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THE BIBLE
AND
THE PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS

A Reply to Mr. Wesley Ariarajah

By

The Rt. Rev. Dr. S. Kulandran

Former Bishop in Jaffna, Sri Lanka



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FOREWORD

It is some years since Dr. Wesley Ariarajah's controversial book "The Bible and The People of Other Faiths" appeared. The response as expected was mixed, from warm acclamation to critical agreement or disagreement and even angry protest. Some thought it paved the way for new directions in Mission, others thought it was a betrayal of the Mission itself.

Its strength lies in the fact that it prompted the debate about the relation of Christian faith to peoples of other faiths and to the re-examination of the concept of Mission itself.

Bishop Kulandran happily is one of those living who attended the Tambaram Conference of the International Missionary Council in 1938. It was in response to a suggestion of Dr. Hendrik Kraemer that the Bishop worked on the doctrine of Grace resulting in his book "Grace in Christianity and Hinduism" (Lutterworth - 1964) to which Dr. Kraemer himself wrote an appreciative foreword. Ever since Tambaram, Bishop Kulandran is one of the Asian theologians who has taken dialogue with other religions at depth very seriously and has given serious thought and much study to the understanding of the Christian Mission itself. His "Concept of Transcendence" in the World Religions (C.L.S. Madras - 1981) is yet another of his major works which deals with these themes. It is therefore very welcome that we have his reactions to Dr. Wesley Ariarajah's book. We recognise that much water has flowed under the bridge since the publication of that book in 1985. Bishop Kulandran himself put down his reactions in 1987 but as he has explained circumstances in Sri Lanka delayed its publication. The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (C. I. S. R. S.) Chunnakam, is privileged to publish his response in the hope that it would further this debate and help the church to redefine its mission in a world of religious pluralism.

D.J. Ambalavanar

**Bishop in Jaffna & Chairman, C. I. S. R. S.
Chunnakam**

**Easter 1991
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Sri Lanka.**

PREFACE

This book is not a spontaneous publication but a reply to another book, which came out curiously enough from an officer of the World Council of Churches, an organisation that was set up to guard the faith. That book may look as if to safe guard the faith against the people who write books prompted by those who attack the faith.

This was dictated by the present author in 1987 and its publication had been delayed owing to the promotion to a higher rank in his profession of the person to whom it was dictated and to some extent to various changes of conditions that have prevailed in our country during the last few years.

Its size and contents had to be adjusted to the book to which it was a reply. Therefore, lack of proportion to the size of chapters and the length of the chapters that one may observe were a necessity.

Before this book goes out to the public I must thank the Rev. Dr. S. Jebanesan for bringing it to my notice and insisting on an immediate reply to it. I must also thank Mr. A. Kadirgamar the acting Director of the C I S R S who prepared the final draft and showed great enthusiasm to publish it. Thanks are also due to Mr. A.A. Paul of the Faculty of Jaffna College for reading the manuscript since the author owing to optical difficulties imposed by advancing age cannot read things by himself.

May the Lord bless this work meant to promote His glory.

S.Kulandran
Former Bishop of the Jaffna Diocese
of the Church of South India
Sri Lanka.

INTRODUCTORY

"The Bible and the People of Other Faiths" is the name of a book recently issued by an officer in the World Council of Churches. The author's name is Wesley Ariarajah. The book is written with grace, refinement and restraint as would be expected by those who know the author. It runs into seventy pages and is extremely well got up in bold print. I heartily approve of everything about the book except its contents.

The problem that the author wants to tackle is that of religious pluralism. This is a problem which can be raised only in the context in which the author lives. It could not have been raised in earlier times. It was said in Athens in the fifth century B.C. there were more gods than men in the city; and when Socrates the great philosopher passed along the streets people would point to him and say there goes the atheist who believes in only one God, and Plutarch (350 - 430 B.C.) the great Greek historian says that he had travelled widely and though he has found cities without walls kings or armies, he had never found a city without a temple. During the early days of the Roman Empire a great mass of foreign religions used to come into the Empire and while wiser heads were filled with misgivings, they were not merely tolerated but accepted with fervour by the mass of people, because as the Roman historian Gibbon said "While to the philosophers all religions were false, to the people all were true". And if you go to Africa even now and travel throughout the continent you will find a multitude of religions. I believe Dr. R.B. Manickam in his **"Coming Asian Revolution"** speaks of many new religions springing up in the Far East.

Wesley Ariarajah seems to be concerned chiefly with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. It's curious that the problem of pluralism was not raised when faced with a multiplicity of religions but that it should be raised when in dealing with only four religions. This is because the author had to make a choice. Christianity is a missionary religion because the Lausanne conference, which took place in 1927 representing most Protestant Christians says,

"We affirm that there is only one Saviour and only one Gospel. We reject as derogatory to Christ and the Gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally to all religions there is no other name by which we must be saved. All men are perishing because

of sin but God loves all men, not wishing that any should perish but should repent".

