

THE CHRISTIAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF HINDUISM, 1940-1956:
INTERRELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT IN MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY INDIA

by

RICHARD LEROY HIVNER

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Preface

I came to the writing of this thesis by a circuitous route. My parents were educators in the public school system of the United States, but in my early years I did not have academic inclinations. I was and am decidedly White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, attending small town schools where the most distinct alternate ethnicity evident was Italian-American. Religious diversity was never discussed in the presence of children, yet some tensions related to the separate Roman Catholic parochial school system and how a few of my friends from that world related to those of us in the public school system occasionally surfaced. I was too young and isolated to be directly impacted by the social turmoil of the 1960s, graduating from high school in 1973.

I attended Grove City College, joining an ethnically uniform student body numbering about two thousand. I began as a math major, but later shifted to religious studies (which meant little more than Christian studies) due to an awakened desire to learn. Personal turmoil, certainly not unrelated to larger social developments, led not only to the change of major but to my departure from the academic world in 1976 with a conscious desire to be an activist, particularly a Christian activist in line with Jesus and his original unschooled disciples.

Yet I was never able to break completely free from academic inclinations and interests. I became known in the voluntary Christian organization which I joined as the person always loaded down with books, primarily Christian theology books in the early days. I traveled in and around India in the early 1980s and dabbled in the rich cultural and intellectual diversity of the mosaics of South Asia. An encounter in late 1986 with Daya Prakash Titus, then Acharya at the Sat Tal Christian Ashram in Nainital, stimulated a focused direction for my intellectual concerns. Acharya Daya Prakash was a Methodist minister with decades of interest and experience in Christian ministry among Hindus, and he (unofficially) initiated me into the world of Hindu-Christian studies.

I had taken a world religions course already at Grove City College, and had read a number of books and papers related to Hinduism during my years in and around India. My perspective at

that time was what I would later call "world view confrontation," a reductionist outlook wherein Hinduism was considered a monistic philosophy, Christianity deemed a theistic alternative, and the two thus set off in opposition to each other. That paradigm is not without import in this thesis, so I acknowledge an ongoing sense of personal gratitude to Rev. D. P. Titus for pointing me decidedly away from that perspective.

Years of intellectual peregrinations followed; I never found a living mentor for Hindu-Christian studies and never considered any academic institution as a viable place to make sense of the issues. My primary relational networks in India were in the Evangelical Protestant world, and I had no greater learning source than the dozens of Hindu converts to Christianity that I encountered and interacted with. Beyond these stimulating "interviews" it was only serious academic writing that appealed to me in wrestling with Hindu-Christian issues.

I was a pilgrim fascinated by what was gleaned from interviewing Hindu converts to Christianity, and some of those "interviewees" became my closest friends. Those interviews were true encounters of pilgrims seeking the best path, not lab experiments to objectify with camera and recorder. I continue to interact deeply and daily with such people and issues, and I wrestle with the tension of lost "data" as I cannot objectify most of my encounters where I am also still a pilgrim on the way and enjoy learning and struggling with fellow pilgrims.

Historical studies provided a deeply instructive route to "objectify" the concerns of people who had become friends, and this route eventually led me to formal academic research. Among the books I began gathering after my initiation by Rev. Titus were a number of studies related to Narayan Vaman Tilak (1868-1919). I thought I had a different perspective on Tilak from my encounters with living Hindu converts to Christianity, so attempted to tell his story from an altered angle in a small book published in 1991. (I decided on a *nom de plume*, H. L. Richard, and once having done so deem it unwise and unnecessary to divert to my legal name for published writings.) That book grew in two later editions as I also grew in familiarity with archival research and general understanding of Hindu-Christian studies.

The path leading directly to this thesis began in searches for helpful writings on the Hindu-Christian encounter. At a CMS (Church Missionary Society) guest house near Nana Chowk in Bombay (now Mumbai) I spent a few hours searching through old shelves of books and

therein stumbled upon R. C. Das, a central figure to this thesis. *Convictions of an Indian Disciple* was the title of his booklet which I discovered there. It had been published in 1966 and introduced him as acharya of a Christian ashram in Varanasi. Following threads from that small beginning I eventually uncovered Das' unpublished autobiography and twenty-seven years of his private magazines (under three different titles; *The Seeker*, *The Seeker and Pilgrim*, and *The Church of Christ*). In this discovery process, and in preparing a collection of Das' writings for publication in 1995 (*R. C. Das: Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity*), I first came across The Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism (CSSH) and *The Pilgrim*.

Wide reading and some basic publications related to the Hindu-Christian encounter brought me into regular contact with people from the academic world, at least some of whom encouraged me to reenter the academy to research and publish under the direct discipline of the scholarly community. This prodding, beside my deep appreciation for and debt to academic research on Hindu-Christian issues, met with a growing sense of compulsion to publish on another figure I had been researching and reflecting on for an extended time. Having learned of UNISA's program for off site scholarly research and writing I enrolled to write a Religious Studies Master's dissertation on K. Subba Rao, subsequently published as *Exploring the Depths of the Mystery of Christ: K. Subba Rao's Eclectic Praxis of Hindu Discipleship to Jesus*. This was certainly a better study under academic discipline than it would have been had I done it on my own.

It seemed obvious to me that a larger thesis would need to be written by some one at some time on the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism and *The Pilgrim*, as this neglected society and its work are of intrinsic interest to students of the Hindu-Christian encounter. I did not sense the personal compulsion on this topic that I had regarding the study of Subba Rao, but under the encouragement of others to earn a place in the academic community I wrote a first draft of a thesis on this topic and submitted it in 2009. That thesis was not accepted, and one reason was that it was not personally situated and did not clarify my own position and biases. That was something of a surprise to me and led to the writing of this preface to the revised thesis. The preparation of the first draft and the critique of my examiners was such a rewarding intellectual experience that I gladly attempted this rewrite.

The first draft of this thesis was introduced by saying, "The aim of this thesis is to allow some long neglected voices to be clearly heard." With that end in mind I reproduced as an appendix the extensive lecture notes of R. C. Das from his teaching under the auspices of the CSSH. That material has now been substituted with a list of the contents of those notes which are discussed in chapter four section 3.1. One of my examiners in particular called for my work to be related to ongoing discussions in the fields of Christian theology of religions and religious studies. That directive brought a focus to many years of rumination and caused me to frame this study as an "interreligious encounter," despite having only the Christian voice of the encounter extant.

It would be gratifying for me to be accepted through this thesis into academia, yet there are tensions that should be acknowledged in this process. I remain an activist in interreligious dialogue. I am convinced that sound academic work must underlie dialogical encounters, yet there is also certainly a sacred space between engaging persons that lies beyond the searchlight of the academy. I have been accepted as a fellow pilgrim by many Hindu disciples of Jesus, and among them have often identified myself as a chela (*celā*; disciple) of N.V. Tilak and R.C. Das. I did not fully own that relationship to Das in the first draft of this thesis, desiring to stand outside that relationship (seeking *epoché*, to use the technical dialogical term for this distancing of oneself from one's own beliefs, an approach no longer in favor among most dialogists) for the purpose of this thesis.¹ Recognizing that acknowledgement is a better way to approach this matter, having made this disclosure I affirm also a deep commitment to rigorous academic analysis even when a guru² is, with questionable propriety from another perspective (i.e. spiritual mentorship), under examination by a disciple.³ Finally, however, it is more important to me to guard my relationships with fellow pilgrims than to use lessons learned in that realm as a stepping stone to gain academic recognition.

¹ Jacques-Albert Cuttat, who significantly influenced dialogue in India, supported *epoché*, which he spelled *epokhé* (Cuttat 1960:30f.). For discussion of the topic and rejection of *epoché* see Kuttianimattathil 1995:477ff., 564ff.

² Many crucial Sanskrit terms like guru (*guru*), ashram (*āśrama*), dharma (*dharma*), avatar (*avatāra*), karma (*karma*), maya (*māyā*), etc., are now understood and accepted in English, sometimes with newly varying shades of meaning adding to already rich and disputed definitions among various schools of thought in India. These terms will thus be used in this thesis without diacritical marks, which will be employed for other Sanskrit terms using the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration. In quotations the original use or lack of use of diacriticals will be followed, except in cases where capitalization of Sanskrit terms appeared, which is replaced either by italicization or standard type for common terms. (Capitalization of Sanskrit terms is especially the procedure in R. C. Das' writings.)

³ This to me fits within the guru-disciple relationship as outlined by Julius Lipner, who is critical of the current tendency to "unquestioning obedience" in the guru-disciple relationship. He affirms that "one must sit at the guru's lotus feet but not grovel before them" (Lipner 2010:222).

Issues of commitment and scholarship come into discussion in the introductory chapter, and my stand in relation to Christianity and my perspective on Hinduism will be outlined there so need no further comment here. My decision to analyze *The Pilgrim* did not come from browsing there and seeing an issue that cried out for examination, although I had a sense of the contents through understanding R. C. Das. I saw this publication of a noteworthy interreligious society and thought that serious analysis was called for. Thus, I truly approached *The Pilgrim* to understand what it said and what its importance was, with no preconceived sense of just what that might be.

If the results of such analysis are not as dramatic as some might hope, this reflects the life and thought of that society and those writers in that time. My conclusion is that the perspectives evident in the mid-twentieth century Christians in India who formed the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism are important in their own right and insightful towards resolution of on-going issues in the academic study of religion and in interreligious dialogue.

1. Introduction: Analytical and Historical Background

This thesis is focused on a particular chapter in the history of the Christian study of Hinduism. Perspectives and attitudes from the mid-twentieth century will be studied as seen in the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism (CSSH, 1940-1956), the first organization or society ever to focus on the Christian encounter with Hinduism, and the first forty issues of its quarterly publication, *The Pilgrim* (1941-1952).¹

The CSSH made no attempt to spell out what it meant by "Hinduism," nor what particular variety of "Christianity" was brought to the study. The non-reflective use of these terms is not surprising for that time but demands examination in this thesis, which focuses on the Christian understanding of Hinduism that is discernable in the work of the society.

The meaning of "Hinduism" has become a hotly contested issue, as has the role of Christians in developing that term and its various shades of meaning. This thesis does not attempt to resolve all the questions and controversies surrounding the study of Hinduism, but does intend to contribute to the ongoing engagement between Christians and Hindus by highlighting an impressive (and neglected) chapter in the history of that interreligious encounter.

It would be inappropriate to read current discussions of Hinduism into records from the mid-twentieth century, yet it is also impossible to ignore contemporary insights and debates. I write as a Christian, so in a sense share common ground with the CSSH, yet in a different historical context. This introductory chapter will explore four different areas that are necessary background to an adequate analysis of the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*.

First, my own position on a Christian approach to the study of non-Christian faiths will be uncovered by interaction with extensive debates in that field at the current time. This will not only illuminate my own perspective in approach to the CSSH but also provide a point of

¹ The only organization in any way similar is the recent Society for Hindu-Christian Studies, an academic organization started in 1994, rooted in the *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* which began in 1988. See the full contents of *The Pilgrim* listed in Sources number one on pages 287-307.

comparison for approaches taken by contributors to *The Pilgrim*. As will be seen, I do not find a fully satisfactory foundation for Christian study of Hinduism in any of the current theories for Christian interaction with other faiths, so continue my probing into the field of religious studies in general.

The discussion below (second area of exploration) of some current issues in the field of religious studies does not attempt to be exhaustive, which would be almost impossible. The central question regards the validity of even talking about "religion" and "world religions." Issues in the study of Hinduism are, admittedly rather artificially, suspended in favor of making that the third major topic of this introductory chapter.

Hindu studies is a field riddled with contested issues. Arvind Sharma suggests that Hindu studies was first a largely textual endeavor, with a new era beginning "after the 1960s, when a new body, and even new generation, of scholars began to combine textual work with at least a stay in the field, if not fieldwork in the anthropological sense" (Sharma 2003:x).² Post-colonial and Orientalist studies of course also came to the fore at that time. These modern discussions and developments are formative for my thought and provide the framework in which the earlier work of the CSSH will be seen.

Finally, issues in mid-twentieth century India that provide the immediate context of the CSSH will be outlined. Discussions then current in the field of Christian analysis of Hinduism are most vital, but issues in Indian Christianity are also of significance and turmoil related to what it meant to be Hindu must also be outlined due to the significance of these matters to the times in which the CSSH functioned.

1.0 The Christian Study of Religions

There are multiple paradigms for Christian study of other religions, and there are deep differences of opinion within the various paradigms. The voluminous literature on this topic will not be surveyed here, rather a survey of perspectives that influence this study will be noted with critical comments.

² Sharma further suggests that a third phase is now emerging, marked by "critical reflection on the nature of the scholarly enterprise constituted by the study of Hinduism itself" (2003:x).

1.1 Christian Assimilation from Non-Christian Faiths

Christian faith is rooted in the concept of incarnation, that God became man in Jesus Christ, and not just generic "man" but a first century Jewish man. Faith in Jesus Christ is thus always related to culture; the cultures of the Bible and of Jesus, and the cultures with which the Bible and people with faith in Jesus interact. The two thousand year history of the development of Christianity provides multiple examples of such cultural encounters, often also involving interreligious encounters and even conflict. There has been constant tension as Christians have wrestled with the true and the false of other faiths and the good and the bad in other cultures, not to mention falsehood and evil within varying expressions of Christianity; often it has not been at all clear what is true and good, or even on what basis to properly determine such questions.

1.1.1 Paul Hacker (1913-1979) and Early Christian *Chrēsis* (χρῆσις)

Paul Hacker noted that already in Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and Origen (185-254) the concept of utilization (*chrēsis/χρῆσις*) of non-biblical insights and practices for understanding and building faith in Christ was present. "With Gregory of Nyssa [330-395] it is on the way to becoming technical. It denotes the legitimate assimilation of contents of pagan culture" (Hacker 1980:50).

Augustine (354-430) developed the concept still further, under the Latin term *usus* and using, not for the first time, the biblical image of the spoiling of the Egyptians.

Like the Greeks, Augustine interprets the Egyptian treasures as symbols of philosophical doctrines....The gentiles are unlawful possessors of those treasures. (Hacker 1980:52)

Hacker's interest in this early Christian development was not merely historical, but paradigmatic for current Christian interreligious engagement. He spelled out three principles that he saw being implemented in this early Christian practice, which he proposed for implementation in the current Christian encounter with other faiths and cultures:

Utilization connotes, (1) that the assimilated elements are made subservient to an end different from the context from which they were taken, (2) that they can be taken over because some truth is contained or hidden in them, (3) that they must be reoriented in

order that the truth might shine forth unimpeded. It is thus a much more deliberate process than the mere reception of influences. (1980:75-6)

This is an impressive definition worthy of careful consideration. There is a need for guidelines in the assimilation of non-Christian concepts and practices, yet Hacker's guidelines are nothing more than his own conclusions, not taught by the church fathers or by any Christian body. At least Hacker demonstrated the depth of a heritage of Christian utilization of ideas and practices rooted outside of biblical culture and thought.

Further analysis of Hacker's *chrēsis* proposal will await an outline of his own application of this concept in the context of India. To summarize that application, Hacker suggested that "up to our day no successful *chrēsis* has been effected in India" (1980:81). Hacker's summary on the early work of Robert de Nobili (1577-1656) is illuminating:

The success of De Nobili's evangelization illustrates the significance of adaptation and assimilation, both combined with Christian orthodoxy, for missionary work in India. But we must not forget that both assimilation and adaptation, though both indispensable, are not sufficient for Christianizing an ethnic group of an ancient and deep spiritual culture.... Ancient spirituality cannot simply be ousted; it must be redeemed from its pagan defilement by way of *chrēsis* so that its truth and beauty may shine forth and add new facets to the "Catholic system" founded on the gospel. (1980:83)

This statement makes clear that Hacker was working from an assumption that the Roman Catholic Church contains a fixed deposit of truth, while also expecting that further insights, "new facets," are to be added to that truth as *chrēsis* is employed in the non-Christian world. Yet this fact (Hacker's perspective) of Roman Catholic history leads to serious ramifications.

Catholicism has already contracted a "marriage" with pre-Christian Western culture and this cannot be dissolved....The fixing of dogmas...cannot be replaced by a second *chrēsis*. They must be *translated*. (Hacker 1980:84, italics original)

Thus, in the encounter with Hinduism there cannot be a new wrestling with Trinitarian or Christological issues; the truths of the Church must be translated, and can only be translated rather than replaced or supplemented by *chrēsis*.

From this perspective, Hacker was severely critical of the Indian church, to the extent of denying that it is qualified to attempt this "utilization" at all.

In antiquity Christian thinkers utilized what they found to be good in paganism, and they could do this only because their mental gaze, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, was unswervingly fixed on the Christian mystery. In our day, on the contrary, writers concentrate their attention on pagan texts or doctrines, and imagine to discover Christian elements in them. (1980:90)

Hacker considered the effort to change the existing Indian church away from its established Westernized practices toward inculturated patterns to be "repaganization" (1980:95-6). Finally, the fate of other religions which have been "utilized" should be noted:

Chrēsis preserves what can be preserved of pagan religions, after due cleansing and reorientation, but as for the rest, pagan religions are doomed to perish. (Hacker 1980:88)

Hacker's analysis of "utilization" has profound repercussions for the Christian encounter with other religions. The core of this concept will be noted in two other scholars immediately below. However, Hacker's very negative position related to other faiths is almost universally rejected by current Christian thought, as will be seen later. His commitment to traditional Roman Catholic dogmatic formulations is also open to challenge. Yet his insights resonate with theories that reject his more narrow positions.

1.1.2 Anton Wessels (1946-) and How Europe Became Christian

Anton Wessels, in the context of discussions of the re-Christianization of Europe, wrote a stimulating study questioning if Europe was ever truly Christian at all (*Europe: Was it Ever Really Christian?*, 1994). He traced out the processes of the Christianizing of Europe, particularly the interaction between the gospel of Christ and culture.

There was never unanimity among Christians on the complex issue of relating to other faiths, and Wessels illustrated this from Boniface (680-754), who "wanted to 'abolish' the religion which he encountered. He devastated pagan temples and in this way won people over to the new faith" (Wessels 1994:10). On the other hand "Pope Gregory the Great [540-604] gave the abbot Augustine instructions to preserve anything of the other religion which was not in direct conflict with the gospel" (1994:12).

Wessels saw different emphases present in Christian interaction with the Graeco-Roman world, the Celtic world, and Germanic and Scandinavian culture. Three different strands of

the Graeco-Roman world are brought into focus. First regarding intellectual concerns, Wessels concluded that the church embraced and transformed Greek philosophy, being subtly influenced along the way.

In building up and expounding Christian doctrine the church fathers borrowed much from Greek philosophy. Under the influence of Greek philosophy there seemed to be an increasing tendency to define and systematize belief. As a result the God of the Old Testament and early Christianity is identified with the universal idea of the God of Greek metaphysics. (Wessels 1994:27)

Christian interaction with Greek mythology, the second area of interaction, was marked by either a demonization of the gods, or rationalization of the myths. The rationalization process was assisted by a similar process underway within the wider Graeco-Roman world, not least by the philosophers. Wessels showed how Christians mined the myths of the Graeco-Roman world for illustrations of biblical truth, to the extent that he suggested that "the mythology of classical antiquity became a type of Christian mythology" (1994:31).

Finally there was the political realm of interaction between Christianity and Graeco-Roman culture, and this was the deciding factor in favor of Christianity against the old ways (Wessels 1994:51-54). Power was also fundamental to Christian triumph in the Germanic world, even though similar adaptation of cultural icons was evident there as in the Graeco-Roman world.

The reason why many people in the Germanic world accepted Christianity was that belief in Jesus Christ was seen as more powerful than other religions or gods....The Germans did not think it necessary to accept the God of the Christians if he showed himself to be powerless. (Wessels 1994:154)

This power of Christianity was again often associated with political power and warfare.

Regarding the conversion of the Celts, there was again conflict between the original faith and practices and the new way of the Christians, but the triumph of Christianity was clearly associated with the adoption and adaptation of aspects of earlier faith expressions.

The early Christian leaders were prepared to incorporate elements of old paganism into their own religious practice and assimilate them, rather than giving rise to a conflict of loyalties among the new converts. The veneration of Celtic holy places, springs and stones was not so much abolished as modulated by making them Christian places, springs and stones. The places were associated with Christian saints instead of with Celtic gods. (Wessels 1994:94)

Summarizing his conclusion, Wessels suggested that

In the early Christianization there was a successful assimilation to culture: what was already there was elevated to a higher plane, in a process of reciprocal fertilization, though much was also abolished. (1994:162)

There is room for much debate on the details of the assimilation/utilization of cultural elements in the Christianization of Europe. How far was this truly consistent with the Bible; how far does it match Hacker's description of *chrēsis*; does the presence of political power issues skew the theological/missiological discussion? The *reciprocal fertilization* of pre-Christian and Christian thought and practice resonates with current trends in thought about the Christian encounter with other religions; the concept of elevating non-Christian ideas to a *higher plane* needs to be addressed at a later point in this discussion.

1.1.3 J. H. Bavinck (1895-1964) on *Possessio* and Accommodation

Dutch Reformed missiologist J. H. Bavinck presented a perspective on the Christian encounter with other cultures and faiths that resonates with the historical perspectives outlined by Hacker and Wessels.

Here note that the term "accommodation" is really not appropriate as a description of what actually ought to take place. It points to an adaptation to customs and practices essentially foreign to the gospel. Such an adaptation can scarcely lead to anything other than a syncretistic entity, a conglomeration of customs that can never form an essential unity....We would, therefore prefer to use the term *possessio*, to take in possession. The Christian life does not accommodate or adapt itself to heathen forms of life, but it takes the latter in possession and thereby makes them new....Within the framework of the non-Christian life, customs and practices serve idolatrous tendencies and drive a person away from God. The Christian life takes them in hand and turns them in an entirely different direction; they acquire an entirely different content. Even though in external form there is much that resembles past practices, in reality everything has become new. The old has in essence passed away and the new has come. Christ takes the life of a people in his hands, he renews and re-establishes the distorted and deteriorated; he fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning and gives it a new direction. Such is neither "adaptation," nor accommodation; it is in essence the legitimate taking possession of something by him to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth. (Bavinck 1960:178-9)

This clearly aligns closely with Hacker's understanding of *chrēsis*, which also entailed the idea that something higher than accommodation was necessary. Bavinck went on to wrestle with the application of this concept, and he strongly stated the complexity of the process.

It is naturally much easier to speak theoretically of taking possession, than it is to give practical advice. The question of *possessio* leads to the greatest problems throughout the entire world. (1960:179)

The problems and complexities relate to the necessity of sifting and selecting as some ideas and practices will be abandoned while others are embraced. In laying out principles for addressing these concerns, Bavinck first noted that there is a general difference between Roman Catholic and Protestant approaches, the former being generally more positive in analysis of natural theology and the natural man, the latter more strongly stressing that "the whole man, in his thinking, as well as in his life, has been affected by sin in every respect" (1960:173).

Yet, Bavinck went on to radically adjust that general Protestant perspective, in two ways.

In the first place...thanks to God's common grace, man is safeguarded against complete deterioration....There are always restraints at various points; a certain protective working of God which holds man's decline in check is always in evidence. There is still the conscience.... (1960:173)

In the second place...the religions we encounter already have a history which is centuries old, and in recent times especially, such religions display noticeable signs of wear and tear. Numerous customs and practices originally based upon pagan ideas and conceptions are gradually secularized and have lost their original meaning....In such cases it is foolish to go back to the original meaning of a custom, because it is now no longer experienced and felt as it had been originally. (1960:174)

Bavinck further commented on the reality that many customs have a mixed religious and social function (175). There is danger in following the ways of the past, but too large a break is also a serious mistake (177). He opined that "the newly formed church is usually a better judge in such matters than we [missionaries] are" (177). While the issues Bavinck addressed in this context are "marriage customs, initiation ceremonies, the eating of meat offered to idols, the practices concerning death and burial, the cultivation of the soil, and the worship service" (180), it is important to note that Bavinck understood that this *possessio* also included ideas and the development of theology. Paul Visser pointed this out in this quotation from Bavinck's 1934 study on *Christ and Eastern Mysticism*:

We are well aware that there in the Dutch East Indies and also on Java, an indigenous Christian theology will have to grow, into which the struggle with Islamic mysticism and Hinduism is, as it were, incorporated. It is true that the fostering of such a theology is a work, not of years, but of centuries, but the seeds of such a theology must be

scattered now, so that these seeds can, under God's blessing and in his time, sprout and bear fruit. (Visser 2003:288)

Despite this assertion that the full fruit of *possessio* may be centuries away, and despite Bavinck's assertion that the decisions need to be made by local followers of Jesus, his own position is unmistakable.

It will be of immeasurable significance if the new churches can increasingly find forms to express something of their old cultural heritage, without in any way denying their faith in Jesus Christ. (Bavinck 1960:190)

Bavinck's delegation of decisions to "the new churches" of the non-Western world reflects a Protestant principle which varies from Hacker's paradigm. Despite any "marriage" with Western cultural forms, Protestant principles affirm that each cultural expression of discipleship to Jesus is not only free but even expected to develop its own contextual theology, including even new definitions and understandings of such basic concepts as the Trinity and Christology, in the assumption that being guided by the Bible and the Holy Spirit the result will not fundamentally contradict the formulae developed, if developed truly, in the West.

1.1.4 Hacker, Wessels and Bavinck in Review

The position of these three authors has been outlined because a common thread runs through their thought, and it is a thread that is significant in analyzing the presentation of Hinduism found in the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*. The concept of *possessio*, or things akin to it, will also appear in other contexts in the discussion of Christianity in relation to other religions.³ But the *possessio* perspective of Hacker, Wessels and Bavinck is also drastically out of sync with most modern Christian thought on other religions; not in terms of the positive utilization of non-Christian ideas and practices, but in the strongly negative (if not harsh) analysis of the other faiths that is present in their outlook.⁴ Interreligious dialogue developed partly in reaction to this negativity in traditional Christian thought, and insights from that field need to be studied next.

³ For simplicity's sake, in the remainder of this thesis I will use *possessio* to refer not only to Bavinck's position but also to Hacker's *chrēsis* as well as Wessels' *reciprocal fertilization*, recognizing the commonality of their positions.

⁴ It must be noted that it is the viewpoint of those who Christianized Europe rather than Wessels' own position that falls into this category.

1.2 Interreligious Dialogue and a Theology of Religions

Interreligious or interfaith dialogue became an increasing trend in Christian interaction with the non-Christian world through the middle decades of the twentieth century, spurred by new explorations of other faiths such as will be seen in the CSSH. William Burrows defined the concept and some key dates and themes.

Interfaith dialogue – understood as conversations among representatives of the world religions treating each other as equals – did not become common or officially recognized as legitimate until the meeting of the World Council of Churches in Delhi in 1961 for Protestants and at Vatican Council II in 1965 for Catholics. Acknowledgement by Christians that interfaith dialogue was necessary, in other words, occurred as the West withdrew from colonial possessions and revivals of Asian religions made it clear not only that Christian mission had not made substantial numbers of converts among followers of faiths such as Islam, Buddhism, and Indian religions but also that it was likely not to in the foreseeable future. (Burrows 2007:121)

Stanley J. Samartha, who in 1971 became the first director of the World Council of Churches subunit on dialogue, suggested that "Dialogue is an attempt to establish a two way traffic in what was hitherto mostly a one way street" (1970:14). With "mostly" in that sentence Samartha has perhaps sufficiently qualified his statement so that it can be considered fair. There was, however, a great deal of two way traffic throughout the history of Christian interaction with other faiths, and the thrust of this sentence could be seen to undermine that fact.

This is not the place for a detailed study of dialogue and how far its emphasis on listening to others was truly new. At least the focus on dialogue brought listening and learning about and from other faiths to a prominence that had not previously been present.

Much of the work in interreligious dialogue was done by non-Western Christians, like S. J. Samartha of India. The internationalizing of the theological agenda led to discussions of intercultural theology. Volker Küster pointed out that "The three disciplines of missiology, ecumenics, and comparative religion (when taught at a theological faculty) are the sources of what we have started calling intercultural theology" (2003:171).

While some writings in *The Pilgrim* magazine are certainly intercultural theology, this field is not sufficiently specific to have developed into a distinct theological discipline. Küster goes on to point out that

If everything is intercultural theology, nothing is intercultural theology. According to its emergence from the pluri-discipline missiology, ecumenics and comparative religion, intercultural theology should be established in the field of systematic theology and integrate its source disciplines. (Küster 2003:184)

Interreligious dialogue and intercultural theology contributed to ongoing debates about the nature of Christianity and particularly the meaning of non-Christian religions. The discipline of theology of religions sought to define the place of those other religions in God's purposes.

1.2.1 Christian Theology of Religions

Various typologies have been suggested for considering the range of Christian theologies of religions that have developed, but most still interact with that outlined by Alan Race in 1982. Before defining the categories of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, Race spelled out his understanding of the Christian theology of religions.

The Christian theology of religions is the attempt, on the part of Christian theologians, to account theologically for the diversity of the world's religious quest and commitment, a diversity which shows all the signs of continuing to exist, in spite of Christian missions. (Race 1982:2)

Race expanded and clarified this definition in two important areas.

First, the matter is viewed from within a Christian framework....What the Christian theologian must do is strive to listen attentively to the faith of the non-Christian as this is unfolded by the believer himself, without pre-judging that faith and without abandoning his own faith in the light of what he has heard, and evaluate that faith of his neighbour in the light of his new understanding of the ways of God's revealing and saving work throughout history. (1982:5)

Obviously, this theology of religions is built on a foundation of interreligious dialogue. Without careful study and listening regarding other faiths an adequate theology of religions could not develop. In his exposition Race explicitly distinguished between the Christian theology of religions and the fields of comparative religion and the history of religions.

Race's second clarification related to the dynamic nature of religion.

The recognition that religions are not petrifications, but live continuously in process, adapting and changing in the light of new circumstances and new knowledge, is relatively recent. But it is important to grasp, for the implications involved if it is taken seriously are far-reaching. Without it, the tension between holding to one's own confession and maintaining an openness to other religious commitments would be intolerable. (1982:6)

He went on to reflect on Christian dynamism and the changes in Christian self-understanding related to the rise of modern science and linguistic philosophy and history. He clearly anticipated similar changes as Christians wrestle deeply with other religions.

Salvation is the central theme in the typology that Race developed for Christian theologies of religions, specifically whether there is legitimate Christian hope that followers of other religions can attain salvation. Exclusivist understandings (note the plural) see salvation only in Christianity (or Christ or the Christian Church); inclusivist understandings develop theologies whereby Christ (or Christianity or the Christian Church) remains central and essential, yet still include followers of other religions or gods; pluralist understandings deny that Christianity or the Church or Christ are necessary for salvation, rather there are multiple means (as well as meanings) to salvation.

A focus on salvation is understandable and defendable. After all, the New Testament affirms that the very name of Jesus points to his role of saving his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Yet a Christian theology of religions must encompass far more than this question, and a typology that divides positions on this point almost necessarily skews ongoing discussion. Eric Sharpe pointed out that there was always a dichotomy among Christians in their approach to other religions. A soteriological focus, from the Bible itself and the early church right up through modern evangelicalism, led to a negative perspective on other religions as alternate paths opposing the one way of salvation in Christ. But an ontological perspective, asking questions about the existence and nature of God or about the accessibility of truth to human beings made in God's image, allowed for a more sympathetic study of other religious traditions (Sharpe 1977:3-7).

This is not the place to attempt a new typology for the Christian theology of religions based on ontological concerns, rather this is just one point towards a rejection of the theology of

religions as the framework in which to interpret the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism. The Christian theology of religions has become as much a dispute about what Christianity itself is as a discussion of other religions. This becomes clear in considering two of the leading voices in recent debates over the theology of religions.

In *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (2002) Paul Knitter laid out a four-fold division of Christian positions. The replacement model which seeks the cessation of all other religions is exclusivist in Alan Race's typology. The fulfillment model, which is inclusivist, sees everything leading in some way to Christ or Christianity. The mutuality model is about dialogue based on all religions being true, a pluralist model that Knitter is concerned about as he sees "creeping imperialism" too easily developing (Knitter 2002:162). The acceptance model of just embracing the reality of multiple religions is fourth, another pluralist model.

In his "inconclusive conclusion" Knitter admitted how much of this was really about Christianity:

Yes, my intent, like that of so many other theologians, was to call my fellow Christians to a more serious, a more fruitful dialogue with persons of other religions. But to do that, I have been trying in these pages to help Christians engage in a more serious and fruitful dialogue with each other. That's what I really had in mind, at least implicitly, in the way I have tried to present each of the models for a theology of religions. (Knitter 2002:238-9)

Jacques Dupuis outlined a somewhat different four-fold typology.

The first is a negative attitude, characterized by a disparaging evaluation of the other religions....The second is a guarded, partial acceptance and limited openness toward the other religions which, besides recognizing – with greater or lesser conviction – the possibility of salvation for their adherents, sees the religions themselves as recipients of a "primordial" (natural) divine revelation which can be the source in their adherents of an innate desire for union with the Absolute. A third standpoint developed later and prevailed at the time of Vatican II. It recognized in the religious traditions themselves the existence of positive values which, however, are subject to different interpretations ranging from natural endowments to elements of truth and grace in some way conducive to the salvation of their members. A fourth perspective – that in which we find ourselves today – is characterized by a more positive approach to the religious traditions themselves. It asks what positive significance these traditions have in God's plan of salvation for humankind in the context of the universal value which Christian faith attributes to the Jesus Christ-event in the historical unfolding of that plan. (Dupuis 1997:27)

Dupuis called his approach the development of a Christian theology of religious pluralism. His work stirred significant controversy, including his being silenced by the Roman Catholic Church for three years while his views were examined.⁵ The intra-Christian debate about theology of religions thus runs the risk of defeating the very purpose of the theology of religions, as it stirs considerable Christian internal wrangling. A new discipline has been proposed, comparative theology, which seeks to address some of the weaknesses of the theology of religions schools.

1.2.2 Comparative Theology

In his introduction to comparative theology Francis Clooney provides a helpful summary of the various disciplines surrounding and related to this field.

Comparative religion (along with the distinct but related fields of the history of religions and social scientific approaches to religions) entails the study of religion – in ideas, words, images, and acts, historical developments – as found in two or more traditions or strands of tradition. The scholarly ideal is detached inquiry by which the scholar remains neutral with respect to where the comparison might lead or what it might imply religiously....Her responsibility is primarily to fellow scholars.

Theology...indicates a mode of inquiry that engages a wide range of issues with full intellectual force, but ordinarily does so within the constraints of a commitment to a religious community....More deeply, it is *faith seeking understanding*....

The *theology of religions* is a theological discipline that discerns and evaluates the religious significance of other religions in accord with the truths and goals defining one's own religion. It...most often remains broadly general regarding the traditions that are being talked about.

Interreligious dialogue points to actual conversations, sometimes formal and academic, sometimes simply interpersonal conversations among persons of different religious traditions who are willing to listen to one another and share their stories of faith and values.

Dialogical or interreligious theology grows out of interreligious dialogue, as reflection aimed at clarifying dialogue's presuppositions, learning from its actual practice, and communicating what is learned in dialogue for a wider audience....

Comparative theology – comparative and theological beginning to end – marks acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which,

⁵ See Allen 2001:11 for a press release related to Dupuis' signing in February 2001 of a Vatican notification related to the "notable ambiguities and difficulties" in Dupuis' teaching. Dupuis himself refers to the controversy in a Postscript to his 2001 more popular version of his 1997 study on religious pluralism (Dupuis 2001: 260-263).

from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions. This learning is sought for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition/s as well as the home tradition. (Clooney 2010a:9-10; italics original)

Clooney is not merely an advocate for comparative theology; he is presented along with James L. Fredericks as one of the founders of the discipline, by Fredericks himself.

Starting in the late 1980s, Frank [Clooney] and I began to suggest a way in which we might rethink faith by means of a critical reflection on the texts and practices of other religious paths. Comparative theology, as we have proposed it, entails the interpretation of the meaning and truth of one's own faith by means of a critical investigation of other faiths. (Fredericks 2010:ix)

Fredericks is quite explicit about how different a discipline he considers comparative theology to be. In his study of *Faith among Faiths* (1999) he stated clearly that he wanted it to supersede the theology of religions.

This book, then, has two purposes. First, I want to summarize the lively debate that is currently underway regarding the pluralistic theology of religions. In addition, I want to suggest comparative theology as an alternative to the theology of religions and a way to get beyond the current impasse over the pluralistic model. (Fredericks 1999:10)

Fredericks reaffirms this in his 2010 introduction to *The New Comparative Theology*, and spells out four reasons for this "most controversial position I have taken" (2010:xiv).

A comprehensive Christian theological understanding of religious diversity...should come only after detailed studies of other religions. This project has barely begun to have an impact on Christian theology....[Second,] interpreting the religious classics of other traditions in keeping with the doctrinal demands of Christian faith usually leads to systematic distortions in the reception of the Other....[Third,] moreover, the continued emphasis on a theology of religions hobbles interreligious dialogue by allowing Christians to continue to talk to themselves, and place in abeyance the need to engage in and be engaged by the bewildering fact of religious diversity today. Fourth, in the past, Christian theologies of religions have not been sufficiently attentive to the hegemony of their discourse. When theologies of religions function as a template for doing theology comparatively, the comparative theologian is placed in the unhappy position of knowing more about other believers than they know about themselves. (Fredericks 2010:xiv-xv)⁶

⁶ Clooney speaks in gentler tones on this subject; "I can sympathize with calls for a moratorium on the theology of religions, if such a moratorium allows us to direct more energy to comparative theology, the less practiced discipline" (2010a:15); "If comparative theology and the theology of religions are kept proximate to one another – in practice, in expectation – they will uncover and ameliorate each other's hidden flaws" (2010b:196).

Some of the distinctives of comparative theology are only reactions to errors and perceived errors in dialogue and the theology of religions, such as prejudging other faiths. There is clearly a reaction against perceived hegemonic aspects of the Christian encounter with other faiths. While this is understandable, comparative theology itself is not immune to these problems, as Clooney even acknowledges in relation to hegemonic approaches ("it is impossible to find comparative enterprises entirely free of hegemonic impulses...." 2010b:195).

Comparative theology is a deep encounter with some specific aspect of some religious tradition, from an affirmed faith position in another tradition, seeking clearer insight into truth. In Clooney's work that has mainly been his Christian reading of sacred texts from various Hindu traditions, and he commends this as the best approach.

In my view, the foremost prospect for a fruitful comparative theology is the reading of texts, preferably scriptural and theological texts that have endured over centuries and millennia, and that have guided communities in their understanding of God, self, and other. (Clooney 2010a:58)

This reading is for learning and understanding and entering into the other tradition, not by any means merely reading to find support for the faith position of the reader. It is also reading for the sake of true learning that will be shared with one's own community, not reading for the sake of instructing the other. Fundamental to the comparative theology endeavor is that broad theologizing about comparative religions must be completely eschewed. Focused learning from many aspects of many religious faiths must develop before there is anything resembling sufficient data for broad theorizing.⁷

There is much to commend regarding comparative theology, and something akin to it will be seen in *The Pilgrim*. There are a number of creative tensions in comparative theology theory, and how one views these concerns will go a long way towards determining the results of an overall analysis of the discipline.

One area of significant tension relates to the strongly affirmed position that "comparative theology needs to remain in living connection with the tradition and faith experience of

⁷ Clooney suggests that comparative theology is just beginning and "will take centuries to come to fruition" (2010b:200).

particular communities" (Clooney 2010a:114). "...It draws what we learn from another tradition back into the realm of our own, highlighting and not erasing the fact of this borrowed wisdom" (2010a:16). Fredericks states this even more bluntly: "The deepest aspiration of comparative theology is a spiritual transformation of Christian believers" (1999:171).

There is to me clearly a commendable aspect to this approach, which seems to succeed in avoiding anything like a conversionist or hegemonic attitude. Yet it also looks fundamentally selfish, and surely is completely impractical as stated. Dialogue is necessary to the procedure, and in some cases is the heart of comparative theology ("Fredericks envisions an inherently dialogical way of interreligious theology that requires collaboration among Christians, Buddhists, and people of other faith traditions" (Clooney 2010a:49)).

There is a rather stark admission that comparative theology seriously undertaken will be transformative, and will leave the practitioner a marginal figure within their home community (Clooney 2010a:158). Surely the same result can be expected for the serious dialogue partner of the other community? In fact, this seems almost a hope and a goal: "this new theology may change us, teach us to speak differently, and it may even precipitate the formation of secondary communities to which many of us will belong in part" (Clooney 2010a:153). We may well end up with "a kind of cultivated hybridity, a multiple religious belonging accomplished by serious study" (Clooney 2010a:160).

Clooney uses the analogy of returning home after "going away" to study deeply in some aspect of another faith tradition. "The return home may be more difficult than we might wish," he suggests (2010a:156); yet in another context he speaks of the journey "*most often* ending in a return home" (2010a:15; italics added). This clearly opens the way for conversion, and in fact one of the contributing authors to *The New Comparative Theology* is Jeffery D. Long, a convert from Roman Catholicism to neo-advaitic Hinduism (Long 2010:159).

The fact that conversion might result, and marginality from one's own faith community is expected to result, from comparative theology raises issues that need to be addressed. Conversion, even if only to a hyphenated identity as opposed to the rejection of one

community and assimilation to another, is constantly happening.⁸ Multiple religious belonging is a new phenomenon in the Christian world as other faiths have ceased to be far away and exotic.⁹ This seems to drain meaning from the stated goal that learning in the comparative theology endeavor will be only for one's own sake and not aimed at the partner in dialogue.

A second area of tension is related to the aim that no broad theology of religions will be presupposed in comparative theology. Hugh Nicholson refers to this goal of

abandoning the pretension to work out a stance towards other religions independently of a study of the specific teachings of those religions. In eschewing the apriorism of the theology of religions, comparative theology abandons a global, totalizing perspective on religions. (Nicholson 2010:45)

David Clairmont suggests that the comparative theologian is

characterized by a kind of sorrow and solidarity that comes with attention to the ease and frequency with which even the most well-intentioned and intellectually gifted religious persons want to settle matters well before there is any need to find answers. (Clairmont 2010:88)

Clooney commends a "certain detachment that chastens grand theories" (2010a:16). Perry Schmidt-Leukel objects to this attempt to avoid holding a definite theological position in the comparative theology field. He points out that

the systematic and consequent pursuit of the comparison – if it is carried out theologically, that is with a prior interest in the truth and value of the investigated religious ideas or beliefs – will sooner or later lead to a point where the question of the relationship between the non-Christian and respective Christian beliefs becomes unavoidable. Then there will emerge quite naturally the four options that either both beliefs are wrong, or that one is true and the other wrong, or that one is more adequate or comprehensive and therefore more true than the other, or that both are different but equally true. However, these four options are nothing more than the basic options within a theology of religions. (Schmidt-Leukel 2009:99)

⁸ For example, see Wingate 1997, *The Church and Conversion: A Study of Recent Conversions to and from Christianity in the Tamil Area of South India*.

⁹ Older streams of multiple religious belonging in the non-Western world will be mentioned below. See Cornille 2002 for a study of multiple religious belonging and Christian identity.

The issue here between Schmidt-Leukel and Clooney lies in the little phrase "sooner or later," since Clooney wants to push the issue back, perhaps even a few centuries, and Schmidt-Leukel sees no reason to avoid answering the question now. Underlying this difference seems to be a difference in theology; Schmidt-Leukel is a pluralist who affirms all religions so has no hesitation in promoting that view ("Only a pluralist approach, with its attempt to combine the acknowledgement of differences with the idea of religiously equal validity, appeared to me as moving into the right direction" (2009:4)). Clooney is an inclusivist who holds to a faith position that somehow in the end the received truths of the Christian tradition do not conflict with what will be learned from other faiths ("My comparative theology is in harmony with those inclusivist theologies, in the great tradition of Karl Rahner, SJ, and Jacques Dupuis, SJ, that balance claims to Christian uniqueness with a necessary openness to learning from other religions" (Clooney 2010a:16)). This leads to an ongoing acknowledged tension between commitment and openness, and to the desire to postpone final decisions about the validity of religions.

Yet how far Clooney really succeeds in postponing decisions about the validity of religions is open to question. Despite his stated position, he is somehow also able to affirm that

Rarely, if ever, will comparative theology produce new truths, but it can make possible fresh insights into familiar and revered truths, and new ways of receiving those truths. (2010a:112)

This is quite a significant pre-judgment, reflecting his Christian faith rather than his ideal of detachment. And he does allow himself to state a broad expectation that there will be a reduction in the distinct validity of different religious traditions:

As the number of persons living this complicated intellectual and spiritual life [of comparative theology] grows larger, the fixed boundaries separating religions will become all the less plausible, not due simply to demographics or social change, but now also because the theological insights arising in comparative study will push the boundaries. (Clooney 2010a:162)

Comparative theology clearly is about change, both personal and societal. Rather than focusing on changing others, it appropriately puts a focus on self transformation. It is particularly self transformation from serious engagement with another religious tradition, with intent to share lessons learned with one's own faith community. This is all quite commendable, and will be seen at points in *The Pilgrim*. Yet the reticence about

acknowledging that change is also expected and desired in dialogue partners seems artificial and overly-sensitive. And the reticence about theologizing about world religions is yet more disconcerting.

In the context of affirming how comparative theology can provide needed data about religions to theologians of religion, Clooney points out that

once traditions are recognized as theologically complex, they are less easily categorized, and it becomes much more difficult to decide their meaning and assign them a particular theological slot that meets our expectations and answers our questions. (2010a:14)

Clooney clearly has seen enough from his comparative studies to know that there is little meaning in the broad distinctions of world religions. His brilliant study *Hindu God, Christian God* (2001) outlined how on fundamental differences in theologies of God, the dividing lines are never between all Christians and all Hindus, but rather a far more complex analysis of commonalities and differences is necessary. Yet the category of "world religions" remains unaddressed, despite an acknowledged expectation that the boundaries between them will weaken and the acknowledgement of multiple religious belonging as a valid development.

There is thus much to affirm in comparative theology, particularly the seriousness with which engagement with other religious traditions with a goal of true understanding and learning is affirmed as the central issue. This should be central to all interreligious dialogue as well, but since that is not necessarily the case there is room for affirming the discipline of comparative theology. Yet tensions internal to comparative theology will continue to surface and may undermine the credibility of the enterprise.

1.3 Conclusion

Respectful dialogical learning from, with and about other faiths by Christians through study of texts, personal interaction and sociological observation is the position affirmed in this thesis. In the dialogical process of comparative theology new insights large and small will be garnered, and individuals and communities will take possession of those insights, utilizing them within their own tradition. Christian students of other faiths can affirm their desire to possess truths from others without hegemonic triumphalism, so long as it is granted that

dialogue partners are understood to be acting in that same way regarding Christian insights and practices. A *mutual possessio* model describing reciprocal interpenetration thus defines respectful learning and the incorporation of insights from one tradition by another.

Possessio, dialogue and comparative theology thus outline a Christian approach to other faiths that guides my interaction with the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism. Yet these are quite pragmatic agendas related to interreligious encounter, and fundamental questions about religion itself are not addressed. The validity of major world religions is assumed, but in the Christian study of Hinduism that is not a safe assumption. For wrestling with religion itself, and with "Christianity" and "Hinduism," the field of religious studies will be explored.

2.0 Religious Studies

Jeppe S. Jensen suggests that "The study of religion may in many ways be considered intellectually, academically, and institutionally dysfunctional" (2003:21). The fundamental crisis in religious studies relates to exactly what "religion" means. Seth Kunin defines this crisis.

Although the word "religion" is used throughout the full range of discourse (popular and academic) in Western society, both about itself and about other societies, the exact definition of the term has provided an ongoing challenge to scholars – with seemingly as many definitions as there are scholars of the subject....Whether religion exists and whether it can be adequately defined are the central issues for religious studies and in fact are questions that go to the very heart of the existence of religious studies as an academic discipline. (Kunin 2006:1)

The reality of this problem of meaningful definition of a term widely used leads to complicated efforts to justify the study of traditional world religions. Graham Harvey introduces an anthology on modern religions with this attempt at explanation:

...although we do not offer a definition of religion, nor do we apply only one approach to religion (whatever it is), all the authors in this book agree that as a foundation it is enough to begin by saying that "the activities studied by scholars of religion are religions." (Harvey 2009:8)

This is not the place to attempt to outline, let alone resolve, complex issues in the field of religious studies. Yet some of the points of contention are directly related to this thesis, not least that of the very legitimacy of the construct of "world religions."

2.1 World Religions

Katherine Young considered the usage of the phrase "world religions" and concluded in her 1992 paper that "there has been little critical reflection on the term; its reputation rests on usage and unexamined presuppositions" (Young 1992:125). Young showed that there is no agreed listing of world religions, no set standard for what constitutes a world religion, and not even clarity on whether the words refer generally to "the religions of the world" or more specifically to "religions of world-wide scope."

Tomoko Masuzawa outlined what she called *The Invention of World Religions* (2005). In the late 19th century Buddhism was accepted as the second world religion alongside Christianity, in comparison to various national faiths and as a development from the earlier four-fold perspective on "Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, and the rest" (Masuzawa 2005:47). It was only in the 1920s and 30s that lists of world religions became standardized as still often enumerated today (Masuzawa 2005:265).

The understanding of Buddhism as a world religion, however, is fraught with difficulties.

The discovery of Buddhism was therefore from the beginning, in a somewhat literal and nontrivial sense, a textual construction; it was a project that put a premium on the supposed thoughts and deeds of the reputed founder and on a certain body of writing that was perceived to authorize, and in turn was authorized by, the founder figure....Once the singular essence of Buddhism was thus identified, the rich and various manifestations of actual Buddhism observed throughout modern Asian nations came to be understood as so many derivative forms and latter-day innovations and corruptions. (Masuzawa 2005:126)

This sets up a broader discussion of Orientalism, but that will be considered in the next section along with Hinduism. Masuzawa is also critical of the Western reading of Buddha as a Luther-like reformer against Brahmanism and the caste system, which she suggests is based on "rather modest textual evidence" (Masuzawa 2005:134).¹⁰ This example of the Western

¹⁰ S. N. Balagangadhara also objects to this portrayal of Buddha as Luther-like, which he documents from numerous 19th century writers (1994:143-145). He later examines the "modest textual evidence" as well

(mis-)reading of Buddhism illustrates her main point that Christian presuppositions and internal conflicts lie behind the development of the idea of world religions.

...a non-European nation of any stature was presumed to have one (or sometimes more than one) of these world religions in lieu of Christianity. Just as Christianity had shaped and disciplined the European nations for centuries, in a non-European nation, a world religion of one kind or another had been functioning as the veritable backbone of its ethos. (Masuzawa 2005:18)

But just what a religion is proved a riddle not yet solved to this day. Buddhism proved a major problem in seeking a basic definition of religion, as noted by David Webster.

One of the clearest contributions of Buddhist ideas to philosophy of religion, as it has often been practised, is to make trouble – to be the grit in the smooth running of the machine. If we consider the themes I mentioned a moment ago – of the nature of God, the nature and significance of creation, and the like – through to topics such as the ultimate purpose and direction of the universe – it seems Buddhism, in a sense, refuses to play the game. Buddhism does not neatly line up to give a set of answers to these questions – for it seems to be concerned primarily with other matters. That is not to say that Buddhism cannot, or does not, have a view on the existence of non-worldly supernatural beings – it just disputes (in the nicest possible sense) the value of debates on such topics. (Webster 2008:88)

So two different problems emerged; Buddhism was defined as a religion without anything resembling a suitable basis for that, and in the process reified conceptions of "Buddhism" were developed that did not match reality. This analysis could easily be carried further, demonstrating how the diversity of Buddhist phenomena only increased with Western ideas about religion impacting Asian expressions of Buddhism and yet more dynamic developments as Buddhism grew in the West. But similar themes will be seen in the study of Hinduism which is central to this thesis, so Buddhism will not be considered further than this demonstration that there are significant problems in the supposition of "world religions."

Arvind-Pal Mandair demonstrates similar problems related to the development of the concept of Sikhism as a religion. He suggests that language and translation issues underlie and support the distorted notion of religion. The British administration in the Punjab commissioned a translation of the *Adi Granth* by German Indologist Ernest Trumpp.

(1994:225-235), concluding that "whatever Buddha may or may not have been doing in these dialogues, it is extremely difficult to suggest that he was *rejecting* the 'caste' system" (1994:234, italics original).

Although it is not generally acknowledged, the conceptual terminology underpinning Trumpp's translation, including his infamous preface to the Sikh "religion," effectively demarcated a field of translation...that provided the conceptual framework within which the future discourse on modern Sikhism would be received. This regime of translation contained an ideology about religion and theology that makes translators imagine their relation to what they do in translation as a "dialogue" or an exchange of guarantees. (Mandair 2009:175-6)

Mandair's fundamental point related to translation is how this appearance of "dialogue" and interchange was not really true, since English was the dominant language and conceptual categories from the West controlled translations through the influence of language.

Mandair further shows how the reformist Singh Sabha affirmed the Sikh religion and nation, and from their supposed indigenous agency the concept is now accepted in religious studies. His call for a total rereading of the Sikh tradition in nondualist rather than theistic terms is beyond the concern of this thesis, but his analysis of the depth of the problem and his suggested proposal for moving forward will be noted. He suggests

...a redefining of the postcolonial as someone for whom the concept of religion may not have existed in their language(s) prior to their accession to the dominant symbolic order imposed by the colonizer/hegemon, but for whom this now exists as if it had been an indigenous concept all along. For them, the critical force of translation, unleashed in the question "What if religio remained untranslatable?" provides a means of distancing oneself from the concept of religion while fully acknowledging that the vestiges of "religion" continue to haunt their very existence and the possibilities of cultural formation. (Mandair 2009:434)¹¹

Any call to move beyond the concept of religion needs to face squarely the daunting nature of this "haunting," as the term has been thoroughly appropriated into multiple linguistic and cultural contexts and cannot be easily uprooted. Mandair calls for recognition of the violation done to non-Christian constructs, and a fresh commitment to a "truly comparative cultural theory" where there is an acceptance of "mutual contamination" and "mutual haunting" between the various parties (2009:435).

My final comments on world religions will be presented after the discussion of Hinduism below. This section should not conclude, however, without presenting a counter voice to Mandair. Brian Pennington, to put his argument into Mandair's terminology, suggests that a

¹¹ The question or proposal of leaving religion as untranslatable is from Jacques Derrida (Mandair 2009:423).

mutual contamination and haunting has been going on for a long time, and there is no need to change terminologies to further that process.

...just as the term [religion] evolved with changed usage to indicate closed systems of competing and mutually exclusive beliefs, it has, since the initiation of colonial contact, continued to evolve beyond its narrow Christian range of meaning. Current debate over the term marks one more moment in that evolution....The academic usage of "religion" has changed substantially, and under continuing scrutiny, it remains elastic. Its semantic range continues to evolve and expand as scholars critique and examine their own categories and as they apply new data from non-western traditions to the category. (Pennington 2005:176-7)

2.2 Enlightenment Narrowing of "Religion"

In 1962 Wilfred Cantwell Smith wrote *The Meaning and End of Religion*, a seminal work critiquing the very concept of religion. He traced the roots of the modern usage of the term to the Enlightenment, where the centrality of the intellect indicated that truth and doctrine were most important in religion.

This is the view of the Enlightenment, evinced not only in the religious realm but as a comprehensive world outlook which stressed an intellectualist and impersonalist schematization of things. In pamphlet after pamphlet, treatise after treatise, decade after decade the notion was driven home that a religion is something that one believes or does not believe, something whose propositions are true or are not true, something whose locus is in the realm of the intelligible, is up for inspection before the speculative mind. (W. C. Smith 1962:40)

Smith adamantly objected to the intellectualizing and reification of religion, seeing personal faith as the vital reality which was obscured by this idealistic construct. "There is nothing in heaven or on earth that can legitimately be called *the* Christian faith," he asserted. "There have been and are the faiths of individual Christians..." (Smith 1962:191; italics original). This suggestion against any form of reification of "the Christian faith" will be discussed below; presently the Enlightenment impact on religion is in focus.

This intellectualizing of religion also began the compartmentalizing and trivializing of it. Jonathan Z. Smith pointed out that

religion was domesticated....the Enlightenment impulse was one of tolerance and, as a necessary concomitant, one which refused to leave any human datum, including religion, beyond the pale of understanding, beyond the realm of reason. (J. Z. Smith 1982:104)

W. C. Smith returned to his theme of Enlightenment distortions thirty years later and had an even more harsh conclusion.

When I wrote *The Meaning and End* I knew that "religion" was a Western and a modern notion. I had not yet seen, but now do see clearly, that "religion" in its modern form is a secular idea. Secularism is an ideology, and "religion" is one of its basic categories....It sees the universe, and human nature, as essentially secular, and sees "the religions" as addenda that human beings have tacked on here and there in various shapes and for various interesting, powerful or fatuous reasons. It sees law, economics, philosophy (things we got from Greece and Rome) as distinct from religion. (W.C. Smith 1992:16)

Thomas Idinopoulos further affirmed this compartmentalization and trivializing of religion.

The word, religion, acquired its own distinct meaning when the forces of secularization became so dominant in western culture that religious belief and practice became distinctly human acts. For once secularity became fully evident in society it was possible to speak by contrast of the religious way of life. (Idinopoulos 2002:10)

Idinopoulos objected to this development, suggesting that in both "archaic" peoples and in modern life there is evidence of "the interweaving of religion with everything else in life" (2002:10).

This was one of the key points of Irving Hexham's stirring analysis of the neglect of African religions in the field of religious studies. Hexham presented an impressive five point comparison of Indian and African traditions, pointing out how in the realm of religious studies, and particularly in Ninian Smart's *The World's Religions*, a positive presentation was given to Indian data while similar African realities were rather harshly dismissed (Hexham 1991:363-4). It is in addressing the positive values that African studies can bring to religious studies that his thoughts are relevant to the current point.

African holism forces us to ask important questions about the nature of the sacred, and about western compartmentalized understandings of "religion." Should religion be seen as a separate realm rigidly isolated from the "secular"? Or can the whole of life be seen as an expression of religion? In the process of dealing with such questions, academic definitions of religion are challenged, and we are forced to consider ways of thinking which take us far from the familiar traditions of Aristotle, Thomas, the Upanishads and Sankara. Following such an approach, students quickly discover the experiential aspect of African religions and are forced to reflect on the role of experience in religion generally. Such reflection removes religion from an isolated intellectualism to include the realm of the emotions and the totality of human life. (Hexham 1991:373)

The fact that religion was compartmentalized in Enlightenment thought raises the dilemma which closed the preceding section; should the term be abandoned for a more holistic term, or, as Hexham clearly envisaged, can the term be salvaged by new data producing a new understanding. This question will be addressed further below.

Bryan Turner pointed out that this compartmentalizing of religion is not only fundamental to the secularist outlook that marks modernity, it is part and parcel of the process of globalization, with complex repercussions.

