

The Christian Faith And Other Religions: The Present Phase

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The Madras Conference of 1938 stimulated vigorous discussion of the relationship of Christianity to other religions, but the advent of the Second World War soon brought other concerns to the fore, and the subject receded into the background. The political religion of nationalism in its Nazi, Fascist, and Japanese forms, received more attention than the old religions and the Christian confrontation of them. After the War had passed, the rise of a new political religion, Communism, drew major attention. However, new movements were stirring in the old faiths, and within a few years it became evident that they were experiencing a renaissance or resurgence. Allied with nationalism, the ancient religions were soon confronting young churches and western missions with a challenge in the form both of practical obstacles and an apologetic literature. Consequently the relation of the Christian revelation to the other faiths has now become one of the liveliest issues in theology and in strategy currently demanding the attention of the Christian world mission.

The confrontation of vital religious forces by the Christian mission today is no mere academic concern, nor is it simple. It leads directly to the basic theological issue: What is that *mission* to which the whole Church throughout the world, and not just the Western Church, is called in unity? It poses the urgent questions of the life and message to be communicated, the "how" of communicating them, the indigenous expression of universals, fostering the growth of new churches in a manner which imparts evangelistic zeal, and a host of other questions. Both global strategy and local evangelistic methods await illumination by the answers to these questions.

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There are at least five ways in which the mission agencies of the Church are presently responding to the contemporary revival of religions. These are: fostering Christian scholarship, technically competent and sufficient in numbers to provide the Church with the data and insights needed for meeting the challenge of this radically new situation; trying to understand what is actually occurring within the various religions; preparing to meet the apologetic put forth by old religions newly become missionary; studying seriously the problem of the Gospel in relation to other religions; and experimenting in the approach, or witness, to devout adherents of other faiths.

FOSTERING SCHOLARSHIP

A quarter of a century ago the opinion spread among missionaries that the Eastern religions were moribund and would eventually die out. They were considered no longer to be a challenge to the expansion of Christianity. Mission boards and societies then saw little reason to urge their missionaries to devote time and talent to the study of these religions. Moreover, scholarly interest in general appears to have waned among missionaries after World War I. Consequently neither the young churches nor the missionary societies have more than a meager handful of experts in the history of religions who can supply the information and the insights now desperately needed for an understanding of these religions, which are so important an ingredient of nationalism, which hold the key to the understanding of national and regional cultures, and which are satisfying the spiritual hunger of millions. This situation is in marked contrast to that of earlier periods of mission history, when missionaries like James Legge, William E. Soothill, S. Wells Williams, and Timothy Richards--to name a few scholars in one country only -- were the principal authorities on the cultures and religions of Asian lands.

Scholars are not entirely lacking among missionaries, to be sure, and a few are constantly at work. A small stream of books has come from the press since World War II. Islam, more than any other religion, attracts missionary scholarship, despite the fact that the mission to Arab lands is an infinitely smaller operation in the quantity of men and money involved than any other segment of the world mission. The total mission among Muslims everywhere is not large. Since the end of World War II there have appeared, for example, the first three volumes of *Islam and Christian Theology* by J. Windrow Sweetman, professor of Islamicics at the Selly Oak

Colleges.¹ J. Spencer Trimingham has published three studies *The Christian Approach to Islam in the Sudan* (1948), *Islam in Ethiopia* (1952), and *The Christian Church and Islam in West Africa* (pamphlet, 1955).² He also has in preparation a book on Islam in West Africa *Islam in East Africa*, by Lyndon Harries,³ is another regional study but not as high in quality. There have been published also such works as: *Toward Understanding Islam*, by Harold G. Dorman, Jr.;⁴ *How to Lead Moslems to Christ*, by George K. Harris;⁵ *Islam*, by Emmanuel Kellerhals;⁶ *Mohammad at Mecca*, by W. Montgomery Watt;⁷ and *The Christian Message to Islam*, by J. Christy Wilson.⁸ *The Call of the Minaret*, by Kenneth Cragg, is in press.

Hinduism follows Islam as the next most intensive field of study, and publications of this recent period include: *The Christian Message to the Hindu*, by A. G. Hogg;⁹ *The Religion of Tagore in the Light of the Gospel*, by Sigrid Eastborn;¹⁰ *Two Religions : A Comparative Study of Some Distinctive*

¹ Sweetman, J. Windrow, *Islam and Christian Theology*, London: Lutterworth, 1947.

² Trimingham, J. Spencer, *The Christian Approach to Islam in the Sudan*, London: Oxford University Press, 1948. *Islam in Ethiopia*, London: Oxford University Press, 1952, *The Christian Church and Islam in West Africa*, (I.M.C, Research Pamphlets No, 3) London: S.C.M. Press, 1955.

