Chapter 7

An Attempt at an Over-all Analysis of Conversion
From all that we have considered so far on conversion, it should be clear that conversion is not simply a question of law and order. Nor is it a question that can be tackled somehow, by such programmes like inculturation and so on. The question of conversion is really a question of the superiority of one religion over another. If a religion is superior to another then conversion must take place.

The conviction of the Christian missionaries was that their religion was superior to Hinduism in (a) doctrines, (b) practices, (c) and on account of certain points of uniqueness. Hence their claim for conversion to Christianity. Whereas some leaders from the side of Hinduism have questioned such claims and convictions of these missionaries. We have seen in this chapter the grounds on which both the parties base their stands. We have also tried to give an analysis of their positions, in each section. We may now recast our analyses, very briefly, so as to enable ourselves to see the whole question at a single glance, and also to arrive at an answer to the question with which we started our inquiry into the problem of conversion: "Should conversion be allowed or not?"

What shall we say about the claim of doctrinal superiority of one religion over another? When one claims that
one's religious doctrines are better than those of another what is meant is that they are more logical or more scientific. One may also mean that one's doctrine is better, because it leads to a better understanding of religious life. But the question is whether 'logic' or 'science' makes people live more religiously? Can a doctrine lead people to a better understanding of life? To put it differently, what is the relationship between religious doctrines and religious life?

No doubt, doctrine and life do interact. But our problem is what is primary? Our analysis in the V chapter showed that life is primary. It is only when doubts arise, then certain attempts are made to solve those doubts. It is the search for clarification of certain questions, raised about life, that results in doctrinalization or belief-system in a religion. So, according to the different levels of questionings by individuals, according to the types of questions, or in other words, according to the differences in the intellectual ethos of a community, the belief systems also differ from community to community. But the 'lives' remain fundamentally the same in all the communities, even given the differences in their belief-systems. If this is accepted then it is clear that the attempt to compare one set of doctrines with another with a view to establishing doctrinal superiority is not justified. That means conversion on the basis of doctrinal superiority cannot be held.
As to the claims to superiority in terms of practice, also, we found that there is really no ground for justification. For, degeneration of a practice in any given religion is possible at any given time. And it is made actual, we said, due to a number of factors — social, political, economic,—although there could be purely religious degeneration also. Hence, merely the degeneration of a religious practice in a community will not be a sufficient ground for establishing the inferiority of its religion and the superiority of the other, and therefore converting people into it.

Thus, neither the doctrinal superiority, nor the superiority in terms of practices, that can really be grounds for conversion. Ultimately it is one's firm conviction that a religion is the Truth that can be the real ground for conversion. If one approaches the other religions, with the presupposition that they also are true, then even if he sees an unsophisticated doctrinal system or degraded practices, he would see them as things which need a change towards the better, but not as grounds for conversion. When, on the contrary, one goes with the presupposition that one's own religion alone has the full Truth, then, even if he comes across a sophisticated system of beliefs, he would understand it only as an 'impotent expression' of man's fundamental yearnings, or as a merely 'natural search' of man, or as an 'unfulfilled and abortive attempt' — which therefore, need
be fulfilled by one's own expression of the Truth. Likewise, even if he comes across a religion with the best practices, he would only understand them as merely 'self-redemptions', 'self-justifications' -- which therefore need be converted to one's own religious framework.