Perhaps the principle paradox of global modernization is the constitution of "religion" as a separate, differentiated, and specialized sector of modern society – a sector that is often thought to refer to, and assumed to manage, the private world of values and activities. Religion in the modern world has been transformed into what troubles individuals, namely what they think is of ultimate importance....Globalization has involved the export of this predominantly Western and modern model of private and individualistic religiosity, and fundamentalist Judaism and Islam are responses to such a development. (Turner 2004:122)

The outworking of Enlightenment principles in Western thought about religion could only skew the development of thought about non-Christian religions. A reified sphere of doctrinal standards and a personalized sphere of values were both strange concepts outside the Western world. The legitimacy of this Enlightenment perspective is in question even in the West so it cannot be a surprise that it does not find acceptance outside the West.

2.3 Multiple Religious Belonging

Multiple religious belonging was not something conceivable while a paradigm of reified world religions was dominant. In fact, in probably the most notable case, there may be a misunderstanding based on this Western concept of religion. This perspective is outlined in a paper by Jan van Bragt. The basic data are clear.

According to the Japanese government, the number of Shinto adherents is about 100 million, and the number of Buddhists is estimated at about 95 million. This total far surpasses the population, not yet counting the followers of the many new religions, the Christians, the nonbelievers, and so on. (van Bragt 2002:8)

In van Bragt's analysis, the fundamental issue here is a basic difference in outlook between the Japanese and Westerners. Despite the strong numbers associated with Shinto and

Buddhism, only 13.6 per cent of Japanese said they were members of a religious organization (van Bragt 2002:10). Shinto and Buddhism are practiced in different situations.

Putting it very crudely, it is said that Shinto is the religion for the living, and Buddhism is the religion for the dead. The Japanese feel themselves to be Shintoists in the cycle of the four seasons, at the times of planting and harvesting of the rice, at the New Year, at the festival of the tutelary deity of the village, and when a child is born. They feel themselves to be Buddhists at the times of funerals and services for the dead. (van Bragt 2002:10)

This is certainly a type of multiple religious belonging, and confirms concerns about the Western view of religion. But it is quite a different type of multiple belonging than is seen in the modern West.

Shifting to Indian realities, David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence objected to the assumption that Hindu and Muslim have always been distinctly different entities on the Indian subcontinent. They called for and promoted a new vocabulary to help get beyond this misrepresentation. "To open up space between reductive religious orientations and mobile collective identities, one needs a new vocabulary that is not restricted to modern connotations of words such as *Muslim* and *Hindu*" (2000:2; italics original). The terms they preferred are Islamicate and Indic, more open terms that are intended to move discussions "beyond a fixation with bounded categories" (2000:2).

Gilmartin and Lawrence were careful not to discount Muslim and Hindu identities, but their volume demonstrates a great deal of overlap between Hindu and Muslim realities, and their supposition is that "religion also includes everyday life and social exchange; it elides with what is sometimes called 'culture'" (2000:1).

This point can be illustrated from the 1881 Census report from the Punjab.

It would hardly be expected that any difficulty or uncertainty should be felt in classing the natives of the Province under their respective religions. Yet, with the single exception of caste, no other one of the details which we have recorded is so difficult to fix with exactness....Among the ignorant peasantry whose creed, by whatever name it may be known, is seldom more than a superstition and a ritual, the various observances and beliefs which distinguish the followers of the several faiths in their purity are so strangely blended and intermingled, that it is often almost impossible to say that one

prevails rather than another, or to decide in what category the people shall be classed. (Ibbetson 1883:101)¹²

This of course is further data against the reification of religion, and is a different angle on multiple religious belonging as generally considered today. Currently multiple religious belonging has come to attention because globalization has contributed to people of all traditional religions moving into close proximity with people of other faiths. Diana Eck commented on how both a hardening of traditions and a merging of traditions are marks of the current ferment.

Scholars of religion have rightly paid considerable attention to religious chauvinism and the hardening of religious "boundaries" in new forms of Christian fundamentalism, Hindu nationalism, and Islamist movements. But the bridging of religious communities through a multitude of interreligious movements, though less publicized, has also become a startling new fact of the late 20th century. (Eck 2000:138)

Eck identified this startling new fact as

Christians who read the Gita, Jews who sit Buddhist mediation, agnostics who religiously practice yoga...immigrant Buddhists in Oklahoma City who keep a Buddhist altar at home and go to church on Sundays...Hindus in Louisville with Jewish and Christian sons-in-law. (2000:134)

Eck questioned how to describe these developments; "Do we use terms like syncretism? Hybridization? Mongrelization? *Mestizaje*? Do we speak of conversion? Convergence? Or is it something else?" (2000:134).

Catherine Cornille edited a volume on multiple religious belonging, terminology that Eck did not refer to. But in line with Eck's analysis Cornille observed that

in a world of seemingly unlimited choices in matters of religious identity and affiliation, the idea of belonging exclusively to one religious tradition or of drawing from only one set of spiritual, symbolic, or ritual resources is no longer self-evident. (Cornille 2002:1)

In line with illustrations above, Cornille pointed out that this multiple religious belonging is not really a new concept in Asia, so the novelty of this is really just in the West.

¹² I am indebted to Webster 2007 for information leading to this source.

This sense or conviction of belonging to more than one religious tradition is thus clearly growing, at least in the West. It may be argued that in this, religion in Europe, America and Australia is just coming to terms with a practice or a form of religiosity that has been prevalent for ages in most of the rest of the world, and especially in the East. (Cornille 2002:1)

The development of multiple religious belonging in the West along with the recognition that this has been a present reality in other parts of the world for a considerable time amount to yet another significant factor weighing against the entire construct of world religions. But I do not find this a fruitful alternative paradigm, as will be pointed out in section 3.5 below.

2.4 Reconsidering Christianity

The concept of multiple religious belonging especially raises questions about historic understandings of Christianity, although questions on that line have been referred to and hinted at throughout the discussion above. Cornille's collection of papers on multiple religious belonging is particularly in light of Christian identity. In the closing paper Raimon Panikkar provided this as a functional definition of a Christian:

the criterion for christian identity lies ultimately in the sincere confession of a person, validated by a corresponding recognition of a community. (Panikkar 2002:123; italics and lack of capitalization original)

This understanding adds an important factor in between the two nodes referred to earlier by W. C. Smith, that "the Christian faith" does not exist, only the faith of individual Christians (Smith 1962:91). Panikkar did not consider his suggested "validation" to be the equivalent of "membership," and his exposition made clear that his position is in contrast to the traditional Roman Catholic focus on "objective grounds" (Panikkar 2002:123). Despite the lack of clarity in this conception, he did add an important element into the equation beyond just personal faith or reified religion.

Critics of the concept of world religions object to the application of "Christian" perspectives on other cultures and faiths, yet the criticisms seem valid related to "Christianity" also. W. C. Smith clearly made this application, but the reified concept of the world religion of Christianity is not often opposed. A new *Atlas of Global Christianity* (2009) presents an interesting taxonomy of the Christian religion.

The aim of this atlas is to comprehensively map "global Christianity," to describe it in its entirety. Every Christian tradition in every country is examined in the context of a global Christianity. This includes every Christian denomination described under the rubric of six major Christian traditions; Anglican, Independent, Marginal, Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic. (Johnson and Ross 2009:x)

The diversity encompassed in such a survey is astounding, as the separate demarcation for "marginal" varieties of Christianity makes clear. There is notice of "increased use of the term 'Christianities'" (Johnson and Ross 2009:x), but no hint that the traditional use of Christianity is problematic. Ninian Smart referred to "a great number of varieties of Christianity, and there are some movements about which we may have doubts as to whether they count as Christian" (Smart 1989:11). Who is qualified to speak and make judgments about dubious versions of Christianity, Hinduism, etc., is a complicated issue to be discussed in the conclusion below (section 3.5).

This diversity of Christianity is brought into direct comparison with religions in India by David Smith.

It need hardly be added that a resume of the history of religion in Europe, careful to note all schisms and sects, would be no less confused and probably more schizophrenic than that of India. (Smith 2003:58)

The vast diversity of "the Christian religion" is not the only reason for opposing it as a meaningful construct. Daniel Dubuisson presented a critique of Christianity on the lines of critiquing the concept of religion. He suggested that the "central framework" for Western Christianity can be summarized in three points, but the points are too broad to carry much meaning.

...the Western Christian model as...a kind of ideal, intangible norm. What do we most often find in this doxa? Essentially, three things, of which one, the first, is already familiar: (1) the affirmation of the existence of God and of the living link that unites the mortal creature to him; (2) a Church or priestly organization; and lastly (3) sacraments and ceremonies, that is, according to the nomenclature proposed by Huber and Mauss, beliefs, institutions, and practices. We may note in passing that this tripartite assemblage is to be found almost everywhere (what class of social phenomena does not entail the concomitant action of belief, institutions, and practices?), and that as a result it is difficult to recognize any religious specificity here. (Dubuisson 2003:64)

Richard King pointed out that "Christianity" is no more meaningful a term than "Hinduism" is.

Hinduism in this context is a key example but hardly a special case and so should not be treated as if it is being denied a putative identity that the other "world religions" are (mistakenly) taken to possess. "Christianity" is similarly a network of a variety of disparate trends and movements. There is no "essential Christianity" uniting all Christian movements and trends across time and space. Christianity, then, like Hinduism, is an "imagined community." (King 2010:104)

Continued reference to Christianity is also objectionable due to the marginalization of religion in modernity. John Cobb makes this point in discussing multiple religious belonging.

Although the Christian ideal is that Christian faith order the whole of life, centuries of secularization have in fact relegated it for most adherents to particular areas of life. The recognition that there are other great religious paths has further relativized the meaning of faith for many of the most sensitive and perceptive Christians. It is unrealistic to oppose multiple belonging in the name of an ideal or norm that is largely inoperative. (Cobb 2002:73-4)

Cobb goes on to express dissatisfaction with multiple religious belonging, but his realistic assessment of Christianity and secularism suggests to me that it is better not even to think and function in terms of Christianity any longer since that term now suggests a compartmentalized aspect of life.

I see compelling reasons to make every effort to cease speaking about religion, Christianity, etc. I will summarize that position shortly. Yet for the purposes of this thesis it hardly seems feasible not to talk about Christianity when it is a study of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism. On the other hand, it is certainly not possible for me to claim to speak on behalf of Christianity, or really even of any particular variety of Christianity.

I am a confessional Protestant Christian (Presbyterian), but necessarily engage far beyond any confession since no confession has ever wrestled with theology of religions or comparative theology. So I am certainly marginalized, as experienced and anticipated by Clooney. The most I can do related to Christianity, then, is to bring to bear on this study some of what seem to me to be fundamentally important Christian insights, one of which undermines hegemonic tendencies.

In response to some Greeks who wanted to meet him, Jesus said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). To suggest that Christianity should die seems rather farfetched, but if the term is misleading,

and particularly if it has hegemonic connotations, this is perhaps a necessary process rather than an impossible dream. Kosuke Koyama made this point with the graphic illustration that the crusading mind needs to be replaced with a crucified mind (Koyama 1974:222f.).

This perspective introduces a definite tension to this thesis, a tension not unlike that encountered in comparative theology. How is it possible to uphold a *possessio* perspective on other faiths and cultures, and yet maintain a crucified mind? Engaging other faiths for the purpose of "plunder" seems the complete opposite of a crucified mind. Yet this is the perspective from which I seek to operate, and hegemony will be avoided, in so far as that is successful (as it is intended to be), by affirming and insisting on the right of the dialogue partner to similarly "plunder" from Christian traditions. In fact, in this scenario the Christian will not only encourage plunder but even point to the richest lodes of treasure from which to ransack artifacts of true value; an engagement that under other metaphors might well be called "evangelism" or "mission."

2.5 Conclusion

The complexity of definitions and paradigms related to religious studies makes firm conclusions difficult. Since the material to follow in considering Hinduism is very much along these same lines, final thoughts will be held until the completion of that section. A definite conclusion at this stage, however, is that a post-religious and post-Christian engagement is the goal of "interreligious" encounters. There are some particularities related to Indian Christianity, and those special concerns and problems will be considered in the concluding section of this chapter.

3.0 Hinduism

There is considerable debate about Hinduism, as well summarized by Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad.

It is now a matter of heated debate as to whether or not there is such a thing as "Hinduism." On the one side is an academic analysis that suggests that what is known as Hinduism is more a collection of loosely related traditions, communities and partly shared customs and concepts that, only through the Western Enlightenment creation of the category of "religion" and the vested, unifying interests of upper caste Hindu informants, led to the construction of "Hinduism." On the other side is a range of views

from vehement, ideological assertions of an ancient and single Hinduism through to an instinctive contemporary fellow feeling amongst Hindus that they belong to the same "religion." (Ram-Prasad 2006:178)

In 2010 the first results of a series of scholarly encounters focused on this topic was published, and the diversity of viewpoints present is a central reality within the collection of papers (Bloch, Keppens and Hegde 2010).¹³ For my purposes, a typology of current perspectives on Hinduism will be introduced. These categories are not exact, as will be noted in the discussion of representative scholars. Nothing like a complete survey can be attempted, but representative scholars supporting various interpretative schemes will be introduced. The diversity of outlooks will thus be obvious and a framework will be present for stating the perspective of this thesis.

3.1 Hinduism as a Non-Existent Misnomer

The basic facts about the evolution of the term "Hindu" are not debated, and it is clear that the concept of "the religion of Hinduism" is from the colonial era. These facts are fundamental to the position that "Hinduism" is a misnomer and is not a term to accept or use in academic discourse. Two quite different proponents of this viewpoint will be considered, R. E. Frykenberg and S. N. Balagangadhara. The historical background to the development of the concepts of "Hindu" and "Hinduism" will be outlined in the teaching of Frykenberg and will not be repeated in the discussion of proponents of other positions.

3.1.1 Robert Eric Frykenberg

On the basis of the historical usage and development of the term "Hindu," R. E. Frykenberg introduced his paper on the emergence of modern Hinduism with the conclusion that "Hinduism" is a misnomer.

The central argument of this essay is that, unless by "Hindu" one means nothing more, nor less, than "Indian" (something native to, pertaining to, or found within the continent of India), there has never been any such a thing as a single "Hinduism" or any single "Hindu community" for all of India. (Frykenberg 1989:82)

¹³ Just as an example, within the volume Lorenzen specifically disagrees with Fitzgerald (Lorenzen 2010:36-38), who returns the favor with pointed criticisms of Lorenzen (Fitzgerald 2010:120-128).

Frykenberg showed the origin of this term in ancient Persia from which it spread to Greek and later Islamic writers with a clearly geographical reference. In sixteenth century Gaudiya Vaishnava texts in Bengal the term appeared "describing episodes of strained relationships between Hindus as natives and Muslims as foreigners" (Frykenberg 1989:84). Frykenberg summarized his survey saying that, though not defined, "Hindu dharma" was terminology that appeared in pre-colonial writings.

"Hindu dharma," therefore, is the closest resemblance to the term "Hinduism" which can be found to have arisen out of indigenous sources within India. The term "Hinduism," on the other hand, is truly modern. (1989:84)

Even in its modern use, however, "Hinduism" initially did not refer to a religion. In a later paper developing this same theme Frykenberg outlined three structures that influenced the development of the modern concept of "Hinduism." The first is the Brahmanical system, the influence of which remains unimpaired.

This system of arranging and ranking different birth communities eventually became so dominant, so deeply entrenched, and so pervasive that no force has ever been able to break it. It became so dominant, philosophically and politically, that its rationale and its epistemology came to be regarded as virtually synonymous with Cosmic Law (Dharma). (Frykenberg 1993:527)

The rise to dominance of this outlook cannot be clearly traced.¹⁴ It is certain, however, that this ideology alone is not enough to account for "Hinduism." A second structure that defined what it meant to be Hindu was the rise of dominant political powers, particularly Indo-Islamic and Indo-British. The continuities between these kingdoms and earlier ruling powers are clear, as all depended on the influence of multiple local elites. "Hindu" terminology was used in these political contexts, but with no overtones of exclusive religiosity.

Bonds had, of necessity, to be developed between alien rulers and scores of indigenous communities over whom (and with whom) they ruled. To be Hindu, Hindavi or Hindiitva, in this sense, was to be part of an eclectic, syncretistic, and tolerant regime. Each elite community's separate identity, as manifested in its own ethnic purity and its own special rituals or symbols, had to be respected. Each group, however high or low, remained confined to its own family/community cantonment. If any regime were to survive and remain strong, given the highly segmented moral, social, and ritual structures which separated peoples from each other, no other political logic would

¹⁴ Cf. Frykenberg, "Exactly how far this rationale for structuring all of society evolved and how it then came to be spread beyond the Brahmins themselves has been debated over the centuries" (1993:528).

work. Hindu, in this sense, did not refer to any one particular religion, certainly not to a single Hindu religion. (Frykenberg 1993:530)

Most strikingly, in this political sense "Hindu" was far from being ideologically exclusive, rather being inclusive of as many peoples as possible for the establishing of political stability. On the basis of this insight, Frykenberg considers the British Raj to also have been Hindu, since it was "genuinely indigenous rather than simply a foreign (or 'colonial') construct...more Indian than British in inner logic" (Frykenberg 1989:90).

Orientalist constructs are the third factor that come into play, building on the previous two structures. (Frykenberg is careful to indicate that his use of Orientalism "is not in the dismissive and pejorative sense now in vogue" (1993:533). I will discuss Orientalism and my position related to it below in section 3.3.1.) Institutional and ideological factors were both significant.

Institutionally, the Indo-British government took control of and centralized the administration of temples.

As early as 1810, Hindu temple properties began to come under the management of local governments. Native (Hindu or Indian) officials took over the day-to-day control of religious and charitable endowments, managing them on behalf of the institutions which they were meant to support, sometimes even supervising daily rituals and calendar ceremonies. In Madras, for example, this process of gradually consolidating State control over Hindu institutions took more than a century (and is still going on).... In the process, the Government itself constructed a huge informational, institutional, and intellectual infrastructure for an officially supported reification of religion. In institutional terms, a modern and organized Hinduism, intermingling all sorts of previously unconnected elements, became part of the imperial establishment -- something which had never before existed. (Frykenberg 1993:537)

Ideologically, Orientalism developed the concept of "Hinduism" as a religion based on what Frykenberg refers to as "a colossal campaign in the collection of information (artistic, antiquarian, and historical)" (1989:92). Five different elements can be identified in the Orientalist development of the concept of Hinduism.

- (1) Hinduism as a nativistic synonym for all things Indian (or pertaining to India);
- (2) Hinduism as an ancient civilization, something clearly identifiable before 1800 and going back 5,000 years;

- (3) Hinduism, as a loosely defined label describing all socio-religious phenomena found or originating in India (comparable to, but less pejorative than, paganism as a label for non-monotheistic religions in the ancient Graeco-Roman world);
- (4) Hinduism as an institutional/ideological instrument for the socio-cultural and sociopolitical integration of an all-India (imperial or national) sway; and
- (5) Hinduism as a single religion... (Frykenberg 1993:538)

The development of the concept of Hinduism as a single religion was thus impacted by many factors, and while clearly birthed in the nineteenth century was not a colonial imposition on India but the result of complex collaboration between Orientalist and indigenous scholars. In his 1993 paper Frykenberg identified Swami Vivekananda's role at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions as the time of recognition of this newly constructed religion of Hinduism. In his 1989 paper he suggested the later date of 1927 as the time when "there could be little doubt that a new kind of religious system, a kind of unofficial, state-sponsored 'Hinduism'" is definitively seen (Frykenberg 1989:95). These are not conflicting dates but relate to the ideological and institutional aspects of the development of "Hinduism" previously mentioned.

In summary, Frykenberg posits the development of a reified religion in the complex socio-political history of colonial India, but that is not what "Hinduism" refers to in the discussion of world religions. The problem is that what "Hinduism" refers to is too broad to have any meaning, and so meaningful discourse needs to move beyond this particular vocabulary:

"Hinduism"...is a concept so *soft* and *slippery*, so opaque and vague, that its use all but brings critical analysis to a halt and intellectual discourse to the verge of paralysis (if not futility). (Frykenberg 1989:87; italics original)¹⁵

3.1.2 S. N. Balagangadhara

S. N. Balagangadhara examined the concept of religion and why it was imposed on non-Western cultures, particularly related to India and Hinduism. His work thus resonates with that of Tomoko Masuzawa and Arvind-Pal Mandair above (section 2.1). He suggested that the Western insistence on finding religion around the world is very revealing about the West, but also that formulations associated with discoveries about other parts of the world, under examination, are found to be inadequate.

¹⁵ A major theme in this Frykenberg paper is the hegemonic aspect of the newly minted statist "Hinduism," particularly in Hindutva rhetoric; see below, sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.3.

In response to a quotation from James Mill in the early 19th century that suggested that Hinduism is a religion full of imprecision and inconsistency Balagangadhara pointed out that

It did not occur to people then, as it does not seem to occur to people now, that this amorphous nature of Hinduism might have little to do with its "amazing capacities." It is more likely that the absence of structure has something to do with the fact that it is an imaginary entity. For obvious reasons, the Christian missionaries could not swallow this possibility as it was, literally, inconceivable. (Balagangadhara 1994:116)

Balagangadhara took the argument a step further in his critique of the concept that Hinduism pervades all aspects of life.

If everything is considered a part of "religion," the very word loses its meaning and becomes trivial. Yet, our scholars deny this implication by suggesting that it is typical of "Hinduism" to pervade all aspects of social, intellectual, and emotional life. (1994:116)

Balagangadhara's proposal in response to this fabricated view of the Hindu religion is to call for a comparative science of cultures where the concept of religion is no longer considered a universal fact but is recognized to belong to the Western cultural tradition.

3.1.3 Conclusion

There is much to commend in the suggestion that Hinduism is a misnomer and the term is best avoided. This approach will be reflected on in the following counter-proposals regarding Hinduism so no conclusions will be drawn here.

3.2 Hinduism as a Religion Born in the Nineteenth Century

In light of data already presented on the development of the concept of religion and the origin of the phrase "the religion of Hinduism" during the colonial period it is perhaps not unexpected that some scholars would conclude that Hinduism is indeed a world religion but it only became that in the modern period. Two representatives of this position will be briefly noted.

3.2.1 Gavin Flood

Gavin Flood outlined the debate on the use and meaning of Hinduism and then stated his own position:

It is important to bear in mind that the formation of Hinduism, as the world religion we know today, has only occurred since the nineteenth century, when the term was used by Hindu reformers and Western Orientalists. However, its origins and the streams which feed into it are very ancient, extending back to the Indus Valley Civilization. I take the view that "Hinduism" is not purely the construction of Western Orientalists attempting to make sense of the plurality of religious phenomena within the vast geographical area of south Asia, as some scholars have maintained, but that "Hinduism" is also a development of Hindu self-understanding; a transformation in the modern world of themes already present. I shall use the term "Hindu" to refer not only to the contemporary world religion, but, with the necessary qualifications, to the traditions which have led to its present formation. (Flood 1996:8)

So, Flood technically considers Hinduism a world religion that began in the nineteenth century, yet is willing to rather anachronistically use the term of earlier periods due to there being a measure of continuity. Flood acknowledged that this "Hindu religion" is very difficult to define or describe, yet this is not seen as necessitating the rejection of the concept of a Hindu religion.

...while it might not be possible to arrive at a watertight definition of Hinduism, this does not mean that the term is empty. There are clearly some kinds of practices, texts and beliefs which are central to the concept of being a "Hindu," and there are others which are on the edges of Hinduism. (Flood 1996:7)

This presentation of central and peripheral aspects of Hinduism is based on George Lakoff's prototype theory where categories do not have fixed boundaries. Flood summarized that "there are degrees of category membership; some members of a category are more prototypical than others" (Flood 1996:7). This potentially opens a minefield where various beliefs or practices could be considered more truly Hindu (prototypical) than others. It also leaves the problem, acknowledged by Flood, of what categories are most central to Hinduism, and who properly decides such questions (Flood 1996:7).

3.2.2 Eric J. Sharpe

Eric J. Sharpe affirmed the position that Swami Vivekananda was the "inventor" of Hinduism, a concept closely aligned with Frykenberg's noted above.

It has been said, not without reason, that "Hinduism" was invented by Swami Vivekananda in 1893. Doubtless this paradoxical statement would be hotly contested by many, both Hindus and non-Hindus. But it is correct in that it was the Swami who first presented the world with an ideal picture of Hindu teaching as a totality, and with the view that the Hindu is invariably tolerant toward other forms of religious belief and practice, seeking to exclude and excommunicate none. (Sharpe 1977:65)

Sharpe immediately proceeded to point out that the tolerance of Vivekananda and his variety of Hinduism did not extend to faiths which made exclusive claims, such as Christianity. Yet Sharpe accredited Vivekananda with the formation of "a new Hindu orthodoxy – that all religious traditions are good and true, and that the highest wisdom consists in recognising that fact" (Sharpe 1975:255).

Sharpe's acceptance of Hinduism as a religion (contra Frykenberg) with an orthodoxy is not without recognition of the problems involved in considering Hinduism a single religious tradition.¹⁶ Yet in two introductory books (one in collaboration with John R. Hinnells) he is comfortable to do so. His justification for this was clearly stated.

...the term "Hinduism" has become too deeply entrenched in Western vocabulary to be easily dislodged. Moreover, it is now widely used by Hindus themselves whenever they have to express themselves in English. (1972:2)

There is certainly room to question this acceptance of Hinduism, especially the idea that orthodox Hinduism is in accord with Vivekananda and his successors. Sharpe clearly saw Gandhi in the Vivekananda tradition (1977:66) and could go so far as to say that "to understand Gandhi is in a very real sense to understand Hinduism in the twentieth century..." (1971:59). Some evaluative reflections on this position appear immediately below.

¹⁶ "We might perhaps sum up by saying that the word 'Hinduism' is both elastic and potentially unclear, and that it is possible to make out a good case both for its abandonment and for its retention – provided, in the latter event, that it is defined with some accuracy" (Sharpe 1972:6).

3.2.3 Conclusion

Since there is no disagreement that the concept of the religion of Hinduism was generated in the nineteenth century, there is clearly a credible case for suggesting that with the concept the reality also came to be. There are numerous difficulties with this suggestion, including the artificiality of the construct as analyzed by Frykenberg and Balagangadhara.

Sharpe's acceptance of an orthodoxy as defined by Vivekananda is particularly troubling. One of Frykenberg's concerns related to the affirming of a Hindu religion for all of India is the lack of any way to determine that people actually approve of or accept that designation.¹⁷ Particularly the lower caste "Hindus" should have a say, and some are providing quite contrarian sayings, such as Kancha Ilaiah's *Why I Am Not a Hindu* (1996).

Gavin Flood recognized the depth and reality of this problem but did not see fit to adapt his understanding of Hinduism to adequately deal with it.

One of the themes of this group [Ranajit Guha and colleagues] is that in Western, i.e. colonial and post-colonial, historiography of India, the highlighting of some themes and backgrounding of others has demonstrated the exercise of power and a denial of the agency of those who were oppressed. Historical discourse, according to Guha, has tended to write out subaltern classes (the lowest castes) and to see protests by those groups as merely an "eruption" of discontent akin to natural disasters. (Flood 1996:19)

The problem with designating the underprivileged of India as belonging to the Hindu religion is not unique to this position that Hinduism is a world religion that began in the nineteenth century. The following paradigms for Hinduism are also not immune to criticism in this area, but it is easier to criticize each particular position on Hinduism than it is to develop an adequate paradigm.

3.3 Hinduism Rooted in the Vedic Tradition

When Hinduism was discovered/invented in the colonial era it was mainly through the study of texts, as was the case with Buddhism discussed above (section 2.1). Criticisms of the

¹⁷ "However much the Registrar Generals of the Census or however much contemporary politicians may insist upon lumping nearly 80 per cent of the peoples of India under this category designation, it is almost impossible to determine how many of peoples so categorized would identify themselves as 'Hindus'..." (Frykenberg 1989:101).

concept of world religions and of particular religions have already been outlined, yet the broad issue of how to consider the work of Orientalists has not. That discussion will lead this section, followed by modern scholars who accept (with various qualifications) the Orientalist suggestion that Hinduism is a religion rooted in the Vedas.

3.3.1 Orientalism

Orientalism needs consideration as a separate topic because it is hard to write about Christian-Hindu interaction without some reference to the heritage of Orientalist study, and particularly because the topic has numerous nuances and can produce strident reactions ever since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978.

Said painted with a broad brush and his critics have pointed out numerous problems with his data and interpretations.¹⁸ Central to his presentation is the definition that Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 1994:3). Said was focused on Arab issues, yet as Thomas Trautmann points out, "at first blush [India] exemplifies the Saidian thesis even better than does the Middle East" (Trautmann 2004:22).

Trautmann introduced a distinction into Said's critique of Orientalism, positing two different meanings of the term that must be distinguished. Orientalism¹ he defined as "knowledge produced by Orientalists, scholars who know Asian languages", while Orientalism² is "European representations of the Orient, whether by Orientalists or others" (2004:23). Trautmann was concerned that the diversity of perspectives of Orientalists gets overlooked, and particularly that the work of diligent scholars might be glossed over due to political (mis)use of information. All study of India will continue to be on the foundation of Orientalist scholars, and "we cannot do without a critical and expert winnowing of that work" (Trautmann 2004:25).

Similar concerns are expressed by David Smith, who acknowledged that Orientalist scholars were "inevitably contaminated to some extent by the prejudices of their age – how could they

¹⁸ For example, Robert Irwin's *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (2006) provides a biting critique of Said.

not be?" (Smith 2003:60). So there was a "corrupting" in a Western and Christian direction of Orientalist works, but the deeper reality is

...not oppression of the East, but the colonization of the Western mind by the East. It is the strength of Indian ideas and Indian texts that overpowers the Western scholar, that forces him to spend his life in willing servitude to them. (Smith 2003:61)

This does not mean, however, that Said's perspective on power and oppression is completely without foundation. Smith agreed that this is an important issue, but lamented that Said chose the word "Orientalism" for this reality.

Said's reversal of the meaning of the word Orientalism has been so successful because there was a need for a word for Western misunderstanding and mistreatment of the East, but his choice was unfortunate. No one has offered any evidence that Indological Orientalist learning, in the strict old sense of linguistic and textual study, served imperial ends. (Smith 2003:49)

I am in agreement with Smith's perspective, but his final statement just quoted is perhaps a bit overstated. Brian Pennington pointed out that by their own admission the pioneers of Orientalist scholarship were not professional scholars.

The men who helped found Indology and the modern study of religion were not "retired from the world," but actively, even eagerly, engaged in directing and managing the affairs of the East India Company. Just as missionary discourse had its clear loyalties and aims, so even these authors, intending to pursue more disinterested scholarship, determined and implemented policy for rulers with enormous military and financial stakes in the way India and Hinduism were perceived. (Pennington 2005:106)

Said himself made a distinction between latent and manifest Orientalism (1994:206), which as Peter Heehs pointed out meant that at places Said did "acknowledge the possibility of varying expressions of Orientalism" (Heehs 2003:171).

"Orientalism" thus lands very much in the same place as "religion" and "Hinduism," terms with complex roots, varying meanings and connotations, and no clear alternatives. In this thesis Orientalism will be used in a non-pejorative sense referring to the scholarship (particularly late eighteenth and nineteenth century scholarship) that developed the concept of the Hindu religion, a concept which is highly problematic at best.

3.3.2 Brian Pennington

Amidst numerous scholars who are comfortable to speak of Hinduism as a religion rooted in the ancient Vedas (despite the nineteenth century coinage of the term itself) I will only look at two works by recent scholars as representative of this perspective. Brian K. Pennington took on the question "Was Hinduism Invented?" in a careful analysis of early nineteenth century writings by Orientalists, missionaries and Hindus.

As stated and illustrated above, there is no disagreement about the colonial coining of the term Hinduism. In Pennington's words,

Wedged between the Battle of Plassey [1757] and the appearance of the Indian National Congress [1885] was a 130 year period of unprecedented social and economic transformation in which Britain and India publicly imagined several Hinduisms into being. For each party, imagining Hinduism was both a political exercise and an effort to consolidate knowledge about self and other. (Pennington 2005:8)

But Pennington firmly rejected the suggestion that Hinduism is thus a foreign construct and so not worthy of retention today. A major part of his argument in this direction is that there is no indication of local Indian rejection of the reified label of Hinduism when it came into use in the early nineteenth century.

A gaping absence of indigenous critique of the category "Hindu" itself must suggest, at the very least, a ready acceptance of the label among many Hindus and that the concept itself corresponded to some elements of Indian self-understanding. It seems even more likely that the idea, if not the label, was already common Indian currency. The British did not mint this coin; they traded in it because Hindus handed it to them. The historical role of the colonizer was not to invent Hinduism either by blunder or by design, but to introduce an economy of concepts and power relations that dramatically enhanced the value of such identity markers. (Pennington 2005:172)

This is a perspective that needs to be engaged, but it is also clear that the "Indian self-understanding" present at that time was really the self-understanding of the newly emerging elite of India; the subalterns had no platform even to hear let alone to engage and respond to the elite encounter with colonial ideas and structures.

Yet Pennington's rejection of the idea that Hinduism was invented by the British is not purely based on historical study. In fact, he introduced his study with a suggestion that historians have no right to speak on the issue of religious formulations.

I regard the appropriation of the authority to pronounce some version of a tradition an impostor as an illegitimate intervention of academic historiography into the sphere of religion itself, a sphere over which practitioners alone should have custody. Many hundreds of millions of people today identify themselves as Hindu and resonate with the literary and ritual traditions that they associate with the idea of Hinduism. The claim that Hinduism is merely a modern invention is tantamount to a theological statement about the normative constitution of religious identity, hardly the appropriate or customary turf of the historian. (Pennington 2005:5)

The embracing of a Hindu identity by many Hindus and the affirmation of Hinduism as their religion is certainly a point that has to be taken into serious consideration when discussing this topic. But to rule that only those who accept a Hindu designation have a right to discuss how and to whom that designation should apply hardly follows. In his conclusion Pennington speaks with quite a different voice on just this issue.

Scholarship must find a new voice with which to speak about religion. We must forge a language and set of interpretative practices that remain faithful to the demands of rigorous analysis and historical accuracy by refusing to capitulate to religious sentiment as the ultimate jury for what may be said about it, while at the same time acknowledging and very carefully wielding the power the discipline has to shape discourse within and about religious communities themselves. (2005:188)

There are other aspects to Pennington's argument, including that of the changing nature of the terminologies under discussion, as in the quotation from his work about the changing meaning of "religion" that ends section 2.1 above. I fully affirm, as will be noted in my conclusions below, Pennington's call for scholarship finding a new voice. But the complexity of that development seems to be increasing rather than decreasing, and any suggestion towards a marginalizing of historical or any other disciplines can only skew the outcome.

The modern Hindu perception that Pennington defers to (at least in some cases) is just as likely to lead astray as to lead to solutions. Particularly in its diasporic developments, Hinduism is taking the form of a compartmentalized religion as envisaged by the Enlightenment. Marianne Fibiger notes this in the context of Denmark.

I will stress how the Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu religious tradition has gone through what can be called a theologization process in its adaptation to the modern Danish society and as a consequence has become institutionalized. Theologization means two things. 1. A consensus making of many local traditions into an overall, mutually acceptable common religion, meaning that the local traditions become reduced into and encompassed in an overall theology. For the Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus this means a special Danish Tamil Hindu religion....2. An awareness of the specific religious

elements of life. Commonly a lot of the refugee and immigrant groups coming to the West have never reflected on different layers of life as different categories or systems; and what we will categorize as religion just has been a part of their overall worldview and common behavior. Or as the Tamil Hindus often stress: "In Sri Lanka we just saw Hinduism as a way of life. Here in Denmark we have become more aware of its particularities as a religious faith." (Fibiger 2003:108)¹⁹

This response to modernity by institutionalizing, homogenizing traditions and compartmentalizing is also cause of great controversy in the study and defining of Hinduism. Who should and will decide what is appropriate change and what is lamentable is perhaps the most difficult question of all.

3.3.3 Wendy Doniger

Wendy Doniger has written "an alternative history" of Hinduism that is compelling and controversial. She grants that "'Hindu' is a somewhat tainted word," but suggests that "there is no easy alternative" (Doniger 2009:91). The alternative nature of her text is spelled out in some detail.

This book tells the story of Hinduism chronologically and historically and emphasizes the history of marginalized rather than mainstream Hindus. My aims have been to demonstrate: (1) that Hindus throughout their long history have been enriched by the contributions of women, the lower castes, and other religions; (2) that although there are a number of things that have been characteristic of many Hindus over the ages (the worship of several gods, reincarnation, karma), none has been true of all Hindus, and the shared factors are overwhelmingly outnumbered by the things that are unique to one group or another; (3) that the greatness of Hinduism – its vitality, its earthiness, its vividness – lies precisely in many of those idiosyncratic qualities that some Hindus today are ashamed of and would deny; and (4) that the history of tensions between the various Hinduisms, and between the different sorts of Hindus, undergirds the violence of the contemporary Indian political and religious scene. (Doniger 2009:17-18)

The tensions inherent in this statement run throughout the book. There are "mainstream" and "marginalized" Hindus, and also "various Hinduisms." Diversity is a defining quality rather than an evidence that the construct is artificial. Yet Doniger is happy to consistently refer to Hinduism as a singular religion. Just a few examples of this will be quoted here.

¹⁹ Others have made similar observations, but I like the concreteness of Fibiger's example. See Vertovec 2004:287 for broader observations about religion and culture, dharma and modernity, in full consonance with my point here.

For though the ideal of renunciation seemed in ways to challenge or even to threaten the traditional Vedic system, it was entirely assimilated by Hinduism, the world's great "have your rice cake and eat it" tradition. To practicing Hindus, it was all part of the same religion, one house with many mansions; their enduring pluralism allowed Hindus to recognize the fissures but to accept them as part of a unified world. (2009:197)

Caste thus paved the way for other conversions, such as that of Hindus to Buddhism or Jainism or to the new non-Vedic forms of Hinduism – renunciant or sectarian. (2009:285)

...if we learn nothing else from the history of Hinduism, we learn that there is seemingly no limit to the variations that Hindus have rung on every aspect of their religion. Authenticity is therefore a difficult concept to apply to any representation of Hinduism.... (2009:650)

Doniger celebrates the complex diversity of Hindu traditions, but makes clear her disdain for

those Hindus who are sometimes called Hindu nationalists, or the Hindu right, or right-wing Hindus, or the Hindutva ("Hinduness") faction, or, more appropriately, Hindu fundamentalists; they are against Muslims, Christians, and the Wrong Sort of Hindus. (Doniger 2009:14)

In the context of this evaluation Doniger rather gleefully recounts an incident where a Hindu threw an egg at her during a lecture (2009:14f.). She clearly does not share Pennington's reticence regarding outsiders making evaluative comments on religious traditions. It cannot be a surprise, either, that her text has stirred deep controversy, including an on-line signature campaign appealing for the book to be recalled.²⁰ Doniger is thus an apt illustration of the complexity of Hindu traditions as well as of the challenge of finding commonality in approach among scholars and practitioners.

3.3.4 Conclusion

Many other representatives of this position of Hinduism as a religious tradition rooted in and developing from the Vedas could be provided. This was the position developed among Orientalists with their bias towards textual constructs. Within this position there are significant differences of tone and content, as illustrated in the cases of Pennington and Doniger. Enough evidence has perhaps been given of the "heated debate" surrounding

²⁰ The petition closed in March, 2010 with 10,281 signatories. A list of supposed factual errors and a list of "derogatory, defamatory and offensive statements" make up the petition. As of August 2010 the petition could still be seen at http://www.petitiononline.com/mod_perl/signed.cgi?dharma10.

Hinduism that was mentioned at the start of this section (3.0). But another important paradigm will be outlined before drawing conclusions from this survey.

3.4 Hinduism as More than Religion

In light of controversies over what religion means and should mean, as well as problems with the construction of Hinduism in light of massive diversity, it should not be a surprise that some scholars prefer to define Hinduism as something other than, even more than, a religion. Again two representatives of this position will be discussed.

3.4.1 Heinrich von Stietencron

Heinrich von Stietencron has proposed an impressive alternative to considering Hinduism as a single religion. His thesis that it is better to view Hinduism as encompassing various religions has not met with great favor among other scholars, but is arguably more consistent with traditional thought about religion.

In popular parlance, most people in the West today speak of Hinduism as if it was *one single* religion, comparable, for instance, with Islam or Buddhism or Christianity. However, scholars who study the history of the Hindu religion more closely discover such a plurality of religious doctrine and practice within Hinduism, that the current practice of subsuming them under one religion appears inadequate. At least Vaisnavism, Saivism, the latest form of Saktism, and some of the other so-called sects of Hinduism must be classed as separate religions. They each have a different theology, rely on different holy scriptures, follow the teaching of a different line of teachers (*guru-paramparā*) and worship a different supreme deity reciting different prayers. (von Stietencron 2007:50; italics original)

An immediate question arises regarding the comparison of Hinduism with Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. Are the latter three really legitimately considered singular religions, with only Hinduism being the odd one out? Most of the reasons for questioning the single religious stature of Hinduism can be applied against considering the other "world religions" as monolithic as well. This does not undermine the point von Stietencron is making, however; Hinduism is clearly very diverse and contains within it systems that can meaningfully be considered as "religions." In another study outlining this perspective on Hinduism a comparison with Judaism, Christianity and Islam is insightful.

... "Hinduism" embraces differences at least as explicitly fundamental as those between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, along with other minor religions and popular cults of the Near East. If we were to subsume all these under one umbrella term as various "sects" of one Near-Eastern religion, this would give us a proper equivalent to Hinduism. But a cry of outrage from all of these religions would stop us; they would never agree to be reduced to mere sects. They never learnt to develop that measure of tolerance which is practised and –more important – theologically or anthropologically justified in Hindu religions. Therefore our choice is limited. If we accept Judaism, Christianity and Islam as "religions" and if, compelled by intellectual honesty, we want to apply the same term to comparable phenomena, we cannot avoid concluding that there are a number of different "religions" existing side by side within "Hinduism" (2005:238).

Here again there is surely a problem that "Christianity" is too broad a category to be meaningful and so needs to be broken down to smaller units. But then the problem of demarking and defining the units comes to the fore. To return to Hinduism, what kind of meaningful "religions" can be defined from the "popular Hinduism" of the masses? Von Stietencron appealed to the diversity manifest here against the understanding of Hinduism as a single religion:

...the so-called "popular religion" or "folk religion" which spreads all over rural India and into the suburbs of cities and, partly through members of the serving castes and partly through personal inclination or family tradition, into many homes of the high-caste Hindus. But folk religion, again, is not uniform. It varies from region to region, from deity to deity. (2005:227).

This is certainly true and a valid point against Hinduism as a single religion. However, it does not provide any guidance towards understanding and defining just how many religions there are and just what those religions are that subsist under the umbrella term Hinduism.

Before concluding this brief overview of von Stietencron's position his definition of this Hinduism which is more than just a religion needs to be noted.

Why is "Hinduism" so difficult to define? This is because we always try to see it as one "religion." Our problems would vanish if we took "Hinduism" to denote a socio-cultural unit or civilization which contains a plurality of distinct religions. (2005:228)

Rather than accede to this statement, a better conclusion would be that with the vanishing of some problems associated with considering Hinduism a religion, a few new problems arise, including the meaning and scope of "socio-cultural unit" and "civilization." No easy

alternatives to the complex vocabulary related to "religion" and "Hinduism" seem likely to appear.

3.4.2 Julius Lipner

In early 2010 Julius Lipner released a revised and expanded version of *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. The title of this study is perhaps suggestive that "Hindu" can have a broader meaning than just the "religious." The first chapter, as one would expect, is a discussion of the terminology of Hindu and Hinduism, and the fourth sentence suggests that "It can be argued that Hinduism – or the plural reality labelled as such – has been a major cultural phenomenon for well over 4000 years" (Lipner 2010:1).

Lipner references the breadth of the Hindu "cultural phenomenon" with reference to "outstanding contributions across the range of the civilized human endeavour...in religion and philosophy, in the sciences and the fine arts, in physical, technical and literary skills" (2010:1). He goes on to reject essentializing definitions of Hinduism, suggesting rather that "'Hinduism' is an acceptable abbreviation for a *family* of culturally related traditions" (Lipner 2010:6-7, italics original). It is like a banyan tree.

Like the tree, Hinduism is an ancient collection of "roots" and "branches" representing varied symbols, beliefs and practices that make up individual sub-traditions, which are all interconnected in various ways....The whole forms a web or grid, microcosmically "polycentric," that is, having many centres, but macrocosmically one, with a canopy covering, in temporal terms, a span of millennia. (Lipner 2010:6)

This web or grid or vastly expansive tree or family cannot, according to Lipner, be constricted to the designations "religion" or "religious."

It is not necessary to be "religious," that is, to believe in some world-transcending reality – a God or the equivalent – to be a Hindu. The great majority of Hindus are religious, at least in this minimal sense, and the overwhelming proportion of human endeavour that has gone into the making of Hinduism *has* been religious in this sense. This is a very important fact about Hinduism But it is important to note that one need not be religious in the minimal sense described to be accepted as a Hindu by Hindus, or to describe oneself perfectly validly as a Hindu. One may be polytheistic or monotheistic, monistic or pantheistic, even an agnostic, humanist or atheist, and still be considered a Hindu. This is why I have described Hinduism as fundamentally a *cultural* phenomenon. (Lipner 2010:8; italics original)

Of course it is a vastly multi-cultural phenomenon, which perhaps suggests that von Stietencron's larger referential term of civilization is preferable. Without quibbling over that terminological distinction, clearly Lipner and Stietencron agree that considering Hinduism to be a religion is too constricting and introduces distortions either to the understanding of "religion" or that of "Hinduism" or of both.

3.4.3 The Supreme Court of India

The Supreme Court of India has had reason to express definitions of Hinduism related to various cases that have come before it, and has clearly sided in the direction that Hinduism is more than just a religion.

A case adjudicated in 1966 (*Shastri Yagnapurushdasji and others, Appellants v. Muldas Bhumardas Vaishya and another, Respondents, the Advocate General for the State of Maharashtra, Intervener. Civil Appeal No. 517 of 1964, date of judgment Jan. 14, 1966*) consisted of the Swaminarayan "sect" (the court itself used this term, see below) claiming to be a separate religion and not a part of the Hindu religion.²¹ In its ruling the court itself phrased the question that it then proceeded to answer.

Who are Hindus and what are the broad features of Hindu religion, that must be the first part of our enquiry in dealing with the present controversy between the parties. (Rao 1966:1128)

In answering the question the court first traced the historical roots of the term and then stated this broad "definition."

When we think of the Hindu religion, we find it difficult, if not impossible, to define Hindu religion or even adequately describe it. Unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one prophet; it does not worship any one God; it does not subscribe to any one dogma; it does not believe in any one philosophic concept; it does not follow any one set of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not appear to satisfy the narrow traditional features of any religion or creed. It may broadly be described as a way of life and nothing more. (Rao 1966:1128)

²¹ The details of this case can be accessed from <http://judis.nic.in/supremecourt/chejudis.asp>, and for a fee from <http://vlex.in/vid/yeshwant-prabhoo-prabhakar-kashinath-kunte-29675654> as well as from the printed text which will be quoted in this discussion. Marc Galanter provides a detailed analysis of this case in chapter ten of his study of *Law and Society in Modern India* (1989).

The court leaned for its exposition on S. Radhakrishnan, quoting his book *The Hindu View of Life* a number of times. Nineteenth century Indologists Monier Monier-Williams and Max Muller were also referenced, along with historian Arnold Toynbee and renowned nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Radhakrishnan is referred to as the basis for the statement that

Hinduism has steadily absorbed the customs and ideas of peoples with whom it has come into contact and has thus been able to maintain its supremacy and its youth....Aboriginal tribes, savage and half-civilized people, the cultured Dravidians and the Vedic Aryans were all Hindus as they were sons of the same mother. (Rao 1966:1128)

The problem of no common belief system within Hinduism was addressed by outlining Radhakrishnan's survey of Indian philosophy, which found commonality in "the Veda as the highest authority in religious and philosophic matters" (Rao 1966:1130). The court editorialized at a number of places, particularly in a comment on the vast length of traditional Hindu *yugas* (ages); "this theory is not inconsistent with belief in progress" (Rao 1966:1130). And favoring one Hindu position over others, "as a result of the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Hindu religion flowered into its most attractive, progressive and dynamic form" (Rao 1966:1130).

Further exposition followed, outlining different views of salvation. B. G. Tilak's understanding of what marks Hinduism was then quoted as being "fairly adequate and satisfactory."

Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and realisation of the truth that the number of gods to be worshipped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of Hindu religion. (Rao 1966:1131, quotation from *Gitarahasaya*)

This paragraph closed with a quotation from Toynbee praising the tolerance of Hinduism. The following paragraph took the definition of Hinduism well beyond the suggested definition of Tilak.

The Constitution-makers were fully conscious of this broad and comprehensive character of Hindu religion; and so, while guaranteeing the fundamental right to freedom of religion, Explanation II to Art. 25 has made it clear that in sub-clause (b) of clause (2) the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly. (Rao 1966:131)

This seems to set up a tri-partite definition of Hinduism, one social (too diverse to actually define), one religious (Vedic authority) and one legal (Sikhs, etc. are included). Probably the preferred interpretation is that Hinduism carries more meanings, even more "religious" meanings, than can be neatly defined, despite what the Vedic authority definition suggests. This is hinted at in the highly qualified acceptance of Tilak's definition, "fairly adequate."

Details related to the Swaminarayan movement follow, leading to the decisive judgment of the case.

In our opinion, the plea raised by the appellants that the Satsangis who follow the Swaminarayan sect form a separate and distinct community from the Hindu community and their religion is a distinct and separate religion from Hindu religion, is entirely misconceived. (Rao 1966:1134)

The court had some rather harsh words as well, again ready to opine not only on true Hinduism but even on the proper interpretation of Swami Narayan.

It may be conceded that the genesis of the suit is the genuine apprehension entertained by the appellants; but as often happens in these matters, the said apprehension is founded on superstition, ignorance and complete misunderstanding of the true teachings of Hindu religion and of the real significance of the tenets and philosophy taught by Swaminarayan himself. (Rao 1966:1135)

The readiness of the Court to pronounce on true and superstitious approaches to the Hindu religion despite an affirmed inability to define just what that religion entails is a bit disconcerting. But it cannot be considered surprising that the Supreme Court laid out a number of different perspectives on Hinduism and presented no all-encompassing definition.

A decade later in the case of Commissioner of Wealth Tax, Madras & others vs. Late R. Sridharan by L. Rs., Case Law No. 301, date of judgment April 29, 1976, there was a dispute related to inheritance for a son of a Hindu father and Christian mother, and the court ruled that the son was entitled to be considered a member of a Hindu undivided family despite the marriage having been conducted under the Special Marriage Act.²² In the discussion of the meaning of Hinduism in this case, the 1966 case was referred to for its explanation of Hinduism. Further definition was provided from the unabridged third international edition of

²² The details of this case can also be accessed at <http://judis.nic.in/supremecourt/chejudis.asp> or [http://law.incometaxindia.gov.in/DitTaxmann/IncomeTaxActs/2008ITAct/%5B1976%5D104ITR0436\(SC\).htm](http://law.incometaxindia.gov.in/DitTaxmann/IncomeTaxActs/2008ITAct/%5B1976%5D104ITR0436(SC).htm) and for a fee at <http://vlex.in/vid/yeshwant-prabhoo-prabhakar-kashinath-kunte-29675654>.

Webster's Dictionary, the 15th edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, the identical B. G. Tilak quotation cited in the 1966 judgment, a legal judgment from 1904 (Bhagwan Koer v. J. C. Bose & others) and the 14th edition on A. Mulla's *Principles of Hindu Law*.

In this ruling the court again made no attempt to arrive at a meaningful definition of Hinduism as a single religion. Before referring to the various definitions just mentioned, the court stated that "it is a matter of common knowledge that Hinduism embraces within itself so many diverse forms of beliefs, faiths, practices and worship that it is difficult to define the term 'Hindu' with precision" (Supreme Court of India 1976:paragraph 9). In fact, the quotation from the Encyclopedia Britannica claimed that "Hinduism is, then both a civilization and a conglomeration of religions..." (Supreme Court of India 1976:paragraph 12), very much at odds with the quotation from B. G. Tilak that immediately followed referring to "the distinguishing feature of Hindu religion."

A third case where the Indian Supreme Court dealt with the meaning of Hinduism was in 1995, Dr. Ramesh Yeshwant Prabhoo vs. Shri Prabhakar Kashinath Kunte & Others, Case Law No. 2835, date of judgment December 11, 1995, a case judged along with Civil Appeal No. 2835 of 1989, Bal Thackeray v. Shri Prabhakar Kashinath Kunte and Others. This case dealt with an appeal against conviction for violations of the Indian electoral code due to campaigning on the basis of religion and promoting hatred between different religious communities.

A section of the ruling is entitled "Meaning of 'Hindutva' and 'Hinduism'" and considers the use of these terms in the election speeches in focus. The court quoted at great length from the 1966 definitions and discussion referred to above, as well as the further definitions quoted in the 1976 case above. In conclusion it stated that

These Constitution Bench decisions, after a detailed discussion, indicate that no precise meaning can be ascribed to the terms "Hindu," "Hindutva" and "Hinduism," and no meaning in the abstract can confine it to the narrow limits of religion alone, excluding the content of Indian culture and heritage. It is also indicated that the term "Hindutva" is related more to the way of life of the people in the sub-continent. It is difficult to appreciate how in the face of these decisions the term "Hindutva" or "Hinduism" per se,

in the abstract, can be assumed to mean and be equated with narrow fundamentalist Hindu religious bigotry....²³

The court went on to indicate that "misuse of these expressions to promote communalism cannot alter the true meaning of these terms," and in fact the court upheld the lower court ruling that overturned the election of Sri R. Y. Prabhoo and upheld the conviction of Bal Thackeray for corrupt electoral practices. The point of interest to this thesis, however, is the definition of terms where Hindu and Hinduism are affirmed to have broader than just religious meaning.²⁴

3.4.4 Conclusion on Hinduism as More Than a Religion

There is solid scholarly basis for accepting the terminology of Hinduism but defining this in terms that are broader than "a religion." The support of the Indian Supreme Court for this construct adds weight to this position, yet there remains a great deal of ambiguity in this perspective. Should the suggestion that there are numerous religions within this Hinduism be accepted, and if so what are those religions and how are they to be defined?

3.5 Conclusion on Hinduism and Religion

This conclusion is properly to the Hinduism discussion and how that term will be used in this thesis, but related terminological discussions about religion and Christianity have previously been deferred and will also be discussed and concluded here.

I will first summarize my conclusions and the position taken in this thesis and then will proceed to spell out the reasons for and implications of these conclusions. The discussion of religion and Christianity and Hinduism above, though necessarily brief and fragmentary, lead to the conclusion that these terms are so broad in their various uses and carry so many conflicting connotations that it is best to avoid the use of each in serious academic discourse.

²³ This ruling can be found at <http://judis.nic.in/supremecourt/chejudis.asp> or for a fee at <http://vlex.in/vid/yeshwant-prabhoo-prabhakar-kashinath-kunte-29675654>.

²⁴ Hindutva will be discussed below in consideration of the twentieth century context of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism.

Three factors hinder, in fact cripple, a proper application of this conclusion. First, these terms are in wide use both academically and in popular discourse, so that the elimination of them cannot be quickly accomplished. Second and most significantly, there is currently no adequate alternate paradigm for speaking about the realities that these terms inadequately represent. Finally, this is a thesis on the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism, so it is hardly feasible not to use the terms "Christian" and "Hinduism." Arguably, I could have avoided the term "interreligious" in my title, but as will be seen the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism did focus on the compartmentalized field that the Enlightenment called "religion," so in its mid-twentieth century context that term seems rightly used.

"Hindu" (meaning indigenous Indian, non-Islamic, non-Christian and non-Western, as if there is any way to neatly separate and distinguish such things) phenomena are so diverse and complex that to tack an "ism" on and speak of "Hinduism" necessarily distorts reality by giving the impression of a unity that simply does not exist. To then consider this imagined unified reality as falling within the category of "a religion" compounds the distortion. Religion in the Enlightenment sense of a compartment of life is certainly not an appropriate way to consider Indian phenomena, so that if there would be "a Hinduism" it certainly would not be "a religion."

The one counter argument to this perspective that is most telling to me is the popular one, that Hindus all over the world are affirming that they follow the religion of Hinduism. There is a particular backlash against the idea that Hinduism is not a religion, as stated, for example, by Vamsee Juluri: "I wonder if the followers of any other faith in America have to live with the absurdity of hearing constantly that their religion does not exist" (Juluri 2010).²⁵ The most appropriate response to this perspective is not to accede to the artificial construct of "the Hindu religion" but rather to acknowledge the hegemonic outlook that created this type of terminological imperialism and then link Christianity and Hinduism not as two world religions but as two equally empty constructs. So far from being the foundation for a

²⁵ This quotation illustrates how discussions related to religion have spilled out of the academy and underlie social and political debates in the contemporary world, making carefulness in analysis and discourse yet more important.

meaningful construct of religion, Christianity is also an empty reification that should not be used in an unqualified sense in serious discourse.²⁶

An argument of this kind is not likely to satisfy Juluri, and it is unlikely that anyone can live and meaningfully communicate without at least occasional use of the terms "religion" and "Hinduism" and "Christianity." Certainly in this thesis these terms cannot be avoided. At the very least, then, in meaningful academic discourse it becomes necessary to provide distinct, contextually specific indications of how such terms are being employed; when the terms are loosely used by others it becomes necessary to discern the nuances of intended meanings and identify what the terms actually mean in each different context, including the use of the terms with no clear content but only to convey, to borrow the words of Ram-Prasad above, an "instinctive feeling."

In the larger picture, an alternate terminology and accompanying paradigm needs to develop and eventually supplant the current domination of religiously oriented constructs. John Stratton Hawley demonstrated the complexity of attempting this, suggesting that "guerilla warfare" is needed against the stated course descriptions of religion professors, of which he is one.

One clear-headed approach is to wage a steady program of guerilla warfare against the hapless [world religions] textbook – perhaps even against the stated subject matter of the course itself. (Hawley 2006:118)

The difficulty of this procedure can hardly be overstated. Jakob de Roover and Sarah Claerhout point out how

...the current discourse on the construction of Hinduism prevents alternative theory formation, rather than encouraging it. This is the case, because one does not realize at which level the contemporary descriptions of, and common sense on, religion have been produced by a particular theoretical framework, namely, generic Christian theology. The very "facts" accepted by most authors are already descriptions that have been structured by this framework. (Roover and Claerhout 2010:165)

Peter Harrison also called for new terminology, with recognition of the difficulty involved in accomplishing the change.

²⁶ Hans Staffner approximated to the position of this thesis in his suggested synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity, but he was wedded to the Enlightenment "religion" paradigm and considered Christianity a religion while considering Hinduism a culture (Staffner 1988:83, 101).

The inertia of our linguistic habits makes it hard for us to relinquish a grammar which seems to have served us well. Yet the time may now be ripe for the adoption of new terms and new concepts....Perhaps the best course of action is to proceed with our studies of the traditions armed with the knowledge that our concepts are at best inadequate, and at worst, misleading. (Harrison 1990:174-5)

Harrison picked up on terminology proposed by W. C. Smith already in 1962, that referring to tradition or cumulative tradition would make an improvement on "religion." There is certainly a danger that the deconstruction of the mega categories of religion will lead to purely individualistic paradigms. There is a sense in which each person does have their own individually developed worldview or religion or dharma, etc., but acceding to an individualistic understanding would be just another surrender to a Western paradigm promoted as universal. There are collective realities, and if the "religion" collectives are inappropriate then alternate collectives that more adequately express the realities of human life and behavior need to be defined.