These were not the exact words with which the World Council of Churches was launched in 1948 but it was the emphasis of Karl Barth also who delivered the opening address. And Hendrik Kraemer who wrote the famous book "The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World" was a disciple of Karl Barth. The World Council of Churches was supposed to be a follow up of the International Missionary Council (I.M.C.) and the Faith and Order Movement and its basic qualifications for membership was that the Church should believe that Jesus Christ is God and Saviour. Certainly it looks a curious origin for the back-ground of Mr. Ariarajah.

CHRISTO-MONISM

What is Christianity? It is a religion about Jesus Christ otherwise it is nothing. There are so many religions in the world and it is obvious that unless a religion is saying something which others are not saying, it is not needed and would not exist. That is why the World Council of Churches makes its indubitable claim that, what it wants to say is that Jesus Christ is God and Saviour. And the business of the World Council of Churches is to uphold and to promote the purpose stated in the basic requirement.

So when an officer of the World Council of Churches takes the pen in hand you would expect this purpose to be carried out. But Mr. Wesley Ariarajah an honest man wants to examine his own credentials. He wants to know in the first place whether Jesus Christ is God. And for obvious reasons people looking for definite facts about Jesus always refer to the Synoptic Gospels, where Mr. Wesley Ariarajah finds no traces to the super-human status of Jesus. But I would like to put before him the following facts taken from the Synoptics.

"Jesus claims to forgive sins (a privilege reserved for God only); Jesus is greater than the sacrosanct temple, the central shrine of the Jewish worship. He is greater than the sabbath, the observance of which in the minutest detail was considered capable of being inviolate by all Jews through the ages: He assumes the right to set aside the law of Moses which had a sacramental value for the Jews ever since the race began. A word spoken against him was comparable to the words spoken against God's Holy Spirit. In the parable of the vineyard He is the only son of the owner to be distinguished from the messengers before Him. He asks for devotion to His person not to His doings or works. Those who trust God and do His commands are still outside the Kingdom. In the Lord's prayer given by Him, He prays not with His disciples but for them.

And we would like to ask if Jesus had not merely gone about relating parables and preaching about God why the Pharisees and Scribes should have so vehemently demanded His crucifixion.

Though the crucifixion itself took place some three years after He started preaching we see in the Gospels that from the start the Jews were determined to kill Him. Ordinary preaching about God was done by their own Rabbis and gladly accepted. It seems

to be clear that it was the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God and therefore equal to Him that impelled them from the beginning to the idea that He should be eliminated. It is obvious that even the Synoptics do not regard Him as purely human. Mr. Wesley Ariarajah puts the onus for the change in the belief of the Christians on what he calls "CHRISTO-MONISM".

The chief influence that created Christo-monism was he says the fourth Gospel, and the Pauline tradition. St. John as may be remembered is reported as saying "I and the Father are one" (10; 30) and C.H. Dodd whose authority on New Testament studies must always command respect says "that a severe concentration in the Synoptic Record to the exclusion of the Johannine contribution leads to an impoverished, a one sided and finally an incredible view of the facts".

Paul's place in Christian theology is well known; but it must not be imagined that he in fact created the theology that he preached. It is generally accepted that he was converted about four years after the crucifixion. Dodd says that his theology was derived from the main stream at a point very near its source and nobody in his senses can believe that he was converted to a theology that he was going to invent. It is clear that Christo-monism began to spring within the Christian community soon after the crucifixion. Neither St. John nor Paul created it. They were simply being witnesses to it. It was because of the innate belief of the community itself and not because of the views propagated by one or two people that the Christian community was from the outset prepared to endure so many hardships and even deaths. It was the life and teaching of Jesus and the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus himself that produced the belief. We have no right to undervalue the contributions of St. John and St. Paul. It is a grievous mistake to imagine that they created the beliefs which they propagated. "The peculiar characteristic of the Christian religion", says Harnack, the great but not an orthodox Christian is conditioned by the fact that every reference to God is at the same time a reference to Jesus Christ. Dr. John Whale a brilliant exponent of recent times has said that most Christian theology is Christology. So Christo-monism is not something that was injected into Christianity from outside but was there from the beginning and in fact created what we now call Christianity. Clarifications and systematizations came later. But Christo-monism has been Christian theology almost from the beginning.

The second plank in the Credo demanded by the World Council of Churches of the members is the belief that Jesus Christ

is the Saviour, "That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners is the *raison d'être* for the advent of Jesus into the world. This is the news that was carried into the world by Christians called the Gospel. The word Gospel occurs in the Bible ninety-six times. The Gospel of St. Mark begins with the words "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God". And St. Mark cannot be argued out of the New Testament. The word Saviour occurs thirty seven times. So the fact of the Saviourhood of Jesus is fundamental to the Christian Gospel. In fact in itself it is the Christian Gospel. Unless Jesus came to save, why did he come at all?

"To save sinners" says St. John's Epistle. Who are the sinners? They are not a few scattered here and there. They do not belong to any particular race or religious group. The world is steeped in sin. Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world and that is why all members of the World Council of Churches are expected to subscribe to that clause.