The question of conversion is, therefore, finally reduced to this vis. the question of truth: Whether one's religion alone is true? Or, whether other religions are also true? Is the ultimate goal of man attainable in one's religion only? Or is it attainable also in others? It is precisely this question that K. is considering in his book referred to. So, we analysed the answer he gives to this question. We found that his answer is affirmative, on the side of Christianity. On the basis of certain points of uniqueness -- such as (a) the Source of Christianity being Christ, the God-revealed in history, (b) the Biblical understanding of Sin as the unique understanding of the fundamental fact of man, and (c) the goal offered in Christianity is also unique, viz. the redemption of man from sin through the Atonement by Christ -- K. claims that Christianity alone is the Religion, is the Truth, and that all other religions are all merely 'natural' religious; they do not recognize sin seriously; they are all simply self-redemptions.
So, the issue is, Christianity, on the one hand, claimed itself as the one true religion, and on the other hand regarded other religions as false or at best partially true. In joining issue with it, Gandhi contends that the great religions of the world were no less true than Christianity. Thus Gandhi feels that it is neither relevant nor necessary for him to assert that Christianity was a true religion. But what he wants really to deny is the unique claim made by Christianity that it alone is the religion. No doubt, the points of uniqueness with reference to the Source, the Understanding of man's Predicament, the Goal, etc., are unique to Christianity only. The particular mode of presenting the predicament of man, for example, cannot be found in other religions in the same way. However, Gandhi's contention is that if one takes the 'substance' of what is presented as sin in the Bible, and the redemption from sin through Christ etc., they can be found in other religions too. Thus with reference to Hinduism, Gandhi claims, first, that the Understanding of man's Predicament given in the Gita in the form of eternal warfare that goes on in the heart of man. Secondly, the goal also, according to Gandhi, is expressed in Hinduism as the one expressed in the Bible: viz. in overcoming our lower impulses on the one hand, and inequality between men, particularly the sin of Untouchability, on the other, and thereby realizing oneself as Divine.
But what about the uniqueness of the fact of Christ, the God-revealed? In fact K's whole position depends on this point, which cannot in any way be common to other religions. But according to Gandhi, a fact of history cannot play a very great role in religion. And he would accuse K. of making much of history. But a Christian will never say that it is just the historical fact of Christ that is unique, but the fact that this historical person has claimed to be the Truth, the Way, and the Life. It is the fact that a person appearing at a particular time of history, claimed to have been even before the time of Abraham. It is the combination of the temporal and the eternal, that gives uniqueness to Christ. But Gandhi will argue that these claims of Christ, even granted to have been made by Christ himself, would have appeal only to those who approach with faith, but not to the unbelievers. To them they may all appear just 'historical facts'. Now, can a religion be allowed to rest upon historical evidence? He would also argue that a claim made by Christ, needs to be interpreted in order to see the full import of such claim. Such interpretations (beliefs) can be had even without any historical basis. What is historical is contingent. Whereas one's faith in Christ or God, and the living of religion is something which demands a total surrender and absolute confidence, and living accordingly.
There may be others who do not find anything of uniqueness about the claims made by Christ, because Krishna also had made such claims. For examples they will quote verses from the Gita: "(I am) the Lord of all existence." For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age." "I know the beings that are past, that are present and that are to come." And, even granted that no body else had made similar claims, other than Christ, there may be still others who would not be attracted by that point of uniqueness of Christ, but rather he ready to make much of what they consider as unique in their own religions.

It is a plain fact that people make a virtue of what they have. To take an ordinary example, a lady who has long hair may make of it a point of virtue, whereas another, with short hair, may make much of 'thickness' of hair. Likewise, the adherents of different religions may naturally make much of what is characteristic of their own religion. To those who are born and bred as Christians, Christ’s explicit oral claims will seem more authoritative, evoking thereby the total surrender of themselves to Him. Whereas to the Buddhists such oral claims may even be repelling and a point of demerit. They will say: 'Our Master, even without having made the oral claims to be the Life, the Truth and the Way, has actually
lived the Life of Enlightenment, shown the Way, and been the Truth. This is much more sublime than doing it, and claiming to have done it. Whereas in the eyes of a Vedic Hindu, religion cannot be made to be a matter dependent on a historic person, with claims, or without. Revelation is truly eternal and non-personal (apaurasheya). Judged in that light, he would say Vedas alone are unique revelation.

If, in this way, the followers of different religions were to go on emphasising their own points of uniqueness, with a view to establishing the superiority of one's own religion, that would naturally end in "warring creeds", which, according to Gandhi, is blasphemy. "Insistence on a particular form or repetition of a credo may be potent cause of violent quarrels leading to bloodshed and ending in utter disbelief in Religion i.e. God Himself." That is why, he adds: "All faiths are equally dear to their respective votaries. What is wanted ... is not a clash among them to show the superiority of (one) faith over (another) ... Conversion, in the sense of self-purification, self-realization, (even remaining within one's own faith) is the crying need of the times."

