of content, value or truth; only their function, purpose or goal is comparable. A proviso is again added: Hinduism surpasses other Dharmas because of its superior insight into their unity (*aikya*) as paths tending toward the same end. Others may think that religious affiliation is arbitrary at birth and that it can be transferred from one Dharma to another; Hindus know that birth is not accidental but accords with previously acquired *karman*. The homiletical extract F therefore wisely counsels us not to disparage anyone's native religion. But is there not a note of selfcongratulation in exclaiming "Praise be to those who worship Viṣṇu according to their religion without reviling others"? For SUBĀJĪ it is Hinduism's profound grasp of the compatibility (*avirodha*) between all religions, insofar as their function is concerned, that enhances its prestige and diminishes theirs. Hindu Dharma, to paraphrase ORWELL, is the most equal among equals.⁷

The Mataparīkṣottara (an answer to the Mataparīkṣā)

Less than a year later, in 1840, HARACANDRA TARKAṆCĀNANA, a Calcutta resident, radicalized what had theretofore been a quiet and sober dialogue by including in his book a canard impugning the Virgin Mary (she was, he claimed, a temple whore) and slanders against Hindu Christians, as converts were then called. Underlying this blatantly pugilistic treatise, however, are several presuppositions that are unquestionably orthodox.

The first concerns Hinduism's undeniable antiquity, which in apologetics translates into the dictum that "older" equals "better". MUIR had argued, as many others also have, that, whereas the historical origins of Hinduism are virtually unknown, the lineaments of Christianity's development are there for historians to at least discuss, even if not agree upon. If the audience is orthodox Hindu, such reasoning is unpersuasive; for the Bible, a mere

⁷ Lest it be thought that SUBĀJĪ's reflections on religious plurality have no resonances in the modern period, I quote from SWAMI B. H. BON MAHARAJ, a leading Hindu traditionalist: "A fallen soul . . . must approach a spiritual master in order to know the real truth. This means that an individual must have developed through practises in various births a given degree of intellectual and moral maturity before he or she can aspire to understand, practise, follow and realize absolute knowledge. . . . It is because of this that (Hinduism) has never been proselytizing or converting others into its fold. One has got to go through many births . . . in religions of partial or relative truths before one is born with the requisite intellectual and moral eligibility (*adhikāra*) to practice (Hinduism)" (1965: 2–3).

nineteen-hundred-odd years old, is nothing in comparison with the Vedas, which they believe are eternal. During the periodic dissolutions of the universe (*pralayas*), the Vedas are retained in the creator Brahmā's memory, then rerevealed to the *ṛsis* coincident with each regeneration of the phenomenal world (cf. the scholiast KULLŪKA BHATṬA on Manu 1.23). This dogma is founded on the Veda and must not be doubted. For the Bible to originate within a specific time frame is enough to convince orthodox Hindus that it lacks prestige - like a sudden best seller that soon disappears from the charts and is forgotten. HARACANDRA therefore argues: "Only that religion is true which has prevailed on earth since the time of creation, and not one which arose subsequently."

If the Hindu Dharma takes precedence over all others because its Vedas are eternal, who, then, has access to them? What hope is there for *mlecchas*, who by definition are ignorant of Sanskrit? In scrutinizing resistant Hinduism's standpoint, one must be cautious, for the issue of access to the Vedas has been obscured by modern Hindu universalism. An apposite example is the often-cited interpretation of Bhagavad-Gītā 4.8: "For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the setting up of the law of righteousness, I come into being age after age" (ZAEHNER, 1969: 184). Only an exegesis influenced by neo-Hinduism would see in this passage references not only to Kṛṣṇa but also to Buddha, Christ, Mohammad, Nānak, etc. In such an interpretation, access to the Vedas is irrelevant because they are no longer unique. Viṣṇu, embodied in Buddha and others, reveals himself through the scriptures associated with them. But for HARACANDRA the Vedas are indispensable and irreplaceable. Contemporary thinkers are entitled to their opinions about the Gītā's catholicity, but they should not attribute their private views to the orthodox Hindu tradition. HARACANDRA could not have endorsed them, and his second presupposition explains why.