Smith wanted "religion" dropped in favor of two terms, faith as a personal commitment and tradition to mark the broader collective aspect (1962:194f.). This resonates with Indian contexts where the indigenous term for "sects" or "denominations" is *sampradāya*, meaning both tradition and the community that develops in following a traditional teacher/teaching. This is not to suggest that all problems can be solved by this simple change; the problems of moving beyond a massively assimilated false paradigm cannot be simple. But some distinct traditions can be identified within "Christianity" and within "Hinduism," and this terminology at least provides a start towards abandoning the improper reifications that continue to dominate discourse in this field. This thesis will not promote the concept or terminology of multiple religious belonging discussed in section 2.3 above simply because that concept prolongs and encourages terminology from an inadequate paradigm.

A. M. Shah lamented the lack of study on Indian sects, which he considered a valid and acceptable English term representing the Sanskrit *mārga*, *panth*, and *sampradāya* (2006:210). There is a clear distinction between sectarian and non-sectarian varieties of "Hinduism," and the former with special initiation rites can potentially be the start towards more meaningful designations of "Hindu" realities. Shah was particularly interested in the relationship of caste and sect, and concluded that

The population of every caste is divided into more than one sect and into non-sectarians, and the members of every sect are divided among more than one caste. (2006:229)

But the potential for developing a more meaningful taxonomy of Hindu realities by focusing on differing traditions (*sampradāyas*, sects) faces massive obstacles. Shah's explication of the dearth of both contemporary and historical data clearly indicated this.

If, as mentioned earlier, we have no knowledge of the proportion of sectarian versus non-sectarian population in the country today, surely we have no knowledge about it in the past. (Shah 2006:224)²⁷

Despite obvious limitations, the focus on distinct traditions at least allows in some situations for an answer to the question of who legitimately speaks for a tradition. The complexity of anyone speaking for multiple traditions as diverse as that which "Hinduism" has come to represent became apparent at a 1998 panel of the American Academy of Religion, which led to an issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* focused on "Who Speaks for Hinduism?" (volume 68 number 4, December 2000).

Douglas Brookes suggested that finally the authority of any speaker comes only from the audience to which he speaks, whether that audience is an academic community or a gathering of believers in some spiritual tradition.

The question "Who speaks for Hinduism?" belongs as much to scholars as it does to Hindus. It is the selected audience who creates the authority of whomever is doing the speaking, and that audience undoubtedly has its own dynamics, history, agenda and bias. (Brookes 2000:822)²⁸

This thesis cannot go far towards solving this intractable problem, but it is written in light of this concern. The mid-twentieth century Christians who formed a society to study, and who wrote extensively on, Hinduism were unaware that the very terms of their discourse would be

²⁷ The false construct of "Hinduism" militated against this closer study of smaller units, but caste data also has not been adequately gathered, as Michael Witzel notes even regarding Brahmins.

...a comprehensive history of the Brahmins has yet to be written. We do not even have a complete census for all of their *presently existing* clans, *gotras*, and sub-castes or for their respective names, their habitats, their religious affiliations, or their Vedic specializations, if any. (Witzel 1993:264; italics original)

²⁸ This is not to suggest that scholars and believers can or should operate in separate worlds. As David Cave points out,

The scholar gains authority as speaker when the scholar, the comparativist, honors the authority of the believers; scholar and believers, speaker and audience, operate in a mutually reflexive manner. (Cave 2006:39)

completely undermined in succeeding decades. This thesis is not entirely antiquarian, although even if it were it would perhaps be useful to understand how antiquarian ideas were discussed. Rather, this thesis outlines struggles within inadequate paradigms and particularly brings into focus a number of restless pioneers who kicked against established patterns of thought and practice. Thus this thesis illustrates the need for some variety of approach as has just been discussed, and introduces some pioneer thinkers who in their time and way sought a path forward beyond the current impasse.

Before turning to that mid-twentieth century Christian study of Hinduism, the mid-twentieth century context needs to be more fully outlined.

4.0 The Mid-Twentieth Century Indian Context of the CSSH

As already indicated, the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism focused rather narrowly on religious topics related to the Christian encounter with Hinduism. The work of the society could not happen in a box, however, so it is instructive to consider the wider context in which the society functioned. The most central context is that of the ongoing discussion of Hinduism in Christian circles, so that will be discussed at length first. The contexts of Indian Christianity, of developments in Hinduism, and of the political world will also then be outlined.

4.1 The Christian Study of Hinduism in Historical Perspective

The history of "Christian study of Hinduism" could well refer to "Western study of Hinduism," making space for some non-Christian Western participants. But this broad meaning of "Christian" is not that employed by the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism. To think of "missionary study of Hinduism" gets much closer to what the CSSH was about, but as will be seen, there was significant Indian Christian involvement in the CSSH so it was not merely a missionary society.

The CSSH was a Protestant society, and though the society had a Roman Catholic contribution to its journal *The Pilgrim*, this was exceptional in the Indian Christian world at that time. So it was Protestant Christians, both national and international, and particularly Protestant Christians who considered the message of the Bible and of Jesus to be of

importance for the world beyond Christendom, that banded together in the CSSH. This section thus outlines themes and trends in Indian Protestant missionary and Indian Protestant Christian thought related to Hinduism that were living concerns to members of the CSSH and authors who contributed to *The Pilgrim*.

4.1.1 The Nineteenth Century Background

By the mid-twentieth century there had been a long history of Christian-Hindu interaction and study. During the nineteenth century a great influx of missionaries from many nations and societies had entered India and the nineteenth century debates about Hinduism which developed were very much in the background of the work of the CSSH.

4.1.1.1 The Dominant Paradigm

Geoffrey Oddie (2006) analyzed British Protestant missionary constructions of Hinduism in the nineteenth century and particularly traced out what he called the "dominant paradigm." This dominant Protestant missionary paradigm began with the work of William Ward (1769-1823) of Serampore, based on the Orientalist scholarship of the time.²⁹ In the preface to his study of the *History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos*, Ward suggested that "we find the Hindoo still walking amidst the thick darkness of a long long night, uncheered by the twinkling of a single star" (1996[1817-1820]:xxvii).³⁰ In Oddie's words,

While Ward's work contained a lot of new and detailed information about religion in Bengal, its basic assumption about the existence of the one unified Sanskritic system and the arguments about the evils of Brahmanism were hardly new. What was important was that Ward picked up and promoted the idea of Hinduism. Indian "paganism," "the Hindu religion" or "Hindu superstition" was now, quite simply, "Hindooism." Furthermore, for Ward especially, "Hindooism" was a word for "the Hindu other," for everything that was evil and different from Christianity. Indeed, in helping to popularize the term he helped develop a very valuable and effective weapon in the arsenal of Christian propaganda. As a result of its increasing usage, English-

²⁹ "The Orientalists thought of Hinduism as an all-India unified phenomenon, based on Sanskrit and still controlled, policed and enforced by Brahmins" (Oddie 2006:100). Further, true religion was found in texts (Sanskrit), and "pantheism" was the basic philosophy of this imagined textual Hindu religion.

³⁰ In light of Ward's reference to "the Hindoo," note that in the same preface he claims that "it is Hindooism which regulates the forms of worship, and the modes of thinking, and feeling, and acting, throughout China, Japan, Tartary, Hindooosthan, the Burman empire, Siam, Ceylon, etc." (1996:xviii). The suggestion that Hinduism and Buddhism are two distinct religions had not yet emerged in the early 19th century.

speaking commentators were tempted more strongly into stereotyping, oversimplification and misunderstanding. (Oddie 2006:179)

Oddie traced the development and acceptance of this negative portrayal of "the Hindu religion" through nineteenth century missionary thought, including an analysis of the publications of missionary societies promoting missions in the UK. Local Indian responses to this developing analysis and critique of "Hinduism" took varied forms. There were those who resisted and sought to maintain the status quo of religious belief and practice.³¹ There were also various efforts to reform popular beliefs and practices, feeding what became known as the Hindu renaissance.³²

Klaus Klostermaier warned about drawing false conclusions from reform movements and their prevalence in literature on modern Hinduism, since these were elitist rather than popular movements.

The momentum of Hindu reforms, especially in the area of social customs, gained considerable strength in the early nineteenth century....The sheer bulk of books available in this area and the captivating attribute "modern" has led many people in the West to believe that these modern Hindu reform movements are identical with contemporary Hinduism, except perhaps for a few remnants of "unreformed" Hinduism that one needed not take seriously. Quite on the contrary, these modern Hindu movements, despite their appeal to Westerners and Westernized Hindus, represent only a small fraction of actual Hinduism, which is still much more rooted in ancient and mediaeval traditions than inclined toward the modern movements. (Klostermaier 1990:388)

While missionaries took interest in and studied the reform movements (Farquhar 1977[1914] for example) they also were in touch with localized beliefs and practices. In light of this, Oddie considered that

By disseminating further knowledge of popular Hindu beliefs and practice....their [missionaries'] work was closer to that of modern anthropologists than it was to that of secular Orientalists. (2006:349)³³

³¹ Richard Fox Young (1981) studied some of the resistant Hindu trends.

³² Among studies of modern reform movements in India see Richards 1985, Jones 1989 and Sarma 1989.

³³ This comment brings a measure of needed balance to Thomas Trautmann's (following David Lorenzen) negative comparison of missionary and Orientalist scholarship; "the production of European scholarly knowledge of India by missionary-scholars was, on the whole, and granting that there are exceptional works of great intellectual distinction, comparatively poor, limited and non-durable" (2009:236).

The Christian study of Hinduism did not take place in a vacuum and was always a dynamic process in relation to local Indian contexts and responses. Perhaps it would be going too far to use a recent term and suggest that it was always dialogical, but that would be a preferable error to suggesting that local reactions made no impact on this Christian endeavor.

4.1.1.2 Fulfillment Theology

By the mid-nineteenth century the ferment of thought among missionaries, secular Indologists, Hindu reformers and Hindu revanchists influenced the rise of a powerful new Christian paradigm for understanding Hinduism. The fulfillment paradigm which then developed had many manifestations, and study of various aspects of fulfillment thought can hardly yet be considered adequate. But that Christianity (or Christ or the Christian church) in some way fulfilled Hindu aspirations (or Hinduism) became a commonplace of Protestant Christian thought by the early 20th century. This continued as a living perspective into the time of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism, so has vital relevance to the current study.

J. N. Farquhar is the name most commonly associated with fulfillment thought. Eric Sharpe in his 1965 analysis of Farquhar noted five trends which lay behind a more sympathetic approach to "Hinduism" which began around 1858. These trends were the rise of the doctrine of evolution, the development of Biblical criticism, the start of the "science of religion," an increase in factual knowledge of other religions, and a general theological drift away from a transcendental focus to an immanent approach to religious phenomena (Sharpe 1965:38-39).³⁴

Martin Maw in his 1990 study dug more deeply into the roots of fulfillment theology. He traced two strands of fulfillment thought, one focused on Aryan race theories rooted in the

³⁴ Besides these trends, Sharpe identified various individuals as fore-runners of Farquhar's fulfillment thought. Particularly he credited the educated Brahmin converts K. M. Banerjea (1813-1885) and N. Goreh (1825-1895). Cf. 1965:94:

In the...essays by the first-generation converts Goreh and Banerjea, we have seen that steps could be taken by academically trained Indians toward a creative and appreciative Christian attitude to the Hindu heritage. This might have been an approach of very great value indeed for the future of the Indian Church – the laying of the foundations of a genuine Indian theology of encounter. But this was not to be. Later generations, in which consolidation might have taken place, produced fewer and fewer such converts: Brahmins trained in Sanskrit and philosophical Hinduism generally. Indian Christianity came more and more to become (*sic*) a lower-caste religion, and the initiative – theological and literary – was left in the hands of missionaries....

thought of F. Max Muller (1823-1900), and the other springing from B. F. Westcott (1825-1901) and expressed in the Cambridge Mission to Delhi. Maw's impressive study demonstrated that there was too much empty theorizing ("rhetoric without instance," 1990:357) and that the practical realities of India crushed these idealistic constructs.³⁵

Kenneth Cracknell (1995) saw F. D. Maurice as the foundation for fulfillment theology, particularly in his book *The Religions of the World and Their Relation to Christianity*, the Boyle lectures for 1846.³⁶ Cracknell was not mainly concerned with fulfillment theology, but does provide a useful counter to Maw in his empathetic approach to developments in missionary thought that led to the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference emphasis on justice, courtesy and love in relating to non-Christian religions.

Paul Hedges in his 2001 study covered the entire period of the development and decline of fulfillment theology. He also saw Maurice as the starting point in 1846, but carried his discussion right up to the Tambaram World Missionary Conference in 1938, just a few years from the birth of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism. Hedges closed with a discussion of "Fulfilment Theology: A Contemporary Paradigm?" (2001:393-397). He pointed out that

for those who wish to advocate Christian superiority yet also acknowledge the good to be found within the non-Christian religions it remains, not just an attractive, but, in one form or another, an extremely compelling option. (Hedges 2001:394)³⁷

As will be seen, this perspective regularly appeared in writings in *The Pilgrim* and was influential in the thought of the three key figures in the CSSH, Appasamy, Das and Chenchiah. Christ and Christianity were considered to be true and for all people, yet there was very much good to be found in non-Christian traditions and particularly in Hinduism.

³⁵ Cf. Maw 1990:18:

Muller and Westcott may be taken as virgin sources of Orientalist thinking: commentators who expressed a "pure" view of India untarnished by experience....how Westcott and Muller arrived at their "imagined empires"; how others tried to live within the borders of those realms; and why, finally, both Aryanism and fulfillment theology foundered amid the realities of the East.

³⁶ Maw noted the likely influence from Maurice (as also from Richard Trench) on Westcott (1990:156f.).

³⁷ This simple logic can apply to other religious traditions also; neo-Vedantic Hinduism which affirms good in all religions and affirms its own supremacy is pretty much *ipso facto* in a fulfillment paradigm. The "fulfillment" nature of Swami Vivekananda's neo-Vedantic thought has often been noted (for example see Sharpe 1977:65 and Braybrooke 1992:42).

Yet this "Hinduism" that was to be fulfilled was itself an artificial construct that was just becoming meaningful to the new elite arising in nineteenth century India.³⁸

Aspects of fulfillment thought will be critiqued in this thesis since it appears so often in the subjects being studied. From the *possessio* perspective of this thesis the fulfillment paradigm is inadequate as it is not sufficiently holistic. Only selective aspects of other faith traditions can be considered to be fulfilled by Christ or Christianity. *Possessio* entails the embracing of every aspect of a tradition, which of course is then filtered with various outcomes including the rejection of some ideas and practices, the transformation of others, and the continuance of still others. What is valid in terms of fulfillment thought in relation to any tradition is thus easily incorporated within the *possessio* model.

4.1.1.3 William Miller's Approach

A third missionary attitude to Hinduism developed by the end of the nineteenth century (Oddie 2006:313f.). William Miller of Madras Christian College propounded the viewpoint that though Christ is one it is not necessary to think that the Christian religion is the only true representation of his life and work and way. The separation of Christ and Christianity was axiomatic even in that time, with many recognizing the need to preach Christ and not Western Christianity or denominationalism. But Miller went well beyond this, as Oddie summarized:

If individuals felt they should be baptized into the Christian church then baptism should occur, but, generally speaking, there was no need for baptism as people drawn from all nations and communities could continue to develop Christian ideas and ideals while continuing to operate within their existing communities, and without a "shifting of camps." It was, therefore, the task of the church and of the Christian colleges to diffuse Christ's teachings and ideals throughout the country so as to enable Hindus to follow Christ within their own particular tradition. It was this last point that was especially challenging for most missionaries. (2006:315)

Miller in this diffusion paradigm comes very close to *possessio*; one might argue that only *possessio* is consistent with his aims. He also anticipated the critique of reified constructs of world religions. But Miller did not spell out a broad understanding of what happens as

³⁸ One of the key points of Oddie's study is that by the time missionaries began to reject the unified "Hinduism" they had imagined, the sense of a unified Hinduism was taking root among educated Indians (Oddie 2006:347-8).

Christian ideas are diffused among other religious traditions, so his approach remained rather vague and thus open to misunderstanding and varying applications as will be noted below.

Oddie's identification of these three broad nineteenth century paradigms for the Christian understanding of the Hindu-Christian encounter provides a useful framework for this study of mid-twentieth century Christian understanding of Hinduism as seen in *The Pilgrim* magazine. But numerous nuances need to be introduced for this outline to be true to the complexity of twentieth century developments.

4.1.2 Twentieth Century Developments

By the time the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism was formed in 1940 the heyday of fulfillment thought had passed.³⁹ But Sharpe, in brief analysis of the International Missionary Council meeting at Whitby in 1947, insightfully noted that

This combination of a semi-Barthian theology of the Word with the long-established "fulfilment" approach was, one feels, typical of the generally traditional way in which Indian Christians of the time dealt with the question of inter-religious encounter.
(1977:105)

This study will document the continued lingering appeal of fulfillment thought into the mid-twentieth century among Indian Christians, as *The Pilgrim* provides ample evidence.

Throughout the rise and decline of the fulfillment paradigm the previously dominant, Orientalist influenced, more negative understanding of Hinduism was never completely eclipsed from Christian and missionary circles. *The Pilgrim* provides plenty of evidence of this as well, and a powerful new voice from that tradition was heard just on the eve of the birth of the CSSH, as will be discussed shortly.

³⁹ This is suggested by Hedges closing his study with 1938, and is explicit in Sharpe 1977. Fulfillment thought was still quite prominent at the 1928 Jerusalem World Missionary Conference. Wesley Ariarajah in his careful study notes that Nicol Macnicol in his major paper on "Christianity and Hinduism" preferred not to speak of fulfillment:

even though Macnicol himself, by and large, avoided the word "fulfilment" and used the word "enrichment," the Asian participants interpreted Macnicol in that way, and freely used the word "fulfilment" as the basis for relationship between Christianity and other religious traditions. (Ariarajah 1991:49)

The 1938 World Missionary Conference in Tambaram focused on the very anti-fulfillment thought of Hendrik Kraemer, as will be noted shortly.

Oddie's third paradigm, which he traced to William Miller, is especially complex and needs careful analysis as in one formulation it becomes quite central to presentations in *The Pilgrim*, despite Miller never being mentioned therein.

4.1.2.1 Miller's Ongoing Influence

Miller submitted comments to the Commission on Education for the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 that define what is best remembered regarding his position on missionary education in India.

It is a mistake to suppose that the making of individual converts was at any time the only, or even the main, aim of these [Scottish Mission] schools and colleges. Undoubtedly, conversions based on matured conviction and settled purpose were warmly welcomed, not only on account of the converts themselves, but even more on account of the influence they might exert on the inner life of the nation. It was hoped that, by the effect of Christian education on this inner life, the proclamation of the gospel and other missionary methods might become far more effective on those hitherto inaccessible to every form of Christian influence....Christian educationists have the right to hope that, few though the individuals may be whom their teaching leads to become openly members of the church, yet the whole mass of Hindu society may in course of time become leavened with Christian thought and guided in daily life by Christian ideals. (Miller 1910:443)

Kaj Baago included Miller among the important figures in Indian church and mission history in his *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity* (1969). He discussed Miller along with Farquhar and others as "the liberals" (the title of chapter five). Yet Baago's treatment shows a sensitivity in Miller's position that is easily overlooked. Miller himself pointed out his difference from traditional missionary thought and practice;

To the Hindu who is feeling his way towards the living God and towards Christ, men like the bulk of my opponents practically say, "Come over to us, and you will certainly be saved. Remain unconnected with us, and no matter what your feelings may be, you will certainly be lost. Everything depends upon a change in the society you belong to." I hope that not even the strongest of my opponents holds altogether these sentiments; but their clamour for baptisms, their pressing men on to baptism in advance of convictions, their taking nothing except baptism into account, makes this *appear* to be their teaching, and thus leads those who regard them as representatives of the Christian spirit into a complete misconception of what that spirit is. It is because I daily see the terrible harm which this state of matters is working throughout India, that I have put, and while my life lasts shall put, openness of heart to God and truth, and willingness to learn of Christ, emphatically in the first place and baptism emphatically in the second. (Baago 1969:77; italics original, taken from *Madras Christian College Magazine*, 1896, pg. 102f.)

Miller's liberalism is still misunderstood and misrepresented, including in Susan Harper's recent fine study of V. S. Azariah. Harper quoted John R. Mott's comments about Miller,

I was pained, in India, to hear the president of a Christian college rise to say that he did not expect conversions in this generation among their students, and I could hardly believe my ears when he added that the governing board at home agreed with him that they were not to expect conversions in this generation. (Harper 2000:40)

Miller's diffusionist view of the spread of Christian truth certainly resonated with liberal Christian views minimizing conversion, yet he also strongly supported individuals firmly resolving to follow Jesus as Lord even while remaining outside of institutional Christianity. A striking example of the latter is Miller's student who joined his staff as a teacher and finally became his biographer, O. Kandaswamy Chetty. Baago pointed out that Chetty made

...a clear and open confession of his faith in Jesus Christ, not just as *a* saviour, but as the only Saviour. He knew, he continued, that this belief carried with it a duty and a privilege, namely to bring the gospel of Christ to others and even to enter into the fellowship of those who shared this faith. (Baago 1969:82; italics and capitalization original)

But to Chetty this did not mean becoming a Christian and joining the church; rather he remained Hindu. Baago reprinted Chetty's statement to a 1915 missionary conference entitled "Why I am Not a Christian: A Personal Statement."⁴⁰

Miller thus supported both the transformation of Hindu thought and the transformation of Hindu individuals without the latter changing over to a Christian identity. The latter construct of following Jesus as a Hindu will be further developed in section 4.2.3 below. Similar ideas will also be seen in *The Pilgrim*, with significant further development.

Yet Miller's thought also fed into a growing polarization between those who stressed conversion to Christianity and those who had a broader conception of Christian ministry. The latter position was strikingly advocated in W. E. Hocking's 1932 study *Rethinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry after One Hundred Years*, which suggested that mission work has a goal

⁴⁰ Chetty's biography of Miller (1924) is a vital source for understanding both Miller's and Chetty's positions.

of "promoting world unity through the spread of the universal elements of religion" (Hocking 1932:28).⁴¹

Eric Sharpe noted that "this layman's report aroused a good deal of adverse criticism from both sides of the Atlantic" (1977:85). What many Christians still recognized as doctrinal distinctives of their faith were considered antiquarian obstacles by Hocking. This liberal stream of Christian thought was not prominent in mission circles which continued to emphasize evangelism, so was not a major influence in the CSSH, whose evangelism focus will be noted below.⁴²

4.1.2.2 Hendrik Kraemer

On the eve of the birth of the CSSH Hendrik Kraemer wrote *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938), a clarion call to orthodoxy that clearly rejected the liberalism of Hocking and also the fulfillment paradigm. As noted by Wesley Ariarajah, this study was commissioned by an *ad interim* committee in preparation for the 1938 World Missionary Conference in Tambaram near Madras (now Chennai), south India. The goal was

To build into the Tambaram preparations a clear statement on the Christian faith and on an evangelistic approach to the non-Christian religions. (Ariarajah 1991:53)

Kraemer's presentation became a central talking point in missionary thought in the succeeding decades. Long after the demise of the CSSH, M.M. Thomas in India was still wrestling with the heritage and meaning of Kraemer's position.

There are signs today that in the area of the theology of mission, a post-Kraemer approach is emerging with Kraemer's own blessing. This is why I have spoken boldly of relevance, preparation and fulfilment... (Thomas 1967:95)

Kraemer began from a deeply Orientalist supposition of vast differences between East and West;

⁴¹ This position clearly falls in the pluralistic category discussed in section 2.2 above. But Kandaswamy Chetty was far from promoting pluralism. It is a variation of the Miller-Chetty tradition which will appear again in *The Pilgrim*, rather than Miller-Hocking.

⁴² Kenneth Scott Latourette's conclusion regarding the Laymen's Inquiry and its Movement for World Christianity focused on the lack of support from home constituencies; "It had a following among some liberal intellectuals, but the brevity of its career testified to the lack of enthusiasm for it among the rank and file of those from whom most of the financial support for the Protestant missionary enterprise was derived" (Latourette 1971[1945]:52).

...never before in the history of the world has there been a meeting between worlds so radically and irreconcilably different as East and West. (1947[1938]:18)⁴³

He defined religions, including Hinduism, as monolithic and holistic.

These non-Christian religions...are all-inclusive systems and theories of life, rooted in a religious basis, and therefore at the same time embrace a system of culture and civilization and a definite structure of society and state. (Kraemer 1947:102)

From this starting point assuming a monolithic "Hinduism" there was little chance that Kraemer could do justice to the complexities of Indian religiosity, despite later affirmations of complexity. He made a basic distinction between revealed religion and naturalistic religion, with only Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the former category. So his basic outline placed Hinduism under "naturalist religions" (Kraemer 1947:147). His summation of Hinduism as "versatile naturalistic monism" (1947:162) was in the context of recognition of "polymorphous complexity" (1947:159).

Even the theistic *bhakti* traditions were dismissively critiqued:

These few suggestions may suffice to make clear that *bhakti*-religion, despite all indications that seem to point to the contrary, essentially remains under the sway of the cardinal apprehensions and attitudes of Hinduism. It rebels against, but is not really emancipated from, the basic naturalistic monism of Hinduism.... (1947:173)

Kraemer's presentation thus placed the reified, monolithic "Hindu religion" central to discussions of mission in India, and viewed this religion in a highly negative light reminiscent of the dominant paradigm of the 19th century.⁴⁴ How far negative approaches to Hinduism from contributors to *The Pilgrim* were influenced by Kraemer and how far by other sources is almost impossible to determine, but that such perspectives appeared in *The Pilgrim* cannot be a surprise in light of Kraemer's influential work.

⁴³ This same antithesis is later asserted in relation to Hinduism and Christianity, as will be noted.

⁴⁴ Students of Kraemer may well object to this as Kraemer affirmed the adoption of meditation, ashrams, renunciation (*sanyāsa*), and other contextual communication approaches (1947:373). Hallencreutz suggested that Kraemer was seeking to provide a third alternative, rejecting both "the aggressive or controversial attitude which merely asserted Christian claims of paramount, exclusive religious truths" and also fulfillment (1970:23). But in the broad sense Kraemer was certainly negative towards both Hinduism and the Christian fulfillment approach to Hinduism, which left him uncomfortably close to 19th century attitudes. Cf. Sharpe, "...in the last resort, it seemed to many of those who read his manifesto that he was simply returning the discussion to approximately the position it had occupied at the turn of the century" (1977:98).

What is certain is that the leading voices of *The Pilgrim*, A. J. Appasamy,⁴⁵ R. C. Das⁴⁶ and P. Chenchiah,⁴⁷ were not swayed by Kraemer.⁴⁸ In fact, Kraemer's study included a focused critique of Appasamy.⁴⁹ Chenchiah was among those who immediately responded to Kraemer in his contributions to *Rethinking Christianity in India* (Job 1938), which includes his review of Kraemer's book as an appendix.⁵⁰

4.1.3 Neglect of CSSH and *The Pilgrim*

It might be argued that the commotion and ferment related to Kraemer's thesis help account for the scholarly neglect of the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*. Three major overviews of Christian-Hindu interaction make no mention of the only Christian society devoted to the study of Hinduism. Ariarajah's survey (1991) of the 20th century focused on ecumenical Christian gatherings, and that focus perhaps accounts for neglect of *The Pilgrim*.⁵¹

Marcus Braybrooke (1971) presented a thematic rather than chronological approach to developments in Hindu and Christian thought since 1800. He referred to Chenchiah and

⁴⁵ Appasamy will be introduced in chapter 3 and his work in *The Pilgrim* related to Hinduism thoroughly analyzed in chapter five. He wrote his own autobiographical reflections (1969) as well as a short work on his theological development (1964a). His thought is introduced in the standard surveys of Indian theology (Boyd 2005[1969], Thomas and Thomas 1992, England, *et. al.* 2002, etc.)

⁴⁶ Das will be introduced in chapter 2, his life and work with a focus on his teaching in Benares Institute sessions and in *The Pilgrim* will be analyzed in chapter 4. His life and thought are introduced in Richard 1995 along with selections from his writings, with further introduction available in Thomas and Thomas 1992.

⁴⁷ Chenchiah will be introduced in chapter 3 and his writings on Hinduism in *The Pilgrim* will be analyzed in chapter 7. Thangasamy 1966 introduces his life and thought and is usefully supplemented by Rajasekaran 1993, Boyd 1972 and also Jathanna 1981 where a careful and empathetic exposition of Chenchiah's theology is presented including a brief outline of his general position related to non-Christian religions; Chenchiah is also noted in the standard introductions to Indian theology mentioned in note 44 above.

⁴⁸ Under the fourth editor an analysis of Kraemer appeared in *The Pilgrim* (John 1953). John did not analyze Kraemer on Hinduism, rather looked broadly at his perspective on religions, which was rejected as extreme in favor of mediating positions like those of A. G. Hogg and D. G. Moses. The failure of that paper to wrestle with Hinduism in Kraemer exemplifies the reason why the work of the fourth editor is not closely analyzed in this thesis.

⁴⁹ Appasamy is interpreted as presenting Christianity as the best form of mysticism, which Kraemer opposes because "the prophetic religion of Biblical realism is no specimen of mysticism" (1947:370). Yet Kraemer has appreciative comments for Appasamy as well (1947:372).

⁵⁰ Among Chenchiah's most pointed statements note "It is not accurate at all to characterise Hinduism as monistic and naturalistic" (1938:appendix pg. 36). But Chenchiah has appreciative comments for Kraemer as well (pg. 54, etc.)

⁵¹ Ariarajah was focused on international Christianity in its interaction with Hinduism, but often the real topic was a more general Christian approach to other religions, with special reference to Hinduism. His study is outstanding, but rarely brings the reader to the nuts and bolts of Christians face to face with Hindus. This thesis is almost a necessary complement to Ariarajah, as *The Pilgrim* presents the voice of Christian practitioners calling things as they saw them, with a minimum of broad theoretical analysis.

Appasamy's work in his discussion of "The Place of Jesus Christ" (chapter 4), but not when discussing Hinduism and the multi-religious world (chapter 5).⁵²

Eric J. Sharpe surveyed Christian attitudes to Hinduism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and made this comment on the post-Kraemer period when the CSSH and *The Pilgrim* were born:

In the immediate post-war [World War II] years, then, there was virtually nothing of importance being said on the subject of the encounter of faiths, though efforts were, of course, being made to rehabilitate the Christian mission in the light of the events of the past decade. (1977:104)

Sharpe's complete failure to note the existence of a Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism is hard to excuse. This neglect of the CSSH in scholarly surveys of interreligious thought points to the continued Euro-centrism of Christianity even into the latter decades of the twentieth century. Without European sponsorship or control, majority world Christian thought and action was not on the map even of academically and internationally alert Christians.⁵³

One study from India, *A Christian Theological Approach to Hinduism* (Gurukul 1956), cries out for attention despite not directly mentioning the CSSH (*The Pilgrim* is noted when discussing Chenchiah). The writings of the first (Appasamy) and third (Chenchiah) editors of *The Pilgrim* are analyzed in this study, along with the work of V. Chakkrai. This study is not about Christian theological thought on Hinduism, but rather on Christian theological convictions in evangelistic approaches to Hindus, as the introduction makes clear.

We set before ourselves the following questions: (1) Has the author understood that the gospel is a message – not a system of timeless truths, ideas or doctrines? (2) Has he

⁵² Another similar study by Braybrooke (1973) also did not mention the CSSH, despite beginning almost contemporaneously with it by opening with analysis of P. D. Devanandan.

⁵³ Sharpe does note *Rethinking Christianity in India* and particularly the chapter therein by V. Chakkrai on "The Relations Between Christianity and Non-Christian Faiths," which Sharpe summarized as saying that The serious point is emphatically made – almost for the first time – that the encounter between Christianity and Hinduism has previously taken place on a distressingly superficial level. Of earlier theories of encounter, nothing of value can be salvaged. (1977:121)

Sharpe noted the neglect of this viewpoint in ways not unreminiscent to my critique of his neglect of CSSH and *Pilgrim*:

The Western world either did not read these words, or dismissed them as Oriental vapourings, unhealthily coloured by Hindu modes of thoughts. (121-122)

Note that *The Pilgrim* was regularly referred to in the *International Review of Mission* in the early 1940s, so there is no excuse for its neglect in the West. See the appendix on page 285 for details of IRM references.

brought out the central contents of the Christian message – God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself? (3) What has he done to make the message intelligible to Hindus – (a) by relating it to their needs and problems; (b) by expressing it in Hindu terms and concepts? (4) Which dangers and defects come to light in his method? (5) How can they be overcome? (Gurukul 1956:x-xi)

And so the book barely mentions "Hinduism" and a proper Christian understanding of Hinduism, excepting some comments in the chapter on Chakkrai.⁵⁴

4.1.4 P. D. Devanandan

Another mid-twentieth century voice on Protestant Christian understanding of Hinduism was P. D. Devanandan. Devanandan had been personally influenced by Kraemer (Verkuyl 1978:76) but along with his coworker M. M. Thomas came to focus on modernizing, emerging Hinduism. This approach did not find a voice in *The Pilgrim*, although Devanandan's name was floated as a possible editor for *The Pilgrim* after Chenchiah's resignation (Das 1952e:14).⁵⁵ In 1939 he wrote that

Every aspect of our [modern India's] life is affected in an unprecedented way by the acceptance in practice of alien principles of conduct and life-outlook which are subversive of the basic assumptions of the religious theory on which Hindu India's thought fabric is built. (Devanandan 1939:465)

He is referring to a this-worldly consciousness, a recognition of social and human values resulting in social service, individualism, and moral purpose as seen in Gandhian ideals. Neo-Hindu leaders Vivekananda and S. Radhakrishnan are then considered in their effort to incorporate these new values into traditional Hindu thought and life.

⁵⁴ "With regard to Hinduism, Mr. Chakkrai forgets all the touching testimonies in Hindu literature to religious longing and groping in darkness, and the all too obvious atmosphere of insecurity, anxiety and fear in which the masses of Hindus live. Paganism, idolatry and demon-worship form a prominent part of a large area of Hinduism" (Gurukul 1956:34). In a similar vein, Appasamy is seen as developing "Hindu religion adorned with some Christian ideas" (Gurukul 1956:7) while Chenchiah is thus lambasted: "It appears that Christ, after all, is not the authority for Mr. Chenchiah; he is his own authority" (Gurukul 1956:64). A European study follows on the same lines, again with a heading of "Some Indian views on the relation between Christianity and non-Christian religions" but then discussing the perceived theological weaknesses of Appasamy and Chenchiah; see Oosthuizen 1958:33-41.

⁵⁵ Devanandan's major work was *The Concept of Maya* (1950). His main influence was through shorter writings which were collected in two volumes edited and introduced by J. Wietzke (1983, 1987). He became the first director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, which was founded to incorporate aspects of the purposes of the CSSH.

Devanandan concluded that Hinduism might simply die as people decide they do not need religious underpinnings for these new values. Or they might live by the new values without concern for the dichotomy in traditional belief and current practice. Finally, there might develop a restatement of traditional religious faith, which Devanandan compared to new wine in old wineskins. "In any case," he concluded, "it is apparent that in a real sense the days of Hindu orthodoxy, as we have known it so long, are numbered" (Devanandan 1939:478).⁵⁶

This conclusion with reference to "Hindu orthodoxy as we have known it for so long" places Devanandan clearly in the Orientalist/Kraemerian grid of a reified concept of a Hindu religion, a concept that will be seen to live on in *The Pilgrim* as well. Devanandan's optimism about change in Hinduism, combined with pessimism about Hindu accommodation to that change, does not seem vindicated by events of the past half century; but the last chapter of that story is far from told.⁵⁷

4.1.5 Conclusion

By the middle of the twentieth century there were numerous streams of thought regarding a truly Christian understanding of Hinduism. At least initially there was enough coherence among a significant group of Protestant Christian leaders that a Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism could be formed. That society failed to survive even for two decades, and it foundered at least partially due to divergent views of Hinduism. This thesis will outline the understanding of Hinduism present in the CSSH lectures of R. C. Das and in the first forty issues of *The Pilgrim* magazine, demonstrating the variety of views present and highlighting the insightful analysis of some of the pioneer thinkers. It thus outlines an important chapter in intellectual history and will inform future historical studies of the Hindu-Christian encounter.

⁵⁶ The application of this view to Christian mission work is that this "is the impact of the eternal life of the living Christ transforming Hinduism from within outwards" (Devanandan 1939:478) so Christians need to work with Hindus toward the new society and be prepared to point out a better intellectual framework. This entire paper is reproduced as the concluding section of *The Concept of Maya* (1950:221-232), excepting a few outdated political remarks and the total reworking of the concluding paragraph to remove all these applicatory points related to the Christian mission.

⁵⁷ Bob Robinson (2004) in an analysis of Hindu-Christian dialogue in India traced Devanandan's involvement in a helpful historical survey which included insight on the influence of Kraemer's position. Robinson did not note the work of the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*, although briefly commenting on the standard trio of Appasamy, Chakkarai and Chenchiah.

4.2 Indian Christianity and the CSSH

In section 2.4 above the inadequacy of "Christianity" as a meaningful term of reference was discussed. Focusing just on Christianity in India does nothing to narrow the field and make the term adequately specific to any particular reality. The *Atlas of Global Christianity* considers India to be 4.8% Christian with a total Christian population of over 58 million (Johnson and Ross 2009:144). As R. E. Frykenberg commented,

As far as can be determined, there is almost no form of Christianity that has ever existed in the world – ancient, medieval, or modern – that has not entered and that does not still thrive somewhere within the continent (aka subcontinent [of India]). (2008:5)

This diversity of Christian expressions imported from international Christianity is further complicated by the local reality of caste. Frykenberg pointed out that

more often than not Christians within India can be seen as being rooted within the history of distinct ethnic communities, each different from the next. (2008:vii)

The Anthropological Survey of India identified 4,693 distinct communities in India (Singh 2002:288) and found a Christian presence in 339 communities, out of which 29 were in fact exclusively Christian (Singh 1998:703). The diverse caste and community setting of deeply varying versions of Christianity lead to a very complex picture. Frykenberg summarized some of the local meaning of these facts.

Wherever one turns, there seems to be no escaping this phenomenon [*jāti* or caste] or its consequences. It lies at the very bedrock of an entire civilization and all its manifold cultures, and subcultures. The result, for Christians, has almost always been that they have tended to carry "dual identities" or have become manifested as possessing "hybridized" cultural features; moreover, since all ethnicities are ranked, by degrees, into respectable and non-respectable, or polluting, categories or *varnas* (or "colours"), various Christian communities are also fitted into some category and ranked, whether they like it or not. (Frykenberg 2008:viii)

This complex reality of Indian Christianity lies mostly beyond the concerns of this thesis. Three aspects of Indian Christianity that are directly related to this thesis will be discussed here. The first is organizational developments and relationships that provided important background to the CSSH and the type of Christians who cooperated in that venture. The second section looks at Indian Christianity as a legal community in India, with a focus on the type of elite Indian Christians who participated in the CSSH. The third section will consider

alternate expressions of Christianity in line with the thought of William Miller, as this background will be seen to be important in considering the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*.

4.2.1 Organizational Roots of the CSSH in Indian Protestant Christianity

Protestant missions in India developed a rich tradition of cooperation and mutual support, rooted in the first Protestant mission when the British Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel supported the work of the Lutheran Danish Mission in Tranquebar (Neill 1985:33f.). Baptist William Carey in Bengal is remembered for his welcome and support for Anglican Henry Martyn and Presbyterian Alexander Duff (Tucker 1983:134, 135).

A larger organizational unity among Protestant missions developed with decennial all-Indian missionary conferences, the first held in Allahabad in 1872. Three other meetings followed in the second year of succeeding decades, laying the groundwork for the birth of the National Missionary Council in 1912 as a direct result of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 (Baago 1965:4-8). The National Missionary Council was later renamed the National Christian Council, and under that name played an important role in the history of the CSSH.

The decennial missionary conferences focused on themes of interest to a wide range of Protestant missionaries, discussing evangelistic, educational, and medical mission work along with matters related to the developing new Christian churches. This broad agenda certainly included issues related to Hinduism, as in this striking comment from 1892:

The principle I contend for, then, is this: *that the books which we publish should be carefully related to Hindu thought, expressed in its terms, done in its style, adopting where it can its positions, and leading on, still in Hindu fashion and in its terminology, from points of agreement to essential points of difference.* In this way we may, perhaps, be able to furnish an effectual exhibition of legitimately "Hinduized Christianity." (Haigh 1893:667, italics original)

The Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism thus seemed a good fit as a specialized unit of the National Council of Churches in India. Steps toward that end and the final failure of that plan will be outlined in chapter 2.

4.2.2 Indian Protestant Christianity and "the Christian Community"

Chandra Mallampalli has outlined legal developments in colonial India that led to the marginalizing of Christians into a separate community. It is ironic that legislation intended to protect new converts to Christianity, like the Lex Loci Act of 1850 and the Indian Succession Act of 1865 regarding inheritance rights, led to the marginalization rather than the integration of converts. "The judiciary found in the Indian Succession Act of 1865 a means to further reify a 'Christian community' so that it was further removed from the inner workings of Hindu society" (Mallampalli 2004:50).

By treating them as a homogenous group, the judiciary denied to Christians what would eventually become a defining characteristic of Hinduism, unity in diversity. As the legal definition of "the Christian community" became increasingly narrow, the legal definition of "Hindu" became increasingly elastic. (Mallampalli 2004:51)

By the early twentieth century different Protestant and Roman Catholic strategies developed for responding to this communal identity in the light of developing nationalism. For the purpose of this thesis only the Protestant perspective needs to be discussed. Mallampalli identified three distinct types of Protestant Christians in India, and lamented that these were constituted as a single coherent Christian community.

Protestant churches could either consist of Western-educated elites from urban centers, Anglo-Indians who imitated European manners and customs, or converted families and caste groups who continued to adhere to local caste practices. (Mallampalli 2004:84)

It is the elite who formulated public Protestant postures, and who also later cooperated in the CSSH. The Protestant (elite) position on "the Christian community" provides important insight for understanding the CSSH.

During the era of Indian nationalism, Protestant elites portrayed the Christian community as something that should never have come into being. They saw themselves as a community in exile from Hindu society and attributed this state of exile to the intolerance of foreign missionaries and Hindu families. (Mallampalli 2004:14-15)

Thus by the time of the Round Table Conference in 1932 to discuss nationalist political developments, the Roman Catholic Christians had embraced a position of strengthening their own community rights (Mallampalli 2004:144) while Protestants "tried to emerge as model minorities who sacrificed their sectarian interests for the uplift of the nation" (Mallampalli

2004:127). The result of this elitist Protestant position proved the opposite of what was intended.

The disavowal of Christian communalism, rather than having the mainstreaming effect that many had envisioned, rendered the Christian community and Christian interest a political non-issue. (Mallampalli 2004:107)

The social dislocation and marginalizing of Indian Christians developed alongside this political marginalization. The reality of social marginalization was outlined in a study of three north Indian church movements, appropriately entitled *The Church as Christian Community* (Hayward 1966). James Alter and Herbert Jai Singh defined the problem as seen in the church in Delhi.

The Church in Delhi came to birth through a process of radical separation from traditional Indian society. Individual converts were driven from their homes and communities and groups of Chamar converts were compelled to break their old *baraadari* ties. This separation had a profound effect on the attitudes of Indian Christians. They now thought of themselves as a distinct *qaum* (people), sharply distinguished by religion from the Hindu and Muslim *qaums*. In their enforced isolation from much of Indian life they turned naturally to the missionaries for leadership and assistance. Many adopted Western forms of dress and behaviour, acquired English or biblical names and in general regarded themselves as having a distinct culture. This isolation also helped to produce an attitude of exclusiveness. Inquirers and new converts were looked upon with some suspicion as representing a potential threat to established practices and as competitors for the educational and economic advantages secured by second- and third-generation Christians. (Alter and Singh 1966:42)

This description is focused on Mallampalli's third category of "converted families and caste groups," pointing out serious social dislocation and marginalization even in this type of Christian. George Soares-Prabhu suggested that the political and social dislocation of Christians in India is rooted in a theological problem.

Because it proclaims a God who is the Father of all humankind, Christianity claims to be radically anti-communal. It "rejects as foreign to the mind of Christ," says the Second Vatican Council, "any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life or religion" (*Nostra Aetate*, 5). But to the extent that it clings to its conviction that it mediates a unique revelation of God and is an altogether privileged way of salvation (as indeed it must do – for does not the New Testament assure us that there is no name other than Jesus through which we are saved [Acts 4, 12], and has not Christian tradition consistently affirmed as an infallible article of its faith that "outside the church there is no salvation"? – it is necessarily aggressively communal. (Soares-Prabhu 1991:159)

Soares-Prabhu was arguing against exclusivist brands of Christianity, which he referred to as "Christian pathology" (1991:162). He suggested that current Christian practice is better than this narrow theology, and supported the "expression of a new, non-exclusivist self-understanding which the church has arrived at but has not yet formulated" (1991:159-60).

I do not agree with Soares-Prabhu's assessment but include it here as another indication of the reality of the problem of marginalized Christianity in India. It was the reified Christianity of the Enlightenment which supported the development of the construct of Hinduism as a religion which is foundational to the legal and social reality of the marginalization of Christianity in Indian life. This communalized (or communitarian) expression of Christianity was objected to by William Miller, as noted above, and by a number of Indians whose perspective will be outlined as another important context of the CSSH.⁵⁸

4.2.3 Following Christ without Conversion to Christianity

O. Kandaswamy Chetty was introduced above (section 4.1.2.1) as a follower of Jesus Christ who chose not to convert to Christianity (supported in this by William Miller). Chetty's story is just one chapter in a larger context of probing toward non-communal (i.e. non-Christian) patterns of discipleship to Jesus.

No definitive study has yet been produced of followers of Christ outside Christianity. The *World Christian Encyclopedia* introduced "crypto-Christian" as a terminology that included these people but also included (in India) "affiliated Christians unknown to the state" (Barrett 1982:371). Attention was drawn to this phenomenon in India under the terminology of "Churchless Christianity" in a 1991 publication of that title (Hoefer 1991; "non-baptized believers in Christ" was another suggested moniker).

Hoefer examined the development of followers of Christ outside Christianity in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Tamil Nadu. He referred to the best known of the non-baptized non-Christian disciples of Christ, K. Subba Rao (1912-1981), who emerged into recognition after the time of the CSSH (Hoefer 1991:155, 203; see Richard 2005 on Subba Rao).

⁵⁸ In a paper focused on this reality I coined the term "communitarian" for Christianity in India due to the very negative connotations of "communal" (Richard 2000). Christianity in India is communitarian even when not selfishly communal.

Two recent studies have probed the significance and implications of this phenomenon in the local situation of Chennai (Jorgensen 2008, Jeyaraj 2010). Jorgensen focused on missiological understanding of current data (both Hindus in Chennai and Muslims in Dhaka), but Jeyaraj introduced his study of Chennai phenomena by outlining 7 case studies; Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Narayan Vaman Tilak, Manilal C. Parekh, P. Chenchiah, R. C. Das, K. Subba Rao and Dayanand Bharati. Jeyaraj did not break down types in his case studies, as his concern was missiological ideas as well as individual case histories. Only Subba Rao among his case studies was a follower of Christ who was never formally associated with Christianity (ala Kandaswamy Chetty, who is briefly mentioned by Jeyaraj (2010:43f.)).

Three of Jeyaraj's case studies were Christians from Hindu families who probed concepts related to discipleship to Jesus outside Christianity while maintaining their affiliation with Christianity. Two of those are central to this study, R. C. Das (1887-1976) and P. Chenchiah (1886-1959), the third being Narayan Vaman Tilak (1872-1919). Three others were baptized as Christians but later moved away from formal Christianity for a variety of reasons. One, Dayanand Bharati (b. 1952), is still living so post-dates CSSH matters. Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) and Manilal C. Parekh (1885-1967) became known for their advocacy of following Jesus outside Christianity, although Upadhyay maintained a position (in modern terms) of multiple religious belonging before he drifted away from Christianity due to tensions with the Roman Catholic Church.

Manilal C. Parekh (1885-1967) was a personal friend of R. C. Das (see Das' eulogy for Parekh in Richard 1995:272-273) and due to deep involvement with Protestant Christianity was certainly known to many of the contributors to *The Pilgrim*. Parekh was from a family with Jain roots but his father had become a Vaishnava devotee of Krishna (Parekh 1974:22). He was baptized as a Christian in the Anglican Church in Bombay (Mumbai) in 1918 after spending some years in the Brahmo Samaj (1974:25-26). Within a few years of his baptism, in his own words, "I severed my connection with all organised Christianity" (1974:27).

Thus Manilal Parekh ended up in the position of Kandiswamy Chetty as a Hindu disciple of Jesus. He summarized his position in those days in this way:

To me both these faiths [Christianity and Hinduism] were not only not antagonistic as practically all Christians, Indian and Western, believed, but they formed integral parts of one whole. To me, to be a true Hindu was to be a true disciple of Christ, and to be a true disciple of Christ meant to be more a Hindu and not less. (Parekh 1974:27)

Parekh always expressed great appreciation for the breadth of sympathy of his own people for accepting him back after he had wandered so far from them (1974:27). Yet he remained active in Indian Christian circles for many years, even being a "co-opted member" of the National Christian Council and attending its sessions in 1924, 1926 and 1928 (Parekh 1974:29). Still, he was unhappy about many aspects of Christianity and particularly objected to the NCC study *Christian Mass Movements in India* (Pickett 1933).⁵⁹

Discomfort with Christianity and interest in wider studies including Swami Narayan of Gujarat (1781-1830) eventually led Parekh into full-blown syncretism with the development of a new religious expression that he called (among other names) Bhagavata Dharma. In the words of Robin Boyd,

His Zoroastrian studies led him to see a fundamental unity in the great Indo-Iranian and Judaeo-Christian faiths, a unity which reaches its climax in the religion of personal theism to which he now – in 1939 when his book *The Gospel of Zoroaster* was published – began to give the name Bhāgavata Dharma....Hitherto he had been writing of – and indeed preaching – Christianity as a separate and distinct religion. Now he began to think of it rather as "an essential part of a harmony of all religions." (Boyd 1974:7; the closing quote is from Parekh, *Autobiography of a Bhāgavata*, 1963 (Gujarati), pg. 302)

Manilal Parekh thus illustrates a number of possible positions that one can hold as an Indian devotee of Jesus; baptized Christian, Hindu disciple of Jesus, follower of Christ outside formal Christian associations, critic of Christianity, promoter of unity of religions rather than Christianity, etc. This type of exploring of options beyond historic institutional Christianity has relevance as issues in *The Pilgrim* come into focus later in this thesis.

4.2.4 Concluding Thoughts on the Indian Christian Community

Christianity was reified as a religion independently of its presence in India, but in India was further reified as a separate religious community both in legal judgments and in socio-cultural

⁵⁹ Manilal's formal response, *Christian Proselytism in India: A Great and Growing Menace*, was not published until 1947.

developments. Elite Protestant Christians in the early decades of the twentieth century were unhappy with this scenario, and some Hindu disciples of Jesus attempted to break out of communalized (communitarian) expressions of discipleship to Jesus. This is by no means a full picture of Christianity in India at that time, but it is a summary of trends most relevant to the study of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism.

4.3 Hinduism, Nationalism and "Hindu Nationalism"

This introduction has traced the origin of the concept of the Hindu religion as well as critiquing the adequacy of that construct. Multiple current approaches to understanding Hinduism were also outlined. This section will introduce particular issues in understanding Hinduism in the decades leading up to and during the time of the CSSH.

The development of Indian nationalism and Hindu identity are clearly related. John Zavos (2000) traced the development of "organized Hinduism" and how different approaches to Hindu identity diverged into different movements. Zavos' helpful survey will first be outlined, incorporating insights from other studies of the development of Hinduism in relation to nationalism. Brief sections will then focus on mainstream Indian nationalism under Gandhi's influence, the Hindutva movement (or "Hindu nationalism") and the subaltern protest movement led by B. R. Ambedkar.

4.3.1 Hinduism and Nationalism

John Zavos pointed out that organization was a crucial element in colonial power, and the pressure of organizing contributed significantly to developments in early twentieth century India.

The theme of organization developed in the second half of the nineteenth century into an important discourse in the articulation of colonial power. It is in this context that organization was to emerge as a critical element in the representation of Hinduism as a single religious tradition. (Zavos 2000:25)

Zavos examined the rise of the Arya Samaj (founded in 1875) as a reformist movement that was also highly reactionary against the British and Christianity. Arya Samaj reforms were based on the authority of the Vedas, which did not support the existing caste system or

popular image worship. This appeal to the Vedas led to, in Christophe Jaffrelot's words, "the invention of a distant Golden Age which was both indigenous and in accord with modern values" (Jaffrelot 1996:11).

But Arya Samaj reformism awakened alternate expressions of "Hindu" identity which defended image worship and caste, particularly the Sanatana Dharma Sabhas (Zavos 2000:50f.). A "self-conscious middle class" (Zavos 2000:9) had emerged and it was this elite sector of society which wrestled with these new concerns. The cow protection movement and the reconversion (*shuddhi*, purification) movement both projected broad consensual Hindu concerns, but the basis of Hindu unity was not at all clear, particularly when Arya Samajis promoted *shuddhi* for low caste communities in opposition to Sanatana Dharma Sabha ideology (Zavos 2000:91f.).

These developments towards an organized Hinduism were in the context of the centrality of religion in colonial understanding. Zavos showed how the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 that established the British Raj "established religion as central to this symbolic projection of rights and privileges" (2000:36). The 1881 census attempted to define and quantify religious affiliation, but there were severe problems (Zavos 2000:74ff.), particularly related to the ambiguity of "Hinduism" as discussed above (section 3).⁶⁰ Zavos suggested that "for the state, religion was the defining principle of Indian identity, Indian history, and culture" (2000:106).⁶¹ Hinduism had to organize in a way never previously imagined.⁶²

Thomas Hanson identified two fissures in nationalist politics in the early twentieth century. One related to the proper political strategy, with radical and moderate approaches competing. The other was the basic understanding of the emerging nation, particularly what "Hinduism" would mean in that nation (Hanson 1999:74ff.). Jaffrelot pointed out that when the British first introduced separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims it was in the Punjab, a stronghold of the Arya Samaj, in 1909. "This kind of discrimination awakened in certain

⁶⁰ Hansen pointed out how the 1911 census sought greater clarity and definition, but in the process created such controversy that its procedures had to be abandoned as they found a quarter of Hindus denying Brahmin supremacy, half not supporting cremation, and forty per cent eating beef (Hansen 1999:241).

⁶¹ Zavos' case is strengthened by the parallel data presented above from Mallampalli regarding the reification of a single Indian Christian community in the late nineteenth century (section 4.2.2 above).

⁶² Note this comment from an Oct. 23, 1909 edition of the Arya Samaj newspaper *Punjabee*:

This is the first time, we believe, in the history of modern India, that the Hindus as a body have sought to give expression to their communal consciousness, as distinguished from the detached movement of sects and castes. (Zavos 2000:118)

Hindus, especially within the Arya Samaj, a feeling of vulnerability, which even took the radical form of an inferiority complex" (Jaffrelot 1996:18).

Jaffrelot centered his interpretation of Hindu nationalism on the concept that there was both a stigmatizing and an emulating of a "threatening other" (1996:11ff). That other was initially the colonial state and Christian missionaries, but after World War One that place was taken by Indian Muslims (Jaffrelot 1996:19f.). The two fissures identified by Hanson both related to the developing tensions between Hindus and Muslims, and eventually led to the Gandhian triumph for moderate nationalist politics and to the birth of Hindu nationalism as a competing ideology. Zavos pointed out, however,

...the proximity of Hindu nationalist ideology to that of elite-led Indian nationalism. These two ideologies operated with the same set of discursive tools and the same range of political strategies, even though they remained distinct in terms of their objectives and their interpretations of Indian culture. (Zavos 2000:216)

The different understandings and alignments that emerged in the 1920s will be outlined in the succeeding sections.

4.3.2 Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885. By the early twentieth century it was torn between radical and moderate factions. Indian nationalism had been jolted into life by the 1905 partition of Bengal into a Muslim majority east and a majority non-Bengali speaking west. In Stanley Wolpert's analysis, the nationalist movement "gathered more momentum from the final year of Curzon's era [1905] than it had in the preceding two decades of Congress's existence" (2009:284). Wolpert elucidated the situation.

Hence at one fell stroke of the bureaucratic machine's mighty pen, the outspoken Calcutta-based Bengali-*babu* was to be thrown out of power in his mortally divided motherland. It sounded like *divide et impera* with a vengeance to Bengali ears, and that was precisely how Congress as a whole came to view the partition. (Wolpert 2009:283)

Violence began in Bengal after the 1905 partition. Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), who led the radical faction of Congress from his base in Pune, was imprisoned in 1908 for six years on charges of sedition for supporting radical measures. Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-

1915) was the leader of the moderate faction of Congress, and it was his initiative which brought Mohandas Gandhi onto the Congress scene.

Gandhi arrived back in India in 1915 from his well documented encounters with colonial power in South Africa. At the 1919 Indian National Congress annual session in Amritsar Gandhi's influence led to the acceptance of a statement condemning both the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh (firing on civilians by British-led troops in a section of Amritsar on April 13, 1919) and the reactionary violence of Indian mobs (R. Gandhi 2006:235f.). Gandhi was further empowered to rewrite the Congress constitution (R. Gandhi 2006:236), and remained the primary voice of the Congress party, not without ongoing tensions with the radical faction, until his death in 1948.

Gandhi the politician is not the interest of this thesis, although political issues of importance in the time of the CSSH will be noted in section 5 below. Gandhi was a remarkably significant figure for Hinduism but, not unlike Hinduism, he is very difficult to define or pigeonhole. R. C. Zaehner concluded his 1966 study of Hinduism with a chapter entitled "Yudhishtira Returns," celebrating Gandhi with the suggestion that "after Gandhi Hinduism will never be the same again" (1966:185).

Zaehner's Gandhi is an orthodox reformer; "his attachment to his ancestral religion was deep and genuine, but his attachment to conscience was deeper still" (1966:184). But the category of "religion" in consideration of Gandhi misleads more than it illuminates. Gandhi's Hinduism was highly idiosyncratic; in Zaehner's words, "he saw himself as an interpreter of the Hindu *dharma* as it really is, not as, in a corrupt age, it had come to be" (1966:184).