In the light of the above remark, given by Gandhi, it becomes clear where K. has gone wrong. He is absolutely
correct when he takes up the point of uniqueness which he considers to be in Christ, and makes it a ground for committing his faith to Christ, and thereby anchoring his hope on a stronghold. But that does not justify him to make it a criterion of deciding the truth value of the whole variety of religions in the world. He should be able to recognise that people are different in temperament, taste and training, so that what he considers unique may not be considered unique by somebody else. What is essential in religion is to translate his (unique) theory into an authentic praxis in the religious parameter. It is equally important to realize that the Attainment which is made possible in one religion is also possible in another, (provided that the faithful co-operates with the grace unreservedly).

This truth was a conviction to Jesus of Nazareth as it is clear from the following facts:

(a) When the disciples of Jesus, seeing a man driving out demons in the name of Jesus, requested him to stop doing so, because he did not belong to their group, Jesus reprimands them saying: "Do not try to stop him, ... because whoever is not against us is for us." (Mark 9:40). This means clearly that for somebody to be for Christ what is needed is not that he should be in a direct contact with the group of the professedly Christians nor have an avowed allegiance...
to the Church, but that he should "do similar things" as a good Christian would do.\(^9\)

(b) Christ recognizes also that there may be people, who would be formally professing faith in Him, but in practice may not be doing what they ought to do. And he shows such a positive disapproval of them that he is all out to disown them: "Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants them to do. When Judgement Day comes, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord!' In your name we spoke God's message, by your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles!' Then I will say to them: 'I never knew you, Get away from me, you wicked people!'\(^10\)

So, according to Jesus Christ's own criterion, what is essential for one's salvation is not just a profession of faith (not even in Jesus Christ's uniqueness or in His teachings etc.) but action, (i.e. doing what one ought to do for the Attainment).

This is precisely what Gandhi also is insisting on:
"Do not flatter yourselves with the belief that a mere recital of that celebrated verse in St. John\(^{11}\) makes a man a Christian. If I have read the Bible correctly, I know many men who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ, or have even rejected the official interpretation of Christianity will, probably,
if Jesus came in our midst today in the flesh, be owned by him more than many of us." Further he says elsewhere: "I am convinced, I know, that God will ask, asks us now, not what we label ourselves, but what we are, i.e. what we do. With Him, deed is everything; belief without deed is nothing. With Him doing is believing."^13

So Gandhi was constantly entreating missionaries to approach the problem (of multi-religious situation) with open-mindedness and humility. And in support of his claim, viz. that what is essential in religion is not a belief of a particular type, but a life of a particular kind. He placed before them a number of facts. Referring to a Pariah's hut, he once said: "There are many such huts belonging to the Untouchables where you will certainly find God.... Vile as some of them may be, there are noblest specimens of humanity in their midst." He would also "quote chapter and verse from his experience" to show that "there are some examples from among the Brahmins who were devoting themselves body and soul to the service of Untouchables, with no expectation of reward from the Untouchables, but with execration from orthodoxy, which they would not mind because in serving Pariah they are seeing God."^15

Again, it is against the background of his conviction (viz. that not mere profession but action is important in
religion) that Gandhi told the South African Chaplain who wanted to convert him: "I am conscious of my weakness and try to fight them — not in my own strength but in the strength of God. Is that not enough or do you wish me to repeat parrot-like that Jesus has cleansed me from all sin?" After that, the chaplain did not want to convert him. Once again it is this conviction that explains his constant wonder about several American friends saying to him: "You cannot have peace unless you believe Jesus". And his earnest reply was: "Well, I tell you I have peace, though I do not believe in Jesus as the only Son of God." And it was not just a reply in retort. For it was a well known fact that he was able to retain his peace and equanimity of spirit even amidst humiliation and social defeat and a tempestuous life, and a peace which had had excited the envy of many of his Christian friends.