At the time of creation, only four castes (*varṇas*) could be created. Brahmā made for them the character of good *dharma* (virtue or duty). How could the eternal Vedic religion be observed by *yavanas* (non-Hindus or *mlecchas*), who have fallen from their *dharma* on account of corrupt conduct? The character of *dharma* consists of ten elements: constancy, patience, self-control, avoidance of thievery, purity, restraint of senses, devout thought, knowledge, truth, and suppression of anger. Thus, their entire lives lived in accordance with these general *dharma*s, they become eligible (*adhikārins*) for (Vedic) Dharma, having become Hindus (*hindutvaṃ prāpya*) in a subsequent birth.

As Christian *yavanas* or *mlecchas*, we have forfeited soteriological privileges that we once had when, in previous existences, we were Hindus. Haracandra does not explicitly say why we have been deprived of our former status, but two reasons are commonly adduced: either we are the offspring of illicit marriages (e.g., between *kṣatriya* fathers and *śūdra* mothers) or our ancestors performed prescribed rituals without consulting brahmins. Consequently we live outside the *varṇāśrama* system (caste and stages of life) and are excluded from initiation (*upanayana*), a prerequisite for Vedic studies. Manu 12.33-43 relegates us to *tamas*, the worst of three constituent elements of all phenomenal reality. *Tamas* implies the dark side of human nature, ignorance,

sensuality, covetousness, sleepiness, pusillanimity, cruelty, atheism, inattentiveness and the like: "Elephants, horses, *śūdras*, and despicable barbarians (*mlecchas*), lions, tigers, and boars (are) . . . caused by (the quality of) darkness" (12.43; Bühler, 1969: 493).⁸ We could hardly be more handicapped.

Compared with the sophisticated demeanor (*śiṣṭācāra*) of twice-born Hindus, our conduct as *yavanas* is ill-bred and contemptible (*dusṭācāra*). But we may at least improve our lot by observing certain very ordinary duties (*sādhāraṇa-dharmas*), patience and so forth. Though these are not the particular duties (*viśiṣṭadharmas*) practiced by Hindus, they will nonetheless debarbarize us and prepare us to reenter the Hindu Dharma. Christianity, then, is a kind of purgatory in which we acquire merit so that we may regain our original state of grace. But this transition cannot occur within the space of a single lifetime: death must intervene followed by rebirth as a Hindu.

HARACANDRA's scheme of religious plurality is unequivocally indocentric. Before attaining *mokṣa*, one must acquire Hindu-ness (*hindutva*) by being born in India, also called *karmabhūmi*, which means the country where one can forestall adverse karmic repercussions, undergo *upanayana* and acquire the true knowledge necessary for breaking out of the cycle of repeated birth and death (*saṃsāra*). In the religious cosmography of the Hindus, *karmabhūmi* does not coincide with the borders of modern India; but what matters is that salvational prerogatives are geographically limited. The idea has a strange hold even on neo-Hindus, including M. K. GANDHI, who once said "For me there can be no deliverance from this earthly life except in India. Anyone who seeks such deliverance . . . must go to the sacred soil of India" (NAIPAUL, 1977: 156).

The Śāstratattvavirinṇaya (A Verdict on the Truth of the Scriptures)

From 1844–45 the *Mataparikṣā* Controversy entered into yet a third phase when MUIR's book fell into the hands of a Benares pandit, NĪLAKAṆṬHA GOREH (1825–1885) who – coincidentally – later became, under his baptismal name NEHEMIAH, one of the last century's most respected Indian Christian thinkers.⁹ Spending these years as a formidable apologist for resistant Hinduism, NĪLAKAṆṬHA subjected Christianity to long-disused but once common Purāṇic interpretations of Antidharma. According to this idea, a retributive god becomes a false *avatāra* (*mohāvatāra*) in order to foist erroneous scriptures (*tāmasasāstras*) and false religions (*mohadharmas*) upon certain hapless sinners who have merited his wrath.

⁸ *Tamas*, which is here more descriptive than insulting, can in other contexts excite anger and resentment. When Dakṣa affronted his son-in-law, Śiva, saying he was full of *tamas*, Śiva cursed and obstructed him throughout a number of rebirths (see *Śiva Vāyaṇīya* 1.18.4–59).