Zavos pointed out that Gandhi's focus on *ahimsā* (nonviolence) was intentionally countered by Hindu nationalism, which had a focus on physical strength (2000:188f.).⁶³ Yet despite this significant difference a significant commonality had developed among all elite nationalists that contrasted with earlier tensions related to the Arya Samaj's reformist position on caste. Both Gandhi and the Hindu nationalists opposed untouchability, yet just as strongly both insisted on a united Hinduism that embraced both the highest and lowest in the caste

⁶³ Gandhi's control of Congress meant the suppression of the radical faction that espoused violent tactics towards achieving independence.

hierarchy. "The idea of Hindu unity, it appears, had by the 1920s emerged as a pervasive force in political discourse" (Zavos 2000:158).⁶⁴

The great question that divided mainstream Indian nationalism and Hindu nationalism was thus not about Hinduism and the united Hindu community, but about the proper response to pluralism and non-Hindu communities in India. Gandhi espoused a generous interpretation of other religious systems based on the tolerance of Hinduism; Hindu nationalists, as noted above, saw Islam as the threatening other which had to be resisted.

That Gandhi's approach ended with Partition and the creation of the Islamic state of Pakistan alongside independent India leaves many unanswered questions that continue to be debated. It is certainly significant that independent India was not established as a Hindu state but rather as a secular nation with egalitarian ideals and freedom of religion. Yet the secularism of India needs careful consideration, particularly in light of Gandhi's peculiar religiosity that played such a large role in the independence movement.

Donald Smith in his study of modern Indian secularism suggested three influences that led to India's embrace of secularism.

First, the long tradition of Hindu religious tolerance enabled the most diverse creeds to coexist peacefully....Secondly, the British policy of religious neutrality provided the direct antecedent of the secular state in India....Thirdly, the Indian National Congress from its inception defined its aims in terms of secular political objectives, and, with the exception of a short period of Extremist dominance, generally remained faithful to the ideal of non-communal nationalism. (Smith 1963:99)

Smith went on to show, however, that the secularism of Congress and India was based on a particular variety of Hindu belief, that all religions are true. Smith documented this both from Gandhi and also from the writings of S. Radhakrishnan, the Oxford scholar who became the first vice-president and second president of independent India.

In 1928 he [Gandhi] declared: "After long study and experience I have come to these conclusions, that: (1) all religions are true, (2) all religions have some error in them, (3) all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism. My veneration for other faiths is the same as for my own faith." Because all religions are true, Gandhi was

⁶⁴ J. T. F. Jordens confirms this by showing that the distinctive marks of Gandhi's Hinduism became cow protection and caste without untouchability (1998:84f.).

convinced that a state based primarily on adherence to a particular religion was worse than undemocratic. It was a negation of truth. (Smith 1963:148; Gandhi quotation from Nehru 1946:365)

"It may appear somewhat strange," he [Radhakrishnan] wrote in 1955, "that our government should be a secular one while our culture is rooted in spiritual values. Secularism here does not mean irreligion or atheism or even stress on material comforts. It proclaims that it lays stress on the universality of spiritual values which may be attained by a variety of ways." (Smith 1963:147, Radhakrishnan quote from the Foreword to Hussain 1956)

Thomas Hansen concurred, pointing out that

Textbook versions of secularism as the absence of religion from the public sphere, or a more fashionable understanding of secularism as a metonym of scientific rationalism, will not suffice....The dominant interpretation of secularism in India did not entail the removal of religion from the political sphere, but rather the belief that religion and culture were elevated to an ostensibly apolitical level, above the profanities of the political. (Hansen 1999:11)

In practice this meant, as Hansen pointed out, that

The meaning of secularism was authorized as "equal respect for all religions," and politicians, ministers, and officials would generate and consolidate their nationalist and secular credentials by visiting temples, mosques, and Sikh gurdwaras, and by attending ceremonies and processions of different communities. (Hansen 1999:54)

Hansen's focus was on Hindu nationalism, and some of his further analysis will be seen below. The point here is that Gandhi led the nationalist movement as a Hindu and by combining secularism and Hinduism was not ideologically different from Hindu nationalism despite a totally different understanding and approach to Islam.⁶⁵ Neither mainstream nationalism nor Hindu nationalism was able to adequately embrace subaltern sectors of Indian society, which will be the final topic in this brief outline of the ferment surrounding "Hinduism" in the decades leading up to and including the time of the CSSH.

4.3.3 Hindu Nationalism or Hindutva ("Hindu-ness")

Zavos traced the organizational genealogy of Hindu nationalism to the establishment of Sabhas in the Punjab starting in 1906. The first significant Sabha in Lahore included among

⁶⁵ Paul Brass confers with this analysis of the problematic linkage of secularism with religious pluralism. He suggests that Partition and the assassination of Gandhi brought a period of true separation of religion and state, but this was not maintained in post-Nehru India (Brass 1998).

its aims "generally to protect, promote and represent the interests of the Hindu community" (Zavos 2000:112). By 1915 the All India Hindu Sabha had been established as a representative body, which was renamed the Hindu Mahasabha in 1921 (Zavos 2000:169).

Various Arya Samaj leaders were involved with the Sabhas, carrying their concern for reforming caste and idolatry. By the 1920s this concern had effectively been sidelined, as Zavos summarized.

The idea of a catholic, horizontal unity based on the perceived tolerance of the Hindu tradition, encompassing all sects and dishing out theoretical respect to all levels of Hindu society, became the defining principle of Hindu representation. (2000:176)⁶⁶

This position was articulated in V. D. Savarkar's *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* which appeared in 1923 and became a basic text for Hindu nationalism. This Hindutva understanding of who is Hindu was founded on three pillars; geographical unity, racial features and common culture (Jaffrelot 1996:26), a decidedly non-religious interpretation. As already noted above, the Islamic other was fundamental to the construction of Hindu nationalism, and that was prominent in Savarkar's book.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was founded in 1925 and particularly focused on "the development of a tightly disciplined corps of well indoctrinated, physically fit, devoted *swayamsevaks* (volunteers)" (Smith 1963:465). As such the RSS avoided politics, whereas the Hindu Mahasabha was politically active.⁶⁷ Hansen considered this RSS approach to lie behind the steady growth of Hindu nationalism over many decades, in the light of the meaning of secularism in India.

...religion and culture were elevated to an ostensibly apolitical level, above the profanities of the political. This institutionalized notion of selfless "social work" as ennobling and purifying by virtue of its elevation above politics and money, provided an unassailable moral high ground to a certain genre of "antipolitical activism," conspicuous among social and cultural organizations but also often invoked in agitations and electoral politics in India. I submit that it was from this discursive field of "antipolitics" and "religious activism" that the Hindu nationalist movement, with

⁶⁶ Zavos' analysis of this attempted organizing of a cohesive Hindu identity parallels Frykenberg's analysis of the British government's unintentional consolidation of an administrative unity through developing state control of temples (section 3.1.1 above).

⁶⁷ Note Smith's comment that even the politically active Hindu Mahasabha was not a significant force at that time; "The Hindu Mahasabha never commanded much popular support, and the Congress could afford to ignore it most of the time" (Smith 1963:141-142).

great ingenuity, built its campaigns and organizational networks for decades. (Hansen 1999:11-12)

This gradual development of Hindu nationalism as a grassroots movement over many decades explains the lack of analysis or even mention of this movement in *The Pilgrim*. The eruption of Hindu nationalism as a social and political force in India in the 1980s brought these early strategies and developments into focus. Romila Thapar in a seminal 1985 essay defined the "syndicated Hinduism" of Hindu nationalism in these terms:

The creation of this Syndicated Hinduism for purposes more political than religious and mainly supportive of the ambitions of an emerging social class, has been a long process during this century and has now come more clearly into focus. (Thapar 1997:78)

Hindu nationalism, like Gandhian nationalism, was never able to incorporate the subaltern sections of society into its agenda. As Zavos noted,

ideologically, the one position which Hindu nationalism has been unable to situate or accommodate fully is that of low caste consciousness. Here, the idea of a composite, horizontal organization of Hinduism has been repeatedly challenged by the assertion of autonomous indigenous cultures which have refused to accept these parameters.... Unlike both Hindu and Indian nationalism, the dominant ideology of low caste consciousness has emerged from a non-middle-class social bloc. (Zavos 2000:222)

The stirring of low caste, non-middle class sections of "Hindu" society remains to be noted in concluding this survey of developments in Hinduism related to the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism.

4.3.4 B. R. Ambedkar

Bhim Rao Ambedkar (1891-1956) emerged as a leader of subaltern classes in the 1920s and today is an iconic figure among Dalits. He was from a military family and received a good education, making it possible for him to do graduate studies abroad where he earned doctorates at Columbia University in New York and at the London School of Economics (Martis 1994:137ff.).

Ambedkar traveled to London to represent the untouchables at the Round Table Conferences in 1930 and 1931. He sought separate electoral representation for the depressed classes and

this led to significant conflicts with Gandhi, who claimed to represent both forward and backward peoples and opposed this bifurcation (R. Gandhi 2006:359).

As noted above (sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3), the rise of the subalterns contradicted the claims of a unified and organized Hinduism propagated by both mainstream Gandhian nationalism and Hindu nationalism. Gandhi fasted in 1932 to influence/coerce Ambedkar to agree with his opposition to communal electorates for untouchables. The interpretation of those events still polarizes opinions; Dalit activists rail against Gandhi's "intrigues" (Thangaraj 2000:33ff.) and Gandhi as "no. 1 enemy of the Untouchables" (Huq 1992:67ff.). Gandhi's biographer and grandson, however, commented that

...the agreement has endured, surviving charges that Gandhi's fast coerced Ambedkar – that fear of caste Hindu reprisals on "untouchables" had forced Ambedkar's hand in Poona. The record of the 1932 fast and negotiations conveys no such suggestion. (R. Gandhi 2006:374)

Ambedkar announced in 1935 that he intended to renounce Hinduism, yet it was not until 1956 that he, along with somewhere between fifty thousand and five hundred thousand of his followers, embraced Buddhism (Webster 1992:107, 156). The ferment of Dalit agitation was below the surface during much of the Gandhi-led campaign for independence, and nothing resembling adequate resolution has yet developed in independent India.

4.3.5 Conclusion

The ferment in Indian society in the early decades of the twentieth century provides a striking contrast to the nineteenth century discussion of Hinduism as a single religion. The quest for a unified Hindu community was undermined by the social diversity of India and particularly by the reality of subaltern classes that did not share the perspective of elite sectors. There can be no final analysis of these issues since tensions that were evident between various parties in the 1920s remain vital issues at the present time. It will be seen that the elite Christians of the CSSH affirmed Gandhian nationalism and celebrated independent India, with definite concern for subalterns and little notice for Hindu nationalism.

4.4 Political Developments

The Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism was not a politically oriented society but it existed during a period of intense political activity. World War II began as the CSSH was being organized but even its end is not mentioned in *The Pilgrim*. Numerous landmarks of the independence movement transpired during the CSSH's lifespan, but with minimal notice in *The Pilgrim*.

The Quit India Movement of 1942 was a Gandhi-led call from the Congress Party for immediate independence. Immediately on the passing of the resolution on August 8 the government responded with the arrest and imprisonment of virtually the entire leadership of the Congress Party. Violent agitations followed and over sixty thousand people were arrested by the end of 1942 (Majumdar 1988:655).

Changes related to the end of WWII finally swayed the British to end their sovereignty over India. But the arrival of independence on August 15, 1947 involved the partition of the nation into India and Pakistan. This event receives a passing editorial comment in *The Pilgrim*, as will be noted in chapter six, section 1.1. Less than six months later Gandhi was assassinated by the hand of a Hindu nationalist, yet even this event passed without comment in *The Pilgrim*.

The Constitution of independent India was accepted on January 26, 1950, the drafting committee having been led by B. R. Ambedkar. January 26 continues to be commemorated as Republic Day in India, but again there was no note of this development in *The Pilgrim*.

4.5 Conclusion

The context of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism outlined in this section reveals the turmoil of the times both intellectually and socially. A significant history of Christian-Hindu interaction lay behind the society, and competing ideological approaches to interreligious interaction were under discussion. Indian Christianity had developed into a marginalized community, but there were voices objecting to this development and some activists seeking to transcend it.

Hinduism was a contested entity, and political agendas muddied the waters making resolution of issues of Hindu identity almost impossible. Elite Protestant Christian leadership embraced the role of a model minority in the political agitation of the day. The CSSH developed from elite sections of the Protestant Christian community so it is not surprising that they kept a focus on "religious" matters and stayed clear of political analysis and even comment.

The analysis of the CSSH and *The Pilgrim* which follows is focused on Christian thought on Hinduism, which was of central interest to the society. My concern is not with details of interpretation related to Hindu history or scripture or society, but rather to the broad paradigm of what Hinduism is and how the interreligious encounter of Hinduism and Christianity should be understood. This focus relates closely enough to topics outlined in this first chapter that at some places observations will be made regarding dialogue and comparative theology. But there is also rich material here for reflection on contextual theology, yet data relevant to that field will be referenced only if it is relevant to Christian thought on Hinduism. Similarly, there is less but deeply interesting material related to interreligious hermeneutics of sacred texts, but nothing will be pointed out or developed in that line. This focus on the broad paradigm for interreligious understanding and encounter determined which writings are dealt with at length in the following analysis, which are referred to in only a cursory manner, and which are not discussed at all.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*, their midwife, the Benares United City Mission, will first be introduced.

2. The Benares United City Mission

There is a direct relationship between the Benares United City Mission (BUCM) and the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism (CSSH). The BUCM began practicing the distinctives of the CSSH, and the CSSH was formed to provide a larger platform for these concerns. The BUCM was shut down in complex circumstances that are directly related to issues in the CSSH, which survived another decade after the closure of the BUCM. A careful analysis of the BUCM is thus vital for a proper understanding of the CSSH.

1.0 Banaras (Varanasi)

Banaras or Varanasi (Benares is an antiquated spelling; Kashi is the ancient name, still occasionally used at the present time) is one of the main pilgrim centers for Hindus. It is located along the Ganges River in the southeastern part of the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh in modern India.

The city has ancient roots, as noted by Diana Eck.

Banaras is one of the oldest living cities in the world, as old as Jerusalem, Athens and Peking. It occupied its high bank overlooking the Ganges in the cradle days of Western civilization. (Eck 1982:4)

Eck goes on to describe the vital place Varanasi holds in Hindu ritual and mythology. It was never a great political center, but "there are few cities in India as traditionally Hindu and as symbolic of the whole of Hindu culture as the city of Banaras" (Eck 1982:6).

Protestant missions, recognizing the importance of the city, first arrived in the second decade of the nineteenth century when the Baptist Missionary Society sent William Smith there. The Church Missionary Society and London Missionary Society followed shortly thereafter (Kennedy 1993[1884]: 21ff.). Diana Eck is quite dismissive of mission history in Banaras, suggesting that

The Christian missions never had a chance of gaining momentum in Banaras, but the early missionaries, steeped as they were in the cultural chauvinism of that era, did not know this. (Eck 1982:92)

This harsh analysis is tempered by a word of appreciation for some noted authors among the missionaries, particularly of the London Missionary Society. The most noted success story of Christian missions in Banaras is that of Nilkanth (Nehemiah) Goreh, mentioned above in note 33 of chapter one. Goreh came in contact with CMS missionary William Smith (not the same person as the BMS missionary of the same name) in Banaras in 1844 and was baptized in 1848 at Jaunpur rather than Banaras due to the uproar caused by his conversion to Christianity (Gibbs 1972:181f., Paradkar 1969:2-3). Yet it is certainly true that successes in terms of conversions to Christianity were few, and by the time of the birth of the BUCM there was a lethargy that the new mission hoped to overcome.

2.0 The Benares United City Mission

The first known archival reference to a new united mission to pilgrims in Varanasi is a letter written from London to India, perhaps indicative of the administrative style of missions even up to the middle of the 20th century. An unknown author wrote on Nov. 11, 1926 that

A little group here [London] is now considering the advisability of establishing in a new fashion and with better equipment a mission to the pilgrims of Benares. When there is something definite to report I will write to you again. You men on the spot will consider very carefully any suggestions that are framed at this side. Local knowledge and practical experience are needed to correct visionary schemes, but there does seem to be a chance that, by co-operation among the big societies here, something worthier can be attempted for the Hindu pilgrims who resort to Benares.¹

On the 19th of November a formal meeting took place in London, and on Jan. 17, 1927 the first definite steps towards the Benares United City Mission were taken by an ad hoc committee meeting in Varanasi. The Zenana Bible and Medical Mission, the Church Missionary Society, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society were represented. Among their resolutions were the following:

"The Chairman read the report of the meeting held in London on the 19th Novr. 1926, and after discussion on the various points referred to us, it was agreed:-

¹ Unsigned letter, presumably by E. W. Thompson, to Geo. Spooner, Nov. 11, 1926; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, 1926-27 #745.

- (1) We believe it is DESIRABLE to start some such scheme, because
 - (a) As Benares is a unique pilgrim and Hindu university centre, a distinctive effort should be made to meet the special conditions here.
 - (b) The missionaries of the separate missions find their time filled up with institutional and administrative work, therefore it is desirable that special men should be set apart to do this work only.
 - (c) This work should be done in the best manner possible, and a joint mission supported by three or four societies would more easily ensure the supply of men and funds.
 - (d) a gesture of cooperation in a place like Benares might lead to imitation in the direction of comity and unity elsewhere.
 - (e) It is hoped that the scheme would provide opportunity for cooperation in work to the Benares missionaries not directly appointed to serve the special scheme.

SCOPE. The scope of the work should be wide enough to include Benares residents and the educated classes, orthodox and modern....

METHOD. We approve the method suggested by the London committee as follows:- The primary effort would be to find more characteristically Indian ways of presenting the gospel alike to assembled crowds or to individuals. Such methods as public recitation or chanting of scripture passages on the ghats with interspersed expositions: or Christian *harikathas* such as Messrs. Hickling and Popley are using in the south must be tried in Benares. And the effort must have behind it a Christian brotherhood to which the three constituent societies will contribute the best Indian workers they can find. Amongst them would be preachers from the Tamil, Telegu and Kanarese areas who could work in Benares for a period, especially for pilgrims from their own language area, incidentally gaining experience which would greatly enhance their value on their return to their usual work."²

The most important resolution, however, was that Rev. and Mrs. J. Chadwick Jackson were selected to lead the new work. With enthusiasm in London and Varanasi, it seemed the work would move forward quickly, but this did not happen. Over the following years the proposal was discussed under various names, including Mission to Pilgrims, Benares; United Mission, Benares; Benares City Mission; United Mission to Pilgrims, Benares; Benares United Mission; and Benares United Pilgrims Mission. A group met in Varanasi on the first of November, 1928, under the name Benares United City Mission, and that is the name which stuck.

² "Record of Proceedings of Meeting of Representatives of Benares Missions to Consider Proposed Union Scheme", Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, 1926-27 #745.

2.1 Early Problems

The start of the mission was delayed due to the Jacksons going on furlough, but also by a prickly problem related to the involvement of the Church Missionary Society in the new work. The Varanasi committee was excited at the possibility of using the CMS facility in Godaulia as the center of operations.³ But problems with the CMS made this impossible and for years to come the prospects of using the Godaulia property of the CMS were floated by BUCM people, never to come to fruition.

Ostensibly the CMS people in Varanasi were concerned about the foundations of the BUCM, and about its stance on doctrine and the conditions for the baptism of converts, as well as practical matters related to the use of the facility.⁴ The committee that moved ahead in formation of the mission, however, felt that "the difficulty is due to the fact that the home secretary has not kept them in touch with the committee at home."⁵ In later years it was also personality and financial problems that hindered cooperation.⁶

Finally, following the Jackson's short furlough, the BUCM began to function in late 1928. A Zenana Bible and Medical Mission facility in Ram Katora was made available, so the committee consisted of ZBMM, WMMS and LMS representatives. Jackson was authorized to repair the bungalow in Ram Katora so he could live there. More significantly,

It was felt that the utmost care and dependence of Divine guidance is necessary in order to secure the men with gifts of heart and head for the work of the mission. The

³ "I am sure the committees at home will be pleased that the new mission does not locate itself in the ordinary style of bungalow and compound," wrote G. Spooner of the WMMS, clearly concerned with the separation from Indian life that the traditional mission compound involved (paragraph 448 in report of Jan. 19, 1927, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, 1926-27 #745). But in the end just such a bungalow and compound set-up resulted (see McGavran 1955:55ff. on the problems of the mission compound).

⁴ See "Second Meeting of the Committee of the Benares CMS Missionaries," Aug. 27, 1927, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, 1927 #747.

⁵ J. R. Hudson, WMMS leader in Varanasi, wrote thus to E. W. Thompson in London on Sept. 1, 1927; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, 1927 #747.

⁶ On personality problems, see under R. C. Das below. A Miss Birkenshaw of the CMS in Varanasi in a confidential letter of May 9, 1940 clearly stated that the problem was that the local congregation would not cooperate from a motive of "crass self-seeking" in terms of rent money earned from part of the Godaulia property. She further expressed that "I do...share the great grief of so many that this building in the heart of the city should be a witness to so many of 'See how these Christians fail when they come to grips with Hinduism'. For it certainly has appeared like that for many years." CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

superintendent is authorized to invite and receive candidates or visitors up to a period of three months at his own discretion without any binding engagement on either side.⁷

2.2 J. C. Jackson

Two men formed the heart and soul of the Benares United City Mission; the founder, J. Chadwick Jackson (1871-1947) of the London Missionary Society, and R. C. Das (1887-1976). Das, to be discussed in detail below, was recruited to the BUCM by Jackson. Jackson began his work in India under the Salvation Army, spending a decade in western India from 1890.⁸ He returned to India again in 1907 under the LMS, where his work was among the low castes and the churches.⁹

The third annual report of the BUCM in 1932 gives a glimpse of some of the more traditional work that had been carried on by Jackson before taking on the BUCM:

On return [from abroad], I resumed my work on the district board as representative of the depressed classes. In the December election my nomination was set aside by the Mahomedan [*sic*] minister in favour of a Mahomedan [*sic*] weaver. I have loved my work on behalf of the untouchables and have been cheered by the appreciation of many of them of the little service I was able to render them, but it is a great relief to be free from the responsibility.¹⁰

R. C. Das in his autobiographical reflections states that Jackson was offered a leadership post in the London Missionary Society based in Bangalore but chose instead to remain in north India (1976:171).

Jackson's normal pattern of ministry while with the BUCM (and no doubt long before) is hinted at in a letter by his successor, S. R. Holt, written in July of 1939:

⁷ "Record of Proceedings of Meeting of Benares United City Mission, Held in Benares, Thursday 1st November, 1928;" Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, #753.

⁸ Biographical details on Jackson are sparse, but it is safe to presume that some of the radical principles of the early Salvation Army left their mark on him. Frederick Booth-Tucker was the pioneer to India, whose three fundamental principles are summarized by his biographer F.A. Mackenzie: "By living wholly among the people, they became adepts in the vernacular in at least as short a time as the average college student. The second distinctive side of the Booth-Tucker plan was the complete adoption of native ways of life....The third great feature was the utilization to the full of native help on terms of equality" (Mackenzie 1930:133). Evidence of Jackson's agreement with these principles is seen in his marriage to a Tamil woman, Manomany, in 1895.

⁹ A brief summary of his history and work up to 1923 is found in Sibree 1923:154.

¹⁰ "The Benares United City Mission: Third Annual Report" February 1932; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, #759.

I find that I simply cannot do the sort of thing that Jackson used to do, such as sitting outside the Bula Nala bookroom offering tracts to all passers by and talking to anyone who stops. I like talking to people in a quiet place and I have interesting and profitable talks with people in my study or in one of the bookrooms, but argue in a public street I cannot, nor can I talk on religious matters with a grinning or curious crowd standing around. This is a weakness, I know, but I cannot help feeling that people think "Jackson could do it, why can't you?"¹¹

There are a number of references to Jackson's poor health and travels (both abroad and to Mussoorie in the hills) related to health problems. In the midst of later controversy related to R. C. Das there is passing reference to the fact that in the 8 years they were together Jackson was in fact away for as much as 4 ½ years!¹²

In September of 1937 Jackson retired and returned to England. In July of that year the head of the London committee of the BUCM commended his ministry in these words:

May I add to this letter one final word of high appreciation of the great service which you and Mrs. Jackson have rendered in connection with the mission. It was an experiment which might very well have been far from successful had it not been in the hands of such experienced and devoted people as yourselves, and I know that the London committee are most deeply grateful to you and Mrs. Jackson for the manner in which you have carried on the work, and have established it on good lines for your successors.¹³

R. C. Das was even more fulsome in his praise of Jackson and his wife:

Mrs. Jackson has been like a mother and grand-mother in our large family of children; we shall never forget her thoughtful love and prayerful solicitude for each one of us in health and in sickness alike. She has been a ministering angel in the city, in the homes of the high and low as well as among the pilgrims. Apart from invariably happy co-operation and fellowship in work with Mr. Jackson as superintendent of the mission and his constant helpfulness and encouragement of initiative in everything connected with the spread of the gospel, I am personally grateful to him as a gentleman and friend who has been unfailingly polite and considerate and has treated me like as a good and wise elder brother would do. His wide and ripe experience, his cheerful disposition and

¹¹ Personal letter from J. R. Holt to Hickman Johnson, July 31, 1939; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1935/36 – 1944/45, #19, #797.

¹² Circulated letter of Alexander McLeish, 5 Apr. 1946; addressed to Dr. A. M. Chirgwin in the LMS archives, Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/B, Correspondence 1941-50, but the same is addressed to Dr. Warren in the CMS archives, CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

¹³ Personal letter from W.J. Noble to Jackson, 26 July 1937; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1935/36 – 1944/45, #19, #785.

inevitable smile have always been a source of inspiration. To both of them we as a family are indebted for their many acts of kindness, for the example of their prayerful life, for their contagious consciousness of God's presence, and for their devotion to duty. Happy memories of living in close contact, of fellowship in prayer and worship, of counsel and work together will linger with us; and any mistakes or thoughtless acts or shortcomings, one feels confident, will be forgiven and forgotten in the spirit and for the sake of the common master.¹⁴

In light of these comments, it is a bit jarring to hear a rather different analysis of Jackson in a passing comment in later correspondence. The issue arose because Jackson, after retiring to England, decided that he would like to return to Varanasi again and end his days while ministering there. This idea was nixed by the leadership of the BUCM committees, both in Banaras and in London.

W. Machin, leader of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in Lucknow and Benares District and long active in the BUCM Banaras committee, wrote in May of 1938 that

Jackson is a great missionary, but he has not always been easy to work with. It is my opinion that Holt will be better able to secure cooperation with other churches in the work of the mission if Jackson's name is not connected with it.¹⁵

Complex church relations will be noted further on in relation to the decline of the BUCM. As much as that issue cursed the young mission, it was a crisis in leadership that doomed the enterprise. In light of this it is insightful to note the approach that Jackson was reported to take on this issue:

Rev. J. H. Allen and I some years ago asked that a young man might be put under Jackson, to learn the work. Jackson flatly refused to consider this and said that he could not teach the work, but that the new man must make his own methods.¹⁶

Jackson's return to Banaras after retirement was opposed by his successor with reasons that would be valid in the world of management, but which raise questions in the work of missionary service:

¹⁴ "The Benares United City Mission Report for 1936," pg. 18-19; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20D, Reports, 1937-43.

¹⁵ Personal letter from W. Machin to W. J. Noble, marked confidential; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1935/36 – 1944/45, #19, #783.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Jackson is so well known in Benares and so senior to me that were his name connected with the mission my position would be most difficult, if not impossible. Jackson would, I am perfectly convinced, be very careful to avoid doing anything that would compromise my position here but it would be very difficult to prevent other people regarding him as the natural leader of the mission's activities.¹⁷

This was strongly affirmed by W. Machin, Methodist mission leader in north India, who suggested that Jackson's successor, S. R. Holt, "is beginning a very difficult job, and he must have entire freedom, under the direction of the local committee, to arrange this work and build it up as he thinks fit."¹⁸

The good start provided to the BUCM by Jackson did not prove sustainable, as two successors briefly tried to fill the leadership role without success. Jackson's leadership style, based on affirmations of Indian leadership and initiative, was no doubt easier for him to assume as an elder statesman; his younger successors found Das intolerably difficult and the mission impossible to maintain.

2.3 Sidney R. Holt

The key figure in the BUCM was R. C. Das, but the flow of this chapter makes it natural to move now to the two brief successors of Jackson, the first being Sidney R. Holt. In the end, everyone including Holt himself felt that he never should have been pushed into the role of succeeding Jackson. (In light of this, the idea that such a man should have "entire freedom" to arrange and build the ministry is revealed as tragically flawed.)

Holt was not the initial favorite for this role; for some time J. S. Moon seemed the likely successor to Jackson (both Holt and Moon were Methodists under the Wesleyan Methodist

¹⁷ Personal letter from S. R. Holt to Norman Goodall of the LMS, May 31, 1938. It should be noted that there is no professional jealousy in Holt's comments, as he goes on to say that "With regard to Jackson's return to Benares I can only say that he would be able to do much good work if he were to come back, and that is, I believe, his desire. As the matter affects me I can only express an opinion concerning his connection with the BUCM. I have not heard the suggestion made, but would it not be possible for Jackson to act as honorary superintendent of the BUCM, looking after the accounts and supervising the evangelistic work? That would be feasible, I think, and would save Jackson the expense of a house. I should be very willing to go back to our district work. I make the suggestion for what it is worth." (Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/A, Correspondence 1937-1940, Z-20-38-24).

¹⁸ Personal letter from W. Machin to W. J. Noble, marked confidential; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1935/36 – 1944/45, #19, #783.

Missionary Society; Jackson was LMS). Moon, who would become the second editor of *The Pilgrim* magazine, later succeeded Holt, as will be noted below. Holt was a capable missionary who had arrived in India in 1929. His concern for preaching the gospel and sadness at problems in the church are evident in a letter of Aug. 2, 1933 to W. J. Noble in London.¹⁹

Holt was appointed head of the BUCM on June 25, 1937, while in Britain; he returned to India in February of 1938.²⁰ His appointment was only for one five year term, to be reviewed towards the end of the term.²¹ Perhaps this rather tentative appointment was due to the recognized shortcomings of Holt for this position. In a letter of May 5, 1937 from W. Machin to W. J. Noble (London BUCM committee), those shortcomings are apparent:

It will certainly be necessary for Holt, or whoever is appointed to the United Mission, to have a course of study in advanced Hindi. I have told Holt that it seems to me that he will have to study three books at least; the Ramayan, the Hindu Mahabharat and a very valuable book on Hindu philosophy by the late Nehemiah Goreh....I think it will be necessary for Holt to have a language teacher allowance for two years.²²

The daunting nature of Holt's assignment was not made easier by an exhortation from the BUCM committee in India that "a knowledge of Sanskrit would be a great asset in his contacts with students."²³

18 months after beginning his new work in the BUCM, Holt opened his heart to the London secretary, Hickman Johnson:

We have not been happy here and have been tempted to feel very bitter that people on the spot, who have been in a position to assess the situation here made no attempt to enlighten us when we allowed our names to go forward for the post....It is understood that we will go where we are sent, but we made it clear that we would sooner be in one

¹⁹ Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, #767.

²⁰ "Joint Home Committee, Benares United City Mission, Minutes," June 25, 1937; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/A, Correspondence 1937-1940, Z-20-37-18.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Letter of Machin to Noble headed "Benares United City Mission," May 5, 1937, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1935/36 – 1944/45, #19, #779. The recommended work by Nehemiah Goreh had a number of titles, the latest being *Mirror of the Hindu Philosophical Systems* (Aleaz 2003).

²³ "India Committee Minutes, 14th September 1937;" Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/A, Correspondence 1937-1940, Z-20-37-17.

of our circuits. J. W. Thomson, who was home at the same time, told me that had he been asked he would have replied that were he appointed to the BUCM he would ask for a home circuit. He didn't say on what grounds, but he knew the BUCM....But the people who have spent any length of time in Benares knew that the man who came to the BUCM would have a difficult time, but none of them wrote to say so.²⁴

In his 1938 report Holt had written that

It was with great trepidation that my wife and I came to Benares in March to join in the work of the Benares United City Mission. This kind of work was entirely new to us since before this we had spent our time in work among illiterate and almost savage jungle dwellers in another district and, for a year, among the hardly more civilized mill workers in the mill towns near Calcutta.²⁵

Miss Brickenshaw, a single CMS worker in Varanasi, commented on Holt in a confidential letter to London headquarters:

Mr. and Mrs. Holt are friends of mine, and I have a high regard for them both. But Mr. Holt is at the BUCM under protest, and he makes no attempt to hide this. He feels that he was posted there by his synod when he was absent in England, and unable to put his own case. His language is Urdu, and he was very happy with his district work at Akbarpur. He is now learning Hindi, and trying to equip himself for the very different work of the BUCM, feeling all the time that he is not the type of man for the work (and I think he is probably right), and suffering from a very real unhappiness. He expressed all this very frankly to the commission, and does not hide it at any moment from his own mission.²⁶

Holt was clearly aware that he had in no way been prepared for the type of specialized service the BUCM called for. Years before the end of his term the search for his successor was underway and no one was sad when he was replaced. Clearly a major share of his unhappiness was related to R. C. Das; this will be considered shortly. The roots of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism lie in these unhappy years when J. R. Holt headed the BUCM, and perhaps BUCM tensions are part of the reason for starting a new organizational structure.

²⁴ The references to "circuits" is Methodist jargon for place of ministry, the "home circuit" meaning ministry in England rather than in India. Personal letter from J. R. Holt to Hickman Johnson, July 31, 1939; this same letter is quoted on page 4 of this chapter; Holt wrote, "another thing I feel about this job is that I am not very good at it. I find that I simply cannot do the sort of thing that Jackson used to do...." Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1935/36 – 1944/45, #19, #797.

²⁵ "Report of Work for 1938," CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

²⁶ Confidential letter from Miss Brickenshaw to Cranswick, May 9, 1940; CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

2.4 J. S. Moon

Already on Jan. 11, 1939, less than a year after Holt started in the BUCM, there had been a telegram asking the London committee about replacing him with Moon.²⁷ Apparently related to this there is a cryptic note giving a telephone message from London board member John Grant, saying

I think that this is a very good proposal that Mr. Moon should take over from Mr. Holt, as I have never felt too happy about Mr. Holt's appointment. I have always thought that a man of special scholastic qualities was necessary for this post. These qualities I thought Mr. Holt did not possess. I notice that it is Mr. Machin who is putting this proposal forward. Mr. Machin is a first-class scholar and I believe that he would share with me this feeling about the necessity of having a man with special scholastic qualities in the Benares United City Mission. It may be this consideration that is influencing the Methodists in proposing the change.²⁸

Moon had an M.A. from Sheffield University and had been teaching in Egypt before becoming a missionary. W. J. Noble had written about him in 1931 that

during his time in Egypt he has picked up a certain amount of Arabic and has of course been in contact with Muhammedan [sic] boys and men all the time. He seems to us to be particularly fitted for special work in the Islamic area. At present he is taking the second part of the theological tripos, and will, I think, certainly do as brilliantly in it as he has already done in the first part.²⁹

Already on Nov. 13, 1941 the London committee of the BUCM interviewed Moon with a view to his possible succession from Holt in 1943. No final decision was made so early, but all looked positive.³⁰ The Varanasi committee was a bit less optimistic. They had apparently learned something from the problems with Holt, and resolved that "no one shall be appointed

²⁷ This is mentioned in a communication from W. J. Noble to W. Machin in India; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1935/36 – 1944/45, #19, #788.

²⁸ Rev. John Grant of the LMS was on the London board of the BUCM. Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/A, Correspondence 1937-1940, Z-2-38-65.

²⁹ Noble to A. Sanderson, 12 November 1931; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, #757.

³⁰ "Minutes of a Meeting of the Benares United City Mission Committee," London Nov. 13, 1941. Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20C, Home Committee Minutes 1937-46, Z-20-42-67.

to any post on the staff of this mission unless he is clear that he has a call to and an interest in the particular work which the mission exists to perform."³¹

By late March of 1943 Moon was in Varanasi and in leadership of the BUCM. His leadership lasted for less than 3 years, as his resignation in December of 1945 precipitated the closure of the Benares United City Mission.³² Reasons for the failure of Holt and Moon will be considered in the discussion of R. C. Das.

2.5 R.C. Das

It is probably impossible to present a fair and just portrait of R. C. Das and his place in the Benares United City Mission. Archival records reveal polarized opinions which cannot be neatly resolved. Das was a founder and central figure in the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism, so analysis of his involvement in the BUCM is vital to this thesis. My own approach to this topic is deeply sympathetic to R. C. Das, without wanting in any way to gloss over what might be weaknesses and errors.³³ I will present Das in a broader perspective in chapter four.

J. C. Jackson told the story of Das coming to the BUCM:

We thank God for the answer to our prayers in the coming of a colleague. Mr. Rajendra Chandra Das, M. A., a Bengali working in a far away village of north Bengal read an account of our Benares mission. Feeling a call to such a work, after prayer he came to Benares to see us. He was so impressed with the need and the opportunity that he volunteered his services, and after full enquiry our committee gladly accepted him.

Over twenty years ago, Mr. Frank Lenwood, on his first visit to India addressed a meeting of students in Dacca. R. C. Das, then a Hindu, was one of them. He was deeply moved and sought a personal interview with Mr. Lenwood, as a result of which he determined to follow Christ and to accept baptism. He did so and his Christian life gradually won over his father and other members of his family. Continuing his studies he gained his M.A. degree in philosophy and was for some time professor of philosophy in St. John's College, Agra. But educational work, even in a Christian college, did not satisfy his eager spirit and he left it in obedience to God's call to village

³¹ "Minutes of a Meeting of the India Committee of Benares United City Mission," Benares, March 12, 1942; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20C, Home Committee Minutes 1937-46.

³² The first issue of *The Pilgrim* that Moon edited was volume 5 number 1 in April 1945. He continued as editor through volume seven number four, January 1948.

³³ My approach is not merely sympathetic to Das, but perhaps amounts to a general bias against missionaries in relation to national workers.

evangelistic work. His wife, who is also of superior educational attainment, is in full sympathy with his evangelistic ideals. Their family life has been richly blessed and they have six children. They share with us our Ram Katora bungalow which is now proving none too large for ten inmates, and the children add brightness to our ashram-like life....Mr. Das' qualifications, spirit, and experience make him a most valuable and acceptable colleague.³⁴

In light of later controversies, it should be noted that Das' reputation was not only for good. C. S. Milford would later confess that "I only knew him slightly but I knew of his reputation as being a very difficult man to work with from his time in Bengal very many years ago."³⁵ Yet under Jackson in Varanasi there was little sign of discord; even his critics wrote in these words: "it seems that people are feeling that R. C. Das is by no means so satisfactory now as he was when Mr. Jackson was chief in the mission."³⁶

Before the litany of problems that led to the closure of the Benares United City Mission, however, it is necessary to outline some of the not-insignificant achievements of the mission, for most of which credit goes to R. C. Das. Three areas in particular need to be noted.

1. In commanding the Christian message to Hindus R. C. Das had few peers among 20th century Christians. Already in the annual report for 1931 Jackson noted that a center in Dasashwamedh at the heart of the city near the central ghat had been opened and was

mainly of use to educated Bengalis, and in a sense is a slight departure from our simple evangelistic effort among pilgrims, but Mr. Das is peculiarly called and qualified for this kind of work, and it is a great satisfaction that now – perhaps for the first time in the history of Benares, direct evangelistic effort in Bengali and English is carried on among Bengali men.³⁷

³⁴ "Kashi Khristiya Sangha, The Benares United City Mission," report of July, 1930; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20E, Documents, 1930-46.

³⁵ Milford of the CMS, to A.G. Dallimore, June 11, 1946; CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

³⁶ Letter from G. M. Lenwood to Rev. G. Phillips, 5 April 1939, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1935/36 – 1944/45, #19, #797. Compare this to the fulsome praise of Das in letters of Jackson (13 Oct. 1938; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/A, Correspondence, 1937-1940.) and W. Machin ("He is a man of rare gifts and even rarer spirituality and devotion;" letter to Noble, May 5, 1932; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, #759; Machin later opposed Das as superintendent due to local opposition, letter to Noble of Oct. 19, 1932; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, #759.)

³⁷ "The Benares United City Mission Third Annual Report," February 1932; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, #759.)

Shortly after arrival in Varanasi Das started the Khristpanthi Ashram in the mission compound where he and Jackson lived with their families.

In his report for 1937 Das commented on the great openness to the gospel:

I have met hardly any opposition or courtesy from the priests on the bathing ghats or in temple lanes. On the contrary I have found open doors everywhere. All our foreign and Indian visitors have been impressed by the readiness and earnestness with which widows, Brahman priests and pilgrims have received gospels and tracts.³⁸

Nothing illustrates the general commendation of Christianity under Das' ministry more than the remarkable caliber of Hindu leaders who were willing to come and teach simple Christian workers at his request. Speakers for his seminars included the principal of the Sanskrit College in Varanasi, the principal of the Mahabodhi Society in Sarnath, and various professors and department heads at the Banaras Hindu University.³⁹ The outreach center at Dasashwamedh (where Das would die alone in 1976) was founded with the help of a leading lawyer, then president of the bar association.⁴⁰ Henry H. Presler summarized the situation by saying that

His Hindu friends were well-stationed in Benares, in temples, *maths*, colleges, and the university. At his request they were prepared to drop their responsibilities and come to the society meetings to lecture to our students. They were theologically-minded men who were serious students of their sects....It was obvious to me that they respected Rev. Das. I feel that he was the salt that savors in Benares. Pilgrims, priests, professors liked him. They listened to what he had to say on Christianity and thought about it.⁴¹

An illustration of this is the Benares Fellowship which appears intermittently in BUCM and CSSH records without sufficient information to develop a proper portrait. In a 1958 eulogy for his friend Dr. Bhagwan Das, described as "a Vedic liberal Hindu...with Theosophist leanings" Das also referred to him as "a patron of the Banaras Fellowship – an inter-religious and international organisation started by our humble selves in 1932" (Das 1958d:30). The

³⁸ "Benares United City Mission Report of Work for 1937," undated; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/A, Correspondence, 1937-1940. Note that this is not just rhetoric, as Das described a much more difficult situation during (and because of) World War II; see "Benares United City Mission Report of Work in 1941 and 1942", undated; CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

³⁹ See "Programme for the Study of Hinduism in Benares" for the 1940 and 1941 sessions, CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47. This will be commented on further in chapter four section

⁴⁰ See Das' unpublished autobiography, pg. 178f in manuscript copy; Chapter Six, Section I, Varanasi: July 1930 – December 1973, pg. 7 in original.

⁴¹ Personal communication to the author dated Aug. 21, 1991.

Fellowship is mentioned periodically in reports of the work of the Benares Institute, which will be introduced chapter three section 2.2. The report for 1942 refers to a Benares Fellowship gathering for social purposes (Das 1943a:109-10), while the report for 1943 says

The Benares Fellowship (an interreligious association) was "at home" to us at the residence of Dr. Bhagwan Das – the celebrated scholar – when Mr. [Ashananda] Nag in one of the largest meetings ever held gave an important talk on "Indian Nationalism and Christianity" which was greatly appreciated by all present. (Das 1944:162)

Only one paper is extant from Benares Fellowship session, by A. K. Nandi presented in 1950 (Nandi 1950). In his autobiography Das referred to this presentation saying that Nandi "read a statement on his conversion to Christianity before an elite assembly of Varanasi" (1976:104). These glimpses of the Benares Fellowship demonstrate Das' acceptance among elite Hindus in Varanasi.

2. Beyond generally lifting the opinion of Hindu society towards Christ and Christianity, the BUCM also saw definite conversions to Christ. The third annual report of the BUCM referred to "several cases of individual conversion and change of life which have not yet ripened into baptism." The report for 1941 and 1942 states that "There have been many heart conversions but cases of these are mentioned below that have been sealed with public confession through baptism and membership of the church;" five such baptisms are mentioned.⁴² In a later booklet referring to many conversions he saw over the years, Das listed 16 striking figures from his years in Varanasi (1962a:21-28).

3. Das was also a networker, looking for ways to encourage and help other Christian workers involved with religious Hindus and pilgrims. Much of his early teaching was of the hands-on, *guru-sisya* type, as seen in his report for 1938: "As in previous years so this year also it was possible to hold more or less regularly a conversational class on popular and practical Hinduism."⁴³ When Henry H. Presler benefited from this informal training in Hindu ministry he had the influence to push with Das a formalizing of the program. Within a few years the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism was born, with support from church and mission leaders all across India. Das also started a semi-formal "retreat conference" in 1938 that

⁴² "Benares United City Mission Report of Work in 1941 and 1942", undated; CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

⁴³ "Benares United City Mission Report of Work for 1938," CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

sought to rally Christian sannyasis, ashramites, and other national Christian workers among Hindus.⁴⁴ Eventually a type of modified church fellowship developed out of these gatherings, but this did not last.⁴⁵

2.6 Fatal Conflicts

Careful reading of the archival material suggests that the main problem in the conflicts that developed related to R. C. Das was always missiological, although no one ever clearly identified this.⁴⁶ Of course, the "science" of missiology was still at a very rudimentary stage in the 1930s. This, discussed rather as "theology," was clearly a major part of the long-standing problems with the local CMS people. As early as 1927, three years before R. C. Das came on the scene, there were concerns in this area (as noted and referenced in section 2.1 of this chapter). In 1940, in the midst of the mess surrounding Holt's leadership, Miss Brickenshaw of the CMS in Varanasi noted (in light of the findings of a 1939 commission to study the BUCM) that

the criticism there implicit concerning the indefinite-ness of the doctrinal position of the mission is justified. This weighs considerably with some of our people, notably Canon Edwin, and it was evident at the enquiry that the effects are palpable and do not make for strength and stability.⁴⁷

The particular points raised against R. C. Das were generally related to church, baptism, anti-missionary and nationalistic sentiments, and of course personality problems. No criticism was more damning than that of Charles Ranson, called from the National Council of Churches headquarters to help sort out the strife in the BUCM in the mid-1940s. He wrote about Das,

⁴⁴ See Das' letter of March 18, 1938 inviting people to come (Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/A, Correspondence, 1937-1940) and also "Benares United City Mission Report of Work for 1938," CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47. The Report for 1941 and 1942 mentions that the U.P. Christian Council decided in Nov. 1942 to sponsor the Retreat Conference; CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

⁴⁵ See Richard 1995:220ff. for details of these later developments, and chapter four of this thesis.

⁴⁶ Archival sources contain no information on the most tragic of the relational conflicts, that which led to the separation of R.C. Das and his wife. Little is known of this, but Das' daughter, Aruna Seetal, conveyed to me that even here there were missiological issues as Mrs. Das was not enamored of an ashram approach and style of life (personal communication, Allahabad, Oct.1997). No doubt the larger context of misunderstanding and conflict played a role in the marital problems.

⁴⁷ Letter of Miss Brickenshaw to E. C. Cranswick, May 9, 1940; CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

I must confess to grave doubts, on both personal and theological grounds, as to his suitability for the position which he at present holds. The success of that whole enterprise depends upon good team work; Das will never make an easy member of a team. The purpose of the work is, I take it, to win men to Jesus Christ and lead them into the fellowship of the church; Das' whole attitude to the church is, to say the least, cloudy and unclear.⁴⁸

Clearly, there were personality problems in the BUCM.⁴⁹ But there were many factors in play surrounding those personality problems. Mrs. Lenwood of the London committee of the BUCM was very insightful, noting that some on the committee "wanted to make the BUCM almost a union church!" This is a missiological problem lurking behind the personality conflict.⁵⁰ Holt was no loyal friend of Das (note Mrs. Lenwood's observation of how "having said good things of Das he turned over very easily"),⁵¹ but even he admitted that

R.C. Das is a member of the local congregation of the CIBC and communicates regularly. There is a certain amount of credit due to him in this as, so far as I can judge, the people there do not like him very much and he is not invited to tea parties when the bishop comes. However, he has accepted what the commission recommended and has loyally carried it out. It is, of course, difficult for a man whose mother tongue is Bengali and whose second language is Hindi to take a very great part in the life of a church whose offices are mediated in Urdu.⁵²

⁴⁸ Confidential letter of Ranson to G. E. Hickman Johnson, 28 March, 1944; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/B, Correspondence, 1941-1950. Cf. Holt's letter to Noble on Jan. 17, 1939 that "Several members of our own synod have asked me what are the terms on which the MMS cooperates in the work of the BUCM. They have been concerned at the way in which R. C. Das expresses himself on such subjects as the church and baptism and at his evident anti-missionary feelings and so on;" CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

⁴⁹ Along with the tensions suggested already in this paper between Holt and Das, and Moon and Das, note that a clash between Das and H. K. Dey was considered the largest problem in the mission in 1943, leading to Dey's dismissal the next year; on the problem see "Minutes of a Meeting of the Benares United City Mission Committee," London, Dec. 31st 1943; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20C, Home Committee Minutes, 1937-46; on Dey's dismissal effective Feb. 1, 1944 see "Minutes of a Meeting of the Indian Committee of Benares United City Mission," Varanasi, Jan. 26, 1944; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20D, Reports, 1937-43.

⁵⁰ The exclamation point is hers. Note that her following sentence is "I know Das must be very awkward, but Paul & Barnabas were too!" Mrs. Lenwood to Norman Goodall, Jan. 2, 1944; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/B, Correspondence, 1941-50.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² S. R. Holt, communication on MMS letterhead to the London BUCM committee members dated May 15 1941; CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47. In 1939 G.M. Lenwood had also noted that "On the occasion of my own visit to Benares, I found a tendency on the part of certain local workers to spread little stories about this mission which were not true;" Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1935/36 – 1944/45, #19, #797. The CIBC is the (Anglican) Church of India, Burma and Ceylon.

It seems quite certain that Bengali-ness also played a role in some of the tensions. Das' nationalistic viewpoints were clearly resented, as seen in a letter written by a missionary:

Mr. Das is moreover admittedly a strong nationalist, and holds definite and outspoken anti-British and anti-missionary views. While admitting that all are free to hold what views they wish, it does not seem right for Mr. Das to be holding the position he is, drawing a salary from British sources, working in a British society and yet definitely speaking against the British. Recently he talked to some of our convert workers in an anti-British strain and at the time of the recent elections he was very busy holding canvassing meeting for the Christian Congress candidate.⁵³

It seems clear also that Das was afflicted with the problem (not uncommon among Hindu converts) of an idealism that expected Christians to live at a higher level than they did, and perhaps also higher than realism should expect.⁵⁴

But especially the theological and missiological issues involved in the situation need to be taken seriously. Was Das' practice of baptism and church as offensive as some in the CMS suggested? His published writings clearly indicate that this is not the case.⁵⁵ But theological statement is one thing, missiological (and pastoral) application is another. In considering the successes of Das and the BUCM the situation of converts "not yet ripened into baptism" was noted; if not yet baptized, surely these people were not yet in the church. Das could say stronger (some might say stranger) things as well, such as

We who are known by the name of Christ may be thankful to God that he is fulfilling the purposes of his kingdom in mysterious ways outside the borders of the visible church, and pray and believe that some day and somehow these other sheep who are not of this fold may be gathered from far and wide and may become one flock under one shepherd.⁵⁶

⁵³ Letter of Miss Birkenshaw, May 8, 1946; CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47.

⁵⁴ See Hogg 1947:40f. for a brief general discussion of this matter.

⁵⁵ See particularly his comments on baptism to the unbaptized follower of Christ, K. Subba Rao of Andhra Pradesh in Richard 1995:142. The closing line, "...one is left to his own conscience as to whether he should be baptized or not," might irk some, but is hardly extreme. Likewise a paper on church and kingdom challenging a heretical emphasis on church (Richard 1995:149f.). Das' position on the church and his various affiliations will be discussed in chapter 4 section 1.5.1.2 (cf. section 2.2.3).

⁵⁶ This is the closing sentence of the "Benares United City Mission Report of Work for 1937;" Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20/A, Correspondence, 1937-40. Note that Jackson suggested similar ideas: "We often hear of these secret disciples amongst sadhus, and not always without scepticism, but I was convinced that this man was one who would follow Christ and command him in places unreachable by any regular Christian effort;" "Benares United City Mission Report for 1936;" Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20D, Reports, 1937-43.

Alexander McLeish of the World Dominion Movement seemed to get the heart of the problems in his striking analysis.⁵⁷ Sadly, he was too late on the scene and his proposals hardly got a hearing. He suggested that

First, it has to be noted that all good India workers are restive under mere "mission" control of the traditional kind. They feel different where the European leadership is more expert at the particular job than they themselves....This undoubtedly is the inner history of Benares. Under the Jacksons Mr. Das worked for eight years as a fully trusted and responsible colleague with complete satisfaction to the others and to himself. The advent, however, of "superintendents" both of whom I find, were in no sense scholars or students of Hinduism and if we are to judge by their activities, had no particular interest in it (*sic*). Knowledge of Hinduism and the Hindi and Sanskrit languages should have been the primary requisites for participation in such a work as has to be carried on at Benares. There are very few Europeans today in India capable of doing such work well.

I am afraid the committee have not looked at the very specialized nature of the task and have appointed young men who have shown no aptitude for it. If they even had gone as learners that would have been something, but there is no evidence of their participation in the real activities of the centre where they functioned mainly on the administrative side....

You may ask what the Indian committee has been doing....This committee cannot be considered as in intelligent or useful control of the work. The local churches which its members mainly represent need the greater evangelistic urge which the London committee can bring to bear.

The responsibility of the London committee, therefore, though a difficult one to discharge from so great a distance is vitally necessary. The choice of a European worker should have been on the broad basis of finding the *best man* in India, not at all necessarily a member of any of the cooperating missions....It further needs one with no religious or racial prejudice, and one who can understand the very different approach and outlook of a good Indian worker. This last point is important as today Indian leaders are rightly asserting their individuality and this reveals the gulf between Western and Indian psychology at every point. A deep understanding of the Indian mind is necessary to fit into the picture as the Indian sees it.

...All dual authorities, i.e., in this case of mere "superintendent" alongside the actual performance of the work by an Indian are no longer possible nor advisable....

I think that Benares is another case where we are called to make the venture of faith to the full limit and let our whole work there come completely under Indian control and inspiration....

⁵⁷ World Dominion got involved with the BUCM in 1941; besides the founding WMMS, LMS and ZBM, the CMS was at times involved, WD came in late, and the British and Foreign Bible Society and the United Society for Christian Literature were involved, making a total of seven societies in the BUCM.

There are going to be difficult days ahead for the conduct of any bit of work in India especially for work of this specialized character.⁵⁸

This was not a perspective that either the London or Banaras committees of the BUCM could handle. The perspective that won the day is presented in a letter of May 3, 1946 by A.M. Chirgwin:

I have just returned from a meeting at Edinburgh House at which Hickman Johnson was present. He has just got back from India. He talked to Goodall and to me about the Benares mission in very distressing terms. His report about C. R. (*sic*) Das will hardly bear putting on to paper. Moon, the superintendent, has resigned and the Methodist synod has recommended that the present arrangement should cease. It means the end of the united mission, at any rate as at present constituted, and the dropping finally of C. R. (*sic*) Das. I mentioned that just lately MacLeish (*sic*) of World Dominion has written a circular letter giving the precise opposite account of the situation and I think his letter has been circulated to members of the mission committee. Hickman Johnson's explanation is that MacLeish (*sic*) stayed with Das and just wrote down Das's views.⁵⁹

Hickman Johnson and Miss Freethy, both of the MMS, shared a report of their visit to India in the June 1946 meeting of the London committee of the BUCM.

[They] had spent a considerable time in consideration of the work of the mission and they reported that after much discussion with many people and exploring every possibility of solving the main problem of personal relationships, they had come to the conclusion that the only way open was that of division of responsibility, Mr. Moon being left with the work of the BUCM as it has normally been conceived and Mr. Das being left as superintendent of the School of Hinduism and its developments. This proposal was unanimously accepted by the Benares committee and also by Mr. Das. Mr. Moon asked for some time for consideration and did not give his reply until December; it was then to the effect that he could not accept the suggestion and offered his resignation from the service of the mission.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Letter marked confidential, dated 5th April, 1946. A copy in the LMS archives is addressed to Dr. A. M. Chirgwin; a copy in the CMS archives is addressed to Dr. Warren and has a faint handwritten note saying "the situation is delicate and I hope you will feel that the policy I suggest should be given a trial for three years at least;" Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20B, Correspondence, 1941-50 and CMS Archives, Birmingham University, Special Collections G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47. Note that in 1932 Machin had initially wanted Das to lead, but changed his mind due to opposition from local Christians and missionaries who objected to "a tendency to spend mission money too freely, and another that he is liable to let his rather extreme political opinions interfere with his evangelistic work;" Machin to Noble, Oct. 19, 1932; Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1920/22-1935, #18, #762; cf. May 5, 1932 letter, #759.

⁵⁹ Letter to Mr. Hurst, May 3, 1946; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20B, Correspondence, 1941-50.

⁶⁰ "Minutes of the Meeting of the Benares United City Mission London Committee," June 7, 1946; Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20B, Correspondence, 1941-50.

The London committee concluded that the BUCM must be shut down, "with profound sorrow and a deep sense of responsibility." Yet a blindly optimistic note was also thrown in, that "the committee is grateful to learn that a considerable measure of cooperative evangelism will continue to be carried out by the Methodist Church and the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon at Godaulia and at the Dasashwamedh reading room."⁶¹

2.7 Conclusion

The Benares United City Mission thus closed. The missiological gap evident between the context-sensitive approach of Jackson-Das and the traditional church-Christianity of the CMS (among others) was never addressed or even recognized. A similar dilemma and crisis developed in the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism, as will become apparent in the succeeding chapters of this thesis.

⁶¹ Ibid. Nothing of note happened at Godaulia; the Dasashwamedh center became the home of R. C. Das so ministry continued there, but not related to the Methodist or Anglican churches.

3. The Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism

The first chapter of this thesis introduced the complex issues involved in analysis of a mid-twentieth century Christian society formed to study Hinduism. The previous chapter gave a detailed look at the immediate organizational context out of which the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism was born. Before focusing on the teaching of the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*, this chapter will give an overview of the history of the CSSH.

1.0 Birth of the CSSH

The Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism was born of the efforts of Henry H. Presler and R. C. Das. Presler had spent time with Das in Varanasi in 1938 and saw the rich potential for exposing many others to living Hinduism alongside serious academic study.¹ By April of 1939 Presler and Das had co-authored "A Proposal for a School of Hinduism and a Brief Guide for Students of Hinduism in Benares."

S. R. Holt sent a dozen copies of this proposal to London on May 25, 1939.² On July 31 he wrote at some length to Johnson, clearly in response to earlier discussion about Das and the school of Hinduism:

Now about this school of Hinduism. When I say that it will be partly Das's child I mean that he has long pressed for it and had a share in getting out the pamphlet "Proposal for a School of Hinduism in Benares," copies of which I sent to Noble, and should it come to anything Das will feel that some acknowledgement is being paid to a view that Mr. Das has always held strongly, namely that missionaries and others who are working among Hindus should have some knowledge of the life and beliefs of the people among whom they work. I hold that view myself and after these 17 months in Benares I can see that had I had, in my younger days, some such training I should have been saved

¹ In *The Pilgrim* 13:2, July 1954 R. C. Das wrote that "...one fine winter morning in January, 1939, there appeared before me a young and keen American missionary (in the person of the Rev. H. H. Presler), then pastor of the Union Church in Naini Tal. He was so impressed by what we were trying to do in a way different from the usual line and by the opportunities and conditions in the city during a stay of three days that he decided to come and stay three months later on and he did it" (Das 1954c: 2). The reference to 1939 is clearly an error of memory by Das as the BUCM "Report for 1938" clearly states that "The Rev. H. H. Presler, minister of M.E. Church, Nainital, has come for two months to make a close study of the Hindu religion in Benares" (CMS archives, Birmingham University "Special Collections" file G2-I7-G5, Benares United City Mission 1935-47).