I notice that in Mr. Wesley Ariarajah's excellent book no account is taken of the fact of sin. Mr. Wesley Ariarajah is so overwhelmed by the facts of God's love that he cannot conceive of God being displeased with anyone. "I love good haters" said Dr. Samuel Johnson the great 18th century literary figure. A good God must still hate something. He cannot be good unless He hates badness. To banish the fact of God's displeasure with sin is to banish the idea of justice from the world.

The absence of the concept of sin was the undermining influence of Greco-Roman civilisation. We may disagree with the Jews about the various taboos but what kept Judaism as a live religion was the fact that they drew the line against sin very definitely. It made them fanatical because they drew the line at unnecessary places, but they were firmly convinced that a God who loves something should also necessarily hate something.

The conviction that the world must be saved is responsible for Christians, whether they do it or not feeling that they must go into the World and preach the Christian Gospel. Mr. Wesley Ariarajah finds two flaws in the Christian Missionary undertaking.

The great commission recorded in Mathew 28:19 (which commands Christians to go out into the world, preach the Gospel and baptize all in The Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) according to Him is based on a misinterpretation. In the first place according to him the

Commission at such an early stage could not have been in the name of the Trinity. Mr. Ariarajah's second indictment is that the Great Commission to preach was not meant for the whole world but for Jews only. In the second place the Christian teaching which follows the model of the Acts of the Apostles is due to the belief that the Christians from the outset wanted to preach the Gospel to the whole world. He says that actually they were only with the Jewish world and wanted to prove to the Jews that Jesus was their long expected Messiah.

We leave alone the anachronism of the Great Commission. But that Paul was concerned with the Jews only and went among the Gentiles only by accident is a thorough misconception.

The initial instructions given to Paul on his way to Damascus is "Get thee hence I will see thee far hence into the Gentiles". In fact, he was told not to go to the Jews. Nevertheless, we always find him when he goes to a new place going among Jews and his first preaching in each city was usually in Synagogues.

Mr. Wesley Ariarajah makes much of these facts, but is it not a natural phenomenon that when a man goes into a new place he always seeks out his own countrymen. To expect anything contrary would be to expect people to behave unnaturally. But that Paul should be arguing all the time from Jewish scriptures throws light on a fact which has been realized only in comparatively recent times. It was formerly believed that Paul's education was Hellenistic and he was well versed in Greek culture. It has only been recently realized that as Paul himself says that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews and to boot a Pharisee who underwent the normal education of a privileged Jew.

He came from a thoroughly Hellenized city with its own Hellenistic university and he might have if he had been a tepid Pharisee or tepid Jew absorbed a considerable body of Greek culture. But what he knew was the Hebrew scripture learnt at the feet of Gamaliel the famous Rabbi. There is not the slightest evidence to show that he was touched by Plato or Aristotle. Whereas Alexander the Great wherever he went carried Homer with him, Paul because he did not have the same facility for portage, carried his knowledge in his own head and that was knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. If Paul was arguing in terms of Jewish Scripture and quoting Jewish Scriptures, it was simply that it was the only kind of knowledge he had, so that though he had to speak to Gentiles, that is Hellenistic crowds, he had to do so in terms of what he

knew. From the start it was understood that he was an Apostle to the Gentiles.

In the second century when many Gentiles had been converted to the Christian faith plenty of Christian arguments and literature could be forthcoming from the Hellenistic converts of Christianity.

To expect Paul, brought up as a strict Pharisee and expected to speak in Hellenistic terms would be to expect the impossible.

Since Mr. Wesley Ariarajah has no use for preaching which according to him is on the model of the Acts of the Apostles, he adopts the method of dialogue. This is by no means a new method of arriving at the truth. Plato (428-348 B.C.) at the hey-day of Greek culture wrote all his books in the form of dialogues. With Socrates as the central figure, Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753), Descartes (1596-1650) the French Philosopher in addition to their books wrote dialogues also to popularize their views. Earlier Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.) had written a book called "The dialogue with Trypho the Jew". The primary meaning of dialogue is a thorough investigation (Dia + logos). Generally now it is supposed to be a general discussion but Plato, Berkeley etc. wanted to explain their views. Socrates and Plato wanted by dialogue to bring people round to their views. But this method according to Mr. Wesley Ariarajah would be manipulation.

In the dialogues that he is thinking of, since there is no message to be explained each person gives witness to his views. The term gospel used ninety-six times in the New Testament goes by the board.

What is the Christian to witness to? Since he has dismissed Christo-monism and what historic Christianity stands for we do not have anything special to witness to. We are reminded of a story told by Benjamin Disraeli (who later became Prime Minister of England) during the law debates of the eighteen forties. An admiral in the Levant was fitted out with a splendid fleet embraced by the Sultan and sent out on an expedition (war), but steered his fleet straight into the harbour of the enemies on the ground that he was an enemy of war. When there is no enemy harbour the fleet is steered into the open seas. Such has been the steering of Mr. Wesley Ariarajah who steers in the field of no beliefs.

