Concluding remarks

Although the necessity and relevance of a full-length concluding chapter has been keenly felt for the maintenance of a connecting thread, we have not inducted any such chapter because the same would have been purely repetitive in character, instead of offering anything fresh. In each chapter, as we have tried to show, Shaw has abundantly spoken about his religious beliefs in different forms, and from different angles, without being inconsistent. So far as the question of basic consistency is concerned, every play more or less marks a gradual development of his beliefs. As we have already stated The Devil's Disciple is basically the spadework for Man and Superman, while Back to Methuselah seems to be the grim sublimation of Man and Superman. Again, plays like The Showman, Up of Blanche Wagnet and The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles present some parallel ideas, without being repetitive, for they are projected in different dramatic contexts. Like two tributaries they too contribute towards the central stream of the Shawian thought.

In the play, Androcles and the Lion, if both the play and the preface are taken together, Shaw remains a
critic of the Bible. The same strain continues in the famous tale, *The Black Girl in Search of God*. As we have seen, in *Androcles and the Lion*, Shaw did not totally lose his faith in the relevance of the Bible; but in the *Black Girl* tale his last faint faith in the Bible is also spent and exhausted, considering it to be absolutely useless in the process of helping man in his eternal search after the Ultimate Reality, or God. At last, the Bible is thrown into the water. Thus, both the works, *Androcles and the Lion* and the *Black Girl*, start from the same base, although they end in the same search through two separate routes.

Major Barbara is an attempt at a scientific probe into the inalienable interrelationship that exists between a man's economic condition and his religious sentiments. *Saint Joan* is also a scathing and merciless attack on the unhappy relationship between the church and the temporal authority. Their relationship is that one tends to fill the gap created by the other in the furtherance of their vested interests.

Thus, Shaw has tried to turn every stone to explore the inherent falsehoods and hypocrisies of the traditional religious ethics, codes, and the institutions. He attacks
the so-called religion from different fronts, while he has all along kept in view his own ideal of religion. He may change his war-fronts according to strategic demands, but not the ideal he tried to establish. The ideal itself constitutes the pivot of his religious belief. So, one might naturally ask as to what is the pivot of Shaw's religious ideas. There cannot be a terse and readymade answer to such a pertinent question. After investigating the relevant works, discussed under eight full-length chapters, one may very safely infer that the sole aim behind the religious beliefs of Shaw was to create a congenial philosophical environment, leading to the creation of a better or higher man, or as Shaw calls him the superman, a superior philosophical being, endowed with self-knowledge and the consciousness of his individual role towards the furtherance and realization of the will of the cosmic force. He calls it 'Life-force'. In short, the creation of the superman constitutes the pivot of Shaw's religious beliefs.

The existing moral values and the institutionalized form of religion, as they are based on certain falsehoods, and shaky philosophical values, can hardly help create a congenial atmosphere for the creation of the superman.
Shaw puts special stress on the 'purpose' of the 'Life-force' and on the process of what he calls 'creative evolution', which he distinctly differentiates from the Darwinian concept of 'evolution'. Darwinian 'evolution' is basically a 'biological evolution' with special stress on physical prowess and biological excellence; while Shavian evolution is primarily a 'philosophical evolution' with special accent on superior intelligence and superior brain. Darwin, according to Shaw, banished mind from the universe. The existing socio-economic set-up, the religious institutions, and the moral values, he believes, are detrimental and uncongenial to the process of 'philosophical evolution'. So, he wants to mercilessly uproot the existing moral values at any cost. He whips practically every idea that impedes the growth and emergence of the superman. As a result, he appears before us as an iconoclast and as an immoral person without any socially acceptable moral scruples. He wanted to identify religion with 'creative evolution'. So, we have already pointed out that the evolutionist and the religionist in him are inseparably rolled into one.

According to him, 'the man who has no religion is

1. This phrase was originally used by H. Butler, and often used by Bernard Shaw.
a coward and a cash. 2 He was guided by his own sense of religion; and we cannot put him to any particular group of believers. He is conscious of the divisions and subdivisions within the Christian church. He has seen the interchurch fightings. In his own words - "As it is, Christianity has split into sects, persuasions, and Nonconformities in all directions." 3

Regarding the number of the breakaway groups within the Christian church he jocularly remarks - "The Statesman's Year Book has given up trying to list them." Sometimes, he calls himself a Protestant of the Irish church. Again, he often calls himself a Catholic with his own terms and conditions. Sometimes, he will say that he is not a Christian at all, because the Christianity of Jesus Christ has been replaced by the Christianity of St. Paul, he states. Pauline Christianity, he says, is completely divorced from the main spirit of Jesus Christ. In his own words - "I am a Protestant; I believe in the Holy Catholic Church; in the Holy Trinity of Father, Son (or Mother, Daughter) and Spirit; in the Communion of Saints, the Life to come, the Immaculate Conception, and the everyday reality of Godhead and the Kingdom of Heaven. Also, I believe that salvation


3. Preface to Farfetched Fables; Ch. A Hundred Religions and only one sauce; P-901 (Complete Shaw Prefaces, Paul Hamlyn 1965, London).