² Letter to Noble, May 25, 1939 (Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1936/36 – 1944/45, #19, 1939, #797.)

much tongue-tied awkwardness when talking to people....Bishop Badley intends to call a conference of missions in connection with this matter when he returns to India, and the BUCM committee (executive) have wisely decided that we must leave the matter till then. Das and Presler wanted to start the thing in a small way this cold weather with half a dozen students from Stanley Jones' ashram in Lucknow housed in our compound. If people want to come to Benares to study Hinduism, let them do so by all means, and we shall give them all the help we can, but I don't want it to be called school of Hinduism till the matter has been gone into properly.³

The formal inauguration of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism took place in Varanasi in February of 1940 (Appasamy 1941a:3). The president of the society was Bishop Brenton T. Badley of the Methodist Church in South Asia, a prestigious leader for the new society. Badley had been consecrated as bishop in 1924, and was a second generation missionary who had been born in India in 1876. He served as president for two and a half years, and thereafter was a patron of the society through 1947.⁴

The vice-presidents of the new society were A. J. Appasamy, who will be discussed in more detail below as he was also the first editor of *The Pilgrim*, and G. H. C. Angus, principal of Serampore College.⁵ Angus continued as vice-president through 1946, when the society changed its structure and ceased to have vice-presidents. H. H. Presler, by then at Leonard Theological College in Jabalpur, was secretary.⁶ R. C. Das and S. R. Holt of the Benares United City Mission were convener of the Benares Institute (see below) and treasurer, respectively.

This thesis is focused on the teaching of the CSSH and not with organizational details. Yet these initial office bearers have been noted to demonstrate that the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism was supported from various quarters of the Protestant Church in India, and particularly had the backing of leaders of churches and missions in India.

³ Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, India Correspondence Lucknow 1936/36 – 1944/45, #19, 1939, #797; the letter is marked "personal;" the quotation is from page 3.

⁴ With vol. 7 no. 3 of October 1947 *The Pilgrim* ceased its practice of printing in each issue the leadership of the CSSH, so whether patronage even continued beyond that point is not known. Bishop Badley died in 1949. He was replaced as president of the CSSH by the Methodist Church in South Asia Bishop of Lucknow, Clement D. Rockey.

⁵ Serampore was the degree-granting body for theological education in India, and so held a place of pre-eminence among Indian theological schools. Serampore College itself had and has a much larger division for general education than its famed theological division. Angus was principal at Serampore from 1929 to 1949.

⁶ Presler soon drops out of CSSH affairs due to being on furlough in the USA from 1942-1949. Note his reappearance with a brief piece in *The Pilgrim* vol. 9 no.4 of 1950, and major contributions when Immanuel was editor (vol. 13 no. 2,etc.; see Sources number one, pages 298, 303ff.).

2.0 Purpose of the CSSH

The purpose of the CSSH was clearly defined in three points, and these were printed regularly in *The Pilgrim* without any alteration over the years.⁷ The purposes were

1. To create and maintain adequate interest in the study of Hinduism by Christians.
2. To carry on this study in a sympathetic, constructive, and critical way for the purpose of effective evangelism.
3. To achieve the above objectives in co-operation with church and mission bodies.

Along with these purposes the society clearly defined its activities also. And first among these was "to encourage the organization of a permanent School of Hinduism."⁸ The other activities were to conduct an Institute of Hinduism in Varanasi, "stressing its popular aspects,"⁹ to discover scholars of Hinduism with teaching and writing skills, and to encourage publications on Hinduism and Christian work among Hindus.¹⁰

2.1 A Permanent School of Hinduism

The CSSH had two strong voices to the Christian Church in India. One was *The Pilgrim*, which began to be listed as the second activity of the society beginning with vol. 2 no.3 in 1942, and the other was the training conferences held under the name Institute of Hinduism, clearly in anticipation of the establishment of the permanent School of Hinduism. Throughout the history of the CSSH the issue of a permanent school of Hinduism was churning. As already noted, one of the documents that led to the birth of the CSSH was "A Proposal for a School of Hinduism." Henry Presler made his points clear in the opening sentences of this pamphlet:

The hypothesis of part one is: The Christian missionary forces in India, especially those working among Hindus, would profit by a school of Hinduism, conducted with the same purpose as the existing Henry Martyn School of Islamics. The hypothesis of part

⁷ The only issues among those extant (see Sources number 1 on pages 297-307) in which the purposes were not published are vol. 1 nos. 3 and 4, vol. 5 no. 4, vol. 8 no. 1, vol. 9 no. 4, vol. 10 no. 1 and vol. 14 no. 1.

⁸ This is the first of four activities listed in vol. 1 nos. 1 and 2 and in vol. 2 nos. 1 and 2. From vol. 2 no. 3 through the remaining issues this is the third of three activities; from vol. 9 no. 3 the activity is no longer to *encourage* the organization of a permanent school, but directly "organizing a permanent school of Hinduism."

⁹ With vol. 2 no. 3 this becomes the first activity listed. Up through vol. 9 no. 2 there is included with this activity a hope that the Institute of Hinduism might also be held in south India. The stress on popular aspects of Hinduism should be understood as elucidating Presler's appeal for a "laboratory" approach to the study of Hinduism in his statement two paragraphs below.

¹⁰ The last two purposes were dropped beginning at vol. 2 no. 3.

two is: Such a school, using the laboratory method, could function well in Benares. A corollary is: Until such a school be established, new missionaries can individually employ the laboratory method of study in the holy city of the Hindus.¹¹

As noted, getting a permanent school of Hinduism established was the first listed activity of the CSSH when it was formed. But the school of Hinduism never came to fruition. The school was expected to develop under the auspices of the National Christian Council, who have reference to it already in their proceedings of Dec. 1939.¹² The NCC discussed the issue regularly, in plenary sessions, executive committee meetings, and in the NCC Committee on Theological Education.¹³ In April of 1946 it seemed a green light was given; "it was agreed to appoint a committee to investigate the possibility of organizing, maintaining and developing a school for the study of Hinduism..." (*Minutes* 1946:13).

The July 1946 issue of *The Pilgrim* (vol. 6 no. 2) contains an elaborate outline of a plan for the school of Hinduism, covering over 6 pages. This plan was developed by a joint committee of the NCC and the CSSH, and looked for \$125,000 to purchase land and develop the property, with an annual budget of Rs. 40,000. The NCC, however, referred to two plans in a recap of developments written in 1953:

In 1946, for instance, a plan was presented to the National Christian Council with two alternatives. One of these an estimated expenditure of \$500,000 for initial and recurring projects over a period of ten years. Another, which was believed to require the minimum expenditure for a satisfactory school, called for an annual budget of Rs. 40,000. (*Proceedings* 1953:103)

¹¹ "A Proposal for a School of Hinduism and a Brief Guide for Students of Hinduism in Benares," pg. 1 (Council for World Mission (formerly London Missionary Society) archives, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, England, CWM 1941-1950, IN/31, File 20E, Documents, 1930-46). The Henry Martyn School was established in 1930 and continues to the present, having been renamed the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies in 1959 (Sunquist 2001:326).

¹² The tenor of this first discussion is rather opposed to starting a school of Hinduism:

Mr. Hodge made a statement regarding suggestions for a school of Hinduism and he informed the council that a move had already been made to start such a school in Benares. He suggested, however, that the great need at the present time was not so much for a new institution as for the strengthening of personnel of existing institutions....There was general agreement as to the desirability of forming a group of thinkers – Indian and Western – who would apply their minds to the great problems of the relations of Hinduism and Christianity and to the presentation of the Christian position to the modern Hindu mind....(*Proceedings* 1940:14-15).

¹³ The school of Hinduism was discussed during NCC plenary meetings in Dec. 1939 (as already noted), January 1944, and October 1950 (see *Proceedings of the NCC* for these dates). The executive committee discussed the school during meetings on Aug. 2-5, 1940, Aug. 4-7, 1942, Feb. 24-26, 1943, Aug. 30-Sept. 1, 1943, Apr. 3-4, 1946, and Nov. 18-20, 1947 (see *Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the NCC* for these dates). The Feb. 24-26 and Aug. 30-Sept. 1 executive meetings in 1943 delegated the matter to the Theological Education Committee. Note also a strong endorsement for the school in C. W. Ranson's NCC sponsored study of *The Christian Minister in India* (1945:208).

Whatever variations of plans might have developed, by November of 1947 it was clear the project was not going to go forward:

The school for the study of Hinduism proposal to date has not received the approval of the required number of boards and churches to initiate the scheme. In fact the great majority of replies indicate that churches and missions at the present stage would prefer to start with the alternative scheme which provides for the opening of a department for the study of Hinduism with a full-time professor associated with an existing theological college. (*Minutes* 1947:31-32)¹⁴

The NCC did not abandon the plan for a school of Hinduism; after all, it was still being brought before them by the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism. But the NCC was not moving forward; it recommended in 1950 that "since there appeared to be no early possibility of setting up a school for the Christian study of Hinduism," theological schools should open departments in Indian cultures and religions (*Proceedings* 1950:56).

Already in minutes from 1943 the NCC discussion had gone beyond a school of Hinduism and mentioned a "permanent school of Indian religions" (*Minutes* 1943:8). This hinted towards the end of the long-drawn discussions, which was the establishment of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS) in Bangalore in 1957.¹⁵

2.2 The Benares Institute

Despite the failure of the CSSH ever to establish a permanent school of Hinduism, the society had a continual influence through the Benares Institute (or Institute of Hinduism) sessions which were held once or twice a year in Varanasi. R. C. Das was the central figure in these

¹⁴ There is no room to doubt that problems in the Benares United City Mission had a negative influence on discussions and decisions related to the school of Hinduism. The same NCC executive which noted this disapproval of the plan for the School of Hinduism also referred on to the U.P. Christian Council a matter passed to it by the triennial meeting of the NCC in 1946, which was a request from R. C. Das for an investigation into the closure of the BUCM (*Minutes* 1947:51).

¹⁵ A brief statement of the history of the CISRS, including reference to the NCC and the School of Hinduism, is given in Taylor 1982:1-2. The purposes of the CISRS are spelled out in Shiri 1982:11. A strange article by P. D. Devanandan, founding director of the CISRS in the July 1957 issue of the *International Review of Missions* perhaps should receive comment. Entitled "A Centre for the Study of Hinduism: A New Venture in Christian Evangelism in India," the paper makes no mention of the CSSH. The title can hardly be considered other than deceiving since there was nothing new about the CISRS proposal, except for its moving beyond merely focus on Hinduism; yet this title only refers to it as a centre for the study of Hinduism. Perhaps the editors of the IRM created that title in ignorance of the CSSH?

sessions, and much of his teaching is extant in notes.¹⁶ The life and teaching of R. C. Das will be analyzed in chapter 4.

2.3 *The Pilgrim*

The Pilgrim magazine was the other ongoing influence from the society to the Indian church, and the teaching published in *The Pilgrim* is a major focus of this thesis.

The purposes of *The Pilgrim* were clearly spelled out in the first issue:

At the annual meeting of the society it was felt that a further advance should be made and that a quarterly bulletin should be published. The object of the bulletin will be to get more people interested in the society, to describe the work done by the society from time to time and to give information of interest to those who work among Hindus. As space permits, articles on different phases of Hinduism will appear. Accounts will be published of Christian converts and of the Christian experience. If any new experiments are made in the matter of the Christian approach to Hindus, these will be described. Brief reviews will also appear in the bulletin of important books bearing on Hinduism and on its relation to Christianity. (Appasamy 1941a:3)¹⁷

There was no comment on the choice of "pilgrim" for the name of the publication. *The Pilgrim* had four editors, each bringing varying perspectives and concerns to its pages. The first was A. J. Appasamy, whose resignation as editor is announced in vol. 5 no. 1. J. S. Moon of the Benares United City Mission was the second editor, self-defined as a temporary fill-in but in the position through vol. 7 no. 4. P. Chenchiah became the third editor, until his resignation in unhappy circumstances, announced in vol. 11 no. 2. R. D. Immanuel was the fourth and final editor of *The Pilgrim*, and continued on as editor of *Indian Cultures Quarterly* after the CSSH closed and *The Pilgrim* ceased publication.

2.3.1 A. J. Appasamy

A. J. Appasamy (1891-1975) was ideally suited for the work of editor of *The Pilgrim*, being well accepted in the Indian church and also well studied in Hinduism and the Hindu-Christian

¹⁶ The contents of these notes are given in Sources number 2 on page 309.

¹⁷ The reference in the first sentence to "further advance" is in relation to a report in the previous paragraphs on the first Benares Institute teaching sessions in Varanasi in January of 1941, with 26 students from around India attending and appreciating the sessions. The quarterly publication was called a "bulletin" for the first 7 volumes, then with the change to Chenchiah as editor became the quarterly "magazine" of the CSSH.

encounter. His father was a noted convert from Hinduism who left an account of his life and experience. About his conversion to Christianity he wrote

I left behind me not merely the faith of my fathers, and the traditions, customs and habits of a lifetime, which had slung to me so long as I was a Hindu; but I had broken with my relatives, and given up all who were near and dear to me, parents and brothers and sisters, as well as the freedom that I enjoyed as a Hindu. All this I cheerfully count as loss for the sake of Christ. (Pillai 1924:1-2)

There is a significant element of hyperbole in this statement. For one thing, Pillai was only 23 years old at his baptism (Appasamy 1924:3). Secondly, his account goes on to share his objection to converts abandoning "non-essential Hindu customs" which included the fact that he did not cut off his sacred tuft of hair (*kudumi*) despite the fact that

in those days there was a regular crusade against the *kudumi* in Christian circles, as it was regarded as a proof and emblem of caste pride, and thought to be a connecting link kept up with Hinduism. (Pillai 1924:4f.)

Finally, his estrangement from family was not severe or long lasting (Pillai 1924:3-4).¹⁸ Pillai married the daughter of a convert from his same Vellalla caste.¹⁹ The Vellallas are a clean caste, traditionally cultivators but also landowners who took advantage of modern education to increase their power and influence (Singh 1998:3,629ff.; Thurston 1909:361ff.). Pillai's account of his life in Christ includes his experimentation with yoga in his last years.²⁰

A. J. Appasamy came to the notice of missionary and Indian leaders in his early years growing up in the Indian church and was enabled to study abroad in Hartford, USA, and then Oxford.²¹ His doctoral work at Oxford was on "The Gospel of St. John and Hindu Bhakti Literature." Sadhu Sundar Singh visited Oxford in 1920 while Appasamy was there, and Appasamy and Canon Streeter wrote a noted book on Singh entitled *The Sadhu: A Study in Mysticism and Practical Religion* (1921).

¹⁸ The hyperbole about the extent of his break with Hinduism is instructive in regard to the attitudes of the time.

¹⁹ His father-in-law's story is briefly told in Devadoss 1922:137f.

²⁰ The first issue of *The Pilgrim* contains a brief comment on the recent reprinting of Appasamy Pillai's account of his life and then reproduces the concluding chapter, indicating A. J. Appasamy's appreciation for his father. Appasamy 1924 is a summary of his father's thought with some analysis.

²¹ This account of A. J. Appasamy's life is taken from his *A Bishop's Story* (1969), unless documented otherwise.

Following his studies in Europe Appasamy spent seven years as English editor for the Christian Literature Society in Madras (now Chennai). But before accepting this position he had written a paper proposing a Bangalore Ashram, indicating how strongly his thinking was in the direction of Indian expressions of Christianity.²² Among the works that Appasamy saw through the press in his editorial position were two of his own books based on his doctoral work (*Christianity as Bhakti Marga* (1928, 1930, 1991) and *What is Moksha?* (1931, 1934)). He also brought out an edition of Hindu *bhakti* songs entitled *Temple Bells* (1930).

Appasamy married a Christian Vellalla, Grace Samuel, in 1923.²³ They had three children, but only their son, the eldest, married a Vellalla. Their eldest daughter married a Protestant Christian from Karnataka and the younger married a Brahmin convert to Christianity from Kerala.²⁴ The Appasamy clan thus remained elite but not narrowly Vellalla.

Appasamy was deeply interested in Hindu-Christian issues but was also a faithful churchman. He put himself forward for ordination and was accepted as an Anglican deacon in 1930. In 1932 he moved to Bishop's College in Calcutta to teach philosophy and the history of religions. But health problems forced a return to south India in 1934 where Appasamy took up work in the Anglican Church. It was from this position that he edited *The Pilgrim*, and it was church work that forced his resignation when he was appointed Archdeacon of Palayamkottai in 1946 (later being elevated to bishop in Coimbatore in the united Church of South India in 1950).²⁵

2.3.2 J. S. Moon

The second editor of *The Pilgrim* was J. S. Moon of the Benares United City Mission. His brief time in leadership of the Benares United City Mission from 1943 to its closure in 1945 has been outlined in chapter 2. He became the editor of *The Pilgrim* in early 1945 and

²² This paper is in the A. J. Appasamy collection in the archives of the United Theological College in Bangalore. It is undated, but prefaced by a paper entitled "My Future Plans" which specifically refers to the paper "The Bangalore Ashram," which is dated as prior to June of 1922.

²³ Christian Vellallas are described in Singh 1998:3650.

²⁴ This family information is from an Oct. 13, 2010 phone conversation with Kiruba Soans, wife of a grandson of A. J. Appasamy living in Ooty. My thanks to Dr. Stephen Inbanathan for the introduction.

²⁵ Thus considering his entire life, Appasamy spent much more time dealing with church issues than with issues related to Hinduism and Christianity, despite his deep and sincere interest in the latter, particularly as reflected in his editorial work on *The Pilgrim*.

continued in that role after the closure of the BUCM, editing his last issue in January 1948 (vol. 7 no. 1).²⁶

2.3.3 P. Chenchiah

P. Chenchiah (1886-1959) had already become a known figure in Indian Christian circles when he took over the editorship of *The Pilgrim* in 1948. He was the most outstanding of the figures remembered in Indian church history as the Rethinking Group, from their most noted publication, *Rethinking Christianity in India* (Job 1938). In that book, Chenchiah led the way in a critique of the agenda for the World Missionary Conference that was to be held in Tambaram (on the outskirts of Madras, now Chennai) in 1938.²⁷

Chenchiah was from a Brahmin family but became a Christian along with his family when he was 15 years old. He studied at Madras Christian College and remained in good standing in the Christian Church throughout his life. He married a non-Brahmin daughter of a Christian pastor, in keeping with his anti-caste convictions.²⁸ He had a son and four daughters, none of whom married into Brahmin families.²⁹

He was one of the founders of the Madras Christo Samaj that became the publisher of *The Guardian* magazine in 1930 and later also developed the Indian Christian Book Club. He was appointed president of the Indian Christian Theological Conference, a fledgling group that only survived for a few years in the early 1940s.

Chenchiah's views of Hinduism and the relation of Hinduism and Christianity will need to be studied in more detail in the following analysis of *The Pilgrim*. It must be noted now that his

²⁶ At the 1946 meeting of the CSSH committee Moon "asked to be relieved of the editorship" of *The Pilgrim* in 1947. Note that more than a year passed between the last issue edited by Moon and the first edited by Chenchiah; this due to problems in shifting the registration, as noted by Chenchiah in 1949b.

²⁷ Chenchiah's detailed critique of Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, the basic text prepared for Tambaram, covers 54 pages as an appendix.

²⁸ See note 32 of chapter seven for Chenchiah's position on caste.

²⁹ This family information supplied by the grandson of P. Chenchiah, Mr. Sri Rajkumar Chenchiah, through assistance from Dr. Madhusudhan Rao, with thanks to both (email to me of Sept. 22, 2010).

opinions were too radical for more conservative Christians, and he was forced to resign as editor of *The Pilgrim* in 1952.³⁰

2.3.4 R. D. Immanuel

The final editor of *The Pilgrim* was R. D. Immanuel of Leonard Theological College. After the closure of the CSSH, a new Indian Cultures Society was formed, and the first of their publications was also called *The Pilgrim* and was numbered volume 15 number 1 in 1958. But from their second issue the name was changed to *India Cultures Quarterly*. As already noted, the NCC withdrew from the CSSH and threw its support behind the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society; their publication, *Religion and Society*, is perhaps better considered the successor of *The Pilgrim*. But there is yet a third claimant to succession from *The Pilgrim*; R. C. Das had his own small publication entitled *The Seeker*. With the closure of *The Pilgrim* he changed that name to *The Seeker and Pilgrim*, clearly claiming to be the true heir of the outlook of *The Pilgrim*.³¹

3.0 Conclusion

Despite three claimants as successor, *The Pilgrim* has been little noted since it ceased publication, and the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism fell off the radar screens of students of Indian church history. But the best of Indian Protestantism left a record of their interaction with Hinduism in the middle decades of the twentieth century in the pages of *The Pilgrim*. Chapters five to seven will provide analysis of *The Pilgrim*, but first the life and teaching of the central figure in the CSSH, R. C. Das, will be considered in detail.

³⁰ In his "Editorial Notes" that announced his resignation as editor, Chenchiah defined the issue as one of control, as foreign funding bodies objected to aspects of his work and threatened to withdraw funding (Chenchiah 1952g:2).

³¹ Das wrote,

"*The Pilgrim* was conceived in this holy city [Varanasi] of Bharat [traditional name of India], was born in Pallamcottai near Kanya Kumari [i.e. Appasamy's south Indian editorship] and ably nursed there and successively in other centres by worthy scholars like Appasamy, Chenchiah, Immanuel. But when in his early youth his foster-fathers have neglected him and even turned him out unceremoniously and in his place have brought in a hybrid monster, the young pilgrim true to his nature and destiny has returned to his natural home in Kashi Dham--the sanctuary of pilgrims and seekers. They will need the affection and blessing of our friends in order that the two brothers -pilgrim and seeker – might grow together in strength and serve hand in hand God and man in this land of sages and saints without fear and with the freedom of the Holy Spirit. (1958a:33)

The "hybrid monster" might be either *India Cultures Quarterly* or *Religion and Society*; probably the latter since that got the sanction of the NCC, who clearly are the "foster-fathers" of this piece.

4. R. C. Das

R. C. (Rajendra Chandra) Das was already introduced in chapter 2 since he was central to the Benares United City Mission. He was one of the founders of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism and remained the key figure throughout this history of the society. He was also a major contributor to *The Pilgrim* so an analysis of his life and thought is central to this thesis.

I wrote a brief introduction to R. C. Das in 1995 in editing a collection of his writings. My basic perspective has not changed in the 15 years since but this chapter provides opportunity for a more thorough introduction and analysis.¹ This chapter will outline the life of Das with a focus on early influences in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) leading to his conversion to Christianity. Then his understanding of Christianity will be discussed, followed by analysis of his position on Hinduism particularly from teaching in Benares Institute sessions and in *The Pilgrim*.

1.0 Background and Life of R. C. Das (1887-1976)

R. C. Das left behind an extensive autobiographical manuscript from which his early life can easily be outlined. The manuscript is in longhand and was written in the last years of his life.² The focus of this section is on formative influences on Das, with only a brief outline of his later career.

1.1 The Namasudras

R. C. Das was from the Namasudra caste of Bengal and presented his own interpretation of that community. This extensive quotation is important as it shows a creative tension between

¹ At that time I did not relate Das' basic approach to Bavinck's *possessio* as I do here, although I did suggest that his approach went beyond fulfillment.

² The last chapter is "Varanasi July 1930 - December 1973" (Das 1976:175); within the text is a reference to "at this writing (1976 February)" (Das 1976:110). Das died on Dec. 22, 1976. Page references are to the typescript copy of the autobiography rather than to the longhand version.

recognition of injustice in the history of his people yet positive assimilation towards equality (even superiority) in reference to Brahmins.

I was born of humble parents, humble in every sense, in the goods of this world, in education, in social status and supremely in spirit. My community though numerous (around three millions) was the progeny of fallen Brahmin ancestors. Historians say about the origin of this caste that their ancestors were the victims of the rage and curse of social authorities and kings like Ballal and Lukohman Sen because of some impertinence and disobedience or social law fault based possibly on a keen sense of justice and self respect. In those earlier centuries of Hindu rule in India society was strictly disciplined. My ancestors' social rights and privileges as Brahmins were snatched away and they were condemned and degraded as "chandals" an (ab)original caste who used to keep dogs and burn the dead. Soon they were being treated as untouchables. So this community of Kashyapa *gotra* (of the dynasty of Kashyap *muni*, the famous sage or *rishi* of ancient India) very wisely took to agriculture as their main profession. They have since then constituted the sturdy peasantry of Bengal, supplied food not only to the province but beyond its borders too, supplied fine soldiers to the Hindu kings and Muslims nawabs of Bengal. In modern times under British rule during the two world wars they specially supplied soldiers and labour corps. This is the only Hindu community that has been a rival to the Muslim mass and has acted as a bulwark against Muslim oppression and conversion of Hindu higher castes. These people, three million strong, were healthy, not too poor nor too rich, clean, industrious, brave and freedom loving. At one time they embraced Buddhism to be free from the social ostracism and persecution by higher caste Hindus. But when Shree Chaitanya appeared they turned back to Hinduism in his religious movement and became followers of Shree Krishna. Because this new religious revival was originally free from caste rules and provided a simpler and more natural faith than the strict Vedic religion. They worship Vishnu – the God of love and grace in his different forms or avatars such as Ram and Krishna. They have also supplied the bulk of converts to Christianity in Eastern and mid Bengal....During British rule they got and utilised, after struggle, fairly large opportunities in education and service with their castes (*sic*) to retrieve their lost position and influence. They have successfully competed with Brahmins and other higher castes and entered into all positions under govt. and into independent professions such as those of magistrates, judges, teachers, professors, engineers, legislators, doctors, lawyers and ministers. As a scheduled caste under terms of the constitution they have been entitled to many special privileges and provisions in public service and life. It is interesting that this is the *only non-Brahmin caste* in Bengal that has kept up Brahminic (Vedic) rites and ceremonies in their domestic and social religious life. They have experimentally proved in various ways in different spheres that they possess as much, if not more, the quality of head and heart as the highest among Brahmins....

Only a few of these groups of able bodied and brainy people have been reclaimed and redeemed by Christian missions, the Muslim brotherhood and the Arya Samaj. "Namasudras," as my community is normally known, are so called because they were "namasya" (salutable, respectable, as Brahmins) though formally condemned as Shudras and even worse. They were popularly abused and despised as "chandals" (untouchables and fallen) though in their professions, life, behaviour and character they can never be compared to the chandals of Hindu social and religious history, who used

to keep dogs and pigs, burn the dead, eat carrion and human flesh, and whose humble homesteads used to be near burning ghats or on the fringes of jungles outside the proper village or town. This name "chandal" of sheer hate and contempt now has long been withdrawn from usage on account of the community opposition and pressure of enlightened public opinion both from public records and social parlour. Though in the past there has always been keen mutual recrimination and bad blood between the Namasudras and the Brahmins, the rigid and unpleasant attitude is now much softened and mellowed. The community is now respected on acc. of good and faithful public service and their intellectual and spiritual talents. Many of the modern educated among them have intermarried with higher castes. Interdining and cultural contacts are now common among the English educated and western influenced intelligentsia of all castes and creeds in India. When I was young the conditions and relationships were not congenial or favourable. There was open conflict between the Namasudras and Brahmins. (Das 1976:5-6; emphasis original)³

In childhood Das encountered prejudice based on caste, as will be noted in section 1.2 below. Das' account of the Namasudras is not fully in accord with that of other researchers. The Anthropological Survey of India states that "the origin of the name, Namasudra, is uncertain," while giving two theories/legends both for the name and for the origin of the community (Singh 1998:2,572).

A. K. Biswas wrote an account of the Namasudras from a different angle than that of Das. The first sentence of his study indicates his anti-Brahmanical approach; "the scheme of creation of caste appears to be a result of concoction and deep-rooted conspiracy" (Biswas 2000:3). Biswas notes that the Namasudra name was officially adopted by the government of Bengal in 1911 (2000:23f.).

Biswas' presentation centers on the Namasudra-Brahman conflict.⁴ He points out that the Namasudras "refused to join the *swadeshi* [nationalist] movement and anti-partition [1905] agitation" (Biswas 2000:25), but as will be seen below, R. C. Das himself was part of that

³ Das also related an incident where Namasudras stood on their own variety of caste dignity; ...the Baptist Mission had a big plan to build a large hostel of their own in the mission compound itself. It would be for the Namasudra students, for high castes, even for Muslims and Christians all living together, eating in the same room without observing untouchability....The Namasudras refused to come as they also would not eat with Christians and Muslims....I was grieved that my caste students did not take advantage of this great opportunity....They were afraid of losing caste and being excommunicated. Caste is an evil genius that has invaded the high and the low equally. (Das 1976:39-40)

⁴ Another point of emphasis is the dispersion of Namasudras into India at Partition in 1947, and related hardships.

agitation.⁵ In reference to a visit of the Simon Commission, appointed in London in 1927 to study the next step in Indian constitutional reforms, Biswas concluded that

Needless to say, Calcutta, nay, Bengal, politically sensitive and radical, was not the place where a delegation by the despised people of Bengal could wait upon the commission. In the background of a year (1928) of intense political activity by great sons of Bengal, the deputation on 21 January, 1929, of the Namasudras and the Depressed Classes was indeed a landmark in *dalit* awakening there. The joint deputation was a watershed. Their unity marks an epoch and defies the upper caste (*bhadralok*) hegemony in Bengal. (Biswas 2000:33)

Biswas referred with scorn to Indian historiography which downplayed the organizing of Namasudra protest movements.

Historians, however, have taken [an] adverse view of the organised community action aimed at self-development among the low and depressed castes in Bengal. Their own predilection and bias is reflected more than anything else. Sumit Sarkar feels: "*British divide-and-rule tactics* (emphasis added) were much more successful, however, among the Namasudras of Faridpur who started developing associations after 1901 at the initiative of [a] tiny elite of educated men and some missionary encouragement." He adds further that the Namasudras "were untouchable poor peasants who felt upper caste gentry exploitation to be [a] nearer enemy than the distant British overlords." It is unfortunate that prejudice against an underprivileged people is flaunted as expert opinion. Did not Hindus devise their own brand of divide-and-rule in still cruder manner centuries before the British landed in India? (Biswas 2000:36-7; quotations are from Sarkar 1989:58, emphasis added is by Biswas)

Das' interpretation of the Namasudras emphasizes their progress rather than their continuing backwardness.

While in Calcutta as a student, I started a small magazine in Bengali entitled "The Namasudra" to agitate for the legitimate and all-round rights of my community and to rouse a sense of responsibility and obligation of the govt. and the educated rich higher castes to this benighted community. As a result within a few years a fairly large hostel for Namasudra students on the Amherst Street was built, because considered untouchable in those days they were not admitted to the ordinary hostels. Education among the Namasudra young soon spread and many were getting posts in govt. service. Within half a century the Namasudra community has made great strides in all stages of life. They have successfully competed with the higher castes and have risen high in the estimation of the public. They are at present not only equals to high castes but in many cases superior to them. In the ministry (state and centre), in parliament, legislative assemblies, in the political parties of the country, in trade and commerce, in professions

⁵ Das himself confirms the Namasudra abstinence from anti-British activity (Das 1976:72) without comment on his exceptional involvement.

such as medicine, educational service, engineering, law, in the fields of scientific and technological production, etc., they have risen high. There is hardly any sense of untouchability against them among higher castes. Many intercaste marriages have taken place. They no longer abuse them as "chandals." Among the scheduled castes, the Namasudras, one of the few largest, have been in the vanguard of progress. Apart from their own struggle, the sympathy of the British Govt. and the socialistic outlook of the Congress regime, as well as the sympathy and actual help of the different foreign missionary societies have been responsible for their rapid and phenomenal improvement in secular life. The only exception, which applies also to other castes, communities and groups, is in the field of morals and spirituality. They are still engrossed in idolatry, polytheism and many other Hindu religious and social superstitions and evil practices. Though a few have joined the Brahmo Samaj, the Christian church and the Muslim community, by and large, they are in darkness and lack truth and righteous. And they are as fully irresponsible, unconcerned, selfish and corrupt as the hundred and one groups of educated people in government or among the public. (Das 1976:76)

R. C. Das' life and teaching must be analyzed in light of his backward caste background as a Namasudra. He clearly believed in uplift through education and religious conversion, a path that he himself trod out of a village into advanced education and interaction with an international cast of characters struggling with issues of the times. His growth and development from low caste village roots will now be outlined.

1.2 R. C. Das in East Bengal

Das spent his first twenty-three years in East Bengal before shifting to Calcutta in 1910-11. By the time he went to Calcutta he was not only a baptized Christian but was emerging into a Christian leadership role.

1.2.1 Family life

Rajendra Chandra Das was born in 1887 in the village of Shyampur ("Krishnaville"), then about 12 miles from Dhaka (now integrated into the outskirts of the city).

The village of Shyampur, my birth place, has always remained a romantic place for me. It consisted of a dozen homes, houses of my grandparents, uncles and cousins possessing extensive lands and gardens, a *mali* or *malakar* (a gardener who rears flowers), a *bhuinmali* (village scavenger), one or two ironsmiths and goldsmiths, a few fishermen and carpenters, a grocer and a rich and large family of Sahas (technically untouchables though very clean and religious, of Vaishnava persuasion) and one solitary family of priests (Brahmins). (Das 1976:3)

Clearly the Das family was not destitute, as further evidenced by the fact that Dukhinath, father of Rajendra, owned a shop which sold ironware in a nearby town. The family was Vaishnava but not pure vegetarian as they ate fish (Das 1976:7). Das' mother died when he was three years old and his father remarried when he was "about eight," so for some formative years his father was the singular influence on his life (Das 1976:13). The family and particularly Das' father was deeply religious; in Das' words, "my parents believed in divine grace and miraculous healings" (1976:14). In this context Das also noted, however, that his father "also believed in *tolka* (ridiculous practice and trick and home remedy)" (Das 1976:14). Yet a sincere devotional spirit left a deep mark on young Das.

My father was a Vaishnava – a follower and devotee of Vishnu and Krishna. His strong moral character left a mark on my life. I also imbibed his faith and devotion. He was a popular and loved companion among the rich "Saha" tradesmen who were devoted Krishna Bhaktas and I became known to them as a young devotee and as a good student. (Das 1976:29)

1.2.2 Education

Up to age 15 Das was educated in village schools where "I was sharp at learning.... Everybody praised and loved me especially because I came from an ignorant village and a comparatively poor family" (Das 1976:15).⁶ It was related to the transition to high school that Das felt the sharp sting of caste prejudice.

There was no high school in Sabhar. To enjoy the govt. scholarship I must join one. My father consulted friends. He decided to admit me to the high school at Rowail a few miles across the river. This school was owned and conducted by our *zaminders* – landlords – a high class Brahmin family. Father had great hopes for not only my admission to the school but also for provision for me to live in the boarding house. He thought that we being their *praja* (subjects) they would have special interest and sympathy for me particularly in view of good results. So one clear morning we started for the place hoping to be fed there too at noon. We arrived there before the school started, met the headmaster. He was barebodied with the sacred thread hanging across his broad chest. We duly made our obeisance and were about to touch his feet when he sharply shifted them away. He could not allow himself to be polluted by the touch of the fallen Shudras (low caste people created by God with *tamoguna* – the quality of darkness). Simultaneously came forth from his shouting mouth many filthy abuses and the remark – "Don't you know this school is reserved only for *brahmacharis* and Brahmin boys. Be off!" We were kicked away (of course metaphorically!) We ran off for life and self respect. We could never think of such insult being hurled against us in

⁶ An earlier account of Das' conversion says up to age 13 rather than 15, as reprinted in Richard 1995:21.

our own home area from any man be he so high and mighty. We felt thoroughly dejected and broken hearted. It took us time to recover from the effects of such a shock. The incident made me pensive. Why has God created us so low as to deserve such cruel and contemptuous treatment? (Das 1976:15-16)

Having been rebuffed by the rural Brahmin school, Das was sent off to Dhaka where he lived in a youth hostel for Namasudras while attending school. He spent six years in Dhaka, completing high school, embracing Christianity and beginning college before moving on to Calcutta around 1910. In the new environment of Dhaka Das faced new freedoms and challenges. He recounted incidents of his rebelliousness against caste scruples:

We did not believe in the caste rules and we broke them and ate and drank from people who were lower in the social grades....We believed in the rightness of widow remarriage and inter caste and even inter-religious marriages....During meals we used to hold the glass when drinking by our left hand instead of the traditional custom of holding it by the eating right hand. The junior students of English High School started to imitate us. This made the authorities of the hostel bitter against us and complained that we were out to break the morals of *sanatan dharma* (eternal religion of Hindus). They suspected us to be hobnobbing with the Brahmo Samajists and Christians. (Das 1976:17-18)

1.2.3 Between the Brahmo Samaj and Baptist Christianity

In Dhaka, Das came in contact with new religious movements including the Arya Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission. But he was most attracted by the Brahmo Samaj and Baptist Christianity, and wavered between the two for some time. His autobiography refers to numerous points where he favored the Brahmo Samaj.

The Brahmo Samaj settled me in the faith of one God and brotherhood of man for the time being and I was somewhat satisfied and remained attached to them. The first phase in the conversion of my life was realised during worship one Sunday evening by hearing a hymn sung with the boomerang of the organ by a young devotee. I felt convinced, after the spiritual and intellectual vacuum created by the Arya Samaj, of the reality of one supreme God and tears flowed from my eyes. (Das 1976:30)

I particularly sought personal and private contacts with Acharya Gurudas Chakravarty (a retired headmaster and minister in charge of the E. Bengal Sadharan Brahmo Samaj), with Bhakta Amrit Lal Gupta bubbling with joy, and above all with Bhai Banga Chandra Roy, minister in charge of the New Dispensation Church of Keshub Chandra Sen founded after the great division of the Samaj. He was an old saintly man with depth of learning and spirituality and produced a deep impression upon me. I liked his sermons and prayers very much and devoured them eagerly. I was surprised to see that though a Hindu (Brahmo) he was fond of speaking about Jesus more than Buddha,

Chaitanya or Mohammed and drew his texts from the New Testament more than from any other scriptures. (Das 1976:31)

The Brahmo form of congregational worship on Sundays, and the Sunday school for the young boys and girls, along with songs, meditation, prayer and sermons appealed to me very strongly. Study of Brahmo literature, constant attendance at their meetings and private personal inquiry resulted in a gradual collapse of my faith in Hinduism. (Das 1976:31)

There was sufficient reason for my partiality to Brahmoism at that time. First of all, it was indigenous in every way; so naturally appealed to the heart and pride of a nationalist. Secondly, it possessed excellent literature in the vernacular and music of a high standard which, I believe, is the most effective instrument to attract men to religion and spirituality and to change their traditional views. Thirdly, it offered a reconciliation of the conflicting and competitive religions of the world.... Lastly, the Brahmo community was highly developed in respect of education (equally for men and women), culture, morals and religion and in women's emancipation from many harmful customs and ideas, in social reform and in balanced political life. Moreover it was a pleasant halfway house between Hinduism and Christianity. All these drew my attention and interest. I hardly found any good Bengali Christian literature and scarcely frequented the Christian church. I remember having gone to the Bengali service once or twice but it gave me little satisfaction. The whole thing appeared to be a got up show arranged by the foreign missionaries. The service was dry and formal; no *bhakti* (devotional spirit) was seen among the few people. It was words and words and sound and sound. No spontaneous spirit of worship that I saw in the Brahma *mandir*. Every thing, even the very atmosphere, seemed foreign and alien to my taste. There was nothing that could meet my spiritual hunger and thirst. (Das 1976:33)

But in the end, perceived weaknesses in the Brahmo Samaj and strengths in Christianity led Das to be baptized as a Christian. A significant influence throughout was from an Anglo-Indian Baptist missionary, Rev. J. D. Morris.

Mr. Morris' pious life and noble character led me to revere him. I became a regular weekly visitor (on Sunday noon) to his house. He did not live in the mission compound in the comfortable rooms with rich missionaries. He had a rented house in the midst of Hindu and Muslim populations. Except during storms he always kept his doors and windows open and people could see when and how he was eating, reading and writing and praying on his knees. He was an Anglo-Indian.... I liked him more than the other missionaries because he was a sadhu – a saint – a simple but staunch believer. He arranged a Bible study class...we used to hear attentively the simple story of Jesus Christ in wonderful words of life giving spirit. I found them so real, consoling and inspiring that they began to take root in my heart. (Das 1976:30)

Brahmoism stirred the depths of my whole being because it was intellectually more critical (and reconstructive too) requiring much mental exertion without the reward of consolation and peace: whereas in the Bible I found a sure, steady and lasting comforter, guide and inspirer whenever I read of the gentle and strong Jesus. I felt there

was something real and living behind the simple words of the Gospel. Gradually, the personality and character of Jesus Christ began to capture my imagination. I realised that the words of the gospels were not mere dead letters written on paper but full of inspiration and power above all soothing and life giving – and this is what my tired and restless soul needed most. (Das 1976:33)

1.2.4 Conviction of Sin and Conversion

It was conviction of sin that finally moved Das from attraction to the Brahmo Samaj to Christianity. In particular Das considered his political involvement to have led to sinful attitudes and actions. He had moved to Dhaka in 1905, the year agitation broke out over the partition of Bengal.

The living word of God warned me of a serious fact in my life. The life and death of Jesus and the teaching in the O.T. (the Psalms, prophets, and the Law) convinced me that God is not only loving, beautiful and almighty and easily pleased and forgiving with our tears (as Brahmoism taught) but that He is also holy and rightness and just. This incidentally referred me back to the Vedas and its teaching on sin and sacrifice in relation to the righteous Varuna – the chief god. The character that has been revealed through the gospel pages sinless, spotless, bright, transcendental brought out my own character in its true colour not as painted by public opinion or my own limited imagination. It told me plainly that I was a miserable sinner unworthy of the Heavenly Father's love and affection, not to speak of his forgiveness....My involvement in politics – in the Boycott Movement as a volunteer, benumbed my conscience and weakened my moral fibre. Hatred and violence though in a good cause soiled my good and humble conduct. This was caused by wrong one sided teaching of the Gita and overemphasis on the importance of political freedom....I felt condemned for my wrong deeds perpetrated though in a noble cause. My sins were deeper than those raw ones of the flesh. My sins flowed from the devil himself and from the world. I was too much devoted to my enslaved mother India and tried my little bit to unshackle her even by unfair means. I was born with a spontaneous hatred and spirit of contemptuousness against the followers of Islam. Coming into close contact with them in my volunteer's work and in the class room and school and in playing games and also the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj on humanity and brotherhood of man had a softening effect on my unfair attitude. I acquired, through politics and due to undue patriotic fervour, a spirit of keen hatred against the British and all western and so called Christian colonialists and imperialists. This hatred attendant with violence and untruth was like wild and burning fire. My sins were rather spiritual and intellectual. The moral character of Jesus in its bright purity and light shed a scrutinising ray of truth into my inner soul and heart and mind and gave me a realisation of these wrong attitudes. It especially revealed my moral complacency and self righteousness that I was a good young man above the average. The opinions of my teachers, my student friends, and the public with whom I came in contact including my *acharyas* and the missionaries confirmed this subtle

Pharisaism. Coming face to face with Jesus in moral grandeur and utter humility and self giving love I broke down and was humbled. (Das 1976:34)⁷

So an organisation of one of the first volunteers groups was completed with fifteen of us young students offering our services enthusiastically. We were taken to a lonely and deserted Shiva *mandir* (temple of god Shiva) on the outskirts of the city and there bowing before the lingam (the phallic symbol) we took pledges and promised to obey our leaders and captains absolutely. We were given regular instructions, allegedly from the Gita, as I did not know the Gita teachings well and accurately in those early days. We were told that in the service of the motherland to free her from slavery one could do anything, adopt any means – falsehood, cheating, telling lies, exercising violence, theft, murder, arson, dacoity, etc. etc. I beat many people with *lathis* – Hindus and Muslims – villagers – who would dare to come to town, purchase foreign cloth, salt, and other goods. I burnt much cloth and drowned quintals of salt into the river, violently obstructed shops having British goods. We were normally four, sometimes more of us, working together. Our normal instrument was bamboo *lathi* (stick) but some of us and sometimes in certain localities we used to carry knives and pistols....The violence and other unethical means adopted freely meant much suffering and financial loss to the public. Along with this political service for the country I carried on my studies and enquiries into religious truth and spiritual life. My growing moral and spiritual convictions convicted me and I gave up political connections by 1908 after 3-4 years of twilight activities of doubtful good. (Das 1976:40-41)

Das' involvement against the opinion and action of his community is indicative of an independent spirit and willingness to act on his own opinions. Yet he related these incidents due to his sense of guilt due to hate and violence, and his conversion to Christianity which appeased his conscience.

I tested Christ both theoretically and practically by believing in him and I found him rationally true and experimentally living and strong. In him I found my highest ethical ideal through his teachings realised in his actual historical life and conduct. Through his straight words and the kind of life he lived in close identification with God I found authentic assurances of a Divine Reality who is our loving and just heavenly Father. The necessity and purpose of the death of Christ at Calvary became clear to me. In the cross of Christ, "Justice and mercy met and kissed each other." God fulfilled the demands of Law and justice by punishing his only begotten son for human sin who made it his own. Thus propitiating for sin God made available to man free salvation and forgiveness once and for all thus satisfying the constraint of his love and mercy. There was true and lasting reconciliation between holy God and sinful man through his eternal love for his creation. As I linked myself to him as dying through faith, my sin to his love and righteousness through trust, and surrendered my will to his, I found myself electrified with his spirit, my sense of guilt removed, my burden of sin fallen, the black stain washed away by the sacred blood of the Lamb of God, my restless spirit cooled by the crimson stream from the cross. The heavens were opened as it were and a new

⁷ In this context Das also mentions a foreign preacher, Frank Lenwood of the LMS, as mentioned in chapter 2 section 2.5, who presented "a thorough analysis of sin enveloping body, mind and soul" (Das 1976:35).

vision of life crossed my mind. I got a new life through a new birth in God through the operation of the Spirit. (Das 1976:36)

1.2.5 Reactions to Conversion

Das was primarily influenced by Baptist missionaries during his days in Dhaka so was baptized by immersion in 1908 at age 21, the same year he ceased his radical political activism. Das' father was hurt ("deeply wounded...very sad") by his baptism and on Das' first visit home to the village afterwards he was shunned as untouchable (Das 1976:18-19).⁸ There was also opposition in Dhaka and Das finally left the Namasudra hostel and stayed with Morris. Das' father once warned him about a plot against his life, and Das tells of knowing about a case where a Namasudra convert to Christianity was poisoned by his own mother. But even in light of these things Das affirmed that

Though I became a little circumspect against possible and further persecution from society in general I never lost confidence in my father, family members, my hostel friends and the majority of the leaders of my community who showed towards me a great liberal spirit of toleration, appreciation and even love. (Das 1976:19)

So Das maintained his connection with the Namasudra people despite his conversion to Christianity. In his new Christian community Das quickly emerged as a future leader. Immediately after his baptism Das became a member of the Christian Endeavour Society, and a year later in 1909 he was elected as a delegate to a World Christian Endeavour convention held in Agra over Christmas of 1909 (1976:25). He also joined missionaries occasionally on their preaching tours (1976:26) and wrote out his conversion story which was published in 1911 and distributed by the missionaries (1976:39).

1.2.6 Das the Christian Convert

When R. C. Das surrendered to "the Divine Person in Jesus as guru and God" (Das 1976:160) it was in the context of an Enlightenment-inspired construct of world religions so that he was rejecting the Hindu religion and embracing the Christian religion. In the early twentieth century Indian context the reification of separate Hindu and Christian communities was still in process, particularly the politically motivated construct of a single Hindu community. Yet

⁸ More details related to Das' baptism are given in Richard 1995:34-7.

Das was engulfed in this double reification of Christian religion and Christian community and necessarily entered into tension with his birth community (Namasudra). The career and thought of R. C. Das are a lifelong struggle with this Enlightenment-based reified construct of the meaning of his surrender to Jesus.

1.3 Calcutta Years

Das arrived in Calcutta in 1910 or 1911 as a college student in his early twenties, and left eight years later as a mature young adult. In his autobiographical reflections there are over eighty pages of tight typescript discussing his years in Calcutta, mostly comments on various events, organizations and individuals.⁹ Already while in Dhaka Das had become engaged in Christian ministry, having felt a call from the day of his baptism (Das 1976:22). It was during the Calcutta years that he came to strong convictions regarding ministry in Indian rather than foreign ways.

1.3.1 Education

Das first completed his B.A. in Sanskrit and philosophy at the Scottish Church College, and later completed his M.A. in philosophy at St. Paul's College. Immediately after completing his B.A. Das went to the recently reorganized Serampore College to study theology.¹⁰ He was not happy here, either with the theology or the spiritual life of the college, so returned to Calcutta after two years to do an M.A. in philosophy instead.

⁹ The autobiography is somewhat chronological up to 1930 when Das moved to Varanasi, at which point it becomes a summary of key institutions developed there followed by geographically arranged memories of events, people and organizations, with sections entitled Dehradun, Shillong, Bombay, Hyderabad, Delhi, Lucknow, Ranchi, Calcutta, etc.

¹⁰ Das claims to have "joined the first band of 15 students after the reorganisation of the College" (Das 1976:50). Das does not mention the year, and there are some difficulties working out a consistent chronology from his account. He clearly states that he made a trip to Darjeeling after completing his B.A. and before Serampore (1976:50) and at another place dates the Darjeeling trip to 1912 (1976:85). A history of Serampore College suggests that the Higher Theology Department was opened in 1910, in 1912 there were six internal and seven external students for the Bachelor of Divinity course (contra Das' fifteen) and in 1915 the first three theology students graduated (Christadoss 1961:37-8). Das clearly referred to having done two years of B.A. study before joining Serampore (Das 1976:48), so this points to a 1910 arrival in Calcutta; but Das clearly affirms a 1911 arrival in his autobiography. There is, however, a discrepancy as he says in closing one chapter that his Calcutta arrival was "early in 1911" (1976:41) while in opening the next chapter under a heading of 1911-1918 he says of the Calcutta arrival, "if my memory serves me well, on a bright June morning..." (1976:41). He did also himself indicate a 1910 arrival in Calcutta in Das 1962a:7.

1.3.2 Church Relations

On completing his M.A. in 1916 Das was confirmed as an Anglican and appointed as a missionary evangelist. This shift in denominational affiliation was explained.

I owe to the public some explanation justifying this transfer of church loyalty personal though the matter be. I have already mentioned my unhappiness over the divisions of the church of Christ into numerous denominations and sects – not so much over the different groups themselves as over the feeling of estrangement and lack of fellowship and even the existence of wrong ideas and the spirit of hostility and unhelpfulness among the groups. I made a fairly good practical and theoretical study of the motives and implications of separatism. While I found some reason for difference in the system of church government and methods of worship and observance of the sacraments and for a variety of emphasis on some doctrines due to racial, national, and cultural background and because of normal freedom of the human mind, I could not justify the narrowness of mind, actual social and religious separation and consequent lack of brotherliness, and even mutual recriminations prevailing in the denominations particularly among the smaller sects. As a believer in the kingdom of God and its partial and imperfect realisation on earth through the universal church and backed by Vedic heritage of broad humanity and world idea and also driven and buffeted by the caste system, my mind was holding the ideal of the Holy Catholic Church apart from and transcending and even in spite of sectarianism. I discovered that the Church of England was occupying a more or less middle position bet. Roman Catholic and other uniform and authoritarian and nonevangelical churches on the one hand and the ultra Protestant groups like Baptist and Pentecostals on the other. The Anglican Church maintained the concept of the Catholic Church and possessed and practiced enough of the evangelical principles. Though I kept up my fellowship for long eight years with the Baptist church and took the trouble of traveling several miles to the Entally Baptist church to make my communion and though I liked the life and conduct of the then pastor – Mr. Banerji – the youngest son of the famous leader Kali Charan Banerji – Registrar of the University, I could not reconcile myself to their fanatic adherence to what is known as Congregationalism prevalent both among Baptists and London Mission churches as also among Scotch Presbyterian churches in north India. This congregational independence and individuality was fatal to the unity and fellowship of the church. I felt it strongly even while the idea of church union was being feebly talked about. (Das 1976:60-61)

In light of this appointment as an Anglican evangelist it is worth noting that Das had earlier been rejected for a similar position with the Baptist Missionary Society. Apparently the missionaries supported Das but Bengali Christians did not.

I was informed by [missionary J. N.] Rawson that the result was negative and a majority rejected my application. He was cut to the quick in sorrow and disappointment. But he confessed to one important thing. Those who outwardly praised me – my qualifications and character went against me at the time of voting and even

Mr. Nag who was so keen apparently, absented himself deliberately at the voting time from the meeting. Mr. Rawson sarcastically said "your own countrymen were mostly against you." I could understand it easily and told him that probably they were afraid that my entry into the mission field would add to the competition for the loaves and fishes of mission service. (Das 1976:89)

Das also recounted a story of the Anglicans suggesting that he join "the brotherhood of the Anglican clergy" (1976:114). In his summary, the appeal was that

India needed to begin to have Indian bishops with evangelical views. They were no longer satisfied with exclusively white hierarchy. They wanted to mix the black with the white and the supposedly inferior with the imagined superior – Indian and English and thus prove the true equality and partnership in Christ. (Das 1976:114)

Das confessed to being impressed by this, but in the end refused the proposal saying

I can live [a] simple Christian life more freely in accordance with his word of instruction and with his way of life in the atmosphere and under the inspiration of Indian spiritual and moral culture than in that of Anglican and other churches of the west. These churches and constitutions and methods of worship are all right in the countries of their development but not helpful to Indian converts to Christianity. Here I am making a necessary and true distinction bet. the faith of Christ and the religion of Christianity, bet. Christian truths and morals on the one hand and their developments in life under certain climatic, social, geographical, historical and even political conditions on the other. (Das 1976:115)

1.3.3 Marriage

Das' autobiography has numerous stories about attempts toward marriage that did not work out. There were some early efforts by his father that he himself resisted, including during his college days "so that my religious fervour might be curbed" (Das 1976:16, 32). A Brahmin convert who was a Presbyterian minister, Rev. Lakshmi Narayan Choudhury, made an effort to arrange a marriage for Das with a high caste background Christian girl as an intentional effort to break caste feeling in the church. But this failed; "Neither of us could think that after conversion to Christianity and among members of the church caste bias was so strong" (Das 1976:62).

In the end Das married a Namasudra girl after being approached by her uncle who worked for the Baptist Missionary Society. Sarojini Sircar was from a Christian family in East Bengal but was studying in Bethune College in Calcutta. In May of 1917 the marriage was performed

in the village of Gopalganj in East Bengal. Serious marital problems developed later and will be commented on below.¹¹

1.3.4 Teaching

Das began teaching even while studying for his M.A. and on completion taught philosophy at St. Paul's College. He described his approach to teaching.

I did not like the orthodox and hackneyed way of lecturing from the platform and letting the students take "notes": some of these notes of professors of Calcutta used to get printed and many students who wanted to shirk work would commit these to memory a short time before the examination and vomit them out on answer papers....I got disgusted with the idea of giving notes to students to make it easy for them to pass their exams....Instead of being on the professor's dais, in the chair or standing, I would prefer walking through the aisle and the sides of the classroom amongst the students to talk to or converse with them. It prevented them from feeling cosy and falling into slumber and they learnt more through the method of questions and answers. It was somewhat like the way Socrates used to teach in his peripatetic ashram or the way our Lord Jesus taught in close contact with the people. This method created good interest in lessons amongst many of the pupils but the majority did not quite like it as it did not allow them to lean comfortably and take a nap, rather kept them alert. Though I acquired some unpopularity I went on in my way. (Das 1976:63-64)

Das' views on church and mission were yet more controversial; section 1.3.5 will outline his retrospective reflections on lessons learned during the Calcutta years. The controversies related to views on mission led to Das being relocated to Agra in 1918. Rev. W. E. S. Holland was principal of St. Paul's and had befriended and encouraged Das all through his Calcutta years. In 1918 he was returning to England for an assignment and he feared Das coming under unsympathetic leadership. He proposed Das to travel to England with him, but Das refused. So he suggested that Das fill an empty post for teaching philosophy at St. John's College in Agra, and that is what happened (Das 1976:117).

¹¹ As Das attempted to marry out of caste he also did not consider caste in the marriage of his children. His eldest daughter married an Anglo-Indian (Das 1976:233).

1.3.5 Retrospect on Calcutta Years

In his autobiography Das summarized seven convictions gained during his years in Calcutta. He exposites each of these points at great length, but for present purposes the exposition will be trimmed to a minimum.

My 8 year period of completing my studies and beginning of some teaching work, my association with various people and institutions, created in me certain ideas and aspirations and confirmed and reinforced others. This will be a sort of resume of my growing and grown convictions.

(1) *I felt quite sure that the foreign system of church and mission of Christian enterprise in India needed a thorough overhaul, though not in its basic purpose, at least in its over structure....* It was sad that the mission work of redemption of man and society through the grace of Jesus was more like a war against Hinduism and Islam. The spirit of hostility, opposition, confrontation, attack, fight has been rampant in the rank and file of preachers – Indian and foreign. The idea was that heathenism was an enemy to be killed rather than a fallen brother to be lifted up....

(2) *The Christianity represented by modern missionaries for the last two centuries in North India has not impressed the country for various reasons....* In the first place it has come in the wake of British colonialism and imperialism. The people could not see any difference between British civil servants, traders and the missionaries or the chaplains. They were actually mixed up....Then the religious life of missionaries and government appointed priests appeared to our countrymen very unsatisfactory....Christianity was a finished product, spick and span and in good trim....So there has been no creative thinking or dynamic action in the life of the church. Whatever it has done has been imitative. So we want a great release and breakthrough from this slavery of mind and will....For real indigenisation genuine Indian personnel – and not the ones trained in mission-established theological schools or trained abroad, Indian name, Indian living standard and style, Indian music and literature are essential....The basic reason why the Indian church has been so cold and sterile, indifferent and diffident, uncreative and static is the absence of genuine life. Even if they had accepted the truer and higher values of western culture, they could have been creative in a western sense. But Christians generally adopted the tinsel of western civilisation and religion and have indulged in cheap imitation. After all, how could even spirituality grow when Christianity was presented in western terms and colour to the Indian mind and heart....

(3) *Hinduism has been an absorptive force....* Hinduism successfully met Buddhism by accepting Buddha as a Vedic *rishi* who was essentially an agnostic Vedantist and even as an avatar of Vishnu to appeal to the popular mind....Hinduism has accepted in toto the ethical, spiritual and humanistic teachings of Christ and have (*sic*) even imitated the works of foreign missions in modified forms....The Hindu spontaneously accepts the teaching, the spirituality, the truth of Christianity – the light and life – the *logos* and the *antaryamin* – the Holy Spirit. He experiments on the faith, grows in it and his inner life slowly affects his external conduct and his social life – purifies and changes it. In some cases this process may end in baptism. In most cases not. But it is producing in the

entire body of Hinduism a new fellowship in thinking and spirit which bids fair to change the whole aspect of Hinduism in time and issue in the genuine national church of India....