FAITH LANGUAGE

This reminds one of a magician's world, where there can be two worlds:- a real world and un-real world. The Y-land denotes the real and substantive land and the N - land or No-land denotes unreal land which can fade into nothingness. The Y-land always exists. The N-land comes into existence at the wave of the magician's wand and fades into nothingness when he waves it off again. Similarly it seems to us, that Mr. Wesley Ariarajah looks upon the world invoked by faith language as really equivalent to N-land which has a relative but no substantive existence. It can fade into nothingness when the magician has withdrawn his wand. To Mr. Ariarajah the whole religious world is the magician's world which has been invoked by a theological wand but has no roots in substantive reality. It is really a dream that exists under certain circumstances. But certainly this is not a world on which a man can pin his faith for eternity and hang all his hopes. Mr. Ariarajah expects too much to expect us to pin our faith on the world invoked by what he calls the faith language.

If once you have said that the language of the Bible is "Faith Language" according to Mr. Wesley Ariarajah you are free to say almost my daughter tells me I am the best daddy in the world since she is speaking "Faith Language" she is honest enough. A toy train or a toy motor car may be considered real vehicles since they are uttered in faith. According to Mr. Wesley Ariarajah the words of the Bible, thoughts uttered in good faith should not be taken seriously. An undergraduate from a university once came and told his father that at his university they had discovered the universal solvent. Where do they mean to keep it asked the old man?

The utterance of Mr. Wesley Ariarajah is a solvent which is not merely against any biblical statement but against any reliable statement. What guarantee is there that a statement made by a Hindu or a Buddhist during the course of his dialogue is not a "Faith Statement"? Bishop George Berkely in the 17th century said that all that we see is mere phenomena and there was nothing back of it. It may surprise my readers that Sankara the great Hindu teacher in fact the greatest Hindu teacher (788-820) said something far more devastating. He said that the multiplicity that we see in the world: sun, moon, stars, mountains and human beings are all due to our looking at them through a cloud of Maya that envelopes the whole world and that none of it has any ultimate but only relative reality.

For instance if I feel hungry I must eat. The food has relative reality otherwise you shall starve.

Perhaps Mr. Wesley Ariarajah comes nearest to Nietzsche the twisted German genius according to whom all statements of theologians are necessarily false. This is called the principle of the reverse criterion that is, it is not to be generally applied but only to theological language. But for our purposes this is bad enough. It reminds one of the jinn that king Solomon had shut up in a bottle which somebody foolishly un-bottled and that jinn could create anything. According to Mr. Wesley Ariarajah the world is produced by Solomon's jinn. Therefore it is high time it is put back into the bottle.

Sir Walter Scott one of the most prolific of English classical writers lay dying on his bed and said to his son-in-law Lockart "Bring me the book", "What book"? asked Lockart. "There is only one book" said Sir Walter who had written much fiction both in prose and verse. His life of Napoleon Bonaparte was the only factual book he wrote, but mixed with kings and noblemen and had acquaintance with high political matters and therefore knew the difference between fact and fiction. So when he said bring me the book, he knew what he was talking about.

The universal solvent had ceased to be universal.

The language of the Bible is "Faith Language" and therefore for factual purposes unreliable says Mr. Wesley Ariarajah. But Hemrich Heine (1797-1836) talking about the same book says,

"What a book vast and wide as the universe? Rooted in the abysses of creation towering beyond the secret blues of heaven. Sun rise and sun set, promise and fulfilment, birth and death, the whole drama of humanity, all in this book, its eclipse would be the return of chaos its extinction the epitaph of history".

I think King Solomon's Jinn has been stoppered up and the universal solvent dissolved.

So the language of the Bible is reliable.
We will leave Mr. Wesley Ariarajah to find further fields where he can conduct his "Dialogues".

DIALOGUE

Now Mr. Wesley Ariarajah enters the field of dialogue. He thinks that with a message of theo-centrism which he proclaims we would be more friendly than the Christo-monism which we proclaim. Christo-monism is not a message which we proclaim but proclaimed for us in the Bible. He regards the Christian claim as arrogant. It is by no means arrogant. We do not claim any virtue because we make it. Dr. Visser't Hooft the former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches has said you are like a beggar pointing other beggars where bread could be found. We are like guides on the path-way to truth.

Mr. Wesley Ariarajah insists that it is not everyone who is qualified to bear witness in a dialogue. He must be qualified by character and conduct and must have experience behind it. Mahatma Gandhi has also said about the same thing in regard to those who undertake fasting in the political field. To carry weight a man who undertakes the fasting must be recognised generally by people as one who is worthy of the undertaking, that is generally a man of self-denial who can stand on his own right.

Christianity does not take the same view. The priesthood of all believers was the slogan of Martin Luther. We do not stand on our own right. We merely witness to what the Bible says and what the Church says however unworthy we might be.

The merit involved is not in the person who bears witness but in the import of the witness itself. The men of Corinth were not saints but they were expected to bear witness. The conduct of many of them show that they were by no means saints in the modern sense of the term. They were called saints in the biblical sense which means "Called or set apart". We bear witness and we let what we have borne witness to speak for itself.