⁹ Scant attention has been paid to GOREH's preconversion Hindu background, both by his hagiographers, to whom he was merely a brahmin trophy, and by contemporary writers such as R. BOYD (1969) and B. PARADKAR (1969), who have at least done justice to him as a pioneering Indian Christian theologian. A detailed analysis and translation of NĪLAKAṆṬHA's critique of Christianity are available in YOUNG, 1980: 163–221.

Now, whichever Smṛtis orthodox Hindus ought to shun and revile, God created so that sinners will be punished. . . . These bad religions are made for their punishment. Only sinners . . . take pleasure in them. Again and again into a foul hell God flings filthy-minded rogues who delight in depraved behavior. . . . This truth God plainly teaches through the scripture: those Smṛtis are made in order to punish wicked people. For this very reason, those who acquiesce to God's instruction, performing meritorious deeds faithfully, do not believe in those Smṛtis.

Christianity, then, is a punitive liability imposed upon us by Viṣṇu because of our accumulation of adverse *karman*, the residue of unspecified egregious sins (perhaps the ones noted earlier, sensuality, etc., which stem from *tamas*). The Smṛtis non-Hindus are deceived into believing include not only the Bible but all non-Vedic scriptures, the Koran, the Pali canon, the Ādi Granth, etc., and in all probability certain Hindu texts of questionable orthodoxy. Although his presuppositions are wholly out of alignment with neo-Hinduism's, NĪLAKAṆṬHA's hostility toward other religions had ample precedent, for it is clearly reflected in the devices Hindus were accustomed to use when accounting for differences between themselves.

Hindus nowadays boast that they are broadminded enough to include the Buddha among Viṣṇu's ten *avatāras*. Few are they who recognize that this concession was granted only after Buddhism ceased to pose a serious threat to brahminical hegemony. At a safe distance, Hindus can now afford to tolerate him. But beforehand, according to the earliest references, the Buddha came to earth for devious purposes. Purāṇic authorities originally assimilated him to Viṣṇu as a device meant to disable a socio-religious community inimical to their own. Buddha was their potential nemesis, and to disarm him they reintroduced an ancient Vedic motif, the fraudulent god. The *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (3.17.9–45 and 3.18.1–34) elaborates this theme, also in connection with the origin of Jainism. R. C. HAZRA's synopsis (1975:24) follows:

In ancient times the gods (*devas*), being defeated by the demons (*daityas*) in a war which was continued for a divine year (360 human years), . . . eulogized Viṣṇu who, consequently, produced Māyāmoha (i. e., a being whose name signifies that his powers of delusion derive from Viṣṇu's creative energy) from his own body and gave him to the gods. This Māyāmoha, with his body stripped of all garments, his head shaved and a peacock feather in hand, went to the banks of the Narmadā where the demons were living, preached to them the religion of 'the naked' (i. e., Jainism). . . . Next, Māyāmoha put on red clothes, painted his eyes with collyrium and preached Ahimsā (i. e., Buddhism) to the remaining demons. As a consequence of this preaching the demons soon gave up the Vedic religion and got weakened. Consequently they were attacked by the gods, defeated, and massacred.¹⁰

Only in the eighth century of our era, roughly two hundred years after this Purāṇic passage was composed, did Buddha's name, linked with the nebulous

¹⁰ The *Viṣṇupurāṇa* myth continues to be relevant to resistant Hinduism as it seeks to interpret religions considered inimical to itself. *Hindu-Viśva*, the official magazine of the Viśva Hindu Pariṣad (founded in 1964 to oppose the 38th International Eucharistic Congress held in Bombay), recently published an article (RAJAN, 1972: 29ff.) which sees in this passage not only allusions to Buddhism and Jainism but also to Islam and Christianity.

Māyāmoha, begin to appear in Purāṇic enumerations of Viṣṇu's periodic incarnations (e. g., *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.40.22a: "Glory be to the Buddha, the pure, the deluder of the Daityas and Dānavas" [the demons who became Jains and Buddhists]). Just as Viṣṇu, disguised as Buddha and Jina, spread lies in order to crush his opponents, so does he do this, according to Nīlakaṇṭha, through Jesus Christ, the latest in a long succession of *mohāvātāras* indoctrinating God's enemies into *mohadharmas*.