_____. *Islam in Ethiopia*. London: Oxford University Press, 1952.

_____. *The Christian Church and Islam in West Africa*. (I.M.C. Research Pamphlets No. 3) London: S. C. M. Press, 1955.

³ Harries, Lyndon P. *Islam in East Africa*, London: U.M.C.A., 1955.

⁴ Dorman, Harold G., Jr. *Toward Understanding Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1948.

⁵ Harris, George K. *How to Lead Moslems to Christ*, London: China Island Mission, 1947.

⁶ Kellerhals, Emanuel, *Islam*, Basel: Easier Missionsbuchhandlung, 1945.

⁷ Watt, W. Montgomery, *Mohammed at Mecca*, London: Oxford University Press, 1953.

⁸ Wilson, J. Christy. *The Christian Message to Islam*, New York: Revell, 1950.

⁹ Hogg, A. G., *The Christian Message to the Hindu*. London: S. C. M. Press, 1947.

¹⁰ Estborn, Sigrid, *The Religion of Tagore in the Light of the Gospel*. Madras: C. L. S., for India, 1940.

Ideas and Ideals in Hinduism and Christianity, by John MacKenzie;¹¹ and *Social Ethics in Modern Hinduism*, by Roland W.Scott.¹²

A few studies in Buddhism have been published since the end of World War II, including *Paradox and Nirvana*, by Robert Lawson Slater,¹³ and *Man in Buddhism and Christianity*, by Bryan de Kretser.¹⁴ Chinese religions in general have been treated by Francis Cho-min Wei in *The Spirit of Chinese Culture*¹⁵ and by Karl Ludwig Reichelt in *Religion in a Chinese Garment* (translated by Joseph Tetlie).¹⁶

These recent studies, it will be seen, fall into two types. There are analytical and interpretative works on aspects of particular religions, and there are a number of studies in the confrontation of specific religions by Christianity. The latter type reveals an increasing concern with central theological issues; and the problem of the Christian faith in relation to others is taken up in a large perspective in a small number of able studies. Hendrick Kraemer's *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* has a reading many times as large as that following publication nearly twenty years ago, and is now being reprinted.¹⁷ His new book, *Religion and the Christian Faith*, will be published this month in England and next fall in America. Other titles include: *Religious Truth and the Relation Between Religions*, by D. G. Moses;¹⁸ *The Christian Interpretation of Religion*, by Edward J. Jurhi,¹⁹ and

¹¹ McKenzie, John. *Two Religions: A Comparative Study of Some Distinctive Ideas in Hinduism and Christianity*, London: Lutterworth, 1950.

¹² Scott, Roland W. *Social Ethics in Modern Hinduism*, Calcutta: Y. M. C. A., Printing House, 1953.

¹³ Slater, Robert Lawson, *Paradox and Nirvana*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952.

¹⁴ De Kretser, Bryan, *Man in Buddhism and Christianity*, Calcutta: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1954.

¹⁵ Wei, Francis C. M. *The Spirit of Chinese Culture*, New York: Scribner's, 1947.

¹⁶ Reichelt, Karl Ludwig, *Religion in a Chinese Garment*, translated by Joseph Tetlie, London: Lutterworth Press, 1951.

¹⁷ Kramer, Hendrick, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, New York: Harper & Brothers for the T. M. C., 1930.

¹⁸ Moses, D. G. *Religious Truth and the Relation Between Religions*, Madras: C. L. S. 1950 (London: Lutterworth).

¹⁹ Jurji, Edward J. *The Christian Interpretation of Religion*, New York: Macmillan, 1952.

The Christian Attitude Towards Other Religions, by E. C. Dewicke.²⁰ These will be treated in a later section. The outstanding example of the current German mission practice of endeavoring to comprehend the whole of the religions of mankind from the standpoint of the Gospel is *Evangelische Religionskunde* by Gerhard Rosenkranz.²¹ Intensive study in the problem of the Christian revelation in relation to truth in other religious systems can be fruitful and can gain the respect of scholars only if they combine with biblical and theological competence a thorough grounding in the methodology and phenomenology of *Religionswissenschaft* along with specialized knowledge of specific religious systems.

The Roman Catholic missionary enterprise has been more far sighted than the Protestant missions, and the mission orders and societies have regularly set aside scholars for continuous study. A steady stream of publications has come from their pens and these are available to us. The same is to be said for the scholarly labors of the experts in the universities, although most of them, regarding religion only sociologically, have been hostile to missions. Now, however, new university departments of the history of religions are appearing all over the country, less doctrinaire than older ones and stressing modern movements rather than narrow preoccupation with the ancient classical aspects of the faiths, and many of the new scholars can be drawn into friendly collaboration.