Now let Mr. Wesley Ariarajah approach his task clearly realizing his own standing. He has disowned what historic Christianity stands for. He is a lawyer without a client. He has no belief but he is ably instructed by Dr. Stanley Samartha. But when he has finished his job it must be clearly understood that he was expressing his own view and not that of his religion. He claims that his message is theo-centrism; Let us see how he fares with the various religions.

Hinduism:

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan an acknowledged authority in Hinduism, had written his Magnum Opus in a book called "Indian Philosophy" in two volumes running into 1551 pages and if anybody knows what Hinduism is he ought to. The number of pages he devotes to Hindu theism is 154. The sections deal with Ramanuja the acknowledged exponent of Hindu theism Saivism, Sakthism, Madhava, Nimbarka, Vallabha and in Chaitanya movement. What must be realised is that theism is considered a deviation in Hinduism. Mr. Wesley Ariarajah and his friend Dr. Stanley Samartha are utterly mesmerised by the temple worship that they see in South India not realizing that in the whole body of Hinduism, this forms but a small if not negligible part only. What is regarded as orthodox Hinduism with Indian philosophers and scholars is the teaching of Sankara somewhat in the formula "I am Brahman" i.e. the individual soul is the same as Brahman the universal soul.

However, in the large country of India with its 900 million people, there are multitudes of cults and temples, all of which are considered Hindu. Very often the worshipper at a shrine does not know the name of the God he is worshipping. The theoretical test to determine whether a person is a Hindu is whether he accepts even nominally the authority of the four Vedas or sacred books, the names of which he may not know, that is why Lord Sinha the well known Indian statesman of sixty years ago said that a Hindu was one who is willing to call himself as such.

This atmosphere is certainly friendly and Mr. Wesley Ariarajah will feel quite at home. In fact everybody will feel at home in this atmosphere except the Muslim.

Buddhism:

There are two main branches of Buddhism, "Theravada" (Hinayana) and Mahayana. Theravada is a branch that prevails in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. Mahayana prevails in China, Japan and adjoining countries.

Theravada Buddhism is atheistic, Mahayana Buddhism consists of two branches which are called Tariki and Jiriki. Tariki believes that salvation comes from outside and centres in Amitabha Buddhism and Amitabha. In Tariki the sect of Jodo - Shinsu, may be presumed to have some affinity with religions that teach salvation by faith and therefore has been considered as close to those who teach Christo-monism except that the centre of that belief is different.

The Jiriki sect is noted for the well known school of Zen Buddhism. The following conversation between pupil and master may give some idea of what he teaches.

Pupil : When is enlightenment attained?

Master : Just see into nothingness

Pupil : Even, if it is nothingness, it is seeing something.

Master : Though it is seen it is not called something.

Pupil : If it is not called something how can there be seeing.

Master : Seeing into nothingness - this is true seeing.

It is obvious Mr. Wesley Ariarajah's theo-centrism does not take us very far in this field.

Islam:

This is truly a theo-centric religion but once you get into it you will find that the Islamic conception of Allah is considerably different from the Christian conception of God.

Judaism:

Where else can Mr. Wesley Ariarajah find some standing ground for his conception of theo-centrism naturally in the Bible before Christo-monism starts i.e. in Judaism. The chief quarrel of the Jews against Jesus and the reason why they got him crucified was because of their theo-centrism. Since Mr. Wesley Ariarajah has Christian associations they will drive him out. So we see that we don't get very far by pursuing the methods of dialogue advocated by Mr. Wesley Ariarajah.

THE CHURCH

Neither Mr. Wesley Ariarajah nor his mentor Mr. P. Chenchiah fairly familiar in Christian circles fifty years ago take kindly to the idea of the Church. Both are decidedly of opinion that the Christian would have done well without an institution like the Church with its necessary implications. Mr. Chenchiah writes;

"But it be clearly understood that one accept nothing as obligatory to serve Christ, Church doctrine and dogma, whether from the West or from the past whether from Apostles or from modern critics, are to be tested before things are accepted". They seem to think that the idea of a Church was a voluntary conception. But it goes back to the dim beginnings of the Jewish race. The Jews regarded themselves as the "people" i.e. chosen **QUOHOL**. Why did God choose the Jews, is an ancient question. He could have chosen the Amorites, the Perizites the Cananites, the Hittites, the Girgasites, the Hevites or the Jebusites. In that case the question would have arisen why did he choose any one of them. We cannot answer it. We are simply up against the fact of the choice. Mr. Billy Graham the famous modern Evangelist was asked why God chose him to be his special messenger in modern times and he said, "That is the first question I mean to ask God when I meet him in Heaven". The question is unanswerable from a human point of view.

Mr. Chenchiah is under the impression that, if he got behind the Johannine and Pauline religion we get the bare Christ. But Archbishop William Temple has said that the only Jesus of whom there is any evidence is a Jesus who made tremendous claims. This would refer to the Gospel of Mark also which Mr. Chenchiah cannot dismiss easily.