If the foregoing considerations are accepted, then we can justifiably conclude that the essence of religion is not a particular belief or doctrine, not even merely the profession of the uniqueness of one's own religion, but the attainment of the life of Perfection, Liberation, Transcendence, etc., as differently called. So the life of faith is primary rather than a particular formula of the profession of Faith or a particular way of practicing Faith which is conditioned by temporal and/or cultural dimensions.
By this, we do not mean that the 'life' need not depend upon doctrines, practices etc. It is generally impossible to imagine such a situation, as long as man is what he is. What we want to say is that the kind of life which we call religious, need not depend upon one particular set of doctrines, and practices. Plurality of religions is inevitable. For, given the differences in taste, temperament and training of human beings, given the climatic conditions and geographic changes, and given the varieties of backgrounds, historical, political, cultural, etc. the set of doctrines, practices which arise in support of the 'life', will necessarily be different. As long as the fact about men is that we never think alike, and that we always see Truth in fragments and from different angles of vision, differences are bound to be there in their systems of beliefs/doctrines, practices/rituals etc. Even if all the existing religions were to be abolished and a new religion created, it is bound to multiply within a few years. Many sects, and sub-sects are sure to arise out of that one religion. The point is that the plurality of religions is a natural and, therefore, an inevitable phenomenon.

These different religions - which is a must - are also 'one' in a fundamental sense, namely, that every religion is able to produce saints of comparatively equal spiritual heights. Thus, e.g., the life of St. Theresa of Lisieux and
that of Sri Andal present such a close similarity of attainments, that each has been able to find fulfilment in life just by offering their virginity to their own respective Divine Spouse, and burning with the divine love with their respective Lords. As St. Paul in Christianity and Appar in Saiva Siddhanta may be compared, so St. Thomas Aquinas and Shankaracharya, the great philosopher-saints of different faiths, may be compared, though on different grounds. Many more examples of this kind could be easily found and a systematic study also could be made.

The implication of the foregoing consideration is that the differences in the frameworks of religions need not essentially involve superiority of one to another, but rather they are all contingent, due to the differences in personal, historical and other factors. At the same time they are essentially one, in as much as they are all able to produce great saints. To put it sufficiently, the different religions are many expressions of one and the same Truth, (namely, the Truth of life, differently called as Perfection, Transcendence, Liberation etc.).

In the light of what has been said so far the weakness of K's position become very clear, as K. fails (a) to give recognition to the differences of religions, and much less, (b) to see through the differences and grasp their fundamental
oneness. These are the two mistakes, committed by K, which we shall present in some more detail in the following paragraphs.

(a) K accepts as correct only the Biblical understanding of the human predicament and its solution, which in turn blinds him to see a different understanding of the same, expressed in a different formulation. Now the fundamental predicament of man, in the Bible, is understood in terms of sin, viz. the disruption of man's relationship with God (and consequently with himself and his fellowmen). This way of understanding involves a clear cut distinction between the Divine and the human, and is concerned with the question: how should man bridge the gap between the two, and re-establish the strained relation? Accordingly the solution to the predicament of man, in the Bible, is understood in terms of 'redemption from sin'. This cannot be conceived except in terms of the Divine Himself taking the initiative to bridge the gap, by becoming man and atoning for the sin of man. For a 'revolt' against the Divine cannot be repaired unless the one who repairs is both Divine as well as human. And it is in this context that the Person of Christ, who is understood to have a hypostatic union of both the Divine and the human natures in Jesus of Nazareth becomes the central point in the Christian faith.
In Hinduism the predicament of man is understood in terms of the one Self becoming many 'selves', because of 'ignorance', or 'illusion' and 'bondage to matter' etc. So, naturally the 'redemption' here consists in Self-realization, or a Self-discovery and so on. Now, each framework is faced with innumerable questions, solvable and unsolvable. Thus for instance, the Christian framework will have to answer such questions as these: How could a man, a fragile creature, offend God, and revolt against Him, in such a way as to be doomed for ever? And why should not God just condone his sin? Why should he take the trouble of coming down as a man, suffer, and die and thereby make atonement for the sins of men? Likewise the Hindu framework also is beset with any number of questions: for instance, how could the Divine Self get the illusion? And, how could the individual self just realize its true nature and become that Self? etc. It is also true that many attempts have been made to answer to all such questions in both the frameworks. And the attempts to solve these problems as well as the fundamental predicament of man, have been proven very successful to the members of both the religions in their own respective frameworks, — as shown from the possibility of great saints in both the frameworks. Nevertheless, the answers given in the Christian framework may not appeal to the members of another framework, and vice versa.
Whereas K. thinks that even the perception of the human predicament is not there in Hinduism, because, he is of the opinion that the Biblical model of understanding the human predicament is the only way of understanding the situation. What he actually does in his study of other religions is to apply Christian model to them. So, when he sees that the paradigm of 'sin', as disruption of man's relationship with God, is not there, he is inclined to say that the other religions have not perceived the predicament of man, or at least that they have not considered it a serious problem to be tackled. Likewise, when he does not find the paradigm of 'the Divine coming down to save man by dying for him', K. is inclined to say that they are all 'self-redemptions' 'self-justification', a mere groping in the darkness, a 'strange impotence'. It is here it becomes clear that K's understanding of his own religion is too mechanical. For, if he had understood the essence of his religion, he would not have been carried away by a Judeo-Christian expression of the human predicament and judged other religions as no religions just because that model is not present in them.