One hears it repeated often that if each missionary agency or young church would devote one per cent of its budget to scholarship in this field the need would be fulfilled. Whatever the figure may be, a small portion of missionary financial resources so invested would return large dividends. And although it is hard to get the funds designated for the purpose, it is much easier to secure the money than to find the right persons to train for the task. Few administrators realize how long and arduous is the task of attaining expert status in this field, even for a member of a young church living in a non-Christian environment. Remedying the present lack of scholars cannot be accomplished in a day. Concern about this need has led through three or four years of discussion to a movement under the auspices of the International Missionary Council for the establishment of institutes for study and training. There will be set up in India next year a new Christian Institute for the Study of Hinduism, under the direction of Dr. Paul D. Devanandan. A similar Institute for the Study of Buddhism is operating in Ceylon and another is being created in Burma. There is soon

²⁰ Dewick, E. C. *The Christian Attitude to Other Religions*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1953.

²¹ Rosenkranz, Gerhard, *Evangelische Religionskunde*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1951.

to be set up at Hongkong another such Institute for the study of Chinese religions, especially religion among the overseas Chinese. Another new study center is being projected for Japan. Professor Kenneth Cragg will later this summer begin an experimental approach, with a non-institutional program for the present, in the Near East under the joint sponsorship of the Near East Christian Council, the International Missionary-Council, and the Overseas Missions Council of the Church of England. The Henry Martyn School of Islamics under its new director, Dr. Akbar Abdul Haqq, is said to show new vigor and promise. In addition to the older provisions for study in this field in the United States and Canada, such as Hartford, new resources are developing, such as Cantwell Smith's program in Islamics at McGill University and a new Center for the Study of the Christian World Mission at the University of Chicago, which will put strong emphasis on the problem of the relationship and approach of Christianity to other faiths and also, at the outset, stress the study of Theravadin and Mahayana Buddhism. Thus it is evident that a determined effort is under way to foster the growth of missionary scholarship in the history of religions. If, in the next ten years, half-a-dozen first-rate scholars can be trained up, it will make a tremendous difference in the illumination available to evangelists and will stimulate a deeper probing into the meaning of the Gospel.

THE RESURGENCE OF RELIGIONS

A group of Asian churchmen prepared for the Evanston Assembly a book entitled *Christianity and the Asian Revolution*.²² One hundred out of its less than three hundred pages are devoted to a section, "Resurgent Religions," and many more pages elsewhere in the book are given to that subject. Every visitor to South and East Asia reports the revival of Buddhism. The modernizing of Hinduism is fascinating to behold. A multitude of new Buddhist, Shinto, and messianic sects have erupted in Japan.²³ Islam is in ferment from the Straits of Gibraltar to Indonesia. Religion is a force in world affairs to a degree not known for many decades.

The revived religions are allied with nationalism. Really a new secular religion, nationalism has succeeded in drawing to itself the blessing

²² Manikam, Rajah B., ed. *Christianity and the Asian Revolution*, [Madras] Joint Secretariat of the International Missionary Council and World Council of Churches, 1954.

²³ See: Ariga, Tetsutaro, "The So-Called 'Newly Arisen Sects' in Japan" in the *Missionary Research Library, Occasional Bulletin*, Vol. V, No. 4 (March 29, 1954).

and the support of the ancient ethnic faiths. Political leaders support the old religions because they have been the integrating force in, and the preserver of, the old indigenous culture, and it is advantageous to associate the sacred traditions of the past with a dynamic program for the present. However, it would be a grave mistake to suppose that the religious revival is due primarily to political manipulation. There is a groundswell of new spiritual life in the Eastern countries, and the politicians who make use of that fact are most frequently also caught up in it personally as practicing believers. Premier U Nu of Burma is an example. Most of the numerous journalistic articles about him, while stressing his political astuteness in making use of Buddhism, nevertheless usually impart also a conviction about his sincerity and devotion as a religious man. Santha Rama Rau reports him as saying, "You think my political position is strong? It is because my religious position is stronger."²⁴ After reading many of his speeches one seems to hear in this statement as much personal sincerity as political canniness. This is notable in other Asian statesmen as well. Christians in Burma and Ceylon feel political pressures exerted in the name of Buddhism as the national faith, but if they believed that the revival were only political, they would deal with the matter within the National Christian Councils and in the organs of the churches as subjects of strategy. They would not be so keen on establishing permanent study institutions if they did not believe that there were profound spiritual depths in the revival.

Professor Devanandan, writing in the book just mentioned above, states:

"This is an age of religious revival. The ancient peoples of Asia are passing through revolutionary social changes; they have made rapid advances as independent nations. They turn to their ancestral religions with a new hope. They realize that a good deal of their national culture is closely related to their religious heritage, and that a cultural reintegration necessarily involves a religious reconstruction. Thus, in recent times, the ancient religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam have become very real forces in the life and thought of Asian Peoples."²⁵

²⁴ Rau, Santha Rama. "Peace, Rice, Friendship and the Burma of U Nu," *Reporter*, Vol. XIV (April 19, 1956).