(4) *The foreign planted church must, for its own good and in its true and lasting interest, shed many of the customs, behaviours, ideologies, loyalties they have borrowed from western civilization and take active interest in the struggles going on for the creation of an egalitarian and prosperous society in India – a truly democratic and socialistic state....*

(5) I felt quite strongly that *the desire of missionaries and mission boards overseas to hand over power to Indian hands was not quite sincere in all cases.* Their idea was to have remote control. So they selected Indians who would not use their judgment or did not have any ability but to obey and remain grateful in a servile sense....

(6) *In all the foreign missions they have always appointed one or two missionaries to keep a watch over their properties.* These watch dogs have sold out large properties without the knowledge, or with the willing approval of their Indian lackeys....

(7) *Theological Education....* The only bare reference they make to Hinduism or Islam is covered by their course on the history of religion which is very theoretical and lectures are given by teachers who possess only some book knowledge.... The church's renewal to spiritual life and revival to evangelism are the two dire needs of today. The theological student who is supposed to be responsible to generate this in church life is encumbered with too many and some unnecessary courses of studies....In most cases, especially in the so called Evangelical Bible schools – social and cultural life is thoroughly western – American in particular.... In the less inhibited atmosphere of the ashram young folks with requisite qualifications of head and heart will have scope to think freely, interpret the word of God in indigenous terms, cultivate music and produce literature and acquire a spirit of go and be dynamic and creative. (Das 1976:118-128; emphasis original)

This statement provides a good introduction to the thought of R. C. Das on Christianity, which will be discussed in section 2.1 below. Das' objection to the way of Jesus being promoted as a war against Hinduism and Islam indicates his discomfort with the reified category of world religions, a topic developed in section 2.2.1 below. His objections to the influence of the West in Indian churches assumes the validity of a separate Christian community, but he desires for that community greater adaptation to the cultural traditions of the emerging new elites of India. Before examining further the struggle of R. C. Das with these constructions of the meaning of discipleship to Jesus this survey of Das' life and work will be completed.

1.4 Calcutta to Banaras

Das made a number of transitions between his departure from Calcutta in 1918 to his arrival in Varanasi in 1930. These will be briefly noted here.

1.4.1 St. John's College Agra

The reason for Das' transition to Agra was already noted in section 1.3.4. He was advised that his national dress, which he habitually wore in Bengal, might not be so appreciated in Agra, so he changed to modern dress for the Agra years (Das 1976:129).¹² Das considered the student-teacher relationship to be more relaxed and more intimate in Agra than it had been in Calcutta, and he was appreciative of that (1976:130).

Das spent three and a half years in Agra, at the end of which he was again requested to go to England for further training. But he was determined to return to Bengal and get involved in evangelistic work.

1.4.2 CMS Evangelist in East Bengal

On returning to Bengal with his family (3 children) Das was assigned by the CMS to Kushtia, a mission station that had been without a missionary for 14 years. A school was functioning there but it was under Das' initiative that a church which doubled as an evangelistic hall was constructed.

Das said that "a community of converts grew" during his time in Kushtia, but he was dismissed from his position due to his allowing a Hindu to share about Christ during one of the evening evangelistic programs. Attempts at reconciliation failed to satisfy Das that he would truly be free to minister as he thought fit, so he left the CMS in 1922 (Das 1976:153-157; see also Richard 1995:7, 43).

¹² Das has used Western dress to indicate status during travels in East Bengal previously as well (Das 1976:95).

1.4.3 Church of God Ministry

After leaving the CMS Das had offers to return to teaching in Rangoon or Punjab, but on his mother-in-law's counsel he waited in anticipation of another opportunity with a focus on evangelism. That opportunity came from the Church of God based in Anderson, Indiana, in the USA, which was under national leadership in India. Das spoke highly of this group despite some serious reservations.

I liked their life and ideas except excesses in the matter of divine healing and denouncement of the use of gold ornaments. There were some tragic casualties because prayer and faith were not effective in curing certain diseases. (Das 1976:162)

This group was also highly separatistic; "They invited members of churches to come out and join the true Church of God....Large numbers of Christians who came out would be rebaptised by immersion..." (Das 1976:162).

Das worked under this mission from 1925 to 1930 in the north of Bengal (now Bangladesh) at Kurigram. In that remote station he had freedom to work as he pleased and he was permitted to retain membership in the Anglican Church even while serving under the Church of God (Das 1976:164). In both their sectarian denominationalism and their healing focus the Church of God is outside the mainstream of historic Christianity, yet Das did not sufficiently object to these emphases to remain aloof from association. He was an advocate of healing ministry throughout his life, though not in the extreme form advocated by the Church of God.¹³

1.5 Banaras Years

Das moved to Banaras on the invitation of J. C. Jackson of the Benares United City Mission and the BUCM was Das' ministry affiliation until it closed in 1946. Chapter two surveyed the work of the BUCM including a summary of Das' work, so that material will not be reviewed here. Das lived in Banaras for another 30 years after the closure of the BUCM so this section

¹³ In his autobiography Das attributes his "initiation into the mysteries of Christian healing in the right sense" to Hickman Johnson of the Methodist Missionary Society (Das wrongly says CMS) during his Calcutta years (Das 1976:102).

will look at some aspects of his ministry and personal life from those years in order to present a complete perspective on his life and work.

1.5.1 New Ministry Initiatives

With Das' organizational affiliation ending due to the closure of the BUCM he became affiliated with the National Missionary Society based in Madras (Das 1949a:20). Two major new developments in the ministry of R. C. Das after the closure of the BUCM will be briefly noted as both are essential for any adequate analysis of the man; a failed initiative will also be noted.

1.5.1.1 New Magazines

Das launched a new magazine called *The Seeker* in the spring of 1947, the year he would reach his sixtieth birthday. There is no indication that the launch of this magazine was related to the closure of the BUCM, although the timing is suggestive. The name of the magazine was changed in 1958 to *The Seeker and Pilgrim*, very definitely in relation to the closure of the CSSH and *The Pilgrim* (as noted in section 2.3.4 of chapter 3). Yet another change followed in 1963 when Das' publication became *The Church of Christ*, which closed only in 1973 when Das was 86 years old.

The purposes of *The Seeker* were clearly outlined in the first issue:

- Review and criticism on important events and opinions.
- Advocacy of radical and independent thinking.
- Encouragement of new experiments, progressive movements, ventures of faith and indigenous efforts such as
 - a) Christian ashrams,
 - b) Study of Hinduism,
 - c) Indian form of worship,
 - d) An indigenous church in India,
 - e) An Indian Christian theology,
 - f) Christian literature, etc.
- Promotion of peace and concord among all men on basis of truth.
- Freedom and toleration.
- Justice for the oppressed, neglected, deprived, weak and helpless. (Das 1947a:n.p.)

These themes are not surprising in light of what has already been revealed about the life and teaching of Das. The magazines clearly had only a very limited circulation, to the point that the only set still extant is Das' own copy presently held at the Roman Catholic Bishop's House in Varanasi; even individual copies can hardly be found elsewhere.

The first theme above, review and criticism of events and opinions, very much marked the three publications. Das freely criticized church and mission practices, sometimes rather harshly. Examples are not hard to find in my collection of Das' writings (Richard 1995), so one example which the publisher wanted removed from that manuscript will suffice here:

It will not be an exaggeration, though rather a shocking surprise to many, to say that the whole mission church system is saturated with corruption, nepotism, irresponsibility and sheer selfishness in the whole of north India as far as our knowledge goes. (Das 1951b:19)

Relational strains such as those evident in the BUCM would not have been eased by Das' publishing his ideas and criticisms. Roger Hooker, who met and interacted with R. C. Das in Varanasi in the 1960s, shared an incident with me related to these criticisms.

Bishop Christopher Robinson (CIPBC Bishop of Lucknow and then of Bombay, and member of the Brotherhood of the Ascended Christ in Delhi until his death about three years ago) once told me that Das would publish the most outrageous stuff about the church in general, and if I remember right, about Robinson in particular, and then be utterly charming on personal meeting. Das certainly had reason to be bitter about the church, but I do think there was probably a streak in his personality which somehow "answered" his unfortunate experience.¹⁴

In this matter of strained relationships with fellow Christians I still support a suggestion made in my 1995 study of Das.

Das seemed simply not to understand why friends would be troubled by his public criticisms which he considered were made in the cause of Christ and truth. (Richard 1995:4)

Another aspect of Das' relational problems will be discussed further in section 1.5.2.1 below.

¹⁴ Personal letter to me, in my possession, dated 19th August 1991. Das did not in fact write against Robinson by name, although he did against his immediate predecessor in Bombay, Bishop Lash.

1.5.1.2 A New Church Movement

In 1953 (*The Pilgrim* was still under the editorship of R. D. Immanuel) the constitution of a new church movement was released by R. C. Das and his "retreat conference" partners (Das 1953a:6). Das traced the origins of his retreat conferences to 1912 when he began gathering "converts, young Christians of some talents and Christian leaders of an independent outlook" for discussion of church and mission issues (Das 1976:200). By the 1930s the National Council of Churches was helping subsidize these gatherings, particularly the participation of students and independent Christian sadhus (Das 1976:201).

The purpose of the new church (the Bharat Khrist Sangh), as recounted by Das in his autobiography, included "the destruction of sectism and promotion of unity of all those who believed and professed Christ as their Saviour and Lord" (Das 1976:201). Yet the constitution of the church included an indirect attack on the existing churches in this definition of the hope of the church:

The church shall pray and wait in patience till other Christian denominations and sects created by modern western missions in India will so modify and reconstruct their spirit and constitutions that they will be apostolic and catholic in doctrine and practice, be adequately integrated into the life of the country and also freed from administrative and financial control of the west. Then, this church as a separate entity will automatically come to an end and naturally coalesce with the others so that the whole will become a distinctive Indian branch of the Holy Catholic Church.... (Das 1953a:11)

It is not a surprise, as acknowledged even by Das, that this new church development was not understood or appreciated.

The emergence and activities of this body have recently created certain misunderstanding and misgivings in certain quarters of the church in India....Let us state emphatically that this is dominantly a fellowship of life and prayer and frankly an evangelistic agency. None has to sever his connection with any church, unless he deliberately wants to on his own initiative. It is an attempt to unify certain very scattered and diverse elements and bring to a common mind many very individualistic persons. Its annual retreat conference has been doing splendid service in this direction bringing together for meditation and study of the Bible sadhus, sanyasis and unattached preachers of very different outlooks. (Das 1956a:19-20)

In 1958 Das wrote an exuberant report of the growth of the new church movement, with 215 workers, over 200 churches and over fifty thousand constituents represented. These figures

were from two networks, Das' Bharat Khrist Sangh and the All India Federation of National Churches (Das 1958b:17-18). Yet Das acknowledged that his network had "many very individualistic persons" and the All India Federation was not a reputable enterprise. J. S. Williams ran afoul of the Anglican hierarchy but won court cases against them regarding a church in Mumbai. Williams was appointed as an archbishop by the Russian Orthodox Church and from that platform was the leading figure in the AIFNC. Das' own summary of their approach was

To promote the cause of the National Church he [Williams] went all over north, east, west and mid India and wherever he found a few families of independent minded Christians dissatisfied with foreign missions and their churches, he chose one or two of them and ordained them as priests or bishops to form a nucleus for a potential indigenous church. The consequence in most centres has been bad blood, feud and even litigation bet. the old established church and the new comer. Only the future will show whether such a policy has been sound. (Das 1976:217)

Das wrote this nearly twenty years after the events, yet still did not see his way clear to completely reject this divisive organization. This reality must also be taken into account in forming a final evaluation of R. C. Das.

1.5.1.3 An Ashram Property

Immediately on his arrival in Varanasi Das took steps to start an ashram, initially on the mission property where his family resided along with the Jacksons. Das explained the rationale in his autobiography.

There was a modest building standing vacant on one side of the compound which could accommodate twelve persons in four rooms at a time. This house was self-contained with kitchens, water pipes and latrines. I suggested that this building be given over to me for ashram purposes. If there were married enquirers they could be put up in the two rooms inside in the bungalow that were reserved for guests and visitors. The name would be Khristpanthi Ashram and would be directly under my control and run on indigenous lines....I intended to preach the gospel in the name and under the auspices of the national institution rather than the name of a foreign mission. This was to my advantage. Though I received my meagre allowance from a foreign organisation and lived in a mission house, I decided to work as an ashramite. (Das 1976:179)

This building became the home for those who attended Benares Institute sessions for training related to Hinduism. Das did not live in this building and there is no record of any other long term residents, so it was not a vital center for ministry.

Das also initiated the opening of a library and reading room right in the heart of Banaras, just up from the central Dashashwamedh Ghat. In his account of an average day's work, the Dashashwamedh center was the key location (Das 1976:180). When the BUCM closed down Das had to move off the mission compound, and he ended up living at the Dashashwamedh center, which at that point in 1947 became the Khristpanthi Ashram. This was an effective ministry center but as a rented property in the midst of a city was not a traditional ashram.

In his magazine in 1954 Das presented a prayer request for a new ashram property; "Please pray that the question of land for the Benares Ashram may be settled soon acc. to God's plan" (Das 1954a:20). A few months later Das referred to two years of waiting on a request to Lucknow Diocese for land for an ashram to be owned by the NMS (Das 1954b:33). In light of all the controversies stirring around Das it was probably not realistic for him to expect a favorable reply. At any rate, no new ashram ever developed and Das died in 1976 in the Dashashwamedh ashram.

1.5.2 Personal Matters

That turbulence in Das' personal life developed along with the organizational discord in the BUCM and CSSH is probably not a surprise. There are few details available on the private life of R. C. Das but there is enough to indicate that there were some serious problems.

1.5.2.1 Family Crisis

In Das' magazines he wrote openly about his struggle related to the illness and death of his second son. The problems in his marriage were never openly discussed.

In October of 1991 in Simla I taped an interview with Amarendra Kumar Das, eldest son of R. C. and Sarojini Das. A. K. Das was born in 1918 just before the Das family moved to Agra. He vaguely remembered Agra and had clear memories of later events until he moved

away when the family was in Varanasi. Six other children survived childhood including three daughters; one young boy died during the stay in Kurigram.

Two of the sons left home quite abruptly in the early 1940s to join the military. One ended up with Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army and died in Burma. The other had regular health problems (already in 1952 there is reference to three years of problems, Das 1952c:12) and died from tuberculosis in 1960 under Das' care in the Dashashwamedh ashram (Das 1960:18).

In his autobiography Das says little about his wife. He affirmed her full support for the shift from Bengal to Varanasi in 1930.

After return from [an initial visit to] Varanasi, and some further thinking and prayer I decided to join the B.U.C.M. I consulted my wife who gave her full and glad consent. Probably she preferred Varanasi to Kurigram for the former's better climate, association and importance as a centre. (Das 1976:173)

Also in Das' magazines his wife was mentioned a few times. One referred to the difficulties of the transition on the closure of the BUCM, when the family left a comfortable mission compound to live in tight quarters in the heart of the city.

It is now over a year that I have been living with my wife and one or two children in this thickest and most crowded part of this great Hindu city. Coming out of the mission house I had to take shelter right in this working centre which I have now used for 18 years, because I could not secure any decent house on rent anywhere else in the city. I am thankful I could fall back on this. Though it has meant scattering my family here and there and constant breathing of air thick with dust and noise we have kept wonderfully well. It is all God's great goodness. We have also gained much in spiritual life in patience and faith and deeper personal touches with our neighbours. I am grateful to those who have given gifts however small, to enable me to carry on the work. (Das 1948a:35-36)

This conflicts with the memory of A. K. Das, but since he had left Varanasi many years earlier it is perhaps not a surprise that he did not keep some dates straight. A. K. Das stated that his mother left Banaras before Partition in 1947 and stayed in East Pakistan for most of the rest of her life. R. C. Das first refers to his wife being in East Pakistan in a brief note in *The Seeker* in 1950, where he comments that she had left over a year previously and is

"occupying our little property lest it should be requisitioned by [the] Pakistan government" (Das 1950a:31-32).

A. K. Das revealed to me just how severe the marital problems were.

My mother was very jealous; by nature, by nature I tell you, really very extremely jealous; almost to psychotic. And she used to, even when we were children, she used to accuse my father of infidelity....My mother was accusing him unnecessarily. Not only that, my mother used to get into a rage sometimes even at our dining table. It is terrible to think of, she would take one of the plates and just throw it at him. Even these porcelain plates and hard things that could hurt my father very badly. Sometimes he even got injured. This sort of thing used to happen over an argument. All my sympathy was for my father; I thought that this is the cross he is bearing, this unhappy family life. (A. K. Das:1991)

When I questioned A. K. Das further about these scenes and when the origin of the conflicts might have begun he traced his memory and then added some speculation.

Even in Kurigram it was there. It was a part of their married life. Very soon after marriage I am sure. Terrible things. It was really not normal, when you lost faith completely in your husband. (A. K.Das:1991)

A. K. Das confirmed that there was truth to the story of the property in E. Pakistan, but there was the deeper reason of marital problems behind his mother staying there. In 1952 R. C. Das mentioned that his wife had visited from E. Pakistan (Das 1952c:12), and A. K. Das remembered some visits as well. But mostly the couple remained separate right up to 1967 when R. C. Das announced his wife's death in his magazine.

Acharya Das has passed through a shadow in recent weeks. He has twice suffered from influenza....While in Calcutta he received news of the passing away of Mrs. Das who had been living in E. Pakistan for some time and was unable to cross over for personal and political reasons. (1967b:13)

A. K. Das indicated that there was no tension between the Das children and either parent, it was entirely between husband and wife. That R. C. Das had serious relational problems in his own home as well as in relating with church and mission leaders raises suspicions about his culpability in these matters, but his son was adamant that from his perspective his father was not at fault in the marital discord.

In his autobiographical reflections Das made an observation regarding a perception he had of the impact of foreign ways on Indian Christian wives:

As has been my lifelong experience Indian women in foreign mission service – whether teacher, preacher, or nurse midwife – acquire a highbrow attitude, and fussy in many ways they forget their natural Indian situation and temper. (Das 1976:109)

There is no suggestion that he had his own wife in mind in writing this, but it was stated as a general truth which certainly would apply to her to as significant extent. Of course, Das thinking in this way can be considered a possible cause of marital tension in its own right. That the separation occurred shortly after the closure of the BUCM forced a move from the mission compound to a crowded apartment in the middle of the city is another extenuating circumstance. There were also constant financial strains after Das left the BUCM, as will be demonstrated now.

1.5.2.2 Financial Strains

In late 1950 Das wrote about "adverse circumstances" and "difficult times" (Das 1950b:2). That finances played a significant role in that is clear from a later statement; "Good friends have come forward to relieve our financial distress" (Das 1950b:3). In 1963 Das referred to lack of finances impacting his magazine and his interaction with other people.

We regret to say that lack of funds causing lack of space prevents us from printing many useful things. Our poverty also interferes with regular correspondence with our friends everywhere. (Das 1963:14)

An explanation came in the next issue, which was the first under the new name *The Church of Christ*. Das was in debt and had to close the magazine he had edited for 17 years from Banaras.

Henry Rodrigus, a convert from Catholicism who carried on a ministry in opposition to the Catholic Church, had been cooperating with Das in the effort to develop a new and truly Indian church, and he offered to print and bind *The Church of Christ* without cost, leaving Das only the paper and postage costs. In announcing this Das referred to "the kindness and generosity of our sincere and faithful friend....courageous leader of the 20th Century

Challenge..." (Das 1964:11). But in his autobiography Das said this about Rodrigus and his ministry.

Bro. Henry Rodrigus was a dynamic and firm brave personality. Some differences with Romanism were real. They were honest in separating and in their protest. But their method of abusive criticism of everything Roman is not justified. They saw nothing good in [the] Catholicism of Rome. They were hard hitting with harsh language accusing the hierarchy of many evils and sins. (Das 1976:203)

This is another example of Das' complex relationship with the institutional church and his cooperation with radical separatists. The point here is that his radical friends enabled the ongoing publication of a magazine for a few more years when he was in financial crisis.

By 1969 due to the financial problems Das was speaking about closing the ashram. He stated that for the past four years it had been sustained by the generosity of one family in Calcutta. "As I have arrived at an age when no hard work or responsibility is possible the ashram will have to cease" (Das 1969:16). But this did not happen.

Already in 1970 new plans were stirring and the ashram revived. A new resident came and Das made plans to live in Bengal and occasionally be present in Varanasi (Das 1970:30). Neither of these plans developed, but a Roman Catholic and an Evangelical joined the ashram shortly thereafter, and Das expressed confidence in this team; "It will be an ideal combination united in the one faith of Christ and based on sympathetic mutual understanding and good will and Christian charity" (Das 1971:29).

Once again Das' dream of a vital ashram, now run in Catholic-Evangelical cooperation, was not realized. In 1973 he closed his magazine after 27 years of writing. In 1976 he died alone in his ashram.

2.0 The Christianity of R. C. Das

The life of R. C. Das has already revealed a great deal about his understanding of Christianity and of Hinduism. He was not a theologian who left clear systematic teaching regarding his Christian position, yet he did in his mature years present a clear statement of his *Convictions of an Indian Disciple* (1966). That these convictions have a practical slant rather than being intellectualist is not surprising in light of the life Das lived.

This thesis, however, is focused on the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism, and Das wrote enough articles for *The Pilgrim* magazine that his perspective on Christianity can be culled from that publication which is central to this thesis. So this discussion of the Christianity of R. C. Das will be based on writings in *The Pilgrim*, with careful reference to *Convictions of an Indian Disciple* and occasional reference to the abundance of other writings by R. C. Das.

Central to Das' Christianity was the unique supremacy of Jesus Christ. Christianity was discussed from different perspectives, with Das being highly critical of most expressions of Christianity in India. But this section will highlight the genuine *possessio* viewpoint that R. C. Das developed as the proper "Christian" approach to "Hinduism."

2.1 Jesus Christ as Unique Savior

R. C. Das promoted and practiced sensitivity in communication with Hindus, yet he was unwavering on, and completely free to refer to, the "supremacy and uniqueness" of Jesus Christ. This is easily documented from *The Pilgrim*.

Herein is the urgent need of discriminate and understanding presentation of the supremacy and uniqueness of Christ by a Christian apologist. (Das 1942:12)

Constructive, positive and definite presentation of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and of the divine grace and power of the cross and the resurrection is pregnant with momentous consequence....Exalt the ethical nature of Christianity and magnify the moral transcendence of Christ's personality. (Das 1943b:22-23)

...Jesus Christ – the Saviour God and the PRINCE OF PEACE. (Das 1949b:19; capitalization original)

We must present directly and honestly Christ Himself – his gospel of redemption.... They [Hindus] need, and that badly, the touch of a true and living master (guru) and regenerative standards. Only the person of Christ can satisfy them. (Das 1951a:13)

The first chapter of *Convictions of an Indian Disciple* was titled "The Unique Christ" (Das 1966:1) and presented both a biblical and theological exposition of this theme. This was unquestionably the foundation for the life and thought of R. C. Das.

How Das developed and applied his understanding of the uniqueness of Christ provides further insight into his perspective. Two topics that are immediately related to this point are raised in this statement from *Convictions*.

But the way and the form in which this truth of the uniqueness of Christianity has been preached or stated has made it appear controversial to many minds both Christian and non-Christian. (Das 1966:3)

The manner of speaking about the uniqueness of Christ was a great concern to Das, yet here he conflated the uniqueness of Christ and uniqueness of Christianity in a simplistic manner that needs careful analysis. Section 2.2 below will demonstrate Das' understanding of the historical and cultural relativity of Christianity. Yet he did speak of the uniqueness of Christianity, as in this statement.

Only living Christianity of the simple apostolic type with emphasis on faith and healing and prayer can be a match against the active idolatry, caste and priestcraft of Hinduism. Hinduism needs primarily Jesus Christ the living Saviour and giver of new life and Holy Spirit....a unique Christianity represented by the early church which stands for full salvation, liberty, brotherhood, joy and abundant life in the Holy Spirit. (Das 1942:10)

The unique Christianity that Das occasionally referred to, also called above "living Christianity of the simple apostolic type," seems more an ideal to seek than a reality. Thus Das can exhort that

If Christianity could be more united, more humble and loving and serve in simple faith and trust, [Hindu] orthodoxy will melt and welcome the Lord of life and saviour of mankind. (Das 1942:13)

The point here is that living is more important than intellectual constructs, and the failure of Christianity is related to its failed practice. This was a major theme in the teaching of R.C. Das.

The stress must be put on vital evangelical truths, not on doctrines and dogmas or creeds, on life rather than theory, spirit rather than form....The emphasis should be on experience rather than on rationality. (Das 1942:10-11)

A rhetorical question lists some of the appurtenances that easily get in the way of the unique Christ;

What have we to offer to the Hindu? – dogma, doctrine, church, Christian civilization, apostolic succession, all thinly veiled under the name of Christ? (Das 1951a:13)

It is Christ himself who must be presented, but the presentation has to be consistent with both Christ and the context of India,

...a Christian life of meditation, of search and realisation, of witness, love and service, lived under fully Indian conditions with Indian ideals and inspiration....a right Christian life in the intellectual and spiritual climate of India. (Das 1943b:20)

The uniqueness of Christ, then, is not only an academic concept but a life transforming reality. It is, again from *Convictions*,

...a conviction far surpassing the demands of pure reason or mere dictates of missionary motive but compelling attention and acceptance by its sweet reasonableness, its all-round dynamic and creative value. In a word, this uniqueness must not only be proclaimable but livable. Can we live by it and show forth its power and grace? (Das 1966:4-5)

Das' focus on the uniqueness of Christ is thus not about the truth of Christianity or the church and particularly not about the superiority of Western civilization. It is about a life transformed by the reality of Christ, not an abstract truth for intellectual debate.

2.2 Christianity as Historically and Culturally Relative

That Das could speak of Christianity as unique was shown above. He far more consistently referred to the relativity of various expressions of Christianity, and particularly critiqued the Christianity being presented in India. As a mid-twentieth century English educated man, Das was comfortable referring to the reified constructs of religion, Christianity and Hinduism. Yet he also consistently undermined these constructs as he wrestled with issues in the Christian encounter with Hinduism.

2.2.1 Das on Religion

In a paper promoting new experiments in religion Das wrote a pregnant paragraph with a number of seeming definitions of religion and Christianity that in fact affirm his practical as opposed to theoretical approach to faith and life. This lengthy statement from *The Pilgrim*

will be quoted in full so the relation of the parts as presented by Das is clear; some key aspects of the statement will then be analyzed.

Truth and religion, if not merely abstract and rationalistic, admit of experimentation and application under differing conditions of time and place. Christianity to my mind being concrete truth revealed in the personality and character of Jesus Christ and also because it is truly universal and catholic is not only capable of, but stands in need of local, temporal, racial and national self-expression. Self-propagation and energetic activity with a redemptive purpose and idealistic impulse as its source are of the very essence of the religion of Christ. To realise itself and to communicate and apply its principles to various situations, the spirit of Christianity must of necessity take note of and use as its field of operation the varying racial, national, and local heritages, and even historical and geographical conditions. The Christian activity presupposes and assumes the need of institutions and ventures which will make it real and adapt to local circumstances the great truths of Christianity. This realization and experimentation will be both on individual and collective lines. This is correct and is bound to happen when religion can be defined as integrated love consisting of and subsisting in both truth and grace. When religion is presented as doctrine, as teachings different from a Saviour teacher, when religion is presented as a theology or a creed, instead of defining it as faith in a personal God or even when while not ignoring the personal aspects of truth, the doctrinal, dogmatic and institutional sides are over emphasised there is hardly any room in that atmosphere and situation of close authoritarian vigilance and dictatorial direction for ventures of faith or experiments of hope and final attainment of love and joy. Experiments are in their very nature new and bring freshness and life when successful. (Das 1949b:16)

In his opening statement here Das is clearly pointing away from religion as a system of doctrines and ideas. Further against that, he later objects to religion as doctrine, theology or creed. But it is much easier to speak against constructs of religion than it is to positively define the concept, and Das does not do well with the latter. "Faith in a personal God," "a Saviour teacher" and "integrated love consisting of and subsisting in both truth and grace" are impressive and suggestive constructs, but that they define religion (and Das does refer to defining religion) is dubious. My point here, however, is not to criticize Das' definitions so much as to illustrate him struggling with the inadequate intellectual constructs of his time.

The definitions of Christianity in this statement are equally problematic. First is it defined as "concrete truth revealed in the personality and character of Jesus Christ." Personality and character do not easily lead to truth in propositional terms, and no doubt Das intends this dissonance as he is seeking to undermine rationalistic definitions. Das goes on to speak of the "essence of the religion of Christ;" that essence is said to be "self-propagation and energetic activity with a redemptive purpose and idealistic impulse as its source." Religion as activity for the good of others is not an objectionable concept, and clearly seems to be one of the

points Das wants to get across in this paragraph and paper. Yet Das then goes on to speak in a highly reified sense of "the spirit of Christianity" and "the great truths of Christianity," and I am not able to integrate such expressions with his comments on religion and his wider perspective on Christianity as often seen in this chapter and as to be outlined further below. This again to me is a struggle with inadequate constructs, just the constructs that are still being wrestled with at the present time (as discussed in chapter one sections 1.1 and 1.2).

In his autobiographical reflections Das also wrote at length on religion, first giving something approximating to a definition of the Hindu religion and then commenting at some length on the Christian religion. Again the full statement will be quoted so the context is clear, and analysis will follow.

Again on another occasion this time at the Y.W.[C.A.] after a discourse on the relative position of Hinduism and Christianity I was being described as almost a Hindu by the innocent members of Y. W. and the visitors. And why not? I have never repudiated it. The difference between a religion and its faith and truth is crucial. Hinduism as a religion – culture, *sadhana* (cultivation) through different forms of dharma karma (religious and devotional behaviour and performance) such as meditation, silence, scripture reading, visits to holy places and saints and scholars, domestic and social rites and ceremonies, bigger national festivals, feasts and fasts, life of discipline as pilgrims and seekers, emphasis on the moral and spiritual denouncing the material and the worldly, in practicing ahimsa (nonviolence), etc. etc. – a convert inherits Hinduism. Its values and goods which have shown him the way to Christ as the O.T. prophecies led the Jew to the Messiah. These partial lights and truths are a discipline and preparation for the enquirer for understanding and acceptance of the truth of Christ as the incarnation, saviour and God to *be followed* as an example and leader and lord of life. This is the convert's ancestral heritage. It ought to be adopted and assimilated into the inheritance of those born in the church. My views on religion, creed, faith, truth, and my way of indigenous life and work have puzzled many and set others a thinking. This is because so many of the church members have just borrowed western ideas and practices of the Christian *religion* developed in America and Europe and quite rightly and naturally for them. But they have in the process to understand and receive the true meaning and purpose of the gospel of peace and salvation – the faith and truth of Christ as the revealed of God and redeemer of man. The truth of the gospel is universal, the religion in which the truth is concretised for man is local and temporary and changeable from age to age and culture to culture. The gospel being divine and universal is understood and accepted equally by all nations and by all men but religion is evolved by man under the leadership of the Holy Spirit in different countries in different forms in different colours according to their native genius and the cultural climate. Unfortunately the Christian servants from the west have given to Indian converts the outer shell more liberally than the inner kernel of Christianity. And most of the Christians being of the lower strata of Hindu society, devoid of the power of thinking and discrimination, have forthwith and gladly received the concrete and attractive

forms of religion rather than the deeper and obscure (to them) and abstract truths of Christ. (Das 1976:209; emphasis original)¹⁵

Das himself identifies the key to interpreting this statement, which is the "crucial" point that religion is different from "its faith and truth." The next sentence associates religion with "culture" and "*sādhana*," the latter defined as "cultivation" but perhaps "spiritual exercises" or "spiritual method" is preferable.¹⁶ The point Das is making becomes clear when he says that "religion in which the truth is concretised for man is local and temporary and changeable...." Here it is clear that religion is a relative vehicle of truth (the truth of the gospel in Das' immediate context) and many different religious expressions are possible in reflection of the truth. The closing two sentences above then distinguish between the outer shell and attractive forms of religion and the inner kernel or abstract truths that are the deeper reality.

Much in this statement remains cryptic, so rather than hard conclusions it is better to see bracing suggestions. Das affirmed that a convert from Hinduism to Christianity inherits Hinduism, and had no objection to being described as "almost a Hindu." This "ancestral heritage" of the Hindu who converts to Christianity also needs to be "adopted and assimilated" by those who are born into Christianity. This suggests that Das sees the Hindu religion as potentially able to "concretise" the truth of Christ; at least it affirms that Hindus who follow Christ do not need "the Christian religion developed in America and Europe." For those born into Christianity, this is a description of what is now called inculcation or contextualization, the expression of discipleship to Jesus in local cultural forms/contexts. When Das defines religion in terms of culture and affirms many different cultural expressions of Christianity he is clearly suggesting that there are and should be many Christianities as opposed to the reified concept of an eternally true Christianity that also appears in his writings, as noted above. The tension between these competing conceptions is not resolved in Das' writings and is seen throughout his treatment of both the Hindu and Christian religions, terms he accepts and uses despite often providing evidence that this is an unsuitable paradigm for the complexity of the phenomena he is engaging.

¹⁵ The elitism and condescending tone of the last sentence here will not be discussed due to the focus on the concept of religion at this point. There will be later reflection on Das' elitism and in section 2.2.4 and in the final analysis of Das in section 4.0.

¹⁶ Walker's *Hindu World* gives this description; "Siddhis are also considered to be the direct or indirect result of a quest for enlightenment or knowledge. The pursuit of any method for attaining to such knowledge is termed *sādhana*" (Walker 1983:394).

2.2.2 Christianity as Religion

By speaking of the uniqueness of Christianity and the spirit of Christianity and the great truths of Christianity one gets the idea that R. C. Das believes in an absolute Christian religion that exists beyond time and history, and it does seem that an element of this reified construct is present in his thought. But he consistently speaks against this in sufficient volume and with sufficient emphasis so that it seems necessary to reject this as his prevailing opinion. Even the quotation above where the spirit and great truths of Christianity were referred to is primarily written against the construct of a religion with objective rational existence.

The concrete historical and cultural manifestations of Christianity, particularly the varieties of Christianity that entered India from abroad, are regularly referenced and critiqued in Das' writings. Evidence for this point will be presented in section 2.2.3 below on the problem of Indian Christianity, but a few statements in support of this position will be presented here.

To meet Benares effectively no one type of Christianity represented by a particular communion is adequate. Common fellowship in living and corporate witness is essential. (Das 1942:10)

Das thus relativizes all expressions of Christianity, undermining any appeal to one Christian denomination as better than others. In *Convictions* he clearly relativizes all expressions of historic Christianity in light of Christ;

We must not confuse or obscure the uniqueness of Christ by over-emphasising historic Christianity. The two must be disentangled for the sake of a clearer vision of the Christ, the Unique whom Hindu India will behold, adore, worship and obey. (Das 1966:6)¹⁷

In his autobiographical reflections Das speaks quite harshly against existing Christianity in favor of what he longs to see develop in India.

The Christian religion which has been developed in Europe and U.S.A. has elements which are unintelligible and unsuitable to Indian mind, heart and genius. If the seed is sown the Indian genius is creative and dynamic enough to grow the oriental body of

¹⁷ I need to point out again that there is inconsistency in Das' writings; in discussing his position on Hinduism in section 3.3 below I will discuss a comment that includes reference to "pure Christianity" (Das 1967a:11) which does not fit neatly with the strands of Das' teaching on Christianity being highlighted here.

Jesus Christ and a church which would be a complement to the so called Catholic Church which is really one sided, narrow and defective in more than one sense. (Das 1976:199-200)

Yet despite this perspective Das could affirm the necessity of joining the Christian religion. The context of the following words is significant as they were addressed to K. Subba Rao, the unbaptized disciple of Jesus in Andhra Pradesh.

Where is the necessity for accepting Christianity? First of all we do not embrace a religion but come and accept Christ, take shelter in him and surrender to him as saviour, lord and God. Such *bhaktas* – devotees, disciples or believers enter a visible fellowship – called the church – the body of Christ through the rite of baptism for mutual encouragement and helpfulness and for access to a body of right belief and a pattern of Christian behaviour as well as for the fulfilment of the purpose of Christian life. But all this is centred in and round the person of Jesus Christ....A person can be a believer without accepting baptism, church or Christianity but he will be in a precarious condition. It ought to be clear to any thinking man that by becoming disciples of Christ we also accept his way, his teachings and commands. These, when systemised, harmonised, believed in sincerely, interpreted and cultivated, give rise to doctrines, worship, evangelism. These latter form the religion of Christianity or the Christian religion. Doctrines are truths of Christ embodied in human language as correct as available. So doctrines are changeable in form as the language or terms of thought change. Similarly worship forms, evangelistic methods, are bound to change from age to age, country to country. But their source, spirit and substance are in Christ who is constant. So, when one believes in Christ, his faith to be full and effective must issue into membership of his body and the Christian religion subject to the understanding and distinction hinted above. So, in accepting Christ primarily as the *acharya* (lord) of life, a man by implication accepts (is grafted into) the body and religion however remotely and secondarily. (Das 1972:11-12)

Religion is here related to "doctrines, worship, evangelism." Since following Jesus involves these things, one who embraces Jesus is necessarily embracing the Christian religion. But the forms of doctrines and worship and evangelism rightly change, so the implication that one joins the Christian religion is only remotely and secondarily true and necessary. K. Subba Rao refused the Enlightenment-inspired reifications of Christian religion and Indian Christian community; R. C. Das never broke entirely free of these constructs despite his relativizing of them as in this statement.

2.2.3 The Problem of Indian Christianity

R. C. Das' concern about the problems of Christianity in India has already been illustrated in outlining his life story and in the discussion just above. The magazines he wrote and edited

for many years were full of critical reflections on the church, making it noteworthy that when he summarized his message in *Convictions of an Indian Disciple* the negative element was minimized almost to non-existent.¹⁸ Two statements from *Convictions* will thus introduce this analysis of the problem of Indian Christianity as seen by R. C. Das.

The church has always, against heavy odds, both internal and external, been trying to realise the values of the kingdom within its religious and secular life. It is the best institution so far evolved among men and gives us an earnest and a practical demonstration, under severe limits, of the kingdom. (Das 1966:9)

...I know that Christianity is the most convincing and self-consistent piece of theology and provides the best philosophy of life to any serious seeker of God and Truth. (Das 1966:31)

These positive statements, however, cannot be considered to outweigh this evaluation from Das' autobiography.

This is where the church had been failing. They had been trying to establish in India a hostile church, alien civilisation and a narrow religion by aggressive and virile methods instead of preaching the universal gospel of peace and love and building men's hearts into a heavenly fellowship – which would automatically be the true church of Christ not Roman or Protestant. (Das 1976:159)

Similar sentiments are present in Das' contributions to *The Pilgrim*.

We must admit, frankly and in humble penitence, the failures and weaknesses of the historic church. It would be untrue and extremely unwise to equate and confuse, as many do, the church with the kingdom of God....To make pretentious claims to divine infallibility and authority for the visible church puts Hindus on their mettle and they see in so many churches the same arrogance, hypocrisy and intolerance as they see in their own caste divisions and priestly orders. Humility and love will win, where Pharisaism and mere constitutional propriety or theological correctness will utterly fail. (Das 1943b:23)

Earlier in the paper just quoted Das outlined a five point analysis of the internal situation in the church in India in relation to the development of a Christian apologetic for Hindus. Those five points will conclude this presentation of Indian Christian problems as seen by R. C. Das.

¹⁸ Perhaps the work of editors at the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society had something to do with this.

A. ...*independent thinking* in the Indian church is absolutely essential....an excess of caution with a compulsory direction of thought-life on the part of authorities and fear of consequences on the part of budding scholars and mystics will inhibit all dynamic thought processes. Until Christianity becomes self-conscious, voluntary and self-respecting through self-exploration and daring experiments, any presentation of its message and meaning to Hindus or others will be lifeless and unappealing like stage-acting prompted by external maneuvering.

B. ...Practically the whole Indian personnel engaged in the church and mission organisations – some of whom would have made a mark in life under different circumstances – have been thinking second-hand thoughts and merely imitating other's deeds....Indian Christian initiative cannot emerge where the Western genius has full scope and play.

C. Let us remember that at this stage of the development of Christianity and of the national life in India, an emphasis on the importance of the institutional aspect of the church – its huge and complex administrative machinery and its highly organized and yet divided life – will be an obstacle to the spontaneous growth of an apologetics of the right type. This should not be construed to mean that in the writer's opinion organized Christianity is wrong or useless. All depends on the emphasis and where it is laid....

D. Individuals and groups unconnected with and not responsible to church and mission authorities but not necessarily unorthodox or disloyal to the church's tradition and authority on that account, will be in a more favourable position to achieve success in the field of indigenous theology and apologetics. Christian ashrams and educational centres as well as centres of Hindu learning and religion will provide the appropriate atmosphere for creative thinking and dynamic living if the thinkers and writers, saints and mystics, are assured of not only non-interference, but even positive sympathy and support from higher authorities. It is more natural and probable that Christian apologetics will be produced by individuals and small intellectual and spiritual fellowships than by official committees and councils....

E. Therefore the rise of a sound and effective apologetics is vitally dependent upon the attainment by the church in India of true autonomy and initiative. A church administratively mixed up and subservient and economically dependent and a Christianity intellectually pauperised and unrelated to the national heritage cannot be in a position to produce a suitable Christian apologetics to meet the high demands of Hindu India. So the first prerequisite is the independence of Christian thought and healthy vigorous Christian life in this country. (Das 1943b:17-20)

2.2.4 Analysis of Das on Indian Christianity

The exposition of Das' position on Christianity already included comments on his use of the complex term religion and his seeming acceptance of the reified concepts of Christian religion and Christian community. His very negative portrayal of the Indian church, despite the occasional compliment, calls for comment before proceeding to the positive strength of Das' Christian position in relation to Hinduism.

Much of Das' analysis of the dependence of the Indian church and the deleterious influences that follow such dependency rings true. This type of dependency has been studied in south India (Houghton 1983) and in broader international Christian circles (Schwartz 2007). But the standard that Das applied to Indian Christianity is open to question. Despite his low caste roots, Das became at home among elite Indian Christians and viewed Christianity in the context of the emerging elite Hindu movements.

Das' perspective on Hinduism will be studied below, but it is clear that he desired Christianity to relate to high caste Hindu traditions, which is fair enough in light of the people among whom he worked. But a deeper recognition of the multiple cultures of India and the multiple contexts, particularly low caste contexts, with which the way of Jesus needed to interact, would have at least altered the direction of some of his objections if not completely muting them.¹⁹

The marginalization of Christianity in India was outlined in chapter one section 4.2.2, and Das had some awareness of this problem. In the second issue of his magazine which celebrated Indian independence he wrote on the Hindu-Muslim communal divide which he attributed primarily to selfishness and sinfulness rather than religious differences. He did, however, point out that Hindus believed a common nation was possible while Muslims thought a separate national identity was necessary. Das raised the question, "will Christians behave like Moslems, and when they grow a little larger, claim distinct nationality and culture?" (Das 1947b:14). He rued the possibility and called for care to be taken against such a development. Yet, as Chandra Mallampalli (2004) demonstrated, the damage had already been done in legal enactments during the colonial period. Das does not seem to have been sufficiently alert to this aspect of the problem of Christianity in India, and a more refined critique of the church would have been possible with this perspective.²⁰

¹⁹ See Harper 2000:140ff. for an insightful and even humorous look into the life of Bishop V. S. Azariah regarding the complexity of contexts in India and questions of to whom one communicates what in choosing ecclesiastical vestments. Cf. also Frykenberg 2008:225 on ecclesiastical architecture.

²⁰ On a related political note, Das objected to Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism, pointing out that "these socalled conversions have been actuated by non-spiritual motives" (Das 1956b:27). He questioned the lack of Hindu opposition to this proselytism, and suggested that Christian conversions would be similarly unopposed if foreign ties were not involved.

2.3 Das and *Possessio*

R. C. Das developed a genuine *possessio* perspective on the relation of the gospel of Jesus to Hindu traditions, even to the point of using the term "possess."

Will Christianity face and touch this Hinduism from outside from the standpoint of an institution and a creed however good and true and thus supplant it or contact it and possess it, revivify it and regenerate it like a dynamic movement of the Divine Spirit? (Das 1943b:17)²¹

This perspective was developed at some length later in this same paper and in various other writings. Das did not center on the term possess, so my interpretation of him as advocating this perspective does not match his own self-understanding. But Das did not give a name to his approach, and the data supports that what J. H. Bavinck referred to as *possessio* is present in Das' teaching.²²

Das' *possessio* position will first be developed from *The Pilgrim* and then confirmed from *Convictions*. The following long quotation is provided so that the full context of the various statements is present, with analysis of various aspects of this statement to follow.

Attacking Hinduism from outside is like beating the wind or the water – Christianity must leaven and transform Hinduism from the inside. Votaries of truth need neither be alarmed nor delighted that in the process a good deal of Hinduism will be surely destroyed. It is the conviction of the writer that eventually Hinduism as a system will die a slow natural death and live within the church as a force, inspiration and mentality. Should Christianity or need Christianity suppress, supplant and uproot Hinduism or rather should Christianity transplant, transform, vitalise its ideas and institutions with Christian spirit, direction and motive? It is futile to attack Hinduism from without, however spiritual our weapons of warfare. A militant religion cannot destroy another

²¹ The next sentence is also a question, "Or is there a harmony available of these two methods of approach?" Das does not hint at what a harmony of an outside and an inside approach might look like and his further teaching to be noted here supports that he intends taking possession as the proper approach.

²² Das also at times used traditional apologetic Christian terms and compared the truth of Christianity with false Hinduism. An example is his comparison of salvation where, in comparison to the holistic approach of Christianity, he states that this

is in sharp contrast to Hinduism....This difference can be fully established by a comparative study and critical appraisal from the theoretical standpoint as well as from a practical experience by following the two ways of salvation. (Das 1957:3)

That there is one Christian and one Hindu way of salvation that can be so simplistically compared goes against the grain of Das' overall teaching. Even in the paper quoted he undermines this appraisal with a reference to diverse Hindu opinions ("Hinduism...promises a hard won far-fetched release from birth....or it is a very easy forgiveness...." (Das 1957:3)). His inconsistency in this area is not an isolated affair as similar tensions and failures are highlighted in this chapter.

religion that looks inward for power and support. The Christian leaven must be allowed to work from within. If this is done Hindu institutions and organizations – its legalistic system – will die, while the true treasures – the ethical and spiritual values – cleansed and replenished by Christian graces, will live within the church. Up to now the Christian leaven has worked very partially in the intellectual life of educated India but the spiritual springs and moral intuitions of Hinduism remain untouched. In a way it is quite urgent to influence the social and public life of India with the Christian verities of liberty, equality and fraternity and with the Christian standards of purity, truth and rectitude – which is possible only if and when the Christian community will act as salt and light, losing itself in the service of men, always being ready to discharge obligations without claiming rights for itself. (Das 1943b:22)

There is an immediate problem here in the reification and personification of "Christianity" as an active agent in encounter with "Hinduism." This type of description of Christianity was already discussed above in section 2.2.1, and Das' view of Hinduism will be the subject of section 3 below which will build on this analysis. At this point my focus is on interreligious encounter and how R. C. Das perceived the meeting of faiths. The encounter of reifications expressed in this paragraph will only actually happen through human agents and institutions, and Das is clearly on record (point D in the lengthy quotation in section 2.2.3 above, for example) that among Christians it is small groups or individuals who will creatively engage Hindu contexts.

Das was clearly commending a *possessio* perspective for followers of Jesus engaged in interreligious encounter with Hindus. These people must be inside Hinduism, seeking to "transplant, transform, vitalise its ideas and institutions" so that "the ethical and spiritual values" of Hinduism "live within the church as a force, inspiration and mentality." This is only one aspect of the *possessio* perspective Das spelled out, with more practical details to follow later.²³ But the paragraph currently under discussion raises the issue of hegemonic triumphalism which will be addressed before proceeding further.

When Das suggested that the result of interreligious encounter will be that "a good deal of Hinduism will be surely destroyed" and that "Hinduism as a system will die a slow natural death" one questions why a Hindu would embrace interreligious dialogue with such an end in view from the Christian side. Two points can be made to offset what seems to be a bias for

²³ The relationship of Das' perspective outlined here to the diffusion of Christianity approach of William Miller mentioned in chapter 1 is complex. Primarily it seems Miller spoke only in generalities, but perceived Christian influences strongly impacting Hinduism. Das here has Hindu terms and values strongly influencing Christianity, which is quite a step beyond Miller. On the other hand, Miller's affirmation of Chetty following Jesus as a Hindu seems to be exactly what Das is pointing towards.

the Christian position here. First, even in this statement Das was implicitly critical of Christianity; he was appealing against an external "religion vs. religion" approach which was the traditional Christian way. When he said that "a militant religion cannot destroy another religion that looks inward for power and support" the context was that Christianity should not erroneously see itself as militant in confronting Hinduism which looks inward, with Das clearly favoring the latter (Hindu in his interpretation) approach. Das was not explicit, but he was certainly suggesting that "a good deal" of Christianity "will surely be destroyed" in effective interreligious encounter between the two faiths, and recognizing this takes some of the sting out of the suggestion that Hinduism will die.

The suggestion that "Hinduism as a system will die" is a second point where analysis lessens the initial shock of the statement. Tensions and inconsistencies in Das' understanding of Hinduism will be the focus of section 3 below, but clearly even in this quotation he was distinguishing external and internal aspect of Hinduism, and he saw the internal living on and impacting Christianity in significant ways. But Das also went further than this in other writings. For example, in a statement from his autobiography already quoted above he suggested that Christian influence

is producing in the entire body of Hinduism a new fellowship in thinking and spirit which bids fair to change the whole aspect of Hinduism in time and issue in the genuine national church of India. (Das 1976:124)

Here the truly Indian church is developing within Hinduism and will emerge as Hinduism is transformed, rather than the church developing by conversions from Hinduism to Christianity. In this perspective what is happening is Hinduism taking possession of Christianity rather than Christianity taking possession of Hinduism, and the dual nature of that process needs to be grasped to avoid the appearance (or reality) of hegemony from one side or the other.

In an earlier paper in *The Pilgrim* Das wrote explicitly against Christianity killing Hinduism:

Christianity foisted upon a dead or murdered Hinduism (or any other faith) lacks growth, spontaneity and zeal, power and joy and ends in respectability and soft-plumed goodness. (Das 1942:10)

Going far beyond this viewpoint, Das could affirm Jesus becoming the head of Hinduism itself:

To meet Hinduism in its anti-Christian aspects or to absorb Hinduism on its pro-Christian side, historical Christianity with its modern missions might find the task too difficult and complex....But when Jesus Christ is disentangled from theology and historical phenomena and presented as a saviour, master and God he will both by his power and wisdom possess the stronghold and himself become its king and commander. (Das 1952b:8-9)

Here it is Christ himself taking possession of Hinduism, a vision which cannot be realized apart from the interreligious encounter that Das himself was engaged in.

Das applied his approach to various details of the Christian encounter with Hinduism. One aspect of that related to language, and in making his point Das appealed to the history of earlier Christian encounters as discussed in chapter one of this thesis.

Christian writers and thinkers should use Hindu religious terminology more abundantly and without fear. This should not frighten or surprise anyone conversant with the spread of Christianity in the West where the thought-moulds and the linguistic expressions of Graeco-Roman culture and the Teutonic races have clothed Christian ideas and truths.....While it is true that no human word can convey the full Christian meaning I venture to state that Hindu terms are excellent vehicles of expression for Christian truths. Few realise the injury done to the Christian case in India through overmuch caution in this respect.²⁴ (Das 1943b:23-24)

Truths of Jesus and the Bible (Christianity) can and need to be expressed in the terms of other faith traditions. But terminology is only one part of a much larger picture. In a broad statement which appeared both in *The Pilgrim* and in *Convictions* Das laid down the principle.

Let us lay hold of great (and) central Hindu ideas and beliefs, practices and institutions – the very foundation and essence of Hinduism – and definitely build up Christian philosophy and life with (and from) them. (Das 1943b:24; 1966:11; the words in parentheses are in the latter version but not the former)

In his paper in *The Pilgrim* Das immediately listed some of the Hindu ideas and practices with minimal comment. Fuller application was spelled out in *Convictions*, where the majority

²⁴ The suggestion that there is a Christian meaning that no human word can convey shows again that Das often slipped into a reified construct of religion and Christianity.

of the text outlined what I call Das' *possessio* approach to Hinduism, so this exposition will now deal with the latter text and leave *The Pilgrim* for a time.

Immediately following the statement quoted above Das went on to offer some explanation.

"Laying hold" in my mind and for my purposes does not mean "using," "adopting," "believing" or "accepting" for their own sake. It simply means understanding intelligently, and seriously grappling with and grasping and gripping. (Das 1966:11)

I do not find that exposition particularly helpful, but include it here as Das' attempt to spell out his ideas. What shades of meaning Das saw in "grasping" that differ from "accepting" are not clear to me, and Das proceeded to comment on careless study of Hinduism with reflections on his experiences. He then returned to a further attempt to develop the meaning of his original statement.

Again, when I say that we should definitely build Christian philosophy and life "with and from them" (the Hindu ideas and beliefs) it does not mean "with them as the basis or content." The only basis or content of Christianity is Christ himself together with the word of God in the scriptures. What I mean is that in the light of these great Hindu ideas and practices Christian thinking and Christian living ought to be so moulded and developed that it may constructively and successfully meet the moral and spiritual needs of Hinduism. (Das 1966:12)

It is interesting to see Das here reducing the broad statement about building up life in Christ from a Hindu foundation, which fits the *possessio* model, to an evangelistic approach that will be winsome to Hindus. In his article in *The Pilgrim* which shared this statement with *Convictions* he pointed out that "such study as is advocated here is needed not only for evangelistic purposes but for the enrichment of the life of the church itself" (Das 1943b:24). Despite dropping all reference to enriching the church, as Das applied this concept to numerous aspects of Hindu life it becomes clear again that his approach is legitimately *possessio*.

Following all the details of Das' application is not necessary, but his approach will be amply illustrated with some critique as well. In the chapter of *Convictions* from which the above quotations were taken Das specified four areas of Hindu life and thought; vision of God and idolatry; karma, sin and salvation; the divine order; and reformed Hinduism.

Under the vision of God and idolatry Das acknowledged the multiplicity of gods and idols in Hinduism. In line with the practical evangelistic focus that he defined for this analysis he suggested that

Instead of trying to cleanse his mind of these other gods it would be helpful to teach him by example the worship of God in spirit and in truth. Prayer along with study and personal fellowship is a potent weapon. The reality of God of an ethical nature brought home to one's mind through constant reference to Christ will slowly grow into a single loyalty. (Das 1966:14)

But in the discussion of idolatry a truly *possessio* attitude emerged. Das pointed out that "idolatry has sprung from a deep human need....that man cannot forever remain satisfied with a distant, invisible, inexpressible, unapproachable God" (1966:14). He warned against an attack on idolatry that leads to "rationalism which is farther from Christianity than idolatry is" (1966:15). Jesus as the express image of the divine person (Hebrews 1:3) should be presented as the true idol. Similarly, the Hindu quest that goes from shrine to shrine to see God and feel his presence cannot be denied or dismissed as sentimentalism. At this point Das was not merely presenting an evangelistic approach, but was taking possession of aspects of Hindu life and enriching the understanding of Christ. Union with God and incarnation were then also briefly discussed in this section with a focus on what is common to the Christian and Hindu traditions.

In the second section under karma, sin and salvation Das discussed reincarnation, bathing in sacred waters and sacrifices. Since cleansing and sacrifice both relate rather directly to Christian teaching I will only discuss Das' treatment of reincarnation. He first affirmed a correlation between biblical teaching and the principle of karma; what a man sows he will reap. But karma was seen as "responsible for much of the fatalism and spiritual indolence in the country" (Das 1966:17). The deferring of salvation beyond many lifetimes was also criticized on this line, with no effort at refutation. Rather,

the village bard, the sadhu and the mystic constantly draw men's attention to the preciousness of this life's opportunity and call them to God and [the] need of salvation here and now. (Das 1966:18)

In relation to this Das saw the immediacy of the message of Christ to be applicable, as also in relation to the Bhagavad Gita teaching on the emancipated man (*jīvan mukta*). At this point

Das slipped in a reference to maya, which rather than as illusion he suggested is experienced by Hindus as a dynamic power of evil which can be personified as a goddess. Das associated the maya concept with the devil and original sin.

In Das' treatment of karma and maya the most accurate term for his treatment is *possessio*. He was not critiquing, he was not contextualizing, he was taking possession and sifting and then expressing in light of his understanding of Christ and his teaching. I am not personally impressed that he had successfully done this, but it seems to me clearly to be what he was attempting. Particularly the relating of maya with the devil, which is perhaps appropriate where Maya is a goddess of evil, seems rather farfetched in light of more standard meanings of the term, which also do not easily align with original sin.

In considering the divine social order Das looked at *varna* (caste), ahimsa and orders of monks. The disciplines of Hindu renunciants were related to Christ's life and to Christian ashrams. Ahimsa Das considered to have "degenerated into an overemphasis on the virtue of vegetarian diet, non-injury and non-killing" when in fact "the doctrine has noble ethical and spiritual values...forbearance, non-vengeance, returning good for evil, mental poise, justice, impartiality, patience, quiet and reserve..." (Das 1966:21). This is perhaps an instance where Das merely reads biblical concepts into a Hindu term rather than demonstrating *possessio*. On *varna* the treatment in this chapter is rather perfunctory, but the topic was taken up again in the following chapter which likewise demonstrates Das applying *possessio* to Hindu constructs. Only *varna* from that chapter will be discussed with here.

Das' discussion of *varna* was rather cryptic and was completed in just two paragraphs. Presently my focus is only on *possessio* and caste, not on Das' understanding of caste in Hinduism which will be discussed in the next section of this thesis. Central here was Das' assertion that

The Great Purusha made the great sacrifice and divided himself into the four *varnas*. This was perverted into the caste system in later years. The important thing to note is that it was an act of God that made the division....It is not just a human device for the division of labour as some modern Hindus are inclined to interpret it. (Das 1966:25)

Das was referring to the Purusha Sukta, Rig Veda 10:90, but doing so in such a way that he almost seemed to affirm that this described a historical event. Such an interpretation seems so

out of accord with Das' known beliefs that I can only attribute this terminology to the *possessio* approach being applied without careful nuances.²⁵ Das after some further elaboration then affirmed that

this is obviously analogous to St. Paul's doctrine of the church being the body of Christ....While the fellowship in *varnashram* [caste-stage of life] came to be limited soon, the church developed into a wide universal brotherhood. The divine origin of both *varna* and church, the fellowship in each, is a reality which cannot be ignored....the *varna* system is fulfilled and satisfied within the body of Christ – the fellowship of the church. (Das 1976:26)

It is certainly disputable that *varna* is analogous to the church as the body of Christ, although Das was assuming a meaning for *varna* which was unrelated to the caste system as it has been known historically. The appearance of fulfillment terminology at this point also seems strange, especially in light of Das' complaints against the church. Again this presentation by Das seems to me to demonstrate that he was in the realm of *possessio* as defined by Bavinck, although his distinct applications are open to question and revision.