NĪLAKAṆṬHA also conforms to precedent when he relegates the Bible to the status of *tāmasaśāstra*, or a text purporting to be scriptural but which actually is founded upon error and all the other negative connotations associated with *tamas*. In so doing, he agrees with a Smṛti passage authoritative to all orthodox Hindus, Manu 12.95–96, which defines precisely what *tāmasaśāstras* are and the dangers intrinsic to them.

All those traditions (Smṛtis) and all those despicable systems of philosophy (*darśanas*), which are not based on the Veda, produce no reward after death; for they are declared to be founded on darkness. All those (doctrines), differing from the (Veda), which spring up and (soon) perish, are worthless and false, because they are of modern date (Bühler, 1969:505).

The Manu Dharmaśāstra diplomatically declined to single out *tāmasaśāstras* for condemnation. Purāṇic authorities, as sectarian at times as they were ecumenical at others, did not hesitate to name them. Their lists of indexed Smṛtis vary, depending on whether they were compiled from a Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava bias. *Padmaṣūratī* 6.263.66–70 is a typical example, wherein Indra boasts to Śiva's wife Pārvatī that, at Viṣṇu's behest, he propounded numerous *tāmasaśāstras*, including even some that are usually considered orthodox (among the *darśanas* mentioned, only Yoga and Vedānta are exempted).

Listen, goddess, while I declare to you the *tāmasa* works in order; works by the mere hearing of which even wise men become fallen. First of all, the Śaiva systems, called Pāśupata, etc., were delivered by myself. Then the following were uttered by brahmins penetrated by my power, viz., the great Vaiśeṣika system by Kaṇāda, and the Nyāya, and Sāṅkhya, by Gotama and Kāpila respectively. Then the great system, the Pūrva(mīmāṃsā) was composed by the brahmin Jaimini on Vedic subjects, but on atheistic principles. So too the abominable Cārvāka (materialist) doctrine was declared by Dhiṣaṇa, while Viṣṇu, in the form of Buddha, with a view to the destruction of the Daityas, promulgated the false system of the Buddhists (Muir, 1868:202).

This is a peculiar specimen of ad hominem argumentation indeed: contrary creeds are denounced by associating them with fraudulent *avatāras*; but all this conniving and scheming is in fact Viṣṇu's, the one who is responsible for maintaining an overall balance between good and evil.

For all his remonstrances against other Dharmas, NĪLAKAṆṬHA's unremitting hostility is not without its ambiguities. A curious ambivalence appears when the extract translated earlier is compared with the prologue, addressed to Viṣṇu: "Lord Śrīnivāsa do I worship, whose *līlā* (cosmic sport or Kṛṣṇa's dalliance with the cowherd women of Vṛṇḍāvana) is beyond our understanding, whom (all) people worship in various ways, though their competence to do so may differ." As Christians we are destined to suffer in a series of foul hells without respite. Nevertheless, in a strained and indirect sense, we, too,

worship Viṣṇu, for in him all other gods – including deceptive *avatāras* – subsist. What distinguishes us from Viṣṇu's more privileged worshippers is our sinfulness, which has disqualified us from the soteriological prerogatives that are theirs alone to enjoy.¹¹

THE BASIS OF RELIGIOUS PLURALITY

In order to extrapolate general principles from these three disparate schemes of Dharma, we must return to MUIR'S *Mataparikṣā*. As a point in Christianity's favor, MUIR drew attention to its universal scope (*sāmānyatā*), its inherent inclusiveness and expansive power. Whereas the Hindudharma is restricted to those who are fortunate enough to be born as Hindus, the Khr̥ṣṭadharma can be embraced by anyone; for God endows us all with the same psycho-social nature and identical prerogatives.

It is symptomatic of resistant Hinduism that these pandits made no counterclaim to the same effect. At least on this they agree: Dharma is not universal but particular and exclusive. It could not be otherwise; soteriological privileges are measured by social status, which non-Hindus, being excluded from the *varṇāśrama* system, do not have. Among *mlecchas* there are either those who fail to actualize the salvific potential in their native religion because they are not instructed by qualified preceptors (cf. SUBĀJĪ), or those who are now acquiring merit in order to be reborn as Hindus (HARACANDRA), and still others whose transgressions will be recompensed in a series of hellish existences (NĪLAKAṆṬHA). In each case Dharma yields results exactly commensurate with its adherents' qualifications.