²⁵ Manikam, Rajah B., ed. *Christianity and the Asian Revolution*. [Madras] Joint Secretariat of the International Missionary Council and World Council of Churches, 1954.

He goes to the heart of the matter with keen discernment, when he states: "The environment, however stimulating, cannot of itself initiate such movements in religious life and thought unless there is a corresponding responsive reaction on the part of the religion itself. For any response presupposes a certain vitality and 'aliveness' on the part of the responding organism."²⁶ The new missionary impulse in Buddhism and Islam, for example, is evidence of vitality welling up from within. G. R. Jackson states: "The modern missionary movement in Buddhism, though yet unorganized, is one of the most powerful of the many dynamic factors in the Asian revolution."²⁷

Not the least significant and interesting phenomenon in the entire religious picture is the rise of a multitude of new movements, religions, and sects from Vietnam to Korea,-- some of them variants of the old religions, some syncretistic products, some apparently *sui generis* in character. Taken together with the movements within the ethnic religions, they strongly reinforce the impression that Asia is in spiritual ferment.

Some observers, on the contrary, come away from Asian countries with an impression of the state of religion quite contrary to that of vigorous revival. Due to the particular persons with whom they associated, they report an espousal of secularism and a turning away from religion. This seems to be especially true among young intellectuals and technologists in India. The fact that a revolt against religion accompanies the revival of religion, only serves to emphasize how complicated is the situation.

Moreover, within the religious ferment of Asia one finds elements of reaction as well as of modernization. There is the Dar-ul-Islam among Moslems and the Mahasabha among the Hindus. Such movements can indicate vitality; they can also indicate the frantic rear-guard delaying actions of despair.

New movements, modernization, reaction, revolt; they all indicate activity and change and focus attention on the present in contrast to the classic philosophies and cultus of the past. These things have immediate bearing on evangelism. There may be no abandonment of the foundation studies in the fostering of scholarship; and Pali, Sanskrit, and Wenli are still important tools for the expert; but the primary stress must now be, as far as missionary scholars are concerned, on the actual present state of the religions as living forces in society. Sociology, cultural anthropology,

²⁶ Ibid., p. 118.

²⁷ Ibid, p, 140.

economics, political science, modern history and psychology are to be added to the traditional tools and methods of the historian of religion. Attention should be given to description and analysis of the contemporary trends and movements with respect to relationships to the national cultural renaissance and national political aspirations, with regard to their influence in international and intercultural affairs, and with reference to genuine spiritual renewal. Within the focus of study come developments in theology, philosophy, religious literature both technical and popular, *belles-lettres* and journalism, art, education, agencies of propaganda, philanthropy, technical services, and foreign missionary movements.

THE NEW MISSION MOVEMENTS AND APOLOGETICS

An almost entirely new dimension of meeting between Christianity and other religions has been created in the last few years due to the missionary invasion of the post-Christian West by Eastern religions and by the enlarged volume of their apologetic literature directed towards Christians and secularized Westerners. Although Christianity has been encountering an Islamic advance in Africa for several decades and the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Mission has long worked with American intellectuals in some of our big cities, the presence of missionary agents of Islam and Buddhism pressing for conversions among our people presents a development distinctly new. They must be accorded the same religious liberty, including the right of propagation, which Christian agents claim. Such efforts will probably not be numerically large, but they do bring the challenge of the revived faiths directly to some of our rank and file church members and they present a new opportunity for Christian witness in conversations with their agents. Propaganda directed to the Christian minority in Asia is far more intense.

Far more important at the moment to the world mission than the propagation of Oriental religions in our midst by a few missionary agents, is the apologetic literature addressed towards Christianity. And today this is just as effective and demands just as much attention by the Christian Church in America as in Asia. There is an unprecedented interest in religion among students and intellectuals, John Noss's textbook, *Man's Religion*,²⁸ has had an extraordinary sale and is now coming out in a revised edition. Other publishers are hurrying books into print in order to cash in on this popularity. Lectures on Oriental religions are popular. Even boys in prep schools are reported to be setting up voluntarily

²⁸ Noss, John B. *Man's Religions*. New York: Macmillan, 1949.

seminars on comparative religions. However, the popularity of such books as Schuon's *The Transcendental Unity of Religions* and *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts* ²⁹ and the picture book *Truth Is One*, by Forman and Gammon, ³⁰ indicates the prevailing viewpoint. A kind of Neo-Vedantist outlook has captured a large section of our so-called intelligentsia. All religions are equated as routes to a unity of truth, but there is a tendency to think of Christianity as antiquated and premodern, and what is Eastern is supposed to have some sort of superiority. The less discerning feed upon such books as Akhilananda's *A Hindu View of Christ*, ³¹ while the more able are attracted to the persuasive reasoning of a work of real stature, like the *Recovery of Faith*, by Radhakrishnan. ³² Buddhism's apology contra Christianity on the grounds of our faith's responsibility for the broken peace of the world and the claim of Buddhism to be able best to provide a spiritual basis for world peace have a strong appeal in both East and West.