The final point of Das' survey of practical aspects of Hindu life was the broad field of reformed Hinduism. Das included Vaishnavism here along with the more standard list of Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophy and Ramakrishna Mission. The defining characteristic was that

Reformed Hinduism is largely and generally syncretistic – all paths lead to the same goal as all rivers join the ocean....The Hindu mind is dominated by the idea of synthesis. (Das 1966:23).

There is nothing here that can be fulfilled, but Das takes possession of this mindset and suggests how the message of Christ related. "To pose against this the exclusive claims of Christ...is not only useless but positively harmful...." (Das 1966:23). Rather,

the Hindu mind should be induced to realise the moral grandeur and the ethical beauty of Christ's personality; then at the end of his search through a process of steady attainment he will become conscious of the moral uniqueness of Christ....Supremacy, uniqueness and exclusiveness must be the result of his *sādhana*, the end of his pilgrimage for truth and God. (Das 1966:23)

²⁵ Cf. section 3.1.3 below where it is explicit that Das does not see this as historical.

2.4 Fulfillment and *Possessio*

Das was clearly comfortable with fulfillment terminology. He expressed this without qualification in a 1952 editorial in his magazine.

Historically our Lord's reference to [fulfillment of] the law or the prophets was immediately and directly of his own earthly forefathers – the Hebrew race. But morally and logically it can have and should have a significant reference to the heritage of every nation on earth. He does not destroy the broken rays of truth or the crude expressions of the good. He fulfills all that is right and beautiful found everywhere and in all ages. He is the energising judging and directive spirit of all the spiritual, moral and cultural heritage of all the earth and of all the times. In him – the way, the truth, and the life – all the inhabitants of the earth and their civilizations converge – regenerated and revitalized. (Das 1952a:1)

While there is no reason to deny that Das worked within a fulfillment framework, there are also many aspects of his thought that do not fit neatly within the fulfillment paradigm. This has already been noted above where the eclecticism of reformed Hinduism does not fit with a fulfillment paradigm, as also Das' discussion of karma and maya fit within *possessio* better than fulfillment.

Das himself reflected on fulfillment as possibly not the best paradigm.

....Christianity is the fulfilment of Hinduism in no mechanical sense. It is not like a dome or tower imposed externally upon the structure of Hinduism. Christianity is rather like leaven, qualifying, vitalizing and reshaping the whole system of Hindu thought, emotion and activity. The moral and spiritual ideas and practices of Hinduism, in so far as they are true and noble, are affected as it were by similar but far deeper truths in Christianity. As Christianity is not essentially a theological system or a moral code but a life and spirit inspired and generated by the Christ living in the hearts of men and transforming them by His dynamic principles, the spiritual and ethical ideas and attitudes that have emerged from Christian experience will naturally lay upon similar truths in Hinduism that have affinities with them. (Das 1937:180-181)

In so far as a Christian is taking Hindu truths and developing them in a deeper way fulfillment would be an adequate description of the process. But later in this same article Das made a more radical statement that pointed beyond a fulfillment model.

...living Hinduism can easily and normally pass into living Christianity without serious loss to either....Outwardly the evangelist should live the Hindu life subject to obedience to essential Christian principles. This will not only disarm opposition and melt

prejudice but will also remove the harmful idea that Christian conversion is mere change of outward community. (Das 1937:185)

That a Christian can and should live a Hindu life reflects an interpenetration that only the mutual *possessio* model outlined in this thesis can adequately encompass.²⁶

Das reflected on the means by which Christians or the church should engage Hinduism to fulfill, or in my terms to take possession of, the Hindu heritage.

The church's relation to Hinduism is not one of non-cooperation or indifference, or hatred – not one of exclusion, or standing aside nor should it be one of thoughtless or indiscriminate acceptance. It should not be a relationship of antagonism or rivalry either. But it should be, and can be, one of discriminating penetration with love and honest cooperation in matters on which we can be agreed....There is a large area in which there can be mutual give and take in the cultural sphere. This has to be ascertained from observation, study and experience. (Das 1959:18)

"Discriminating penetration" is a very helpful elaboration of *possessio*, and it happens with deliberative observation, study and experience. On the other hand, however, Das also affirmed spontaneity in this process. Das here reduced the Christian-Hindu relationship to the personal engagement of the Hindu who chose to follow Christ.

....the important question of the relationship of Christianity to Hinduism – concretely that of the Hindu convert to his past and to the country. The proper relation must be fairly intelligently and emotionally grasped otherwise there is the danger of either (a) aloofness – resulting in an ineffective barren Christian life or (b) indiscriminate mixing – consequence being a flat syncretism. The heritage of India in its spiritual as well as cultural aspects belongs to the Hindu convert to Christianity as to the Hindu himself. The difference is that Hindu accepts and follows the tradition blindly whereas the convert uses his judgment enlightened by Christian truth and rejects everything that is inconsistent with Biblical revelation. But he does not do it in any mechanical way. To a true believer and lover of his country it just happens. It is spontaneous. Because the word of God made flesh – Jesus Christ – is the truth all truths find their fulfilment in and through Him. He is the energising and directing spirit and judge of all and keeps his disciples from falling into error.... (Das 1962b:21-22)

There is an unhappily pejorative note here; Hindu traditions have always been in a transformation process and the disciple of Jesus joins that process rather than being the exception who does not blindly follow tradition. But the focus on spontaneity is helpful,

²⁶ This terminology pretty much qualifies Das for the multiple religious belonging construct discussed in chapter one section 2.3, but as section 3.5 of that same chapter states, this is not an adequate solution for the problems of the world religions paradigm.

particularly when affirmed in light of Jesus Christ as the "directing spirit." Human effort is necessary to *possessio*, but divine direction is also needed. This Christocentric comment makes a fitting conclusion to an exposition of R. C. Das' Christianity. A final analysis of R. C. Das needs to include his perspective on Hinduism so will be withheld until following the succeeding section.

3.0 R. C. Das on Hinduism

In the outline of Das' life and his teaching on Christianity a great deal of information related to his perspective on Hinduism has already been presented, particularly in the discussion of religion and Christianity in sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 above. This section will outline Das' teaching on Hinduism by first looking at his Benares Institute notes followed by his writings in *The Pilgrim* and then some final comments based on other sources.

3.1 Lectures on Hinduism to the Benares Institute

Thirty two papers of notes from R. C. Das' teaching in Benares Institute sessions of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism were given to me by Fr. Ishwar Prasad, who stayed at Das' Kristapanti Ashram in Dashashwamedh, Varanasi, in the early 1970s before starting his own Kristapanti Ashram in Nagwa, Varanasi (with permission from Das to use the same name since Das' was defunct by that time due to his extreme age (mid-eighties)) and later the Matridham Ashram in Christnagar on the outskirts of Varanasi and yet later the Bharat Mata Ashram in Kurukshetra, Haryana, where these notes were shared with me in October of 1998.²⁷

In this analysis three features of the notes will be highlighted, the focus on teaching facts about Hindu realities, the concern for practical matters rather than theory, and the comparative aspect. More often than not the notes are extremely cryptic, sometimes just a word or a name. Where there is some measure of elaboration it is still in the form of notes and nothing close to development into a publishable paper. Thus the evaluation of these notes is a necessarily limited undertaking. Das' stated aim for the Benares Institute sessions is

²⁷ A list of the contents of these lecture notes is in Sources number two on page 309. The original notes are with Fr. Ishwar Prasad, the set given to me is now in the archives of Bishop's College in Kolkata. In referencing the notes here I refer to the title of the paper and then outline numbers and/or letters within that paper when present; there was no overall order or numbering to the 32 topics (papers) covered in the notes.

important to note: "Our aim has always been in these institutions to create enough interest in the students so that they may themselves continue their studies" (Das 1946:89).

3.1.1 The Facts of Hinduism

The major thrust of the Benares Institute notes is providing factual information about Hindu traditions. Some aspects of interpretation and of comparison with Christianity will be noted below, and certainly in the presentation and in discussions associated with these lectures much more of that would have come out than is present in the notes themselves. The notes do not reveal creative reinterpretations that deviate radically from Orientalist scholarship, although one point of interest on this line will be mentioned below.²⁸

"Facts" about something as complex (and now disputed, as it was not in Das' day) as Hinduism are not as simple as first appears. It is to Das' credit that he recognized this and stressed the diversity and complexity of Hindu traditions. He also addressed the issue of bias in approaching Hindu phenomena. This is the last subpoint in a brief paper on "Means of Obtaining the Best Knowledge and Experience of Hinduism" (number 2 on the list in Sources number 2 on page 309).

f- For correct knowledge of Hinduism the student should be disabused of all kinds of bias – evangelistic, religious or philosophical-theological – as far as possible, and study from an impartial and dispassionate point of view. Prejudices should be set aside.

Currently the recognition and acknowledgement of presuppositions and perspectives is seen as preferable to an attempt at (or pretense of) dispassionate objectivity. But the warning against bias and exhortation to remove prejudice in this statement is still commendable, and the "as far as possible" demonstrates acceptance of limitations.

The first point in this paper (it was not numbered, but point 2 followed) called for "contact with true representatives and institutions of Hinduism" and "books of first rate importance preferably by Indian authors." Related to this was the exhortation that books "especially by Christians should be avoided at any rate in the beginning." No books were recommended in

²⁸ This is only to be expected, particularly in light of Thomas Trautmann's point in critique of Said's Orientalism that all knowledge of Eastern traditions is deeply indebted to the early Orientalists, as noted in chapter one section 3.3.1.

the notes, nor were any warned against. Similarly, there was no overt suggestion regarding the "true" representatives and institutions of Hinduism. Yet in light of the discussion in chapter one section 4.3 it can be noted that Das clearly saw Hindu Nationalism as a fringe reactionary movement.

Only twice do the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS appear in Das' notes, neither time with any exposition of history and ideas. This is in marked contrast with other reform movements, with papers focused on Theosophy and the Brahmo Samaj (numbers 29 and 30 in Sources number 2, page 309) and papers on Protest and Reformation (number 26) giving details on the Arya Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission and on Modern Movements (number 27) more briefly but with some details on the Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, Theosophy, Ramakrishna Mission and "Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya etc." (see below on this last reference). In contrast, the Mahasabha and RSS appear without any comment at all in the paper Reform Movements (number 25), simply listed under modern movements in contrast to ancient movements (Buddhism, etc.), referenced as "akin to Ramakrishna Movement." In the second reference, the paper Modern Religious Movements in India (number 28), there is a division of "reform movements through rationalisation" (the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj are here) with the Mahasabha and RSS appearing under "self defense movements" (the Ramakrishna Mission is also here) which has this comment; "these movements are totalitarian and authoritarian – inclusive defense of Hindu faith and culture."

Das clearly favored reformed movements among the Hindu traditions and not the conservative movements now referred to as Hindu Nationalism. His basic paradigm was that Hindu traditions are rooted in the Vedas with various accretions and reform movements over many centuries leading to current expressions.²⁹ Numerous reform movements developed, and Das had a self-contradictory classification for these among the various papers. In his Reform Movements (number 25) notes Das distinguished the ancient and modern. Under ancient only Buddhism and Vaishnavism were mentioned, with a comment that Vaishnavism was "simultaneous with Reformation in Europe." But, as already noted above, in Modern Movements (number 27) Das listed "Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, etc." saying, "these represent the North Indian expressions of the Vaishnavik faith." So in one list they were ancient and in

²⁹ The Vedic roots with other accretions will be documented in section 3.2 below as it is explicit in a paper in *The Pilgrim*; the paper on the Vedas among the Benares Institute notes is almost completely lacking explanatory comments. The importance of reform movements and Das' various classifications of them will be noted here.

another modern. Das' bias for reform movements was demonstrated in providing some details about these movements in the latter paper; "these and other small reformist groups represent the purer side of Hinduism." There was another classification system related to these movements in the notes on Popular Hinduism (number 4) where "the age of sects" is B.C. 500 to 1200 A.D. which covered "popular religion (*bhakti* and karma)," with "new Hinduism" following, covering "modern movements of Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya, Brahmo Samaj, R.K. Mission, Theosophy, Arya Samaj, Satsang (Radhaswami), Tagore, Arobindo, Gandhi, etc." Classifying Kabir and Nanak as "modern" does not fit standard classifications from either Orientalism or modern scholarship.

Something on this line appeared in yet another similar classification in the paper on Popular Hinduism (number 4) under The Evolution of Sanatan Dharm. Here Das presented a "bird's eye view of the transformation of Vedism into Hinduism," carefully qualifying that the periods he outlined are "very rough and vague." The five periods were early Vedic (Rig Veda), speculative or contemplative (Upanishads, monism and "theism culminating in *bhakti*"), the epic age (no description whatsoever present), scholasticism (philosophies, Shaktas, Vaishnavas, Saivites) and finally the age of popular religion which included "Shankara and Vaishnava apostles....production of a huge mass of devotional literature." Das clearly did not have a single well-developed paradigm for the historical development of Hindu traditions. This is not a point of sufficient importance to dwell on further here.

Voluminous data about Hindu traditions was clearly presented in Benares Institute sessions, not always with total internal consistency. This thesis is more interested in broad interpretations of that data, and Das provided a definition of "the nature of Hinduism" as point 3 in the paper "Means of Obtaining the Best Knowledge and Experience of Hinduism" (number 2) which has already been referred to above. Das gave six lettered subpoints under the nature of Hinduism, the last being rather off the topic, which was the exhortation quoted above to study without bias. The first five points will be quoted in full.

- a- Its utter catholicity.
- b- It is not one religion but rather a conglomeration (jumble) of many varied religions with different creeds, systems, organisations and founders.
- c- Yet it possesses a certain unity – an essential minimum running through it all.
- d- It is more a geographical and cultural term than a religious or a spiritual one – Hinduism!
- e- It is vast, ancient and complex.

The complexity and diversity of Hindu traditions is explicit here, with Das siding with those who object to defining Hinduism as one religion. Despite that diversity, Das saw "a certain unity" present. On the whole Hinduism is more a cultural than religious term, yet the "essential minimum" or uniting feature was not defined here in any way, either religious or cultural. The catholicity of Hindu traditions was highlighted, but clearly pluralism was not itself the defining feature of Hinduism as is suggested in some modern discussions. The study of Das' Benares Institute notes leaves one without any clear answer for the question of wherein this central unity lies; a similar comment, "essential unity," appears in *The Pilgrim* so I will take up discussion of this point in that context below.

3.1.2 The Practical Focus

Lecture notes are not a good source for illustrating the practical focus of a training program, but that is sufficiently discernable in this case. Even in the previous section in discussing the paper on "Means of Obtaining the Best Knowledge and Experience of Hinduism" (number 2) it was pointed out that Das first listed personal contact with Hindu people and institutions and only second mentioned books.

The Pilgrim consistently printed advertisements and reports about the annual Benares Institute sessions. Almost without exception the reports contained reference to "excursions" to various religious and cultural sites in Varanasi for on-site learning. A sample of that type of report for the 1942 session called this laboratory work.

Laboratory work. Benares affords unique opportunities for the practical study of Hinduism at first hand. With the conviction that practical experience through research is more valuable than mere theoretical knowledge, 25 excursions were undertaken to different institutions, organizations, temples, mutts and art galleries, representing different sides of Hindu life and thought. (Das 1943a:111.)

In another of these reports Das wrote of the "proper Christian attitude and approach to Hindu beliefs and practices" (1945a:24). That meant something very practical to Das, as illustrated from his lecture notes, where he suggested that "patience, reverence and a seeking spirit are

essential for success in Hindu studies.³⁰ An acceptable paradigm for "Hinduism" can only develop when an attitude and practice of dialogical encounter lead to deeper understanding.

This in today's terms is about the sociology of Hindu studies. Geoffrey Oddie pointed out that much of the Christian encounter with Hinduism aligns more easily with anthropological fieldwork than with classical Orientalist research (2006:349, as quoted in chapter one section 4.1.1.1). Some of Das' papers in the Benares Institute notes clearly demonstrate this kind of focus ("Indian Culture," paper 5 and "Some Chief Hindu Festivals and Rites," paper 19) as such activity was already noted in conjunction with the Benares Institute sessions.

3.1.3 Comparing Hinduism and Christianity

The Benares Institute notes often demonstrate a traditional Christian apologetic where Christianity is favored over Hinduism. Since these notes were not for publication and were prepared for teaching Christians about interaction with Hindus it is not particularly surprising that this element would be present here. After documenting this from a number of places some comments will be made on how to integrate this into a larger analysis of R. D. Das' position.

Some of the comparisons made in the notes were very much in line with the teaching outlined in section 2.3 above where Christianity is seen as fulfilling Hindu concepts and practices. For example the notes on Holy Waters (number 21) where Das drew a comparison with the Jordan River and baptism, suggesting that "to an enlightened Hindu it is not the water that actually cleanses sin but it serves as a symbol standing for the grace of Ganga that cleanses the heart spiritually" (point III).

A more subtle comparison was undertaken in the paper "Sin," particularly in relation to sin and sacrifice in the Vedas (paper 15, unnumbered section "The significance of blood in Vedic sacrifices"). At one point Das was careful not to read biblical ideas into Vedic texts, saying that "the idea of blood cleansing sin is obscure and latent. So 'without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin' does not actually or directly apply to Vedic sacrifices." In the same context Das went on to the Purusha Sukta (Rig Veda 10:90) on the sacrifice of God

³⁰ This statement is again from "Means of Obtaining the Best Knowledge and Experience of Hinduism" (number 2).

which resulted in the creation of the universe. Here Das allowed for a Christian interpretation of the text; "By Christians it may be spiritually interpreted as an anticipation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross – a concrete and historical implementation of the ideal or prototype in the Vedas." Das later compared these Vedic concepts with blood sacrifice particularly as it appeared in the traditions surrounding the goddess.

Here blood is offered more to appease the anger of a goddess than believed as a propitiation of sin or as power washing sin. It is a religion of fear or appeasement or bribing a god for strength or courage. Though blood is not in prominent mention in the Vedas, the idea of the whole sacrifice is nearer the Christian conception of atonement. (concluding sentences of "Sin" notes)

This type of comparison calls for analysis of Das as a comparative theologian, but two more areas where Das made explicit comparisons between Hindu and Christian traditions will first be outlined.

In the notes on "Avatar (Descent of Vishnu – of a God or Goddess)" there were some stimulating suggestions which of course were not developed in these brief notes. There are eight points, the first of which reads "Can the supreme being – God – incarnate? No." Just what the "no" was intended to convey or how it would have been expounded is difficult to guess since the remaining notes certainly affirm the reality of incarnation. Das drew a definite distinction between avatar and incarnation, part of that lying in the statement of point four (without any further comment), "All avatars are manifestation of power – not of truth, holiness or love." His fifth point illustrated diverse Hindu theologies, as he suggested that "the idea presupposes a particular conception of God and of human soul – *bhagwan* not *brahma*." In points six and seven Das made explicit comparison between Vaishnava avatar and Christian incarnation.

6. According to Hinduism Vishnu takes any form – animal or human. It is just assuming the external form rather than the inner nature of the living being. Moreover the idea of the god's character being manifested is absent. It is only functional.

7. According to Christianity incarnation is essentially the revelation of God's nature in a perfect human personality in whom divinity and humanity mingle inevitably and eternally. Incarnation is only secondarily a function – in which forgiveness of sin, strengthening of weak character, peace, joy, thankfulness and power of the Spirit are attained by believing man through faith in the cross (atonement) and the resurrection (new sublimated life).

Controversy and complexity were woven into those statements, but nowhere near to the degree of the concluding statement of this paper. "8. Incarnation (only one and for all) is the culmination of many gradual and imperfect revelations." Without comment or explanation, one is left to speculate on just how Das would have expounded this point. Did he see avatar as one of the "many gradual and imperfect revelations"? It would seem almost certain that he did, for if avatar is not one such, where in the world are "many" others? At this point Das was adjusting standard Christian teaching in light of his understanding of Hindu traditions.

Finally considering the comparative in Das' notes, one of the longest sets of notes is that on "Shree Krishna" (number 11). There are four sections here, the first asking who Krishna is and giving various possible answers. Section two looked at resemblances between Krishna and Christ, questioning if there was borrowing in either direction. Twenty-seven points were listed, including the sound of the names and their being born in poor and obscure families. Section three had five points on the love of Krishna and section four outlined the difference between Krishna and Christ. The difference was to the advantage of Christ who was portrayed with a universal spiritual love while Krishna killed the wicked and manifested love that was "partial and limited to one class – his devotees and favourites" (point 3).

In these comparative studies that appear in the Benares Institute notes a glimpse is presented of R. C. Das taking possession of his Hindu theological heritage in a distinctive practice of comparative theology. Today's comparative theologians emphasize an intentional reticence for direct comparison, and Das' comparisons perhaps illustrate the importance of that as his viewpoints too easily convey a hegemonic judgmentalism. But comparative theology also states as a fundamental purpose the application of lessons learned to one's own religious tradition, and the context of these lectures is exactly that of Das teaching Christian people, incorporating perspectives gained from interaction with Hindu traditions. How bluntly Das would have made the comparisons above in dialogical encounters with Hindus, even how far these were settled conclusions as opposed to tentative statements in need of further refining, cannot be judged just from these notes.

What is clear is that Das desired a sincere interreligious encounter as part of the process of developing Christ-centered theology, and this alone blunts the edge of the apologetic aspect of his comparisons. He clearly stated an ideal that Hindu and Muslim scholars would

contribute to the development of this Christ-centered theology, as stated in this appeal for a new generation of theologians to develop a "revolutionary mind."

To build truly Indian Christian theology the first prerequisite is a revolutionary mind. Our young theologians will have to brag less of their learning which is secondhand. Out of their own personal experience of the riches of Christ they will have to weave, humbly and tremblingly indeed, the warp and woof of its structure in indigenous terms and thought forms artistically and strongly too....An association formed with original scholars of Hinduism and Islam in their own ranks will be a great desideratum. We can learn and check ourselves in this way. (Das 1948b:14-15)

At all Benares Institute sessions Das arranged for Hindus to teach, and he acknowledged those guest speakers by name in his reports. This cordial, dialogical interaction of Hindus teaching Christian students is itself noteworthy. A list of teachers appeared in Das' account of the history of the CSSH (Das 1954c:4) and included the names of nine Hindus and three Hindu institutions from which other Hindu teachers came. No lasting association developed and no noticeable impact on Indian Christian thought or the practice of interreligious dialogue and comparative theology can be traced to Das and Benares Institute sessions. But this was a pioneering venture that is worthy of remembrance and illustrative of complex issues in the ongoing interreligious encounters of the present time.

3.2 Viewpoint from *The Pilgrim*

R. C. Das was one of the three most prolific contributors to *The Pilgrim*, and his contributions spanned the entire life of the magazine. A. J. Appasamy and P. Chenchiah wrote more than Das, but their contributions were primarily during the relatively short periods when they also edited the publication. The largest number of items Das wrote was his reports on Benares Institute sessions; the content of these are not of interest for interreligious studies as such. He only wrote one paper that in any way approximated to spelling out his understanding of Hinduism, so that paper will be the focus here.

In introducing his study of "A Modern Apologetics for Hinduism" Das' first point was on "The Background of Hinduism." He made four points about Hinduism here, with six subpoints to the fourth. The first was that "The Vedas are the source of Hinduism in all its essentials – adaptable and interpretable" (Das 1943b:15). That Das did mean this in any restrictive or narrow sense is clear when he commented further that

Different schools of thought and groups of men with different ways of life have fought with one another making a common appeal to the Vedas. (Das 1943b:16)

It was pointed out above (section 3.1.1) that Das saw many accretions and reform movements transforming this Vedic heritage, as is suggested in the reference here and in the point following. In this paper, having introduced the diversity of Hinduism, Das' second point sought to put that diversity in the context of a deeper unity. This point needs to be quoted in full to catch all of the nuances of meaning.

It ought also to be noted that Hinduism is not a mere heterodox jumble of ideas or incoherent plethora of practices as it appears to superficial observers but to all patient and impartial students it will reveal an essential unity and real growth of certain fundamental truths. Hinduism is the resultant from a severe clash, a long contact and wide compromise of Vedic Aryanism, Dravidian culture and aboriginal cults. Hence one need not be surprised to find in it apparently contradictory elements. (Das 1943b:16)

A similar affirmation of an underlying unifying principle to Hinduism despite vast diversity was seen in the Benares Institute notes above (section 3.1.1). Just what Das meant by this is never made clear, and it perhaps belongs in a category like Ram-Prasad's "instinctive feeling" (chapter one, section 3.0). Later in this same paper Das, as quoted above in section 2.3, referred to the "true treasures" of Hinduism, further referred to as "ethical and spiritual values" (Das 1943b:22). This leaves a very subjective understanding of Hinduism, as was the case in Das' approach to Christianity.

Das' third point focused on the social system of Hinduism, contrasting intellectual openness and social exclusiveness.

Hinduism is spiritually inclusive, comprehensive, and absorptive but practically and socially exclusive, eventuating in caste and outcaste. It is fearlessly and even licentiously catholic in thought, fostering endless philosophies and legends but strongly critical and even oppressively narrow in the practical affairs of life, issuing in the *varnashram* system.... (1943b:16).

There is no exposition of this point, but Das did say more on this topic in the Benares Institute notes. In the paper on "Varnashram Dharma" (number 3) under point 3, after quoting Rig Veda 10:90:10-12, the well known Purusha Shukta passage on the sacrifice of the Primeval Man resulting in the caste system, Das commented that

This can be interpreted both literally and symbolically thus giving rise to two theologies of society – the orthodox and liberal – the modern hide bound caste system and the free Hindu society in which the rigours of caste rules do not exist – in which inter-dining and intermarriage are allowed. Such as the *sanatani* Hindus, by far the largest majority who observe and support the present day caste system in toto. The liberal groups such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society and a few other smaller communities (like Kabir Panthis, Satsangis, etc.) believe in *varnashram* according to *guna karma* but not in the modern caste system which is based on the accident of birth and many social customs and traditions.

Das went on to immediately mention "reasons and causes of the perversion and transformation of *varna* into the elaborate caste system," making his position unmistakably clear. He sided with reformed approaches rather than traditional, yet he still affirmed a strong positive aspect of caste, saying "Caste provides (1) status and security to the individual (2) fellowship and respectability to all" (point 8 in the "Varnashram Dharma" Benares Institute notes).³¹

In his fourth and final point in this brief outline of Hinduism Das made a broad critical statement that resonates with the perspective on Hendrik Kraemer.

Hinduism stands for a naturalistic system of metaphysics, worship and social activity. It lacks a clear and emphatic revelation of the nature, will and truth of God and the meaning of the world. (1943b:16)

There is a similar negative assessment in the Benares Institute notes; "In Hinduism God is a vague something – neither clear nor certain as in Christ. Hence the intense longing to find out God" (from "Pilgrimage" point 2, number 20 in Sources number 2 on page 309). This negative reading of the concept of God in Hindu thought is problematic to say the least; there is such a variety of theologies of God in Hindu traditions, as there are in Christian traditions, that the importation of singularity in speaking of Hinduism in this context seems particularly inappropriate. In making a similar criticism Das stated his objection in quite a different way later in this same paper.

Let us emphasise revelation and faith, the spiritual values of Christianity – matters upon which Hinduism either says too little or too much, there being no steady criterion of judgment. (Das 1943b:23)

³¹ Das' perspective on caste follows the modern Hindu reinterpretation that Julius Lipner traces from Ram Mohan Roy through Dayananda Saraswati of the Arya Samaj to Mahatma Gandhi (2010:131f., 140f.).

Here the recognition of multiple voices from Hindu traditions, with vast variation in perspective, provides a better picture of the situation. Of course this type of polarized opinion is not unique to Hindu traditions, as it appears within Christian traditions as well despite Das' suggestion that there is a steady criterion for Christianity. So rather than a problem of Hinduism in defining God there is certainly a problem related to the meaning(s) of Hinduism. The ambiguity of the terms religion, Christianity and Hinduism has already been discussed, as has the confusion this brought to Das' thought. Further comments on this point will be made in the closing analysis of Das.

Six corollaries are outlined to this supposition of Hinduism as a humanly generated tradition without "clear and emphatic" revelation from God (this should not be interpreted to completely contradict the "many gradual and imperfect revelations" referred to in section 3.1.3 above). These six points referred to philosophy, caste ("a highly organised socio-religious system"), karma ("a well thought out ethico-religious system...the divine moral order"), idolatry ("an ornate, richly ritualistic and symbolical system"), union with *brahman*, and the popular religion of festivals and pilgrimages (Das 1943b:16-17). Most striking in this discussion, and most positive, was the fifth point on Vedanta.

Defying and comprehending all, Hinduism bids man – the lover and seeker – to realize his identity with the Absolute Reality – *brahman*. In a nutshell Hinduism has produced the Vedanta – the profoundest philosophy which the human mind has ever woven and which holds the intellectual of India absorbed, admiring and spellbound. (Das 1943b:17)

Reifying and personifying Hinduism so as to portray it as somehow producing Vedanta philosophy compares with similar statements about Christianity that were critiqued above (section 2). There is no key that can unlock the tensions in Das' thought in these areas as he both reifies and examines concrete changing details.

Most of Das' writings on Hindu topics in *The Pilgrim* were focused studies with a sociological slant. Three different papers looked at Varanasi, two with a focus on evangelistic work there (Das 1942, 1949c, 1952d), the last particularly looking at pilgrims to the holy city. Two other of these studies were slight adaptations from Benares Institute notes, on sadhus and sannyasis (Das 1945b, number 22 in Sources number 2, page 309) and on ashrams (Das 1951c, number 23). Also a stimulating paper on "Hinduism: The Source of Its Power" that

focused on the family as the central Hindu institution followed by the temple and then the pilgrimage center (Das 1952b).

R. C. Das presented Hinduism as a dynamic development with institutional expressions, an essential unity yet with remarkable diversity. There are spiritual values and an outlook on life that can be called the "true treasures" of Hinduism, and which transcend any institutional expression. This does not lead to a simple textbook definition, and when comparisons with Christianity are considered there is perhaps from an early 21st century perspective too harsh a criticism of various Hindus ideas and practices. The tension between criticism and appreciation will be considered in a last section before a closing analysis of Das.

3.3 Further Thoughts on Hinduism from R. C. Das

I suggested in section 2.3 above that Das presented an approach to interreligious encounter that can be described as mutual *possessio*, the reciprocal interpenetration of two traditions. Das' teaching in CSSH circles, both Benares Institute sessions and in *The Pilgrim*, provide data in support of his taking possession of his Hindu heritage but nothing explicit regarding someone from the Hindu heritage, or Hinduism itself in the type of reification common in Das, taking possession of Christ or Christianity. The data from wider writings by Das is also sketchy in this area.

At one point Das, in a report from one of his "retreat conferences" for sadhus and ashramites, seems to speak directly against the possibility of Christianity being taken possession of by Hinduism. This statement needs to be carefully analyzed for the various nuances associated with "Hinduism," which is seemingly defined in the opening statement.

Hinduism is primarily and fundamentally a geography, a culture and a way of life – an atmosphere in which different creeds, like trees in a garden, have flourished, different customs and manners and social patterns have been followed. In the midst of this fertile climate, Christianity like other religions both foreign and native has been set for good or for worse. It has to draw its breath and grow in this climate. The situation is not very different from that of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world. We have clear convictions that the faith of Christ will rise triumphant not by suppressing or destroying everything local but by judging and incorporating every thing good and true and beautiful that is in Hinduism. Hinduism has no unifying principle or synthetic category by which to appropriate Christ into its own system of beliefs or ideas without mutilating the power and grace of Christianity. That it seems to have swallowed many faiths is only apparent. It simply acclimatises. It cannot even nationalise. That power is

not within itself. That in the process of indigenisation there is danger of diluting and compromising Christianity is a bogey of little minds and a thorough misunderstanding and belittling of the reality of the cross and the risen Lord – the living Christ. (Das 1953b:15-16)

When Das defined Hinduism as "geography, culture and way of life" he also indicated that this is "primarily," leaving a question as to what secondary meanings exist. It does not seem to be a secondary reference, but it certainly does not match this primary meaning, when further along in this statement he suggested that "Hinduism has no unifying principle" yet refers to "its own system of beliefs or ideas." It is in the context of this Hindu system of beliefs that Das affirmed the impossibility of Hinduism taking possession of Christ "without mutilating the power and grace of Christianity."

The inadequate paradigm of "religion," "Hinduism" and "Christianity" is again wreaking havoc here. The Hindu "system of beliefs" cannot handle "the power and grace of Christianity" and the reason is because there is no "unifying principle or synthetic category." I do not see the logic here and I do not see how this fits with other statements Das made. Perhaps this was a group report and did not really reflect his personal viewpoint? Yet the paper was full of typical Das opinions and he was surely the leader of that conclave as well as the one writing the report. But compare this statement made a few years earlier;

Our firm conviction is that in the Indian pantheon Christ can preserve his identity, distinctiveness and in God's own time be recognized as the unique saviour and lord. (Das 1948c:24)

Here Christ was placed among the Hindu pantheon, which certainly seems to relate to "system of beliefs" rather than "culture," and Das was embracing the prospect. This resonated with data in section 2.3 above where comments from Das that suggest Hinduism taking possession of Christianity are documented. Even the paper which is quoted above against Hinduism appropriating Christ goes on to suggest something very close to mutual *possession* after all, although the focus is definitely on the follower of Jesus taking possession of Hinduism.

Hinduism is being judged, rejected, naturally accepted into the life of a true son of India who has found a new life in Christ. Among ordinary folks, both in towns and villages, in whom Christ is real this indigenisation is slowly but surely proceeding through song and worship, through neighbourliness and love, through social mingling and economic sharing....What the west has wrung from Christ is great treasure, rich and

valuable for the universal Church. Also in India in the same way the Christian in the local atmosphere will have to catch the Hindu experience of a serene God, his sense of the fundamental divinity of man and of the divine beauty and bliss in nature and of the still voice of God in the eternal silences. The Christian will share the Hindu's sense of the inviolability of all life and hence *ahimsa* in the social and political sphere. He must learn India's interpretation of peace as the very order of this universe and rested on the very nature of God. He will have to learn and practice the Hindu relationship between a guru and a *shishya*, the supreme importance of discipline – moral and physical purity. He must catch the Hindu's spiritual abandon – renunciation and simplicity and his burning desire for God and reality, the relentless search for truth. The Christian will have to establish cooperative endeavour of the community life of a Hindu ashram as an ally, adjunct and specific expression of the church's life. Above all the Christian must cultivate the Hindu's freedom of thought, tolerance of views and actions, his spirit of adventure and enterprise in the direction of new and creative experiments. We are firmly convinced that the church will have to mould itself along these and other lines – which is true Indianisation (not simple substitution of nationals in the place of non-nationals) and without which the church will not march but limp but with which the church will be rich in experience and power honoured at home and abroad and triumphant over evil and sin. (Das 1953b:16-17)

Das was clearly dreaming here of a deeply Hindu expression of discipleship to Jesus. That he stated this in terms of a Christian learning these things from Hindu traditions made it an example of Christian *possessio*; but just as legitimately this can be viewed as deeply Hindu realities taking possession of Christ/Bible/Christianity in a dynamic synthesis.

In his magazines Das would at times print news or comments from others and then share his own perspective. In closing this survey of Das' teaching on Hinduism two cases of this type will be documented. In 1958 he quoted from a P. D. Devanandan article in *The Guardian* referring to changes in modern Hinduism including redefinitions of maya and karma so that modern Hinduism is "in some ways a new creation." In response Das wrote

The implied suggestion is that modern Hinduism is a denial of its roots and origins in the Vedas and contradicts the agelong evolution of Hindu thought and life. But nothing of the sort has happened. Only a superficial observation of the Hindu religious phenomena in modern India will lead to the conclusion [at] which Dr. Devanandan has arrived. They have not ceased to believe in maya or karma. These conceptions have been variously interpreted in different ages by various schools of thought which have always existed. If some of them are emphasised today under the exigencies of modern times it does not make Hinduism a "new creation." No sweeping remark can be made about the whole of Hinduism. (Das 1958c:23-24)

This demonstrates again Das' understanding of the diversity of Hindu traditions and his understanding that the evolution of Hindu thought and traditions continues. The suggestion

that no sweeping remark should be made about the whole of Hinduism seemed to be violated at times by Das himself!

Another example of Das' reified conceptions of religions is seen in a comment in response to a report from *The Guardian* of an address by Kaj Baago on Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. The report contained a significant quotation which apparently was from Baago; "Christianity, therefore, was in no way a contrast to Hinduism rather it was to be considered a return to and at the same time a fulfilment of Hinduism." In response to this Das said

This has been my own personal experience and position vis-a-vis Christianity and Hinduism. Pure Hinduism (partly reflected by Brahmoism) is an integral element of pure Christianity. (Das 1967a:11)

The suggestion that a pure variety of either Hinduism or Christianity exists or might ever exist conflicts with numerous statements from Das discussed above. Yet this type of statement also frequently recurred as he sought to express the dynamics of interreligious encounter. Pure Christianity for Das would presumably be the non-institutional early Christianity of the Acts of the Apostles; although how pure Hinduism would relate to that is rather hard to imagine. That the Brahmo Samaj partly reflected pure Hinduism does not give much understanding of what Das considered pure; presumably at least the anti-idolatry and anti-caste positions of the Brahmo Samaj were in mind. That pure Hinduism is an "element" of pure Christianity also seems an odd choice of words. A preferable way to express what Das seemed to intend here seems to me again to lie in the *possessio* perspective outlined by J. H. Bavinck.

4.0 Analysis of R. C. Das

For over sixty years through the heart of the twentieth century R. C. Das eloquently represented the cause of Christ among Hindus in Varanasi, and among Christians advocated the indigenization of Christianity.³² This analysis of his life and work is from the perspective of the focus of this thesis on the Christian study and interpretation of Hinduism.

³² Indigenization was Das' favored term; presently Protestants generally speak of contextualization and Roman Catholics of inculcation, and this thesis prefers *possessio* terminology.

Das grew up in East Bengal in the colonial era where reified concepts of religion were taking root in India in the form of separate identities based on religious affiliation. From youth he imbibed an aversion for Islam, yet he also knew the reality of diversity in "the Hindu community" since he was from a backward caste. In Dhaka during his late teen years he was confronted by new reformist expressions of Hindu faith as well as by Christianity.

In personal turmoil in his late teen years Das surrendered to Jesus Christ as Lord and guru. He was already unhappy with various aspects of Christianity as he observed it then, but there was no option available to him as a follower of Jesus except joining the Christian community as it had come to be defined at the time. Within the Christian community Das was never fully comfortable and among Christians he was always a controversial figure. Das' association with institutional Christianity opened many doors of opportunity for him and his entire career was within the Christian world despite his constant focus on Hindus. In his teaching Das proposed a synthesis of Hindu and Christian traditions, as will be discussed below, but he was always on the Christian side of the communal divide.³³

In his early years as a Christian Das left the Baptist communion and joined with the Anglicans, where he remained affiliated for the rest of his life. There are ironies and contradictions involved in this decision that contribute to the enigma of R. C. Das. He was a nationalist and loyal Congressman but became a member of the Church of England in India.³⁴ He chose to be Anglican but also decided not to seek leadership within that church due to his desire for more deeply Indian patterns of discipleship to Jesus. He became a significant voice due to his gifts and zeal, but was never more than a marginal figure in Indian Christianity. In theory he opposed sectarianism yet he associated with sectarian bodies and finally started one; he defined his new church association as anti-sectarian but perhaps only he believed that to be the case.

Strained personal relationships are an important part of the story of R. C. Das, and this started in his own marriage. The Benares United City Mission and the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism were both plagued with relational tensions related to Das. To reduce these

³³ This in contrast with other Hindus who followed Jesus like Kandaswamy Chetty who never crossed into Christianity and Manilal C. Parekh who crossed over to Christianity only to return again to a Hindu identity; see chapter one sections 4.1.2.1 and 4.2.3.

³⁴ In 1930 the Anglican Church in India ceased to be a branch of the Church of England and became a self-governing body, the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon (Gibbs 1972:354ff.).

tensions to merely the personal level would be simplistic, since conflicting paradigms for interreligious activity and missiological theory were also in play.

R. C. Das was an independent thinker but was completely unwilling to be a theorist. He acted on his convictions and thus became a difficult person to deal with when there was a difference of opinion. Despite rural low caste roots he embraced Indian nationalism and identified with elite concerns in both the Christian and nationalist movements. He envisaged Christianity as integral to Indian independence and development, but neither India nor Indian Christianity developed in accord with elitist projections and dreams.

Das was a practitioner in interreligious encounter and theorized on that encounter as well. He operated in the constructs of that time, as a Christian identified with the church encountering Hindus of another religious community. Yet he never fully acquiesced to this paradigm at the theoretical level. As this chapter has shown, there is inconsistency in his writings as he shifted from speaking within this paradigm of Christianity as true and Hinduism as false, yet regularly transcended this to a more dynamic description of the meeting of faiths.

Das could speak of Christianity taking possession of Hinduism, and he approximated to affirming that Hinduism likewise can and should take possession of Christianity. The terminology of religion and Christianity and Hinduism skewed much of Das' discourse, as he shifted between reified concepts and historical developments. Interpreted to today's terms, Das was advocating interreligious dialogue in support of comparative theology wherein insights from various faith traditions would be taken possession of leading to the transformation of individuals and communities.

From the start Das lived in a world where there was a Hindu-Christian antithesis, and in his experience this narrowed to a Brahmo-Baptist choice. Das chose Baptist, but soon was not happy and shifted to Anglican. He was never fully at home as an Anglican but was never able to escape the paradigm of Christianity and Hinduism as separate choices and separate communities. As his life could not transcend this antithesis, so also in his thought he struggled with the constraints of the religion paradigm. In this inconsistency and tension Das was representative of mid-twentieth century Indian Christianity, as will be seen in the further exposition of Christian teaching on Hinduism in the *The Pilgrim*.

5. A. J. Appasamy's Stewardship of *The Pilgrim*

For a four year period (1941-44) A. J. Appasamy was the most significant voice of the CSSH as he functioned as first editor of *The Pilgrim*. He was not only editor but also the largest contributor to the 14 issues that were produced under his leadership.¹ This chapter will thus focus on Appasamy and his writings as by far the most prolific and influential during this first phase of *The Pilgrim*.²

Appasamy's life was outlined in chapter 3 section 2.3.1 so will not be reviewed here. His contributions to *The Pilgrim* focused on Christianity in the context of Hinduism, alongside biographical sketches of Hindus and Hindu textual studies. His perspectives on both Christianity and Hinduism are interrelated with his conception of religion. So after first considering Appasamy's position on religion there will be an analysis of his understanding of Christianity and Hinduism and their relationship.

1.0 Religion in A. J. Appasamy's Thought

Appasamy was a prolific writer and some use will be made of his wider works in this analysis. But as this thesis is focused on the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*, and since Appasamy's contributions to *The Pilgrim* provide sufficient material to outline his perspective, there is little reason to draw on other writings.

The world religions paradigm critiqued in chapter one of this study is dominant throughout Appasamy's writings, and there is little sign of the tension related to this perspective which was pointed out in the discussion of R. C. Das. Appasamy worked from a distinctive definition of religion which impacted his understanding of Hinduism and Christianity.

¹ Appasamy contributed 20 articles. The next largest contributors were R. C. Das with three articles and three reports, and J. N. Rawson with four articles.

² Chapter six which follows will include analysis of the other contributors during Appasamy's editorship.

1.1 Defining Religion

In a paper on "Christ's Revelation of God," which was based on an evangelistic talk to educated Hindus, Appasamy began by stating that "man is an incurably religious animal" (1943g:73). He proceeded to outline four "common beliefs and practices which are held in common by the followers of different religions" (1943g:73).

The first point was that there is one God who is the creator and who should be worshipped. Atheistic and Buddhist thought are given no credence.

Men who do not experience the need for God even in the severest physical or moral crisis of their lives are very few indeed. It may, then, be said that the belief in God and his worship are common to all mankind. (Appasamy 1943g:74)

The second point was that there have been prophets in all ages and lands, and Rama is included here but not Buddha. The third point was that "the claims of such prophets to utter God's voice to mankind are confirmed by their lives" (1943g:74). The final point was that by following the teachings of these prophets "the spiritual and moral forces of their followers have been strengthened" (1943g:75).

Appasamy then presented a defense of this position, and his defense raised tensions with some of his other suppositions about religion. He first affirmed the four points above as "the core of human religious experience" and claimed that "men of all creeds can give their assent to them" (1943g:75). The authority for this position, however, was not in "the Bible or in the Koran or in the Vedas," nor in "the authority of a religious organization which teaches them" (1943g:75).

We accept them and give our assent to them as rational beings. With our intelligence we note that these facts emerge from the history of the religions of the world.
(Appasamy 1943g:75-76)

In a later paper Appasamy appealed to Rudolf Otto as the authority for his position on religion.

He [Otto] has shown us that the essential element in all religion is the awareness of the majesty and awfulness of God. In more primitive forms of religion this awareness is a

crude type of fear. As religion becomes refined this essential element becomes refined too. (Appasamy 1947b:62)

So although Appasamy appealed to rationality and history for his position, his deepest foundation for religion was finally experiential. The "essential element" is an awareness of God that can be experienced as fear although it later goes beyond this. In discussing the eternity of God in another paper Appasamy appealed to intuition as the only authority.

The eternity of God is one of those profound spiritual intuitions which cannot be demonstrated on logical grounds or in practical experience....The eternal nature of God is a profound intuition which the prophets of the human race have felt in some of the clearest moments of their spiritual insight and we accept it because of the noble character of the prophets who uttered it and also because it falls in line with our own other spiritual convictions and appeals to the deepest instincts in us. (Appasamy 1944b:16)

Appasamy thus presented a definition of religion that was deeply theistic and focused on encounter with God. His neglect of Buddha is understandable as Buddhist traditions do not neatly fit this paradigm. Listing Rama among the prophets is straining credulity and is nowhere explained. The personal encounter with God that to Appasamy was the core of religion was often described by him as mysticism, although he did take note of non-theistic mysticisms also.

1.2 Mystical Religion

In his discussion of "Religious Experience in India" Appasamy outlined his perspective on mysticism.³ He suggested that "...the distinctive type of religious experience in India is that which stresses a close relationship with God as the fundamental business of religion" (Appasamy 1943a:88). The focus of this paper was on, in the words of the first sentence of the paper, "the growth of a Christian theology suited to the character of our people" (1943a:83). Thus it was not inappropriate for him to say that "it is not necessary to dwell at length on the point that mystical experience has a great appeal to the Hindu" (1943a:89).

Appasamy suggested that there are five different types of Christian religious experience, with experiential mysticism the preferred option.

³ There is a fuller discussion of mysticism in Appasamy 1991[1930]:5ff.

With many millions of Christians religion is primarily the way to character....Religion has become for large numbers of Christians the most vital factor in the reconstruction of society....For Christians with whom intellectual questions are of compelling urgency religion often means the holding of correct beliefs....There are others with whom the institutional element is of primary significance....What may be called the mystical approach to religion stands out clearly from these other types....The man who follows mystical religion regards his contact with God in and by itself as the highest goal attainable. (Appasamy 1943a:89-90)

Appasamy went on immediately in this context to refer to two types of mysticism; one being fellowship with a personal God and the other being merged in the Absolute.

Both these types are found in India. The Christian thinker realizes that the experience of union with the divine in which the human personality is completely lost goes against the entire background and the essential character of Christianity. (Appasamy 1943a:90)

After defining religion as belief in God as noted above it is clear that Appasamy would not favor a mysticism that focused on merging with the Absolute.⁴ But his definition of religion as fundamentally theistic seems overconfident in light of his acknowledgement of non-theistic positions. Rather than a study of religious phenomena as such Appasamy focused on what he considered true religion or the best religion. He did not wrestle with the five types of Christianity that he outlined, rather just used that to highlight the best and truest form of Christianity which is the mystical.

Appasamy's focus on personal mystical experience as the fundamental reality of religion brings him into acute tension related to the discussion of religion in the first chapter of this thesis. This is a compartmentalized viewpoint dependent on developments from the Enlightenment worldview. Appasamy did not completely separate the mystical from the rest of life; his discussion documented below promoting Christianity over Hinduism due to its social concern is sufficient evidence against that. But with his focus on personal experience Appasamy missed the organizational and political development of "syndicated Hinduism," and also had no paradigm for dealing with the communitarian construction of Hinduism and Christianity as alternate belongings and identities.

⁴ Cf. Appasamy's statement on Christ's use of water and food in relation to advaitic thought; "It is the peculiar genius of the Christian religion that it builds up our soul with the perishing things of life which the *advaitin* says are *maya*" (1944b:12).

In a completely different context from his outline of five types of Christianity Appasamy outlined a very different taxonomy of "at least five different types of religious life in Hinduism" (1942h:6). The five were atheism, polytheism, pantheism, monism and theism (1942h:6-8). The last was about *bhakti* (devotion), which became the focus of Appasamy's attention. This selective approach to data fit the focus of Appasamy's work, and it was not pretentious as he quite openly admitted in one of his most academic works that he was not approaching religion in a "scientific" manner.

The noble elements in Hinduism which stir us profoundly with their beauty and power are imbedded in a vast amount of heterogeneous matter. In our quest for all that is of value in the religious life of India we have deliberately to see what we want to see and to ignore what we want to ignore. This may not be a scientific procedure....But that is the way of living religion. (Appasamy 1934:17)

Appasamy did not completely ignore religious differences, as seen in his paper above that outlined his suggested four common points for religions (section 1.1 above) where he mentions some significant areas of disagreement. The first was whether there is one God only or also "many gods through whom He works" (Appasamy 1943g:76). Then also whether or not God is personal was raised, and if he is personal with attributes, just what are those attributes? How God should be worshipped, particularly whether images should be used, is another area of difference. Finally, there is the question of what the goal of religion should be.

Personal communion with a loving Father is the only goal that is worth the name as far as large sections of mankind are concerned. Multitudes of people, on the other hand, believe that the final destiny of man is absorption in the divine being; the human personality with its frailties and imperfections must lose itself in God. (Appasamy 1943g:77)

In the remainder of this paper Appasamy then appealed to Jesus as the authority who teaches and is the way to communion with God, so it is clear where he stood on this matter. But the focus on Jesus in light of various religious opinions raises other important questions about religion. Appasamy suggested that

Now here in India there is no problem of greater importance in the field of religion than the comparative significance of the spiritual values nourished by the various religions. (1943g:80)

That "spiritual values" was defined as the area of great importance between religions is not a surprise in light of Appasamy's definition of religion, but it is reductionistic rather than holistic. Appasamy suggested that the reality of various religious traditions being in juxtaposition is a modern issue that in fact is a blessing, since there is now the opportunity to understand other faiths in ways not possible to previous generations. He added that "I must have the open mind and be prepared to listen and absorb anything that is of value in the religious experience of other people" (1943g:82). Here again, the focus was on religious experience and broader aspects of religious traditions were not brought into the discussion.

This paper ends with Appasamy suggesting that the sins and failures of Christians should not be held against Jesus. The closing sentence is, "The religion of Jesus ought to be considered on its own merits" (1943g:84). This raises the question of how this "religion of Jesus" relates to religious experience if the experience of the followers of Jesus should not be counted against it. The "religion of Jesus" certainly seems to refer to more than mystical experience, in fact brings in the back door all the baggage of the world religions paradigm. The depth of the paradigm of competing religions in the perspective of Appasamy is seen in a comment that the Brahmo Samaj

has been a half-way house between Hinduism and Christianity and a half-way house is never full. The Arya Samaj has been exclusively Hindu and has spread widely. Christian missions, with their unique message of hope and salvation, have brought millions into the Christian church. The Brahmo Samaj has been neither wholly Hindu nor wholly Christian and its influence has been therefore steadily dwindling. (Appasamy 1943f:46)

Appasamy's mystical approach to religion is thus in tension with reified constructs where a stark choice of one religion or the other is necessary.

1.3 Concluding Comments

Appasamy's view of religion as fundamentally mystical experience does not provide a strong enough foundation for him to adequately account for the complexity of Christianity and Hinduism. He recognized varying and non-mystical aspects of each of these diverse traditions and since he was not attempting a taxonomy of religions he was able to continue to focus in the areas of his particular interest and concern. In considering his broad approach to Christianity in relation to Hinduism below it will be seen that Appasamy's mystical

understanding of religion did not provide an adequate paradigm for the encounter of these traditions.

2.0 Christianity and Hinduism

A. J. Appasamy's approach to the Christian engagement with Hinduism is certainly a variety of *possessio*. This is unmistakable from his affirmation that "whatever in the religious experience of India is in harmony with the mind of Christ is ours" (1943a:87). The context of that statement will be outlined below in analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of Appasamy's position.

2.1 Utilitarian *Possessio*

There is an acute dialectical tension running throughout Appasamy's writings, and arguably through *The Pilgrim* itself. This is evident from the "ours" of the quotation above, which clearly refers to Indian Christians or the Indian Christian church. What Appasamy is claiming as properly belonging to Indian Christians is truth in Indian traditions; "religious experience," in his preferred terminology.

Appasamy clearly had a generally positive view of Hinduism; there is much truth therein, much that "is in harmony with the mind of Christ." Yet a "we" and "they" mentality runs throughout his treatment, and there is never doubt that "we (Christians)" are the truly enlightened ones and "they (Hindus)" need what "we" have to offer. At a few points Appasamy came close to suggesting that Christians need to learn from Hindus, but it seems this is a statement he was not ready to make.⁵

In a discussion on mysticism (1942d:19ff) Appasamy was critical of Western Christian disinterest in the mystical and commended the mysticism of even the common people of

⁵ A possible exception here is in his commending Christians who want to learn from Gandhi (1941b:20). But the overwhelming emphasis of this article is negative, contrasting Gandhi's views and Christian teaching, as this closing statement suggests: "this book gives much food for thought to all Christian workers among educated Hindus. It shows the many peculiar difficulties which they [educated Hindus] experience in understanding the Christian religion and suggests fruitful lines of approach" (26). Similarly, a statement that "we have to learn from the [Hindu] *bhaktas* the great lesson that prayer is fundamentally a means of communion with God" (Appasamy 1942d:25). But the context here shows this is really a reminder rather than a new insight gained from Hindus.

India (problematic aspects of this analysis will be noted later). He went to the length of referring to his father's experience of seeking "spiritual instruction" from "a Hindu yogi" (1942d:22), and affirmed that his father reached a "higher spiritual level" through this contact. Yet he did not commend this approach to others, rather constantly stressed the need to study *Christian* mysticism. Most tellingly, his fundamental advice was that "As missionaries and Christian workers it is our duty to make the fullest possible *use* of these longings and strivings of the Indian soul" (1942d:21; my italics). The basic mindset was not dialogical or seeking to learn, but rather utilitarian, looking for strategies and approaches that would succeed in winning Hindus to faith in Christ.

2.2 Fulfillment

The basic framework of Appasamy's approach to Hinduism was clearly that of fulfillment. This is evident in a lengthy paragraph in a paper on "India's Road to Christ."

It is often pointed out that a great many of our Christians in India have no knowledge of the heritage of their country. The problems which trouble Hindu devotees leave them cold; they are not interested in the many speculations which the Hindu mind spins; the task of relating the Christian gospel to the indigenous thought of the country has no attraction for them. They are quite content with the Christian doctrine on which they have been brought up and have no wish whatever to experiment with Indian forms of thought. This is because the Indian Christians have become de-nationalized. We have no knowledge of the culture of our country and are aliens in our own land. We must certainly see to it that this criticism is no longer true of us. Our witness to Christ will be far more effective if our links with the heritage of India are close. Our loyalty to Christ must not waver in any direction; He demands from us complete loyalty and full surrender. But He has come to fulfil and not to destroy. Whatever is noble, true and pure in the life of India must be dedicated to Him. (1944a:126-127)

However, Appasamy did not promote Christ as the fulfillment of all aspects of Hinduism. He was quite consistent and insistent in his rejection of an advaitic worldview.⁶ Even regarding *bhakti* Hinduism, however, Appasamy had much more to say that was negative than positive.

⁶ This was noted above in section 1.2 where loss of personality in merging with God was rejected. Appasamy spoke specifically against advaita in a paper on "The Weakness of Hindu *Bhakti*" where he suggested that Hindu *bhakti* is weakened by the influence of advaitic thought. Specifically he criticized the great advaitin Shankara, saying that "Shankara is consistent, but by saying that all human longing for worship [of God] is wrong" (1942b:3). Further criticism of Shankara, this time referenced from a Hindu author, is seen in 1942e:46. The black and white nature of Appasamy's perspective on this point is again clear in 1943d:8 where a Hindu attempt to harmonize *dvaita*, *viśiṣṭadvaita* and advaita thought is adamantly rejected. A similar rejection of what he considers the advaitic view of maya or illusion is stated in 1944b:12.

My analysis of Appasamy's fulfillment-based, critical, utilitarian approach to Hinduism will be in relation to the stated purposes of the CSSH.

2.3 Appasamy and the Goals of the CSSH

The first purpose of the CSSH was "To create and maintain adequate interest in the study of Hinduism by Christians."⁷ Appasamy regularly lamented the ignorance and even disdain of Christians and missionaries for Hinduism.⁸ His concern to teach his Christian readership about Hinduism as he understood it is evident from the many papers published in the issues of *The Pilgrim* that he edited.⁹

But the second purpose of the CSSH presented a far more challenging proposition with its call "To carry on this study in a sympathetic, constructive, and critical way for the purpose of effective evangelism." Appasamy certainly kept the evangelistic motive to the forefront of his writing. His first major contribution to *The Pilgrim* was an extensive review of Mahatma Gandhi's book on *Christian Missions: Their Place in India*. The first point Appasamy made is a fundamental disagreement over conversion, and he defended Christian conversion at considerable length (1941b:19-20). The entire focus of this paper assumed the world religions paradigm and that Christianity was a preferable religion over Hinduism.¹⁰

⁷ As pointed out in chapter 3, this purpose was clearly printed in almost every issue of *The Pilgrim*.

⁸ Two significant quotations will suffice to demonstrate this.

The Christian missionary in India is apt to look upon these questions [related to mysticism] as of no great significance. What is of importance is that men should lead a good life and work earnestly for God. The practical aspect of Christianity dominates his whole thinking. He is not interested in the inner life which is the source and fountainhead of this practical activity. (Appasamy 1942d:19).

I may say without exaggeration that most missionaries and Christian workers in India make no special effort to study Hinduism. In their younger days they may have taken courses on Hinduism as a part of their theological work and read some of the standard books on the subject. But as they grow older they cease to take a vital interest in the throbbing spiritual life of India. If they are studiously minded (and some few are) they read the latest theological books published in the West but make no real attempt to become familiar with the problems of the Indian thinker. India's spiritual heritage is like a vast ocean. There is a great deal to learn and much expenditure of time and energy is needed. It is curious how many of our Christian workers, whether Europeans or Indians, fail to realize this. (Appasamy 1944a:122)

⁹ For example, Rawson 1941 on the Gita, Appasamy 1942f on the Katha Upanishad, Paul 1943 on Neo-Hinduism, particularly the thought of Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan, and Dewick 1944 on Divine Indwelling in Hindu thought.