(b) K. is unable to recognise the possibility of the differences in models of both understanding the human predicament and its solution, because he does not want to go beyond the differences and try to grasp the ultimate meaning of the different models. This is what we term as
his failure to see the ultimate oneness of the different religions. It is perfectly true that the two religions are different. Thus the focus in the Christian framework is on the Divine, so much so that the fundamental predicament of man is understood as the disruption of the relationship with the Divine, and the human goal is considered as re-establishing that relationship, which again can be brought about only by the Divine coming down as man. Whereas in the Hindu framework, the focus is on the human so that the predicament of man is understood with reference to the 'illusion' that man is in, and the goal is considered in terms of removing the 'ignorance'.

However this does not mean that the two frameworks are altogether different from each other. They do have a point of contact at the fundamentals. Thus with regard to the human predicament the Christian understanding of 'sin' cannot be explained unless an element of 'ignorance' of the fact that man is created in the image and likeness of God is brought in. In the same way, the Hindu framework, although it speaks of the human predicament in terms of 'the ignorance', 'illusion', etc., it cannot but bring in some sort of 'disruption' of the relationship with the Divine. With regard to the ultimate goal also, the two frameworks must meet at the fundamental level. Though the Divine, taking the form
of a slave, has made a perfect atonement of sins, and redeems man, according to the Christian framework, yet the fact remains that it is ultimately each individual who has to work out his own salvation. Christ's objective way of redemption cannot be taken as a sort of compensation paid on behalf of man, so that man individually needs to do nothing. Christ has saved man objectively. But man has to save himself subjectively. Fittingly St. Augustine says: "God who created you without you will not save you without you". Likewise, in the Hindu framework, although the 'liberation' is talked in terms of 'Self-realization' or 'Self-discovery' by one's ceaseless efforts, yet the role of grace from the above is not denied. Man is in constant search for the 'unveiling' from the above. Thus, in short, Christ's redemption - in Christianity - does not mean that there is no self-effort. And, man's efforts at self-realization - in Hinduism - do not mean that there is no need of Divine-help.

As against these points of weakness in the position of K. the great merit of Gandhi is to have perceived the oneness of the different expressions of the Truth, couched in different frameworks. The differences, the imperfections of the frameworks are explained by Gandhi with reference to the 'human touch', the human instrumentality. This is, in fact, readily accepted by K. too. That is why, even about his own religion
which he speaks of as the Truth, K. acknowledges that it shares with the human frailties, imperfections of any human institution. But, what makes Gandhi essentially different from K. is that, while Gandhi sees a 'divine touch' in every religion, K. sees it only in Christianity!! And the reason K. has is his faith in Jesus Christ alone as the Divine-Revelation. And he does not want to go beyond the Christocentric position.