Let it be remembered that to start with, God did not choose the Jews as such, he chose one man - Abraham. His descendants were the Jews who considered themselves automatically as the chosen race. The idea has never deserted the Jewish people. Even Benjamin Disraeli a Prime Minister of England in the last century though anxious to be an English Squire and land owner could never free himself from the idea that he belonged to the chosen race. So the Church is not a voluntary organisation. It simply took the place of the "people".

Jesus himself did not disconnect the new band that he was gathering found himself from the chosen people of the Old Testament.

It is significant that the number of his disciples tallied with the number of the Jewish tribes and regarded the law of Moses as a heritage which had descended into his time and circumstances and therefore to be respected. He has said that He came not to destroy but to fulfil and over and over again we find him asking those people whom he cured, to fulfil the law of Moses.

But while Jesus did not dismiss the age old concept of the "people" He reconstituted the content of the concept. Old Israel had failed. He set up a new Israel, the form remains the same but the inside has changed. God could make children of Abraham out of stones, but they are still children of Abraham. They shall sit in the New Kingdom and on twelve thrones with twelve tribes not the old ones but still twelve tribes and Paul writing to the gentile converts says that they had been grafted into the old olive.

By now we hope that it would have become clear that the Christians of the early church did not of themselves think up the idea of the Church. But simply fell into line and felt they had been chosen by God which was the indispensable condition of their existence. The term Church in the original Greek comes from two words - which meant called out of. So those who constitute a new Church felt that they were being called out of their old community into a new one. The original Greek was ecclesia which is still in use in its various derived forms.

We have spoken of the New Israel which was but a continuation of the Old Israel. But was this New Israel or ecclesia actually established by Jesus? Mr. Chenchiah and his disciple must be convinced that the Church was actually established by Jesus and cannot be easily set aside. What are our reasons for thinking so?

In the first place, after the great confession of Peter at Ceasaera Phillipi, he says on this confession "I will build my Church." The Roman Catholics have built their whole case for papacy on this verse, taking it for granted that Peter was the rock on which the Church was built. But the word Petra from which the word Peter comes means a rock.

So Protestants interpret the verse to mean that it is on that confession that the Church was built and Simon son of Jonas came to be called Peter because he made the confession.

Secondly, when at the last supper, he said to his disciples "this do in remembrance of me till I come", he was establishing a new fellowship which would be loyal to him always.

This makes it clear that the New Israel in its reconstituted form was actually established by Jesus.

Mr. Chenchiah and Mr. Wesley Ariarajah take exception to the various creeds and confessions of the Church and its statements and rites which form a barrier shutting out others from entering the fellowship.

In one sense the charge is untrue and in another sense it is true. In this connection it is permissible to relate two stories. One of which can be testified to by the present writer. One night, many years ago when he arrived in a government inn in the city of Madurai in India, he was asked whether he was a Brahmin and turned out into the street because he was not. This was the barrier between the Brahmin and the non-Brahmin, not an expansible barrier. A non-Brahmin could not become a Brahmin because he wanted accommodation in an inn. The barrier set up by the creeds and confessions of the church are not such a barrier.

The other story pertains to the second world war, a protestant soldier had died and his companions took him to the nearest cemetery which happened to be Roman Catholic. The Priest in-charge told them, that the rules of his church did not allow him to bury a Protestant on the consecrated ground of a Roman Catholic cemetery. But he could do one thing, he could bury him on the boundary line. The next day, when the dead soldier's friends went to look for the grave they could not find it. On inquiry they were told by the priest that he had expanded his boundaries and no rule (forbidding lands) prevented him from expanding his lands. So it was an expansible boundary. The boundary set up by the Christian ecclesia with its creeds and confessions are inexpandible, as far as non-believers are concerned but is expansible in the case of believers, nobody unwilling to believe in the essential Creeds of the Church could be a member of the Church but those willing to believe are readily admitted.

This seems a reasonable arrangement. H.G. Wells, a famous writer in his own time and who when he was living was supposed to wield the power of ten kings said the following:-

"We are telling our young people about the real past, the majestic expansion of terrestrial events. In these events the little region of Palestine is no more than a highway between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Nothing began there, nothing was worked out".

This kind of opinion is not common among educated people but it can prevail. After all Palestine is a small piece of territory which was a negligible part of the Roman empire in its hey-day, Pilate the Procurator of Judaea was a negligible officer in the Roman hierarchy of the officialdom in that period in the long history of the Roman Empire. So the opinion of H.G. Wells can prevail. As against, the Christian Church says - that into this world in the words of Nathaniel Micklem.

"The low sad music of humanity its infinite quest, its infinite desires, its impotence, its questions, its dreams and hopes and intimations, its discussions, its pitiful and fruitless efforts to win peace, purity and love" God did verily come down as man, on this stand, we stake our all. If he did not, it is consolation that we could still be religious.