Plurality in religion is intrinsic and purposeful because birth and the abilities and prerogatives acquired then are not fortuitous but proportional to the *karman* accumulated earlier. Karman coordinates all the facets that determine an individual's salvific privileges. The Sanskrit shows how these ideas synchronize. Much is connoted by the unmanageable term *adhikāra*, used by all three pandits. English can express it only by means of a wide range of words, from "capacity", "ability" and "competence" to "eligibility", "right", "entitlement", etc. No one is entitled to give up his native Dharma for another because no one is mentally competent to do so. Individuals are cerebrally equipped to understand, so as to benefit from, one religion only: the one acquired in childhood.

¹¹ Whereas the delusion-motif has ample precedent in Hinduism, especially the Purāṇas, the dogma of eternal damnation, explicit in the translated extract from NĪLAKAṆṬHA'S text, does not. Although punishment is usually considered remedial and of limited duration, eternal damnation is a cardinal tenet of MADHVĀCĀRYA'S Dvaita-Vedānta and of certain sectarian Purāṇas, such as the Vaiṣṇava *Br̥hannāradyapurāṇa*. R. C. ZAEHNER'S interpretation of Bhagavad-Gītā 16.18–21 includes an excursus on this dire possibility, but other scholars (notably F. EDGERTON) dispute this. On the whole, it is difficult to see in NĪLAKAṆṬHA'S "again and again" any possibility of relief from the dismal condition to which Viṣṇu consigns sinners.

Yet more than bare intellectual talent is presupposed here, for *adhikāra* is also proportionate to social status. Even *Śaṅkara* denied that *śūdras* can share in the salvific privileges that belong only to twice-born Hindus (*Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* 1.3.34). Caste is an insurmountable handicap: *śūdras* and *mlecchas* (Christians, etc.) cannot be eligible for *brahmavidyā* (knowledge of Brahman) until they rise higher on the path of transmigration to another caste. Returning to MADHUSŪDANA's *Vedāntakālpalikā*, men of other faiths cannot even be interested in *mokṣa* (deliverance) because they are unable to properly conceive of it (*tatra mokṣasvarūpaṃ yāvad viśiṣya na niścīyate tāvat tatra kasya kāmanodetu*). On this basis it is not only absurd but presumptuous to invite someone to cross over religious boundaries. Any such crossing over, then, is an egregious overstepping; for after all, liberating knowledge is a strictly Hindu prerogative, restricted to the upper castes.¹²

A somewhat strident writing style has deliberately been adopted here when presenting resistant Hinduism's brief in defense of its superiority vis-à-vis other religions. I have done so in order to convey the aggressive, inhospitable and uncompromising tenor of the original Sanskrit texts. It is the same militant spirit, but with the three pandits' sophisticated apologetics mostly muted, that periodically erupts in the fulminations of the Hindu Mahāsaṁhā, the Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsevak Saṅgh and the Viśva Hindu Pariṣad (extremist organizations advocating Hindu nationalism and thus inimical, in varying degrees, to non-Hindu communities). Moreover, I have used the pronoun "we", when referring to Christians, because it is symptomatic of resistant Hinduism that it does not reflect upon the faith of other men abstractly and with studied indifference; for there is no salvation apart from the Vedas or outside India. In the pandits' eyes, MUIR was a *pāṣaṇḍin*, a "heretic" or "infidel"; we are not less suspect.

Calculating the extent to which resistant Hinduism continues to be perpetuated is beside the point. Several appended notes and quotations verify that it still resonates, sometimes even in the statements of leading neo-Hindus. What matters most is that the history of interreligious dialogue confirms that the Hindu encounter with Christianity, indeed with the dilemma of religious plurality itself, has not always yielded positive results. But this is to raise another subject, tolerance, which cannot be entered into here.

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¹² According to certain *bhakti* (devotional) texts (e. g., *Śaṇḍilyabhaktimīmāṃsā*, vv. 78-82, and *Nārada-bhaktisūtra*, vv. 33, 72-73), *śūdras*, *candālas* and females are equally eligible for salvation, provided they recognize how sinful they are. Resistant Hinduism is not cast in the *bhakti* mold and therefore excludes this possibility.

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