Actually a committed Christian, as K. claims to be, cannot give up, nor is there a need to give up the Christocentric angle of vision. Even holding on to the Christocentric position, one can talk of other religions also as equally authentic expressions of Truth, say for example, as the expressions of the Cosmic-Christ, the Logos aspect of the historic Christ. And in fact, many such attempts have been taken in the recent past. The Unknown Christ of Hinduism of R. Penikker is but one example of a well-known attempt in this line.

K. does not seem to be inclined to take up such an attempt. He seems to be only ready to 'apply' mechanically the 'expression' of Truth in the form of Christ and Church to all other religions, Naturally he does not find a one-to-one correspondence between the expression of Truth, which he has taken it to be the model, and with the other
expressions, he is only too eager to condemn them as no
expressions of Truth. If only he could realise that the
Christo-centric model of expression of the Truth is limited
and finite — for no other reason than this that anything
that appears in space and time must be so — and that God
being almighty can have innumerable models of saving people,
he would not have committed the mistakes he has committed.
So, what needs to be done by K. is not that he should give
up his Christo-centric outlook, or his commitment to Christ,
but rather to realise that just as his angle of vision is
good for him, so too other angles of vision must be there,
and then they are good for them. In other words, while he
can be committed to the Christo-centric aspect, with reference
to himself, he should transcend it and go to the theo-centric
aspect, while considering the problem of plurality of
religions. The enormous thing about Gandhi is that he has
gone beyond his Ramo-centric or Krishna-centric angle, to
Theo-centric angle, but even from Theo-centric angle to the
'Truth-centric angle, which would embrace even a God-denying
men within its ambit.

Here, somebody may say that the whole approach of Gandhi
is essentially a Hindu approach, because he seems to base his
whole approach on the prevalent Hindu idea that 'all religions
are equal'. And in so far as it is so, he cannot expect
others to accept his way of solving the problem of plurality
of religions. Again, one may not find an essential difference between K. and Gandhi. For just as K. is applying his Christo-centric model, Gandhi is applying the model which he has imbibed from Hindu background. So it appears one cannot talk of Gandhi's approach as superior to that of K. and a relevant position universally acceptable in a multi-religions context.

No doubt, a committed Hindu, as he was, Gandhi must have been influenced by the prevalent Hindu idea of all religions being equal etc. But definitely he does not seem to have just 'applied' that concept to the problem of the religious diversity, as K. has tried to do. Rather, Gandhi seems to have re-created that concept in the context, which is evident from the change he made from his position 'God is Truth'... to the position 'Truth is God.' Again, Gandhi was too ready to consider the difficulties and problems, to merely apply that concept. As is well known from his life, he considered all the difficulties from all sorts of people, from missionaries, from the orthodox Hindus, and even from avowed atheists. In fact it is in the context of such readiness to consider the problems, that he brought about the change from 'God is Truth' to 'Truth is God,' in which he could even include the best of an atheist's life, as meaningfully explainable. It is also important to see that Gandhi was not satisfied with the traditional Hindu terminology for explaining the attitude to all religions: "Sarva dharma Samanatva."
He said of the existing ones it was least objectionable. But he was trying to find a more suitable term.

Again it is of momentous significance that when Gandhi talks of 'oneness' of religions, he equally emphasizes the 'differences' among them. They are all one in this that they all provide the possibility of salvation to their adherents. He said that they are all one in this that they all have a common source, and the trunk, and the same sap passing through all the branches. But he equally stressed the distinctness of each branch of that mighty Tree, so much so that he said one who is in one branch cannot go and come back from branch to branch. Again while emphasizing the need for 'toleration' for other faiths, he also equally stresses that the toleration should not mean indifference to one's own faith, nor an easy accommodation of the different faiths nor a compromise with evil etc. So, Gandhi's concept of equality of all religions does not mean somehow granting to every religion an equal status of being a means of 'reaching the same goal'. But it is only as a result of a constant and sincere search into the question of plurality of religions, recognizing the value as well as the weakness of every religion, that Gandhi put forward the thesis of the equality of religions. He recognizes the value of every religion in this that each one of them has the 'Truth' in as much as it is able to produce
the life of Transcendence, or Perfection, or of Realization etc., with the help of its own doctrines and practices. But at once Gandhi will add that that every religion is imperfect because of the human instrumentality.