The new missionary movements and the apologetic literature of the Asian religions extend the encounter from Asia and Africa into Europe and America. This is one more reason why the mission is a world mission. Pastors and theologians in America and Europe who have thought of the missionary encounter of faiths as something remote ought now acknowledge their front line position and become actively engaged. And perhaps the most significant fact about this new development is that after having been on the defensive against Christian aggression for a very long time, these religions have turned about face, are claiming both spiritual and moral superiority and have put Christianity on the defensive. Canon E. C. Bewick writes: "... some of the non-Christian religions, ancient and modern, are today putting forth claims to absolute supremacy and universality, very similar in essence to those of the political totalitarianisms, and others, while they are admitting that they are not absolutely perfect,

²⁹ Schuon, Fritjof. *The Transcendental Unity of Religions*. New York: Pantheon, 1953.

_____. *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*. London: Faber, 1954.

³⁰ Forman, Henry James and Roland Gammon. *Truth Is One*, New York: Harper, 1954.

³¹ Akhilananda, Swami. *A Hindu View of Christ*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1949.

³² Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli. *Recovery of Faith*, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1955.

still maintain that they can offer alternatives to Christianity which are more satisfying to the moral and spiritual needs of mankind.”³³

THE GOSPEL AND RELIGIONS: THE CENTRAL ISSUE

The general resurgence of religions and their new missionary activities require that Christian missionary scholarship give high priority to the problem of the relation of the Christian revelation to other systems of religion and to the related question of the approach to adherents of other religions.

It must be recognized that for thousands of missionaries there is no problem. It is with them, as it was with the majority of the missionaries of the nineteenth century, simply a matter of destroying heathenism and replacing it with Christianity. Professor Hocking well characterized this as the concept of radical displacement. Moreover, most of that enormous number of missionaries who have gone out under very conservative faith missions since World War II have a similar idea of “heathenism,” but do not look forward to complete displacement. They expect the end before the goal might be achieved, and hope to pluck individual brands from the burning while there is yet time. Both decades of experience in meeting adherents of other religions and objective study by missionary scholars laid bare the wrong perspective and the distortion involved in the usual attitude towards the “heathen,” and the majority of missionaries after the beginning of the 20th Century were increasingly uncomfortable about holding such a view. The unhappiest thing about such an attitude is that it tends to magnify in the missionary that un-Christlike spiritual pride to which he appears to be unusually susceptible. During the course of a joint faculty seminar on the Christian mission in which social scientists and theologians participated, references to the pride of missionaries in cultural relations were numerous, and the cumulative effect was painful.

The period roughly from the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 to the Madras Conference of 1938 witnessed the gradual growth to primacy, among English-speaking missionaries at least, of the “fulfillment concept.” This is the view that God has never left any of his children orphaned and has in every generation granted the saving revelation of His truth and grace, so that deposits of divine truth are found in the various religious systems. They are, however, “broken lights,” containing a mixture of truth and error. All that is good, noble, and true in them is to be gathered up, comprehended, and fulfilled in Christianity, while the error is to be cast

³³ Dewick, *The Christian Attitude Towards Other Religions*, p. 39.

off. Thomistic and Anglican theology, relying strongly on ideas of natural theology and general revelation, find such a concept naturally attractive. The book, *Mankind and the Church*,³⁴ written by a group of English bishops, was a pioneer work in this field. Dr. J. N. Farquhar's notable book, *The Crown of Hinduism*,³⁵ generally regarded as the typical expression of this viewpoint. His attitude is summed up in these words: "Christ provides the fulfillment of the highest aspirations of Hinduism... He is the Crown of the Faith of India," The writings of Bishop Appasamy, Kenneth J. Saunders, and Daniel J. Fleming are other examples of this school of thought, and generally hold that whatever is true, good, and noble in the thought and practice of the religions can be transformed, adapted, or sublimated to the worship and service of Christ and made a living part of the experience of the Christians.³⁶ Dr. Karl Reichelt not only wrote along these lines, but also put his theories into practice in the Christian Mission to Buddhists at the celebrated monastery of Tao Feng Shan.³⁷ Such an attitude was reflected in the papers and discussions of the Jerusalem Conference of 1928, where a concern over the menace of secularism led many to advocate some degree of a common front against a common enemy.³⁸

There were certain persons, especially some American humanists, who were prepared to go far beyond the concept of fulfillment. It came

³⁴ Montgomery, H. H. *Mankind and the Church*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907.