SALVATION

When we look out on the world and confront the panorama of religions there are two features that will immediately strike us; the multiplicity of those who profess the various forms of religion and the variety of forms that any particular religion assumes. The multiplicity consists of individuals, races and nations. To those who profess religion the variety consists of the different forms and kinds of religions.

Whereas the multiplicity of individuals is almost infinite the variety of religions is much less infinite and if you leave out the cults practised by small groups in jungles, bushes and mountains, only a small number of religions is left. Of this small number, the existing differences are wide and different. When we look at these religions we have a right to ask why they are in business? Though the differences are wide and different there are certainly common features between all of them. They have all places of worship, and priests and have certain common practices like forms of worship, penances, fasts and vigils. Certain have practices of self - mortification. Still there must be fundamental differences. Otherwise they can all merge.

Though there are common features, the differences at the bottom must be fundamental.

All religions desire to practise, preach and propagate the method of salvation. The differences are due to the fact that each religion advocates a different method of salvation.

Salvation or redemption means being freed from. When a man in a court of law is accused of a certain crime and is acquitted by the judge, he is saved from punishment. Salvation means safety or deliverance from peril or punishment.

No person living in the world feels that he has lived totally aright. This feeling is common not merely to the sinner but to the saint as well. In fact the saint has his feeling more intensely than the sinner. So everybody feels the need to be protected from the consequences of his acts, intentions and thoughts of which they were responsible. This is what religions offer to do.

How does Christianity differ from other religions in its prescription for salvation?

It may be thought that, whereas other religions prescribe penances, pilgrimages etc., and on the whole lay down methods of self effort, Christianity offers salvation from outside which can be obtained without an ordeal on your part. This cannot be maintained because there are prescriptions in other religions also which point to offers of salvation which have nothing to do with self effort. For instance no less a person than Sankara has a passage in one of his writings which reads as follows:-

I know no mantra, yantra or sutra;
I know no invocation or contemplation;
I know no stories in your praise;
I know not your Mudras, not even how to cry out
(to you) simply.
I know mother, simply to run after you, which itself
destroys (all my) distress.

There is another school in theistic Hinduism which is in the branch known as Sri Vaishnavism in which there is a Doctrine called Saranakathy that teaches a doctrine of complete surrender that results in total forgiveness. This teaches that on the utterance of the formula I offer my adoration to Narayana (Vishnu) and Sri (His consort) there is total forgiveness of sins.

And Mahayana as an important branch which commands the allegiance of most Japanese Buddhists, it is called JODO-SHINSU associated with a figure called Shintan (1173-1262). According to this sect Amirthaba Buddha offers free Salvation. Many therefore, regard JODO-SHINSU akin to Christianity.

But the point about free salvation is that it is entirely free. God is willing to forgive the sinner without any effort on his part. The fundamental defect of free Salvation is that the consequences of sin are done away with. It may be seen that this eliminates the element of justice in the dispensation of the administration of the universe. Everybody will agree that though they appreciate pardon and freedom its against the basic order of Administration if there is no consequence or punishment for wrong doing. No doubt, divine punishment is awful to contemplate. But how can you imagine that God lets people do what they like and close his eyes to the need for dealing with the need to take account of the fact that there has been a violation of its rule. The difference between Christianity and a religion like JODO-SHINSU and Sri Vaishnavism on the one hand and Christianity on the other is that whereas the individual is not punished, there still is punishment - the message of Christianity is not merely that Christ saves but that he has saved

mankind by himself bearing in his person the punishment due to man.

"The Yawning Chasm" therefore, that would otherwise exist that were God's justice and our sins is done away with.

The Emperor Titus is said to have boasted that he never denied any request made to him. This may have made him popular but was it right? I think it was Voltaire who said "God's business is to forgive". This takes away from God one of His basic characteristics viz: His justice. It would be a violation of God's Holiness to think that God forgives everything that man may do because of His love for them. God may be love but He is also Holy and therefore just.

So that the forgiveness of sins cannot be gratis. There must be punishment somewhere. But to ask man to expect forgiveness for all his sins is unthinkable. So though punishment somewhere is indispensable that man himself should bear it is also unthinkable. What Christianity proclaims on the point is that when Jesus died on the Cross, God was in Him forgiving our sins. And through the centuries the Christians have insisted that the following words of Isaiah the Prophet written some centuries before Christ were in reference to Christ Himself.

"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted".

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed". Isaiah 53:4,5 To the Greeks the idea that forgiveness of sins was secured by Jesus dying on the cross seemed foolishness and to the Jews it was a stumbling block. Still Paul persisted the preaching of the cross, which to him was equivalent to the Salvation of mankind. Because to Him God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. So there is no salvation granted gratis.

This is how it has come about: the cross which used to be the cruelest and the most ignominious form of punishment has become the glory of the Christian. Churches are built in the form of a cross and Bishops and monks bear pectoral Crosses. So that it is not merely that Jesus saved but that he saved through a peculiar act of which a famous theologian said that Jesus was crucified not

inspite of the fact that he was a Messiah but because he was the Messiah. And His Apostles have said that the death of Jesus was according to the determinate counsel, and fore knowledge of God.