The only justification for Gandhi to say that every great religion has Truth is the fact that each principal religion is able to produce great saints, in spite of their differences in framework. Each religion has produced a variety of exemplars, basically with the same framework. But the same 'variety of attainments' is also found in a different framework. Hence Gandhi argues, that the differences between them cannot be of the essence of religion, although they will necessarily be there in all religions.

Gandhi's position is not without a support from technical philosophy, particularly in the context of Wittgenstein's discussion on 'Religious belief'. Taking inspiration from the account of a religious belief by Wittgenstein, we may boldly say that the different belief-systems or religious frameworks are all valid in so far as they are able to regulate the lives of the adherents in such a way, that great saints of variety of models can be produced in each religion. If one accepts only his religious belief as correct and condemns another, it only means that he has not been able to appreciate the technique of using that 'picture'. 
If thus, the theoretical plausibility can also be shown with reference to the Gandhian position, which we have profusely taken inspiration from, then it is clear that the conclusion we arrived at, viz. that different religions are many expressions of the same Truth, is perfectly justified. Consequently the criticism which we levelled against K's position in the light of our conclusion is also justified. So, we may reiterate our stand: all religions are different expressions of one Truth, viz. the Truth of living, the way of facing the fundamental Predicament of Man and also successfully solving it, each in its own way.

Now one can see the bearing of our analysis, above, on the problem of conversion with which we started our inquiry: "Should conversion take place or not?" If, in the light of our analysis above, all religions are different expressions of the same Truth, the truth of living, (and the particular beliefs about God, Soul, World etc., are theorizations which arise differently depending upon the personal and historical factors, and also upon the intellectual ethos of different communities), then, 'to be religious' does not mean primarily holding on to a particular belief but rather a constant effort to use the given theory/practice so as to move closer to that Ideal of Transcendence, Perfection.
If, in this way, we understand that the actual living or realization of Transcendence or Perfection as the central message of all religions, of course, concretely expressed in different ways, then the question of comparison of religions with a view to establish the superiority of one's own 'expression of Truth' does not arise. What is being suggested is that 'to be religious' would not primarily mean adhering to a particular expression of Truth but rather to translate the theory into an authentic praxis in the religious parameter. Nor would there be a scramble for adding numbers to one's own religion, rather positive efforts would be made in each religion at enabling its members to live truly religious lives, to produce eminent saints in any given religious framework of theory and practices.

As a result of such strenuous struggle to live a truly religious life, suppose there arises a man with intense spirituality, then such a person would be able to touch the hearts of millions who have never seen him, even without speech or gesture. For, the highest truth needs no communication. It is felt only through the inner experience. And when it is found in a man to such heights then it is by its very nature self-propelling, radiates its influence as the rose spreads its fragrance without the intervention of a medium. Now, being drawn by this spiritual fragrance of the saint, people may follow him even from among various sects,
creeds, and communities, and form a new group, with the same ideal of Transcendent Living, which gradually grow into a new religion altogether. Now, such conversions around a great saint, will never be a problem. For they arise owing to a natural and spontaneous expression of the Faith rather than to an institutional endeavour, or an organized movement. Now, what is natural and spontaneous need not be encouraged and what is inevitable cannot be prevented either.

There may be certain circumstantial factors which permit or even necessitate conversion to a different faith other than one's own native faith. As also in the case of certain individuals who, after great spiritual search and struggle, opts for one religion as against his own native religion. Here it is assumed that the individual has made all attempts within his means to use the 'possibilities' provided in his religion for Attainment, and also inquired into possibilities of other models within his reach. But it may so happen that either he is dissatisfied with all those models, or more correctly he is spontaneously attracted by a particular model of Realization in another religion, or the particular way of formulation of the Goal, presented in the other religion. Or there may be an individual who has been, right from his birth, amidst the surroundings of a particular religion, so much so, that he did not have an opportunity of knowing about, much
less practising his own faith, may find it better to change to
that religion formally, rather than remaining in his own
native religion as a 'dead' member. Thus in all such situat-
ions, conversion will not present a problem because, the
individual has the capacity, and has actually exercised his
capacity, to know the relative suitability of a religious
framework to his pursuit of the Goal.