³⁵ Farquhar, J. N. *The Crown of Hinduism*, London: Oxford University Press, 1913.

³⁶ Appasamy, A. J. *Christianity as Bhakti Marga*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1927.

_____. *The Cross and Hindu Thought*, Madras: 1932.

Saunders, Kenneth J. *The Gospel for Asia*. New York: Macmillan, 1928.

Fleming, Daniel J. *Christian Contacts with Non-Christian Cultures*, New York: Doran, 1923.

_____. *Attitudes Towards Other Faiths*. New York: Association Press, 1928.

_____. *Ways of Sharing with Other Faiths*. New York: Association Press, 1929.

³⁷ See: Holth, Sverre, *Karl Ludwig Reichelt*, Oslo: Egede Institutet, 1952. This pamphlet presents a sketch of Reichelt's life and work and a bibliography.

³⁸ See: *The Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council*, 1928, Vol. I. New York: I. M. C., 1928.

into the open in the report volume of the Laymen's Foreign Mission Inquiry, entitled *Re-Thinking Missions*, published in 1932. The furor over the theological viewpoint there expressed led to an almost complete disregard of the remainder of the report. Professor William Ernest Hocking, the chairman of the Laymen's Inquiry, developed his ideas fully in a subsequent work entitled, *Living Religions and a World Faith*,³⁹ and Hugh Vernon White contributed much to the same school of thought in *A Theology for Christian Missions and A Working Faith for the World*.⁴⁰ Hocking called his attitude "the concept of reconception," His idea is essentially that by friendly cooperation with other faiths Christianity will discover and develop neglected aspects of its own inherent truth; that the effect on the other religions will be similar; and that eventually then Christianity will become in fact the world faith which it is now potentially, and that the other religions will remain and revolve around Christianity as regional satellites. Professor Arnold Toynbee appears to revive some of these ideas today.

A major challenge to both the prevailing Anglo-Saxon viewpoint and Hocking's concept of reconception was presented by *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, prepared for the Madras Conference by Professor Hendrick Kraemer.⁴¹ No summary of this famous book needs to be given to members of the Association of Professors of Missions. The key words in this work are "Biblical Realism" and "Discontinuity." Biblical Realism demands the conclusion that Christ is *sui generis*, that Christian revelation places itself over against all other efforts to apprehend the totality of existence, that the only possible relation between Christianity and the other religions is one of "discontinuity." It is impossible to compare Christianity and other religions; there are no genuine points of contact or bridges; and the other religions are irrelevant to salvation. Relatively little attention was paid to Professor Kraemer's assertion that empirical Christianity as well as other religious systems stands under the judgment of the revelation in Christ, and still less to his guidance in approach to the other religions.

³⁹ Hocking, William Ernest. *Living Religions and a World Faith*, New York: Macmillan, 1940.

⁴⁰ White, Hugh Vernon. *A Theology for Christian Missions*, New York & Chicago: Willett & Clark, 1937.

⁴¹ . *A Working Faith in the World*, New York: Harper, 1938.

⁴¹ See note 17 above. A new reprint is now being brought out by Feature Publishing Service. EMIC OPEN PRESS OF ASBURY SEMINARY

Continental theologians and missionaries supported Kraemer in the debate at Madras and in subsequent books, such as *The Gospel, Christianity and other Faiths*, by Heinrich Frick,⁴² and *Mission als Theologische Problem*, by Karl Hartenstein.⁴³ Most English-speaking missionaries at the time rejected Kraemer's view as decisively as that of Hocking and occupied a middle ground between them. There was lively debate of the issues for a short time after the Madras Conference, but then, as was noted earlier, the advent of the Second World War threw the subject into the background and brought other issues into prominence. Apart from the activities of the so-called Bangalore Continuation Committee, under the leadership of P. Chenchiah, who wrote *Re-Thinking Christianity in India*,⁴⁴ little interest was shown in the matter until almost a decade after the end of the war, when the resurgence of the religions had made it a burning issue once more.

One of the first indications of the reemergence of the problem was the publication of *The Gospel and Other Faiths* by Canon E. C. Dewick in 1948, followed by his Hulsean Lectures of 1949 on "The Christian Attitude to Other Religions."⁴⁵ The lectures were published under the same title in 1953. *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* by J. H. Bavinck appeared simultaneously with Dewick's first book.⁴⁶ Then came *Religious Truth and the Relation Between Religions*, by David G. Moses in 1950,⁴⁷ and other works including *The Christian Interpretation of Religion*, by Edward J. Jurji,⁴⁸ and the section on "Resurgent Religions," in particular J. R. Chandran's chapter on "The Christian Approach to

⁴² Frick, Heinrich. *The Gospel, Christianity and Other Faiths*, London: Oxford University Press, 1938. (English Translation).

⁴³ Hartenstein, Karl. *Mission als Theologische Problem*, Berlin: Furche-verlag, 1933.