4. Ibid.
depends on redemption from belief in miracles; and I regard St. Athanasius as an irreligious fool - that is, in the only serious sense of the word, a damned fool."

For Shaw God is not an anthropomorphic being. He is against any kind of idolization. Pointing to a Jainist temple he states - "But go into a Jainist temple today: what do you find? Idols everywhere. Not even anthropomorphic idols, but horse idols, cat idols, elephant idols and what not. The statues of the Jainist sages and saints, far from being contemplated as great seers, were worshipped as gods." 6

Instead of running away from God with a sense of reverential awe he tries to understand and at the same time wants others to understand the purpose of the Life-force. "It is no use falling back on the old evasion and saying that God is beyond our comprehension", he writes. God, he believes, has a well-knit plan, and proceeds through the method of 'trial and error'. Shaw puts special emphasis on 'dedication', absolute dedication to the will of 'Life-force', for the sublimation of man's creative potentialities. In the word of Shaw - "...the development of life is everybody's religion, that life is the thing,

---

than co-operation with this power becomes your religion, you begin to feel your hands are hands of God, as it were, that he has no other hands to work with, your mind is the mind of God, that he made your mind in order to work with. Then you not only get an enormous addition in courage, self-respect, dignity, and purpose, yet turned aside from all sorts of vile and base things, but you get a religion which may be accepted practically by almost all the churches.... if I come across religious people, Indian, or Irish, or Mahometan, or anybody else, we can meet on this common ground. You find that this thing is in everybody, the hope of this thing. The moment you clear up people's minds and make them conscious of this, that moment you discover that the roots of this religion are 8 in every person...."

Shaw was an ardent believer in human vitality, and he tried his best to mobilize and exploit the same for higher ends. The existing moral values do not help in the manifestation of that inherent vitality. He is also aware of the perennial struggle between human vitality and the 'artificial system of morality'. In his own word - "I am a moral revolutionary, interested, not in the

Thus, Shaw wrote his plays with the deliberate object of converting the people to his opinions. He wanted the people to revise and reconsider their moral values; and like an out-and-out propagandist he stated: "I am not an ordinary playwright in general practice. I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays. My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals. In particular, I regard such current morality as to economic and sexual relations as disastrously wrong; and I regard certain doctrines of the Christian religion as understood in England today with abhorrence. I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions in these matters." His plays, thus, constitute a class by itself, and he himself declares - "My plays are sui generis."

Bernard Shaw is virtually a lone wolf, and we cannot compare him with any single author. He practically stands alone with his own ideal. His ideas too constitute a class by itself. Prof. Leon Hugo perhaps rightly says:

11. Table Talk of G.B.S, P-80.
"Another difficulty about Shaw is that he is, partly of historical necessity, his own touchstone. We do not gain a great deal by trying to compare him with Ibsen or Chekhov, because Shaw was too much like Shaw and not sufficiently like the two continental masters for anything particularly illuminating to emerge; and there is no immediate tradition of good English drama by which to measure him."

Shaw often calls himself a 'mystic'—"As for my own position, I am and always have been, a mystic." Critic like Prof. Leon Hugo goes further, and calls Shaw a "practical mystic". That is to say, for Shaw religion cannot have an isolated identity, or a fugitive existence, completely detached from the mainstream of man's socioeconomic life. Religion divorced from a man's down-to-the-earth material issues is fundamentally anti-life; and logically speaking, whatever is anti-life can hardly do anything positive for the emergence of the superman. But, he also believes that the advent of the superman can in no case be averted by man's anti-life activities. If man does not cooperate with Life-force, the latter will not keep sitting chairtight. It will finally take its

own course for the fulfilment of its purpose and "the
superman will certainly come like a thief in the night."

Shaw often creates a great deal of confusion in
our minds; and we cannot specifically point out as to
what he really is, and what he really stands for and
fights for. Although we understand the implication of what
he says, yet an element of confusion always persists. Prof.
Desmond MacCarthy explained such a state of affairs as
"chaos of clear ideas." Perhaps he was right.

We can sum-up our discussion in the given words.
That is to say, for Bernard Shaw 'Superman' is the central
point within the circle of his religious philosophy; and
all his ideas, manifested in different forms in the
different works, simply move around that centre with a
violent centrifugal tilt.

15. Preface to *Sanity of Art*, p. 802 (Complete Shaw prefaces,