One may also visualize another case of conversion which
can take place without problems. For instance, when a great
leader of a community, which is sufficient in number and
ability to judge its future, under the leadership of a person
who is interested in the welfare of the community and who
belongs to that community. Now this leader, if after consi-
dering all the interests of his community, social, economic,
political, spiritual etc. takes the whole community to a
different religion, would be in a position to mould his
followers in the way he has judged good for his community,
because the interests of the community are really at his
heart. Again, as one who belongs to the community, he knows
its tradition, its needs in all respects, social, spiritual,
etc., and would have considered all the possibilities and
limitations of the step he has taken on behalf of the
community. The conversion of Mahars under the leadership of
Dr. Ambedkar may be a good illustration of this kind of
conversion.
From the above, it is clear that the conversion of the types we have illustrated, (viz. conversions (a) that occur as a result of an eminently spiritual leader, or (b) arising out of genuine circumstantial factors, or (c) as an outcome of a considered effort on the part of a genuine leader of a community), cannot pose a problem. There can easily be a consensus about the fairness or genuineness of conversions in all the three types, we have mentioned above, because the possibility of other factors influencing the case of conversion will have been considerably reduced. Whereas in other cases of conversion which are carried out as a 'programme', the presence of other factors, like political interests, financial gain, improvement of social status etc., cannot be avoided, neither can they be detected that easily. So conversion as a programme, and merely as a change of religion, cannot occupy a central position in any religion.

This is specially true in the light of the analysis we have made above about the nature of religions. Wherein we have shown that we cannot understand religion as something so closely connected with doctrine/practice/history/founder etc., that we can talk of some religion being superior to another or others on account of the supposed superiority of the doctrine/practice/founder, so on and so forth. Rather, we should understand religion as something which enables man
to attain the ultimate goal of man which though differently called in different religions, and ontologically connected with different historical and cultural factors, etc., yet is fundamentally the same. Any great religion will have its own particularity regarding its doctrine, practice, founder and so on, so that it is possible for one to talk of one's religion being superior to another's or others'. Actually it was owing to the tendency of some people to establish such a relative status of religions that they were faced with the question: "Should we convert or should we not?". In other words, the question of conversion would immediately be there when one tried to understand the different religions in terms of the comparative merits of their doctrines/rituals/practices etc.

But we suggested that 'to be religious' does not mean primarily comparing the relative status of religions, but in whatever religion one is one has to try harder and harder to move closer and closer to the ideal of man, which itself may differently be called in different religions. Thus in one, it is said to be striving after the perfection of the Heavenly Father; in another it is a said to be the Atman-Dhema-akya, or Brahma Jnana; still in another it is called 'nirvana' etc. Or it may be put attainment of peace with oneself, and with others, or simply the 'Attainment', 'Realization' and so on. That means whatever be the
formulations of the Goal, 'actual living' is the central message of any religion, and that the question of comparison of religions with a view to establish the superiority of one as against another is secondary and peripheral, if not even irrelevant.

If we are right in this then it is legitimate to infer that the whole problem of conversion is the result of mistaking what is there at the periphery to be the central message of religion.

We also showed in our analysis that every great religion has the Truth in as much as each one is able to give an understanding of the fundamental predicament of man, and also a way to tackle it. But every religion is also imperfect in as much as the human instrumentality is there in every religion. Thus we said that all great religions are equally true and imperfect expressions of the same Truth (the truth of living). If, in this way again, we understand the 'equality' of religions, then the question of relative status of the different religions would not arise. And consequently there would not be the type of conversions that were carried on, or perhaps even now are prevalent viz., conversions carried out as a programme.

This is not to say that there cannot be a possibility of conversion at all. There may take place genuine
conversions, the types of which we have already discussed above.

This means that we should not be either for or against conversion, but certainly for the proper living of one's religion.