Aim and Goal:

The contention running through Mr. Wesley Ariarajah's whole book is that Christians should evacuate its Christo-centrism and substitute in its place Theo-centrism. This is based on the false antithesis that the New Testament is Christo-centric and not Theo-centric. The New Testament is certainly too Christo-centric to be purely theo-centric. However, the person who would have been most surprised at hearing that it was Christo-centric and not Theo-centric would be Jesus Christ Himself because to him both meant the same thing. The word was with God and the word was God.

"He is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1;15). "This is the work that you can do to believe in Him that God had sent". A distinction is always drawn between God and Jesus. No doubt in John 10;30 Jesus says "I and the Father are one". This may suggest identity. But its purpose is to assent co-incidence. There is a father, there is a son, there is distinction but it is a distinction that holds within it coincidence.

The idea of ditheism was abhorrent to the Jews, Tertullian the famous second century theologian had said "**SI DEUS; UNUS EST**" (if there is a God, He can only be one) and in the Council of Nicea, Athanasius who is responsible for the most Christo-centric clause framed there that Jesus is the very God of the very God, light of light, etc., is said to have been more concerned with avoiding ditheism than to assert the Divinity of Christ. So it must be admitted that while Christianity is certainly Christo-centric, it is also theo-centric. Mr. Wesley Ariarajah wants to eliminate Christo-centricism and strive for the bare retention of theo-centrism, that is, he wants to sail on the uncharted seas in search of bare theism. Let us see what happened?

Man is now on his own. There is no guidance. He is the master of himself i.e. he is given unlimited liberty in the task of God making our readers would have seen various objects like mountains and rivers worshipped in various parts of the world. This does not mean that people do not realize that mountains are made of stone and rivers of water. They are in search of the super-power behind the universe and they look upon all things which are more than ordinary as the projections of a super-power in the universe. Sister Nivedeta the famous disciple of Swami Vivekananda has a

magnificent passage in which she explains how Mount Everest piercing the sky entowering beyond it came to be regarded as Mahadeva (the great God Shiva). So actually the search for bare theism in uncharted seas leads to proliferation of deities.

The search we have referred to leads to another curious result. Xenophanes (570-480 BC) a Greek writer said that if lions and horses would have fashioned a God, they would have fashioned them like themselves. This was because in Greek times they fashioned their idols in human form. But oddly enough some Philosophers in the 19th century took up the same position as Xenophanes. Of these, Ludwig Feurbach the German philosopher said man first projects himself into the position of ultimate reality as an object and makes the object he himself has projected as subject and becomes an object to what was his own object. Freud, Karl Marx, Nietzsche have followed Feurbach in this argument.

Rudolf Otto who spent a year in India and therefore knew something more about what man projects into the position of ultimate reality makes his pertinent comment that man has made a god out of everything imaginable.

Therefore, Mr. Wesley Ariarajah's search for bare monotheism may also end up in unlimited idolatry.

From a pragmatic point of view uncharted theo-centrism will have a devastating effect on morality. It provides solid ground for **amoralism** (non-moralism). Because people take the cue from their God what is right or wrong, for what they think God considers right or wrong. If God making had been in the hands of man, he could not have on his own fashioned the God of Holiness, Justice and Mercy. He would have left him bare of qualities. And every man would have been free to assign such qualities to him as he thought best. We do not know whether Mr. Wesley Ariarajah gave sufficient thought to his goal in making this sustained contention to provide universal peace.

We do not know whether peace in itself is uniformly desired. Jesus did not live at peace with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. A struggle sometimes is an utter necessity. Dietrich Bonhoeffer the modern German martyr gave up his work in America to come back to Germany and fight Hitler. From one point of view this attitude must have been considered a kind of ignorance. When everything is considered and other things are equal, peace is preferable to wrangling, quarreling and struggling whether among individuals or among nations. But it cannot be considered an

ultimate. In morality what is ultimate is right regard to ideals, what is ultimate is truth and not peace and that is what Christianity whether right or wrong is trying to preach. To produce peace and merely to avoid discussion and debate for the sake of peace is after all not a worthy ideal.

Adieu:

There seems to be two rival stands. The dicta which seem to be at bay: the position taken up by Mr. Wesley Ariarajah which tells him that more or less all religions are substantially the same, and the stand of the WCC which has given an undertaking to the world that it would proclaim that Jesus is God and Saviour. As to which of these should have priority is a task which Mr. Ariarajah must urgently perform.

POST - SCRIPT

This book from start to finish may seem negatory and not affirmative; it denies many things and it does not affirm anything on its own. That impression would be perfectly correct. The author was asked to write a reply to Mr. Ariarajah and write it post-haste and therefore, did not think it his business to write a book on his own presuppositions. If the author had been given liberty he would have written on the subject from his own point of view. The book would have been well rounded and well proportioned and not unduly concerned with what Mr. Ariarajah thinks on this subject or that. For what the author has written at length on the subject the reader may refer to the "Concept of Transcendence" published by Christian Literature Society, Madras.