⁴⁴ Chenchiah, P. *Rethinking Christianity in India*, Madras: A. N. Sudarisanam, 1938.

⁴⁵ Dewick, Canon E. C. *The Gospel and Other Faiths*, London: Canterbury Press, 1948.

_____. *The Christian Attitude to Other Religions*. Cambridge University Press, 1953.

⁴⁶ Bavinck, J. H. *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1948.

⁴⁷ Moses, *Religious Truth and the Relation Between Religions*, Madras: C. L. S. 1950, (London: Lutterworth).

⁴⁸ Jurji, *The Christian Interpretation of Religion*, New York: Macmillan, 1952.

Non-Christian Religions,” in *Christianity and the Asian Revolution*.⁴⁹ Now Professor Kraemer’s great book is being reissued and his new work, *Religion and the Christian Faith* will be published this month in England and next autumn in America. Most significantly theologians not directly participating in the mission have also begun to be attracted by this central issue of Christian concern, and notable contributions are being made by Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Herbert H. Farmer, and others. It is to be hoped that participation in the discussions will become even more extensive and profound. However, this is not a field of study and discussion in which the systematic theologian can work in the realm of pure theory. He must be supplemented by the experience and insights of the theologian-evangelist who does his thinking about the issue on the frontline of the encounter. More over, both of them require the partnership of the historian of religions who adds to his knowledge of recognized methodology in his field a fair measure of competence in Christian theology. Neither the theologian *qua* theologian, nor the historian of religions *qua* historian can accomplish this task alone. The former is likely to fall into the trap of spiritual pride if he works alone.

Some attention was given to the problem in the discussions of the Commission on Evangelism at the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Evanston; and, since this was a matter of grave personal concern to Dr. D. T. Niles, the secretary of the Department of Evangelism, he began to make plans for taking up again what he called “The Tambaram Debate.” Consequently a Consultation on Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions was held at Davos, Switzerland, July 21-25, 1955, under the joint sponsorship of the Department of Evangelism and the Department of Missionary Studies. There was a review of thinking in the field since the Madras Conference, various aspects of the problem were discussed, and it was recommended that the two departments jointly initiate a series of studies under the title, “The Gospel and Religions,” involving contributions by individual authors and group consultations. Planning for such study is now in progress. Thus the subject has once again become a very live one, in which there is participation by individual scholars working independently on their own projects and by agencies including the World Council of Churches, the International Missionary Council, and the various National Christian Councils.

The situation at the moment is this: it is futile to speak of taking up the “Tambaram Debate.” Hocking vs. Kraemer is not a live option. The study and discussion are to be taken up at a point some where beyond

⁴⁹ Dewick, *The Christian Attitude Towards Other Religions*, p, 202.

this. It is hoped that the topic, "The Gospel and Religions" will provide a framework within which that is possible. Hardly a voice is now raised either among the young churches or in missionary circles on behalf of complete continuity. There is much appreciation of aspects of the various religions, but there is a deathly fear of syncretism. Views based on natural theology and general revelation are still strong among English-speaking people, and Dewick is typical of the best spokesmen of this group. He holds: 49 "that through Jesus Christ, God has given a revelation of truth that is central, distinctive, supreme, and satisfying for all mankind," but that this does not exclude the possibility that God may also have spoken to men truly through other channels; that when religious systems are tested by the principles of Jesus Christ's teachings it is impossible to claim that they are all alike or of equal value; and that Christians, realizing those differences, may prayerfully engage in inter-religious conversations, expecting the Holy Spirit to lead them into fuller light. Professor Kraemer has an increasingly large following accepting the concept of "discontinuity," especially Continental missionaries, but also more and more English-speaking missionaries. This view, however, seems to assume that God did indeed leave some of His children orphaned, and that in all His dealings with them He did not let His right hand know what His left hand was doing. It leads to the sin of spiritual pride, which Dr. Kraemer would be the first to condemn. Kraemer is challenged chiefly in Europe by a group of conservative Dutch theologians -- including Bavinck, Korf and Berkauer -- who reject "discontinuity," saying that while man in his sinfulness always resists God and rebels against Him, the love and grace of God in His outreach to them is stronger than their resistance, and that He breaks through it with His revelation, consequently leaving deposits of His truth which can be identified and used as bridges. A variety of other views shading into one or another of these main types are to be found. Some of them are briefly described in Dewick's book and in Chandran's chapter in *Christianity and the Asian Revolution*. Fresh treatments of the subject are now needed in order to present all the valid live options, and in order to make the exponents of the various schools of thought probe deeper. Any concept newly set forth will of necessity have to be supported by sound biblical, theological, and history-of-religions scholarship if it is to be influential.

THE APPROACH OF THE APOLOGIST

Study into the problems of the relation and attitude of the Christian faith to other religious systems is to the Christian mission by no means a mere academic exercise. It is rather the provision of a foundation for a

Christian apologetic adequate to this new period of world mission and of revived Asian religions now also embarking upon a world mission of their own. Like everything else connected with the mission in this day, theology has an ultimately evangelistic purpose. In the final analysis much of the effectiveness of the frontline evangelist's witness will be dependent upon the expert scholar's efforts, but it is not the scholar's job to instruct him in the tactics of evangelism. The scholar's task is to prepare the apologetic approach which will be effective. The local churchmen and evangelists will then form their tactics in the light of the scholar's findings. And, of course, the apologetic literature can be used directly in witnessing to intellectuals and to professional representatives of other faiths.

The scholarly apologist and the local evangelist ought to share certain attitudes as they take up their respective tasks. Above all, they must approach those to whom they witness in humility, shorn of spiritual pride, acknowledging themselves debtors "both to Greeks and to barbarians," identifying themselves with all men as God's children and as sinners before Him. The shortcomings and corruptions of organized Christianity and the vanity, pomp and arrogance of the Church must weigh heavily on their hearts. It is required that they recognize that their task is to witness, not to convert, since conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. But along with all their humility and penitence they must have the joyous conviction that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and that their ministry is a sharing in His work of redemption.

There seems to be a consensus among recent writers that both the apologist and the evangelist are witnessing to people -- individuals and communities -- and not to religions or ideological systems. For example, Professor Bavinck stated at the Davos Consultation last summer:

We must distinguish between a religion as a body of tradition, rites, and doctrines, and as the personal experience of individuals. The religion of the individual may be deeper and richer than the official religion. Moreover, in our approach we are not meeting religions but persons having individual religious experience.

Similarly, Principal Chandran writes:

The Christian apologist is primarily concerned with People -- Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Communists -- rather than with the religious systems they represent. But one cannot really understand a person without a thorough

knowledge of the religious system which has moulded his life.⁵⁰

Canon Warren at the Davos Consultation advocated an “experimental approach” to the problem of truth and revelation, that is, to truth as it is involved in the evangelistic task rather than as an abstraction. He stated that truth for the evangelist is primarily a personal relationship and only secondarily propositions about the Person to whom he endeavors to introduce the inquirer. His attitude is not one of “I have the truth,” but rather of, “Let me introduce you to a Person whom to know is to live in a new dimension.” There are four steps in making the introduction: telling the story of Jesus, interpreting the story in relevant terms, demonstrating Jesus’ spirit through *agape* and *diakonia* in the Christian community, and presenting an invitation to focus one’s capacity for faith on Jesus Christ. Writers on Christianity and Hinduism call attention to the necessity of witness in and through the community as a safeguard against syncretism.

The apologetic task in interpreting Christ is well described by Principal J. Russell Chandran of Bangalore, and this survey of the subject will be closed with a summary of his statement. He states:

The main task of the Christian apologist is to see how the truth of the Gospel can be so interpreted that the non-Christian is able to understand the wisdom of accepting Christ as “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” and to find in Christ the truth that judges, fulfills and redeems his own religious life. This task involves the presentation of the Christian truth through doctrinal exposition and indigenous expression, and through the demonstration of the relevancy of the Gospel to concrete human situations.⁵¹

He goes on to point out that in Christian faith the primary emphasis is not on revelation and truth, but on the person of Jesus Christ, and that truth is not known in the form of propositions about the nature of reality but in the person and work of Jesus Christ. All other ideas of revelation and knowledge of God should be examined in the light of this faith in the self-disclosure of God in His saving act in Christ. In this perspective the apologist examines the various doctrines of God, man, the world, sin, life after death, etc., saying both a yes and a no to the truth in

⁵⁰ Chandran, J, R, “The Christian Approach to Non-Christian Religions,” in *Christianity and the Asian Revolution*, p. 199.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

other religions, eliminating what is false in them, upholding what is true. The use of indigenous expressions is another kind of apologetics, for the Westernized form of presentation of Christianity is often an offence to the non-Christian. Apologetic literature should be addressed directly to the individual Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist, and not clothed in unintelligible language or expressed as an impersonal analysis of some religious system. Finally, Christianity must be presented as relevant to the life of Asia today, the Church taking seriously its responsibility to society at every level, and particularly at the most local one of the congregation. The apologist has to find the relevance of Christ's words, "I came not to destroy but to fulfill," as he considers the relations of Christianity to other faiths.

The present phase of Christian confrontation of other religions is manifold. The resurgence of the ancient religions presents a new opportunity for witness at the same time when these revived faiths have put Christianity on the defensive. There is a new role for theological scholarship in the world mission. An effective apology awaits the combined efforts of the systematic theologian and the historian of religion, with considerable help from the church historian and the cultural anthropologist.



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