¹⁰ The Quit India movement led by Gandhi convulsed India throughout 1942, but *The Pilgrim* made no reference to any political events during the Appasamy years. This is perhaps another fruit of the focus on mystical religion.

The evangelistic motive was in the forefront of a paper on "Christianity and Educated Hindus," where the second paragraph began, "For the same reason [educational clarity] it is very desirable that we should know something of the religious psychology of the Hindus so that we may preach the gospel effectively to them; we need to start from where they are and lead them to Christ" (Appasamy 1943d:2). Perhaps most striking on this point is a study of the Tamil Christian poet H. A. Krishna Pillai, where particularly his "passion for souls" and his "missionary fervour" were highly commended (Appasamy 1942a:55f).

Planting an evangelistic agenda front and center of studies of Hinduism placed great strain on the goal of "sympathetic" and "constructive" study of Hinduism. ("Critical" study, also in the purpose statement, seems to fit more easily.) Appasamy clearly desired to be sympathetic, yet careful study of his writings in *The Pilgrim* raises questions in this area. In fact, Appasamy himself confessed a failure to attain sympathy in this statement:

Practically all the devotion of the *bhaktas* centres round one or the other of these gods [Siva, Vishnu, Krishna, Rama]. It is impossible to see how the *bhaktas* could have been stirred to such fervent piety by these gods. Siva is a terrible god who embodies the destructive forces of the universe. In spite of our best efforts to study Krishna with sympathy we fail to appreciate him. (1942b:7)¹¹

The dissonance of this passage with the stated purpose of *The Pilgrim* is not mitigated by its exceptional character in Appasamy's writings. It is noteworthy that in a later reprinting of this paper, in Appasamy's 1970 study of Hindu *bhakti*, this passage was removed.¹²

2.4 Sympathy and Triumphalism

In a similar but less jarring statement in objection to karma, self-centeredness in religion and a suggested lack of Hindu social service, Appasamy said that Christians "cannot have any sympathy with such phases of Hinduism" (1943a:88). It is too easy and too common to judge

¹¹ This is probably a use of the royal "we," but a few sentences later Appasamy writes that "we should offer Christ to India," so it is possible that the "we" assumes all Christians will assent to and join in affirming his point.

¹² "The Weakness of Hindu *Bhakti*" is chapter 13 of 14 in *The Theology of Hindu Bhakti* (Appasamy 1970). That chapter is exactly the paper of the same name from *The Pilgrim* (Appasamy 1942b), except that the concluding paragraph featuring the derogatory comparison of Hindu deities with Christ which is quoted above is deleted. The final chapter of that book is a full reprinting of another *The Pilgrim* paper, "The Survival Value of Hindu Bhakti" (Appasamy 1942d). The only change here is that the last subsection is entitled "The Joy of the Religious Life" in *The Pilgrim*, but "The Joy of God" in *The Theology of Hindu Bhakti*. This certainly on the surface appears to be recognition by Appasamy of the inappropriateness of his comments on Siva and Krishna.

people of the past by the standards of the present. Not wanting to err in that way, it must yet be said that these are statements that were written by the editor of a journal which clearly announced its aim to be sympathetic. R. C. Das was also critical of karma, yet in his *possessio* approach there was a positive embracing along with a refining, whereas Appasamy in his own words is without sympathy for the concept of karma.

Appasamy also confessed a failure to understand Hindu thinkers at a point quite central to his critique of advaitic Hinduism. This was written in a eulogy to Rabindranath Tagore.

Once a Hindu professor of philosophy said to me, "There are times when I am drawn to the worship of a personal God. These are my devotional moods. There are other times when I am led to think of God as the One Supreme Reality. These are my philosophical moments." Tagore would probably have said the same. These two ways of thinking of God are entirely different. I fail to understand how Hindu thinkers pass from the one outlook to the other without any difficulty. (Appasamy 1941c:36).

This failure to understand led to a clear lack of sympathy for anything resembling an advaitic outlook.

There are other passages besides these acknowledged failures where Appasamy clearly did not attain an adequate level of sympathy for Hindu positions. In the eulogy for Rabindranath Tagore just cited, Appasamy noted that Tagore "was not willing to acknowledge any indebtedness to Christian sources" (1941c:36). Appasamy suggested that this was because he

resented a good deal the aggressive methods of missionary work in India. He went too far in his fear that if he expressed in any way his indebtedness to the life and work of Christ, missionaries would make capital of his utterances and use them in their propaganda. (36)

Appasamy went on to point out that Tagore "owed much to Christ" through his upbringing in the Brahmo Samaj and through English literature and by his frequent visits to the West (Appasamy 1941c:36). And so he made propagandistic use of Tagore's exposure to Christianity even though he recognized Tagore's abhorrence for exactly such behavior.

It seems to me inescapable that a triumphalistic attitude and accompanying condescending approach to Hinduism is too often present in fulfilment writings.¹³ Appasamy's claim of Christian influence on Tagore could hardly avoid seeming triumphalistic. A great Hindu poet who was influenced by many experiences and teachings is claimed as an example of the influence of Christ. This same style of triumphalistic comparison is seen in a reference to the social work done by the Ramakrishna Mission ("we know how much the Ramakrishna Mission owes to Jesus;" Appasamy 1943e:33).

At numerous other points in his writings there is room to question whether Appasamy is being suitably sympathetic to Hinduism in line with the stated goal of the CSSH. But that there is at least some measure of failure in this area is clear. The goal of being *constructive* in approach to Hinduism is much more difficult to evaluate. What exactly did the CSSH founders have in mind when they called for a constructive study of Hinduism? Since their end goal was effective evangelism, suggesting conversions of Hindus to Christianity, "constructive" certainly did not mean for the building up of Hinduism.

A proper interpretation at this point is probably indicated by examination of the opposite, a *destructive* approach to Hinduism. Chapter one already noted this tendency in the early Christian encounter with Hinduism, and fulfilment theories arose primarily in contrast to this. But cynical and destructive readings of Hinduism by some Christians continued throughout the decades of the CSSH, and indeed continue on to the present time.¹⁴ There is no effort at sympathy with Hindu teaching in this destructive approach, rather a glorying in failure and weakness and falsehood.

But, arguably, a constructive view of Hinduism in the mid-twentieth century Christian encounter with Hinduism referred more to a new type of constructing of Christianity than to constructiveness in relation to Hinduism itself. Regardless of whether this was the intent, this

¹³ I have discussed this previously in a survey of Christian evangelistic approaches to Hindus in the 20th century (Richard 1997:422f).

¹⁴ A glaring modern example of this type of destructive reading of Hinduism is seen in a prayer booklet from the Southern Baptist Convention that got notorious publicity in India on its release in 1999. The opening sentence reads, "More than 900 million people are lost in the hopeless darkness of Hinduism, worshipping 330 million gods and goddesses created by the imagination of men and women searching for a source of truth and strength" (International Mission Board 1999:1). Note that a later edition of this booklet, without any indication that a change had been made, altered this opening line to "More than 900 million people seek healing from disease, salvation from natural disasters, definition of their place and role in life, acceptance in their communities and meaning in life through the path of Hinduism" (International Mission Board 2000:1).

concern to construct a new type of Indian Christianity is certainly evident in Appasamy's writings. In his paper on "The Survival Value of Hindu Bhakti" Appasamy made passing reference to what was clearly to him an axiomatic reality: "We speak of the bringing into the Christian Church the spiritual heritage of India" (1942d:21). Similarly, the opening sentence of his paper on "Religious Experience in India": "We in India are particularly interested in the growth of a Christian theology suited to the character of our people" (1943a:83).¹⁵

2.5 Christianity Learning from Hinduism

For Appasamy this Indian expression of Christianity learned in relation to Hinduism was mainly about mysticism. The centrality of mysticism to Appasamy's approach to religion has already been discussed. He regularly appealed to the Indian Christian mystic Sadhu Sundar Singh. His understanding of Christian mysticism is clear from a passing definition given in his tribute to the Tamil Christian poet H. A. Krishna Pillai. On Pillai he commented,

While he was not a mystic in the sense that the realization of the Presence of God was the dominant passion of his life, his devotion and love to Christ at times reached a definitely mystic fervour and depth. (Appasamy 1942a:53)

This reveals the highly subjective element in Appasamy's approach to mysticism, which in this statement would be defined as "a dominant passion for the realization of the presence of God." This is expanded and perhaps deepened in a series of questions that indicate "mystic strivings" of Hindus:

The main strivings of the Hindu *bhaktas* are all mystical. How shall we reach God? How shall we worship Him? How shall we meditate upon Him? Is it possible to see Him? How shall we get into states of ecstasy in which, with the outside world dropped out of our consciousness, we shall be in union with God? What shall we do if the sense of God's presence leaves our hearts? These are the problems which perplex and exercise the minds of the *bhaktas*. (Appasamy 1942d:19)

It must be stressed that Appasamy did not see this mysticism as in any way elitist. Maybe that was the case in the West, but in India even the common folk are attracted to the mystical way:

¹⁵ In "India's Road to Christ" Appasamy discussed when this new Christianity in relation to Hinduism should develop, referring to a view that there should be no artificial stimulation towards this end. Appasamy disagreed, affirming that the time is now; "It is certainly our task to awaken in the minds of our people an earnest desire to think out for themselves the meaning of the Christian religion against the spiritual background of India" (1944a:129).

The *bhakti* hymns are cherished by the common folk in India. They are on many people's lips. The man in the bazaar keeps chanting them. The postman off his duty pores over them. The clerk before he goes to office spends the early hours of the day singing them. Crowds of men and women listen with rapt attention to these songs as they are sung and explained to them. The experience of the spiritual life which the *bhaktas* had are known to, and in a measure participated in by, devout men and women in India today. They are not confined to the few. In the West mysticism may be the cult of the few but in India it is the cult of the many. (1942d:20-21)

This is clearly far from a cynical or destructive view of Hinduism or Indian spirituality. Appasamy sought to construct his Indian theology on the basis of this understanding of Indian mysticism. "In the development of Christian theology in this country such experience [communion with God] must find the first place" (Appasamy 1943a:91). From this foundation Appasamy went on to very briefly discuss the personal nature of God, the transcendence and immanence of God, ethics, sin as a barrier to fellowship with God, grace, forgiveness (contra karma), incarnation and the cross of Christ (1943a:91).

Obviously there is very little from Hinduism in this specific effort towards an Indian theology.¹⁶ There is little even that contrasts with historic Western Christian teaching. At one point Appasamy did suggest something rather different from Western theological traditions, but then he hedged his suggestion with such severe qualifications that one wonders what is left at the end.

The Christian thinker in India will be drawn to study the inner life of Jesus even more than His outer life, though he will acknowledge that the materials for such study are meagre and that there is a real danger of the effort to understand the inner life of Jesus becoming more or less speculation, not closely related to fact. (Appasamy 1943a:92)

This analysis of Appasamy's constructive interaction with Hinduism yields rather meager results.¹⁷ The vast majority of his analysis of Hinduism was critical, even critical to the point of sitting in judgment on Hinduism. There is a sensitive dialectic here, and it would not be fair to merely extract and list all the criticisms that Appasamy stated against Hindu teachings

¹⁶ Note a related discussion where Appasamy suggested that "It is often said that an Indian interpretation of Christianity means the use of Hindu terms in our theological books" (1944a:123). Appasamy objected, suggesting that much more than this is meant. But his further discussion was little more than an illustration where dissonance (like the intrusion of karma in mentioning forgiveness) with Hindu teaching was much stronger than assonance. This point will be developed below.

¹⁷ Evangelistic contact with Hindus and developing theology in reference to Hindu issues are clearly the center of Appasamy's encounter with Hinduism, with little sign of struggle with the double reifications of religion and Indian Christian community.

and practices. Often his most positive statements about Hinduism were intricately related with triumphalistic or critical evaluations.

For example, in a discussion of the Christian approach to Hindu religious experience Appasamy strongly affirmed his belief in the legitimacy of the encounter with God of Hindu saints.

We cannot but accept that there has been in India the thirst for God, the realization of God's presence and occasionally the experience of the forgiveness of sin. These experiences, which take place in the sanctum of the soul and which are only revealed to the outside world by the devotee's own words, must be considered carefully and their value must be assessed. I, for one, cannot believe that such profound devotion to God, conviction of the utterly degraded nature of the devotee, sense of the need for complete surrender, radiant joy in God's presence which are found abundantly in Hindu religious literature can be achieved by human effort; they can only be regarded as God-given. Man is too weak and sinful a creature to pass through such exalted experiences without divine grace to help him. (Appasamy 1943a:86-87)

Appasamy immediately proceeded to suggest that claims of religious experience must pass the test of the claimant displaying a consistently upright character.

If men who claim such experiences are truthful in their dealings, loving towards others, clean in their sex life and ready for the utmost sacrifice for God, we cannot but say that their religious experience is genuine. It is quite certain that there have been thousands of people in India who have fulfilled the most exacting tests of character to which they have been subjected. (1943a:87)

The very next sentence is that which opened this chapter: "Whatever in the religious experience of India is in harmony with the mind of Christ is ours" (1943a:87). And then immediately follow the qualifications: "There is, of course, a great deal in India which fails to come up to the Christian norm" (1943a:87).¹⁸ This discussion of Appasamy's critical objections to aspects of Hindu teachings needs to be understood in the context of the more positive statements that also run throughout his writings.

2.6 Christianity Correcting Hinduism

Appasamy himself wrote at some length on the assonance and dissonance between Hinduism and Christianity, particularly related to when the dissonant aspects should be raised in

¹⁸ Idolatry and karma are the points used to illustrate Hindu shortcomings in the immediately following context.

discussion with Hindus. This lengthy paragraph is another example of the utilitarian mindset of most of Appasamy's writings on Hinduism, and of the "we" vs. "they" assumption.

In our approach to Hindus do we emphasize only those aspects of Christianity which appeal to them and ignore the others? They have a deep longing for God. They are keenly aware of the need for realizing His Presence. They are prepared for any measure of sacrifice in order to love God fully and to serve Him truly. They know the joy of living in God. These are all profound spiritual experiences. They are of the very texture of the Christian religion. In seeking to build upon them an Indian interpretation of the Christian religion we shall not go wrong. There are many directions, on the other hand, in which Hindu spirituality is lacking. The holiness of God is not first and foremost in the thought of a Hindu devotee. Great prophets of the Bible like Isaiah and Jeremiah have much to teach India in this respect. The awfulness of sin, the need for daily forgiveness, the readiness of God to forgive, the necessity of the cross, the experience of the joy of forgiveness – all these are comparatively lacking in the religious life of India. It is obvious that these latter experiences belong to the heart of the Christian religion and cannot be ignored even if they do not happen to call forth any immediate or effective response from many Hindus. They will modify in many important respects the experience of oneness with God for which the Hindu earnestly strives; they will also determine the nature of the practical results which will emerge from such oneness. It is necessary that emphasis should be laid in India as well as in the other countries of the world upon the holiness of God and all that follows from it. The only question is whether this ethical stress should come first in our approach to Hindus or whether it should come after we take into account those aspects of Hindu religious life such as the longing to live in fellowship with God which are of characteristic importance and which are in accordance with some of the noblest spiritual experiences of the Old Testament and of the New. I am inclined to think that we must begin at the point where a Hindu has firm convictions and strong beliefs, viz. his profound longing for oneness with God, and then proceed to explain those aspects of Christian teaching which are vitally different from his own heritage but which are just as essential for him if he is to be a true Christian. (Appasamy 1943d:10)

The specific issues that Appasamy focused on here where Hinduism needs to be corrected by Christian teaching are the holiness of God and human sin. These points, along with a few others, are regularly raised in his writings. In the most philosophical and theological of his papers in *The Pilgrim*, "God is *Sat*," he affirmed biblical support for the Vedantic triad of *sat* (being), *cit* (consciousness) and *ānanda* (bliss), yet also suggested that this *saccidānanda* remains inferior to the biblical emphasis on the holiness and love of God (1944b:1, 15f.).

In "The Weakness of Hindu *Bhakti*" Appasamy's critique of Hindu views of God did not mention holiness, but rather the tension between personalistic and monistic views of God.¹⁹ His second point of criticism, often raised in other contexts as well, was related to karma.

¹⁹ See note 5 of this chapter for a quotation from that paper on this point.

Among his problems with karma teaching was that he considered it to compromise a true understanding of God. "The full acceptance of the doctrine of karma has somehow given to the *bhakti* doctrine of the love of God an air of unreality" (1942b:5).²⁰ Finally for that paper, he objected to idolatry.

Further in his indictment of karma, Appasamy stated that "the fatal idea in India that all action, whether good or bad, is sure to involve a man in a cycle of births and deaths, was absent from the teaching of Jesus" (1943e:33). This was in the context of criticizing a book that stressed the renunciatory aspects of *sanyāsa*; Appasamy showed how the Bhagavad Gita also affirmed concern for the welfare of the world (Gita 3:20), and he acclaimed Jesus as "the noblest example of a true *sannyasi*" (1943e:33). The common mystical core of religion that Appasamy sought and affirmed was thus often overwhelmed by a comparative religion paradigm that always favored Christianity over Hinduism.

The general lack of a concern for social service is another aspect of Appasamy's critical analysis of Hinduism.²¹ He acknowledged change in this area, particularly due to the Ramakrishna Mission. But his compliments were rather backhanded, and in the end he admitted to being confounded:

The Ramakrishna Mission is spreading far and wide, both by teaching and by example, the need for combining the service of one's fellows who are in distress, physically or spiritually, with a life of prayer and meditation. I feel that the ideal of the advaita philosophy which is followed by the Ramakrishna Mission is least compatible with that of service, for ultimately in the philosophy there is no room for human personality; and all social service implies the recognition of such personality. We seek to educate and help our fellow men because they have souls and bodies which are truly real. From the point of view of logic the ideals of advaita and social service are quite incompatible; but they are being combined with remarkable success at the present time by the

²⁰ Appasamy's view of Hindu teaching on karma is not in line with more nuanced modern interpretations, as that of Julius Lipner:

Free will has a role to play in all three kinds of *karma*....For Hindus it is a question of balancing determining forces and the strength of free will (aided by God's grace if one is a theist), and, in weighing up the scales, some give more weight to one side, some to the other. (2010:266)

Cf. also Lipner 2010: 260, "one could say glibly that there are almost as many versions of the belief [*karma-samsāra*] as there are believers."

²¹ This was already noted in passing above, both in a quotation about not having sympathy with this aspect of Hinduism and in reference to a triumphalistic attitude related to the Ramakrishna Mission borrowing their social concern from Jesus. It appears also in an otherwise commendatory introduction to the Alvar saints in a book review.

We miss in the Alvars, with all their rapture and devotion, the spirit of service. They did not realize that love for God must be expressed in the service of the poor, the sick and the needy. India has much to learn from Christ, who constantly sought God's presence in silence and contemplation and who also went about doing good. (Appasamy 1942g:82)

Ramakrishna Mission. Life, in its profound mystery and diversity, seems to defy all logic. (Appasamy 1943d:9)²²

A final point on this overview of Appasamy's critical writings on Hinduism is a strong rejection of caste or *varnāśrama dharma*. In opposition to a reformed Hindu suggestion that *varnāśrama dharma*, if separated from a hereditary foundation, can solve the problems of modern society, Appasamy wrote that

The institution of *varnashrama dharma* has been given a long trial in India under exceptionally favourable circumstances. It has proved to be the bane of Hindu society. I fail to see how it can yet be modified and deprived of its inherent weakness so as to suit modern conditions. (1942e:40)

The nature and tone of Appasamy's criticisms of Hinduism makes it difficult to accept that he was meeting his own standard for being constructive or sympathetic; certainly he was consistently more negative than R. C. Das. Even when simply expounding on a Hindu topic, as in a paper on the Katha Upanishad, there was no sense that Appasamy was learning anything; rather he was the judge who in this case was giving approval to the concepts outlined (1942f). As referenced above, when praising the Alvar saints he found their point of weakness. He clearly did not think it inappropriate to point out the true meaning of the Gita in response to a fourteenth century Hindu teacher ("Vidyaranya, like most Hindu *sannyasis*, has failed to grasp the significance of the Gita doctrine of *nishkama karma*" (Appasamy 1943e:28).)²³

Even at the point where Appasamy had the greatest appreciation for Hinduism, the teaching of the *bhakti* saints, he pronounced a simplistic and condescending conclusion in comparison with the Old Testament of the Bible.

We do not dismiss the Old Testament because the story of Israel is tainted with idol worship. On the other hand, we find much value in the slow and toilsome growth of Israel towards clearer light about the nature of God and about the method of worshipping Him. The *bhakti* religion of India may be considered to belong to the spiritual level which is represented by the Old Testament. The faith and devotion and love which have been lavished on idols must be directed towards the one true God,

²² Appasamy did write one paper of high praise for a Hindu social reformer with no hint of criticism of any kind. This was in a review of *Harvest from the Desert* by B. P. L. Bedi, a biography of the social reformer Sir Ganga Ram (Appasamy 1943b).

²³ Vidyaranya wrote a Sanskrit treatise, *The Jivan Mukti Viveka*, a new translation of which, published by the Theosophical Publishing House in Madras, Appasamy was reviewing. *Nishkāma karma* is the Bhagavad Gita teaching on doing works (*karma*) without (*nish*) any desire (*kāma*) for reward.

especially as we know Him through His Incarnation in Jesus Christ. (Appasamy 1943c:109)²⁴

The truly sympathetic, positive and constructive elements in Appasamy's teaching were in relation to Christianity in India. He was optimistic about the new Christianity he saw emerging from interaction with India's Hindu heritage.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is of universal validity. The Christian thinker in India will approach it from the background of his own national heritage and he will find in it new aspects of truth, love and joy, which will help him supremely and which may also help Christians in other parts of the world, to become more earnest and faithful followers of Christ. (Appasamy 1943a:93)²⁵

In light of this central concern, it is no surprise that Appasamy moved on from *The Pilgrim* to a larger role in the Indian church, eventually that of Bishop of Coimbatore in the Church of South India. His resignation as editor of *The Pilgrim* included the understanding that he would not be able to write further articles, either.²⁶ His later writings after resigning from *The Pilgrim* were mainly related to church and revival issues.²⁷ Appasamy moved on to a new stage of his life which took him far from concerns related to Christian interaction with Hinduism.²⁸

²⁴ Orthodox Christians would point out that the prophets of the Old Testament uniformly opposed idolatry. Thus this comparison puts the *bhakti* saints on a significantly lower level than even OT, let alone New Testament writers.

²⁵ These are the closing sentences from the paper on "Religious Experience in India" which has often been quoted in this chapter.

²⁶ This is explicit in *The Pilgrim* 5:1, page 1. He did later contribute papers to 6:4 (on the early history of *bhakti*), 7:3 (part two from 6:4 on *bhakti* in the Bhagavad Gita) and 8:2 (on *pramānas*).

²⁷ Appasamy wrote two biographical studies (*Sundar Singh: A Biography* (1958) and *Tamil Christian Poet: The Life and Writings of H. A. Krishna-Pillai* (1966)) which very much related to his concern for Indian Christianity in relation to Hinduism. A third biography, *Write the Vision: A Biography of J. Edwin Orr* (1964b), related to his interest in revival. In his introduction to this work he wrote, "I retired [as bishop] on 1st April 1959....I resolved that I would devote the rest of my days to pray and work for revival in the Christian Church all over the world" (Appasamy 1964b:11). That same introduction explains the impact Orr had on Appasamy in the early 1950s. He published four revivalist booklets in the 50s (*A Spiritual Awakening in South India* (1953), *Behold, I Stand at the Door & Knock* (1954a), *An Outpouring of the Holy Spirit* (1954b), *The Pentecostal Element in the Christian Church* (1955)). Two autobiographical items were also published, the booklet *My Theological Quest* (1964a) and *A Bishop's Story* (1969). The one book intimately related to Hinduism published later in life was *The Theology of Hindu Bhakti* (1970), noted earlier for borrowing two of its major chapters directly from *The Pilgrim*. A final noteworthy publication was a creative attempt at Indian Christian theology, *What Shall We Believe?: A Study of Christian Pramanas* (1971), which is rooted in a paper in *The Pilgrim* 8:2 (as acknowledged in his preface, where still older roots in his thinking are also traced out).

²⁸ His last contribution to *The Pilgrim* stressed the "weakness of Hinduism" in that it "does not accept the authority of common councils and ecclesiastics who set up standards of orthodoxy in matters of doctrine," this clearly in the context of Christianity having this source of authority (Appasamy 1949:15). Chenchiah in his editorial in that same issue of *The Pilgrim* openly disagreed with Appasamy on this point (Chenchiah 1949d:3f.).

3.0 Conclusion

A. J. Appasamy approached Hinduism from a fulfillment perspective that resonates in some ways with the *possessio* viewpoint outlined in chapter one of this thesis. A major concern with the *possessio* position is the danger of it becoming, or being perceived as, hegemonic and triumphalistic. Appasamy was respectful and appreciative towards aspects of Hindu teaching and life, but despite his affirmation of a common mysticism he also held to a reified world religions perspective and affirmed the superior position of Christianity in the interreligious encounter.

Where R. C. Das at least approached to a *mutual possessio* position that affirms all dialogue partners in taking possession of insights from other faiths, this element is lacking in Appasamy's perspective. Christianity as the true religion fulfilled and took possession of what is valuable in the Hindu heritage. How the Hindu heritage was to react to Christ and Christian teaching was not addressed; clearly it was only to be swallowed up in Christianity. Das looked for dynamic change within Hinduism, Appasamy saw only conversion into Christianity as the way forward. Appasamy thus faced far less tension with the world religions paradigm than Das. There were certainly tensions in Appasamy's thought on religions related to his understanding of religion as mysticism, but he simultaneously held reified compartmentalized understandings of Hinduism and Christianity that eliminated the grey areas present in Das' thought.

Many more voices from *The Pilgrim* need to be heard before finally concluding this analysis, including the major voice of P. Chenchiah.

6. The Many Voices of *The Pilgrim*

J. S. Moon became the second editor of *The Pilgrim*, in his first editorial clearly defining himself in a temporary role ("locum tenens," 1945:1). Yet in the end 12 issues of *The Pilgrim* were released under his editorship, just two less than came out under Appasamy. Moon's contributions to the journal are important to study as they provide insight into his editorial concerns. But he was nowhere near as prolific a contributor as his predecessor and successor were.

1.0 Moon and Summary Approaches to Hinduism

In light of Moon's lower profile, this chapter will study well beyond his personal contribution to *The Pilgrim*. All contributions to the first forty issues of *The Pilgrim* related to the Christian encounter with Hinduism will be surveyed except those by R. C. Das, A. J. Appasamy and P. Chenchiah which are discussed in separate chapters.

Under Moon's editorial supervision two important papers appeared that attempted clear summarizations of information. One, by Ashananda Nag, attempted a clear definition of Hinduism. The other attempted to outline a summary of Protestant Christian approaches to Hinduism. Entitled merely "The Approach," this article is "part of a thesis entitled "Evangelisation of the High Caste Hindus" by Rev. N. T. Jacob in Trichur, Cochin (now Kerala) State (Jacob 1946:75). Nag's effort will be critiqued with appreciation; Jacob's paradigm less so, and an alternate approach will be used in the remainder of this chapter to summarize Protestant Christian approaches to the study of Hinduism as seen in all contributors to *The Pilgrim* under the first three editors.¹

¹ As will be noted in the following chapter, Chenchiah was overwhelmingly the main contributor during his editorship. He also drew on a number of Hindu authors. So there is little Protestant Christian input to *The Pilgrim* under Chenchiah (excepting his own), making this chapter mainly about the second editorial period, with input from Appasamy's time and less so from Chenchiah's.

1.1 J. S. Moon's Writings

As noted in chapter two (section 2.4), J. S. Moon entered India with a background in Islamics. The difficulties in the Benares United City Mission meant that his stay there was less than 3 years (early 1943 to December of 1945). His contributions to *The Pilgrim* amount to an editorial, two sets of "notes," four book reviews and two articles (one in three parts). These writings reflect his rather introductory engagement with Hindu issues.

Moon's first and last statements in *The Pilgrim* give a good picture of his outlook. His opening editorial (the only editorial he wrote) briefly discussed "the study of other faiths by Christians" (1945:1). Fair understanding and evaluation of others' positions is the first reason to study other faiths.

In its dialogue with the non-Christian world the church must take care not to set up, as it were, mental, philosophical, and spiritual skittles of its own making to knock down. It must take the trouble to know what the others really think and say. (Moon 1945:2)

Beyond this concern for factual understanding, there is also the practical reality that Christianity is not in a vacuum but in dynamic relationship with other religions in the modern world. As dialogue was assumed in the quotation above, so Moon here gives at least tacit approval to a fulfillment perspective.

In a world reeling under destructive blows it is good to remember that Christ insisted that he had come not to destroy but to fulfill. This is not sentimental doctrine; no one need quote it as giving approval to all things equally. The pearl merchant in the parable has to choose. If he would possess the pearl of great price he must be prepared to give up other pearls. We need only note that he is not told to destroy the others. (Moon 1945:3)

Moon's final notes written for *The Pilgrim* are also of interest as they are reflections on the fact of Indian independence, the partition of the country and the union of churches in south India. Under a sub-heading of "Boundaries" the new boundaries of India are referred to, with broader reflections on less physical boundaries. Moon generally accepted the suggestion that Westerners look for boundaries while Indians are concerned with core issues; yet he pointed out that caste is "boundary drawing with a vengeance" (1947d:23).

Referring to his studies on the epistle to the Hebrews (to be noted below), Moon saw a positive aspect to boundaries. But he also suggested that they have their day, and a time for a higher unity is needed. In the political context, Moon was clearly hoping that someday a united India might reemerge from the current partition. Specifically he referred to the "great step forward" in south Indian church union, and called for a similar development in north India.²

Moon continued with the theme of boundaries in his other subheading, "Our Theological Task." This was a commendation for Marcus Ward's book of that title which came out of the first Indian Theological Conference in Pune in 1942 (published in 1946). Dogma and doctrine were differentiated in Ward's study, and Moon affirmed the distinction between unchanging, absolute, permanent dogma and doctrine which is relative and "must be restated from age to age in language and argument which the particular age or culture can understand" (1947d:24).³

Moon went on to suggest that a book like "our philosophical task" was also needed. Yet more important than this reflection was his ardent call to dialogue. First stated as a question, in light of "Christian preaching, which is certainly a proclamation of good news, and to that extent a monologue," Moon came to the conclusion that "there must be dialogue" (1947d:24, 25). Related to dialogue is risk, and Moon referred back to his first writing for *The Pilgrim*, where in his editorial he pointed out that "it is necessary to take a risk and go outside ourselves" (1945:2; 1947d:25).

On this foundation of careful understanding and eagerness for dialogue, Moon's approach to Hinduism was primarily apologetic.⁴ This is clear in his most extensive piece, a 3 part analysis of the Epistle to the Hebrews entitled "The Epistle of Pilgrimage." Introducing the third and last of the series, Moon wrote,

² The casual nature of the references to Partition in relation to other boundaries illustrates again the lack of political concern in *The Pilgrim*. The Enlightenment compartmentalization of religion to private spirituality is in evidence.

³ The immediately succeeding sentence suggests that "that thought underlies the work of our society." The tension between what is permanent and what relative in Christianity is of course a long and complex and controversial matter. Ward's terminology never became popular and his paradigm currently could only be called antiquarian.

⁴ Cf. Moon's suggestion that the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism itself is primarily apologetic: "All higher educational enterprise, theological, university, technical, and apologetic task like that with which this society is concerned, all these call for united effort" (1947d:23).

Our justification for considering the Epistle to the Hebrews in these pages has been that in that book appears a dialectic not unlike that which to a great extent must influence Christian apologetics in India. The epistle is the meeting point of two arguments, one strictly in accord with the Jewish-Christian historical outlook, the other implying a point of view for which history is largely irrelevant. (1947c:17)

This is one of the central points of Moon's presentation, and he was insistent that the historical perspective needed to be introduced as a corrective to the Hindu position. Similarly, he strongly affirmed that personality is neglected in Hindu thought, referring to B. Heilmann in *Indian and Western Philosophy* suggesting that

the great difference between Indian and Western thought is that the latter is anthropological – ‘man is the measure of all things’ – whilst Indian thought is cosmical – man is one manifestation of the *atman* among others. (Moon 1947a:98)⁵

Writing elsewhere Moon made the point on personality more strongly.

Hinduism admits of personality, but for it personality is one of a myriad manifestations of the dance of life, of Shiva’s creative and destructive energy. We Christians must stake our all on personality.... (1946a:32)

Moon did not present anything resembling a definition of his understanding of Hinduism. It is clear, however, that he saw a number of basic conflicts between Hinduism and Christianity and he desired dialogue towards demonstrating the superiority of the Christian position. He thus worked within the Enlightenment world religions paradigm with reified constructs of both Christianity and Hinduism. This apologetic approach in favor of reified Christianity was not the only aspect of the Christian encounter with Hinduism in Moon's teaching, so needs to be balanced by other emphases.

For one thing, Moon foresaw much development within the Indian Christian Church as it engaged with its Hindu environment. This is clear in his analogy with the epistle to the Hebrews:

The writer of Hebrews under a sense of urgency in order to confirm and strengthen his brethren makes use of terms and arguments which did not belong purely to the Jewish or the Christian world. But he is using those terms among fellow Christians and is not in the first place addressing them to the outer world. And it may well be that the soundest restatement and rethinking will be done in coming days *within* the Church in

⁵ Moon goes on to suggest that Hebrews makes Christ the measure of all things rather than man as such.

India in order first of all to strengthen and confirm professing Christians in their faith.
(Moon 1946b:84; italics original)

Moon also placed a strong emphasis on the *life* of the Christian, as in this illustration:

Some time back a saintly minister introduced the writer to a Hindu enquirer saying that we might enjoy talking over things philosophical. When the minister had gone the enquirer said, "After all it is not philosophy which brought me to Mr. ___, it was the example of his life. I felt that he took seriously Christ's command, Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." (1947c:19)

Further in indication that Moon's concerns were more than merely apologetic, his comment in a review of a study of H.A. Krishna-Pillai; "the church in India has few greater needs today than for poets and hymn-writers" (1947b:128).

J. S. Moon was still just beginning to engage Hindu issues when circumstances pressed him into the role of second editor of *The Pilgrim*. In this light, and understanding the ongoing tensions in the BUCM, it is hardly surprising that he did not prosper in that role.⁶

1.2 Ashananda Nag on Hinduism

The Pilgrim under Moon presented an attempt to define a clear intellectual paradigm for Hinduism in a paper by Ashananda Nag entitled "Hinduism: A Methodological Approach" (1945b). Nag started by affirming the problematic nature of his task, which he seemed to say would not hinder his attempt, yet he seemed then to hedge on that certainty.

Hinduism is a problem to the student of comparative religion, and is not easily defined. It is said that its connotation is so vast and comprehensive that it hardly admits of definition. But if Hinduism is a religion, and if religion can be defined – and it has been defined – there is no reason why the term Hinduism should not lend itself to definition. The difficulties attaching to the definition of Hinduism may arise from the fact that there is something arbitrary and wrong about the term. (1945b:1)

This strangely contradictory statement sets the tone for the article. There is a firm insistence on the validity of speaking about Hinduism, yet simultaneously recognition that there is "something arbitrary and wrong about the term." Despite the affirmation that religion has

⁶ Already in the sixth issue that Moon edited there is reference in the "Notes" section to his request to be relieved as editor, with Moon himself adding in a reference to his original claim to be *locum tenens* (McEldowney 1946:60).

been defined, no definition is provided in this paper. Rather than the methodological approach suggested in the title, the article primarily traces the history of the term "Hindu." An opening salvo makes the main point: "In the whole range of Sanskrit literature the word 'Hindu' is not to be found" (Nag 1945b:1).

The Persian roots of the term are then traced and how it became prominent during the centuries of Muslim rule in India. This led to a conclusion that sounds definitive, but which was undermined by the opening statement above and succeeding discussion.

In light of this historical fact Hinduism may be defined as "a collective term invented by foreigners to lump together the religions that were then current in India." There is no such religion as Hinduism and for this reason the term does not correspond to reality as we know it. Hence the difficulty that one has in defining it. Hinduism is only a name and an artificial name at that. To the realm of actual existence belong such religions as Saivism, Vaisnavism, Vedantism, etc. (Nag 1945b:2-3)⁷

But Nag immediately began to back off from this statement. He differentiated between Hinduism and Christianity, the latter starting as a single movement related to Jesus and his teachings and followers, later developing numerous creeds and sects. "In Hinduism, on the other hand, we have diversity first and then some sort of unity comes afterwards" (1945b:3). Seeking to come to grips with this unity, Nag referred to efforts by Hindu scholars to avoid the "Hindu" terminology due to its foreign origin. But he is impressed neither with *sanātana dharma* or *ārya dharma* as terms that bring clarity to the picture.

The problem, he suggested, is the syncretism of Hinduism.

There was a time when Saivism was at loggerheads with Vaisnavism and Vedantism was fulminating against dualistic and pluralistic creeds....Syncretism was probably the result of the impact of Buddhism and Mohammedanism upon cults and creeds which acknowledged in varying degrees the authority of the Vedas. Cults and creeds of Vedic origin presented a united front against the onslaught of these hostile religions. (Nag 1945b:6)

⁷ This very much anticipates the position of Heinrich von Stietencron referred to in the Introduction, section 3.4.1.

This led to a revised definition of Hinduism as "a collective term invented by foreigners to lump together creeds and cults that had directly or indirectly their origin in the Vedas and acknowledge their authority" (Nag 1945b:7).⁸

But this was still not a definition that Nag was comfortable with. He concluded his paper with a comparison of Hinduism with Hellenism, the prime difference being that the Greeks called themselves Hellenes whereas Hindu is a term from outside the Sanskrit world. Nag's final statement demonstrated his ambivalence.

Whatever its origin or its real meaning may have been in the past, the word Hindu has come to stay. Withdraw this word from usage and you will have a confusing conglomeration of creeds and cults and of lords many and of gods many. This word of foreign origin, which has for centuries been refused admission to the sanctum of classical Sanskrit, serves to give unity and coherence to a bewildering variety of religions and cults which otherwise defy unification. The history of Hindu thought, barring the social implications, has been on the whole one of unity in essentials, difference in non-essentials, and charity in all. (Nag 1945b:7)

Nag's entire presentation seemed to undermine his opening claim that Hinduism is a religion and thus can be defined. His analytical tools assumed the world religions paradigm and there was no way to adequately fit his data into that system. He was probably right that the term Hinduism is here to stay and he is to be commended for insightful observations in his meandering discussion of a complex construct. Yet he certainly did not produce a satisfying definition of Hinduism.⁹

1.3 N. T. Jacob's Paradigm

Most contributors to *The Pilgrim* made no attempt at broad conceptual understanding or definition of Hinduism, but N. T. Jacob did outline what he saw as four distinct Protestant Christian approaches to interaction with Hinduism in his paper "The Approach" (1946).

Jacob did not personally develop a paradigm for a Christian approach to Hinduism, although his basic perspective becomes clear. In fact, his conclusion was that

⁸ This revised definition ruled out Buddhism and Jainism. A note that concluded the paper objected to the Hindu Mahasabha understanding that subsumed Buddhism and Jainism as Hindu due to origin in India. This is the only reference to the Mahasabha in *The Pilgrim* and it is decidedly negative. Nag's opposition, however, was rooted in the world religions paradigm; "There is no reason why an independent status should not be assigned to Buddhism in the commonwealth of religions" (Nag 1945b:8).

⁹ Nag wrote three other major articles for *The Pilgrim*, as will be discussed below.

To work out a convincing point of approach, God must raise up an Indian Christian who is a first-rate theologian and also a saint. Until then the problem will remain unsolved. (1946:82)

Jacob did provide his critique of each of the four Protestant Christian approaches to Hinduism that he identified.¹⁰ The first was the "Rethinking Missions" approach of the American Layman's Foreign Missions Enquiry (Hocking 1932). Jacob's approach to issues is evident in these dismissive comments:

The emphasis is on cooperation and not on proclamation of a distinctive message....Is it not want of sincerity to seek with people of other lands a true knowledge of the love of God, when once the messenger is convinced that it is revealed in Jesus Christ, who is the one, whole, and final revelation of God, instead of proclaiming the vital message? Thus an approach to Hinduism on such a basis of cooperation will be more a farce than real evangelism. This view does inadequate justice to the truth of special revelation. (1946:78-79)

Jacob's exclusivistic approach assumed the truth of traditional Protestant orthodoxy and the need for proclamation of the message of Jesus, and so could not countenance an approach to Hinduism (or other religions) that did not share this position.

The second approach Jacob discussed was Hendrik Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. Jacob saw a measure of ambiguity in Kraemer, as there are at points some comments suggestive of a fulfillment approach. But those hints are overwhelmed by a negative approach to religion. Jacob expressed sympathy with Kraemer's negative views;

We can very well understand why Dr. Kraemer takes this extreme uncompromising view when we take note of the cheap religious syncretism that has arisen in recent years. Some are under the impression that some "addition" and "elimination" will turn Hinduism into Christianity. (1946:79)¹¹

But despite the sympathy, Jacob found Kraemer inadequate. "Kraemer like all Barthians does inadequate justice to the truth of general revelation" (1946:80).

P. Chenchiah's response to Kraemer was presented as the third approach in Jacob's paper. Chenchiah's outlook was introduced as "wholly unconvincing and partly illogical" and the analysis only became more bitter thereafter (1946:80). Chenchiah's suggestion that religions

¹⁰ Brief mention was made of the Calcutta School of Roman Catholic thinkers presenting "Christ by way of Vedanta," but Jacob's focus was on Protestant discussions.

¹¹ This sounds like an indirect attack on the position of R.C. Das. A direct attack on P. Chenchiah follows.

are complete entities that need to be understood in their own right raised in Jacob some significant questions:

If every religion is perfect, I wonder what is the necessity of preaching the gospel. Is it only the opinion of man? What are comparative merits and demerits in religion from God's point of view? (1946:80)

Chenchiah's objections to fulfillment thought brought forth this rejoinder from Jacob:

But in this fulfillment and satisfaction theory he seems to be under a delusion. Christ fulfills and satisfies the noblest aspirations and sublimest (*sic*) longings of every man, *as they ought to be*, in an unique sense. Also he puts into them new aspirations and longings which he can satisfy. (1946:80-81, italics as in original)

This looks like a pretty definitive exposition and defense of a fulfillment approach to understanding Hinduism and Christianity, but Jacob went on to reject fulfillment as the last of the four approaches he outlined. Jacob also objected to Chenchiah's low view of the Bible and the church, and closed with this comment regarding the latter.

If the church is the body of Christ, created by the creative will of God, then there can be no objection to her existence as God's instrument for the saving of the world. Mr. Chenchiah wants the church to be as amorphous as Hinduism, resulting in her final absorption there, which was the fate of Buddhism. The church of Christ cannot but regard this as heresy. (Jacob 1946:81)

The "if" with which Jacob opened this statement determines one's interpretation of his position. Clearly to Jacob the "if" is rhetorical, and exclusivism is the proper Christian approach to other religions. To reject Jacob's if clause within his own paradigm of true and false world religions would not have led to clarity since the paradigm itself was inadequate. The next chapter of this thesis will deal with Chenchiah, and this critique by Jacob prepares the way for the unhappy ending to Chenchiah's tenure as editor of *The Pilgrim*.

The fourth approach that Jacob discussed was the fulfillment perspective, where he referred to William Miller and J. N. Farquhar and a contemporary exponent, Mr. Cumarasamy, who wrote that "Hinduism is a tutor that leads people to Christ" (Jacob 1946:82). Jacob considered this "an extreme view," the acceptance of which would incur "great danger" (1946:82). Yet his closing comment was a bit more tentative; "This view of approach too is not wholly acceptable" (1946:82). Thus it would seem Jacob found acceptable aspects in fulfillment theology but rejected some of the more extreme statements of this approach.

Jacob identified some clearly diverse Protestant Christian attempts to define Hinduism in light of the missionary or evangelistic aspect of Christianity, with significant weaknesses in his critical analysis. Yet his effort is helpful if only because the vast majority of authors in *The Pilgrim* do not neatly fit within any of the four approaches Jacob outlined. Jacob's conclusion that a suitable paradigm for understanding Hinduism and Christianity in relationship to each other is simply not present, and may not be present for a long time to come, seems to be very much the default position of *The Pilgrim*.

2.0 Many Other Voices

Over two dozen authors contributed to the forty issues of *The Pilgrim* under discussion. Some contributed only a single article, from which an understanding of their position on comparative religious studies would be very difficult to deduce. So a Jacob-like analysis of Christian approaches to Hinduism is not possible from this data. The contributors to *The Pilgrim* show that missionary and Christian interaction with Hinduism in the mid-twentieth century was variegated, with variations in themes, theoretical approach and practical goals.

2.1 Studies of Hindu Texts

An analysis of *The Pilgrim* writings related to Hinduism shows a marked focus on textual studies. Five different papers engaged Vedic writings.¹² Another three studies looked at the Bhagavad Gita, one discussed one story from the Mahabharata and there are four studies related to Saiva Siddhanta.

2.1.1 Vedic Studies

Of the five Vedic studies papers three are thematic studies looking at sin, suffering and sacrifice. Henry Lefever of the London Missionary Society in Trivandrum wrote on "The Idea of Sin in the Rigveda" (1942). He compared and contrasted Christian and Vedic thought on sin, seeking a proper understanding of sin in Vedic thought as primarily related to *rta* (cosmic order or law) rather than to God or gods. Lefever saw Vedic thought as a corrective

¹² It is noteworthy that all five of these are under Appasamy's editorship. One might conclude that his succeeding editors had less concern with Vedic studies, but one of the papers was written by Chenchiah!

towards Christian individualism, yet needing correction in its "tendency to regard sin as a substance" (1942:62).

Lefever's commendably careful scholarship and desire to learn and apply lessons across religious boundaries fits the *possessio* approach commended in this thesis and is a legitimate expression of the new discipline of comparative theology. This contrasts with the paper of A. J. C. Selvaratnam on "The Concept of Suffering in Hindu Thought" (1942). The textual bias towards understanding Hinduism that is broadly seen in the textual focus of *The Pilgrim* writings is explicit in this paper. Perhaps the title was not that of the author, but whether from author or editor the title talks of suffering in Hindu thought while the outline of the paper has three sections on the Rig Veda, the transition to the Upanishads, and the Upanishads. A pejorative tone runs throughout the paper as well, illustrated in this comment on reincarnation:

The theory in its attempt to solve the inequalities of life brings in further suffering to the individual. He learns not only that his suffering is due to his past sins, but that he must be born again and again to be immolated on the altar of suffering. (Selvaratnam 1942:34)

A third brief paper by J. N. Rawson considered "The Meaning of the Vedic Sacrifice" (1943b). Primarily following A. B. Keith and contrasting with J. Frazer's magical theories, Rawson saw the development of magical views in Vedic sacrifice but also a tendency towards communion with deity. There is recognition of diversity within Vedic thought; there is no direct comparison with Christianity although the theme of sacrifice clearly resonates with Christian teaching. This "objective," non-comparative study is another noteworthy aspect of the Christian study of Hinduism.

Having considered the three thematic Vedic studies, the remaining two Vedic studies will be noted. These are studies of two different Upanishads by two editors of *The Pilgrim*. A. J. Appasamy wrote on the Katha Upanishad (1942f) and P. Chenchiah wrote on the Isa Upanishad (1944). The differences in approach here are as would be expected considering the two authors.¹³ Appasamy traced *bhakti* teaching in KU and freely analyzed and judged based on his Christian understanding. Chenchiah also desired a Christ-centered study; "a study of the Upanishads from the non-sectarian standpoint in the light of the fuller revelation in Jesus

¹³ See the succeeding chapter for an analysis of Chenchiah.

may bring out the truth in them more satisfactorily" (1944:151). Yet he was also fully prepared for rather irreverent criticism of traditional Christianity;

So the first word [of Isa Upanishad] tells us that this Upanishad advocates a monotheistic form of religion having for its worship an all powerful God – not a God among gods – not a supreme God – but one and only one God to be worshipped in *dhyanā* [meditation]. In this respect worship in the Upanishadic age was superior even to current Christian worship which after all is a form of temple worship. (Chenchiah 1944:146)

There was clearly a significant measure of academic interest in the Hindu texts discussed in *The Pilgrim*, yet just as clearly it was Christian comparative interest that drove the selection of texts.

2.1.2 Bhagavad Gita Studies

One of the Gita articles was by A. J. Appasamy, whose approach to Hinduism has already been discussed.¹⁴ The other two Gita studies were by J. N. Rawson, whose paper on Vedic sacrifice has already been noted. The first was on "The Gita Doctrine of Salvation" (1941), presenting the traditional three ways of salvation (*jñāna*, karma, *bhakti mārgas*) with brief exposition. The concluding two paragraphs were comparative of the Gita and New Testament, with this concluding paragraph:

In its doctrine of salvation by grace and faith the Gita obviously approaches very close to Christianity. It is true that this impression almost of identity of teaching would be modified if we were to deal adequately with other Gita teachings, logically irreconcilable but which lie side by side with the doctrine of grace. But incomparably the greatest difference is in the character of the Divine Incarnation through which the grace is conceived as being expressed. (Rawson 1941:43)

The second paper very much followed on from this point, but was much more brief in its discussion of "The Gita Teaching on Krishna as Avatarā" (1943a). Rawson here was quite critical of Krishna, but leaned on lengthy quotations from D. S. Sarma for his point that Krishna "is a composite imagined figure with possibly a historical basis" (1943a:104). Further quotation from Sarma supported Rawson's claim "that Sarma does not use the word

¹⁴ This is "Bhakti in the Bhagavad Gita" (Appasamy 1947b), part two following a paper on "The Early History of Bhakti" (Appasamy 1947a). Appasamy mainly discussed theism, concluding that "The line between theism and monism is always so thin" (1947b:68).

avatar in the sense in which Christians use 'incarnation' (nor yet in the sense in which it is used in popular Hinduism)" (1943a:106). These papers contrast with Rawson's earlier paper that avoided direct comparison with Christianity, and illustrate a tendency to interpret to the distinct advantage of Christianity in comparative study, although some of that advantage was left to be read between the lines.

2.1.3 A Mahabharata Story

Far more direct Christian influence into Hindu scripture is suggested in Ashananda Nag's paper on "The Old Old Story in the Mahabharata" (1947). Nag briefly introduced the Mahabharata and then told the story from *Santi Parvan* where there is a description from the white peninsula of aniconic *bhakti* worship related to the memory of God's self-immolation. The German scholar Weber and Bengali scholar Brajendranath Seal considered this to be an account of an ancient Indian visit to Alexandria and an encounter with Christian worship, and though Nag outlined alternate theories and saw "the plain fact that the story is related in terms of Hindu mythology and Hindu philosophical speculation" (1947:28), yet he suggested that "the story may be regarded as the first recorded indication of the reaction of the Hindu mind to the old, old story of Jesus and His vicarious suffering on the cross" (1947:30). Despite Nag's conclusion that this "is a landmark which should be taken more note of by everybody who is interested in the progress of Christianity in India" (1947:30), it is hard to see that there is any great practical significance in this story, however interpreted.

2.1.4 Saiva Siddhanta Studies

The four remaining textual studies related to Saiva Siddhanta illustrate the various Christian approaches to the study of Hindu texts. The first was a paper by W. J. N. Snell on "The Idea of Sin in the Saiva Siddhanta" (1943). With many quotations from Saiva texts Snell outlined the teaching on the soul and its bondage, yet came to the conclusion that "a Hindu is religious but he does not see the necessity of being moral" (1943:111), which of course is contrasted with Christian morality.

At the other extreme is a lengthy exposition of Saiva Siddhanta teaching by J. H. Piet (1945). Piet systematically explained Saiva Siddhanta philosophy by expounding briefly on the three eternal principles of *pati* (the supreme), *pasu* (the soul) and *pasam* (the power binding the

soul). There was no critique and no comparison with Christianity, not even an explanation for why the study was undertaken.

H. A. Popley also wrote for *The Pilgrim* on Saiva Siddhanta. In a three part article he presented his own translation of Meykandar's *Sivagnanabotham* (1947a), with his own commentary on the text (1947b, 1948). A separate paper studied "The Grace of God in Saiva Siddhanta" (1949). In his introduction to his translation of the *Sivagnanabotham* text Popley clearly stated his purpose for focusing on Saiva Siddhantha.

I believe that of all Indian religious philosophies the Saiva Siddhanta comes nearest to Christian teaching and that a careful study of this system will be of great value to the Christian student and evangelist in India. I hope later on to expand this translation with notes from the great commentary of Sivagnana Yogi and with a critical appreciation of its value and of the differences with Christian teaching. (Popley 1947a:32)¹⁵

Noteworthy in Popley's translation is his decision to omit the name Siva, which he explained in his introduction. "...to English readers this conveys the idea of a limited and local God and Meykandar always regards Sivan as the One Supreme Lord, besides whom is no other" (1947a:32). The translation and extensive commentary present an exposition of Saiva Siddhanta teaching without critique or comparison with Christianity, but at the conclusion there is an extended section of "general notes" where comparison is made. Particularly six criticisms are presented, introduced with this attempt to convey empathy:

The following criticisms may be made regarding the teachings of the Saiva Siddhanta. I do not make these criticisms in any carping spirit with a view to find faults in it, but as one who has always had a very high opinion of it and as one who has found much to help the spiritual life in its teachings. (1948:117)¹⁶

Despite this clear indication of objections to Saiva Siddhanta teaching, in his 1949 article on grace in Saiva Siddhanta Popley again returned to exposition without comparison or critique. The closing section of that paper, which was full of quotations from Saiva literature throughout, was a series of quotes on the necessity of a guru. This was perhaps suggestive of a fulfillment in Christ? The concluding paragraph ended with a quotation from J. N.

¹⁵ Popley seemed to be assuming a monolithic Hinduism where any and all Hindus will be impressed by resemblances between Saiva Siddhanta and Christianity. But advaita Vedanta philosophy (for example) objects to Saiva Siddhanta as much as to Christianity, so the "great value" for Christian evangelists from studying Saiva Siddhanta seems imaginary.

¹⁶ The six criticisms deal with a suggested metaphysical rather than moral emphasis, lack of "viciousness" of sin, lack of emphasis on divine forgiveness, lack of concreteness in teaching on the guru, lack of practicality in teaching on salvation, and acceptance of idol worship.

Farquhar's *The Crown of Hinduism*, again at least hinting towards fulfillment ideas. The point of the closing quotation was that the idea of a gracious God demands a moral understanding of God and life. Presumably Popley saw this as a corrective towards Vedantic thought.¹⁷

In Protestant Christian expositions of Hindu texts in *The Pilgrim* there is a variety of approaches not only among writers but even in the works of individual writers. There is a desire for "objective" scholarship, yet often also a comparative angle, the comparison at times certainly biased in a Christian direction. Yet there is also an underlying bias present just in this concern about textual study. As Richard King pointed out, "There is a clear literary bias within modern Western conceptions of religion" (1999:62).¹⁸

King drew out this point in relation to Protestant missionaries and Hinduism:

Protestant emphasis upon the text as the locus of religion placed a particular emphasis upon the literary aspects of Indian culture in the work of Orientalists. Academics and highly educated Western administrators are already inclined towards literary forms of expression because of their training, and so it is not all that surprising to find Orientalists (both old and new) being drawn towards Indian literary materials as sources for understanding Indian culture. Many of the early European translators of Indian texts were also Christian missionaries, who, in their translations and critical editions of Indian works, effectively constructed uniform texts and a homogenized written canon through the imposition of Western philological standards and presuppositions onto Indian materials. Thus the oral and "popular" aspect of Indian religious tradition was either ignored or decried as evidence of the degradation of contemporary Hindu religion into superstitious practices that bore little or no relation to "their own" texts. (1999:101)

Surely this Orientalist and missionary textual bias is at play in the large place given to Hindu texts in *The Pilgrim*. But arguably also, the Christian scholars involved in *The Pilgrim* were aware of the dangers of a textual focus. The evidence of a more holistic approach follows, and is mainly seen in the emphasis placed on personality studies complemented by sociological studies.

¹⁷ Cf. Popley's comment in his commentary on the *Sivagnanbotham*; "The next verse makes use of the illustration of the stars to prove that although the soul in the presence of God loses all operative individuality yet it is not merely absorbed into God as the Vedantists say, but still retains its distinct identity" (1948:101).

¹⁸ This was discussed more broadly in terms of religious studies in chapter one section 2.1 and in relation to the development of a Protestant dominant paradigm for understanding Hinduism in chapter one section 4.1.1.1.

2.2 Biographical Studies

A. J. Appasamy's first article in *The Pilgrim* was an analysis of Mahatma Gandhi's book *Christian Missions: Their Place in India* (Appasamy 1941b). A significant part of that article was given to Gandhi's "vital religious experiences," which involved a discussion of silence, guidance from God, peace, austerities and worship (1941b:24f). This painted a very different picture of Hinduism than one gathered from textual studies. Appasamy also wrote an interpretative paper on Rabindranath Tagore (1941c) and gave considerable space to book reviews related to two other modern Hindus, a biography of the social reformer Sri Ganga Ram (1851-1927; Appasamy 1943b) and the autobiography of Brahmo Samaji Dr. T. C. Khandwala (b.1858; Appasamy 1943f).

Two other studies in Hindu biography should also be noted, a paper by Chenchiah on Aurobindo (1943) and a three part study of Tukaram by J. F. Edwards (1944a, b; 1946). These were dependent on other sources and related both the life and teaching of the Hindu saints studied. Of deeper interest are personal accounts of living Hindus studied and written by Christians.

R. R. Keithahn wrote an account of Swami Ramdas reflecting on his experiences with the man at his ashram. Entitled "A Visit to Ramdas" (Keithahn 1942), the paper presented background information from published material on Ramdas but highlighted personal reflections and interpretations. Keithahn clearly had deep appreciation for the ashram and its service, and particularly for Ramdas himself.

Ramdas has been of constructive help to many Christians. I have their testimony for that. And I can understand it. He is so understanding, so sympathetic of other points of view. He seldom creates antagonism. (Keithahn 1942:70)

The one criticism Keithahn offered follows immediately from the previously quoted statements.

And yet when we are the happy guests of his ashram I know many of us are troubled by what seems to be almost the worship of a man. Ramdas would be the first to say that he is but a mere man and that each must draw near unto God himself. And yet it is difficult to understand why such a one allows his followers to prostrate regularly at his feet as though he were God himself. Perhaps here is where the West will never understand the East. (1942:70)

Keithahn's concluding statement provides insight into his perception on Christian study and understanding of Hinduism:

Surely, as one comes to know several of the religious experiences of Ramdas we must say, "Ah, this is definitely Christian; something I have lost! This good man has brought something within my religious experience to my attention – I must be thankful and be more loyal to my own Master, the Christ!" (1942:70)

Chenchiah wrote at still greater length about Master C.V.V. of Kumbakonam (1946:a, b), including a bibliography of sources on the guru and his teachings. The early history of Venkasami Rao was outlined and his development into Master C.V.V. was portrayed. A fascinating autobiographical note was inserted by Chenchiah on discussing Master C.V.V. as a guru rather than just a teacher; "To the writer, the idea of laying hands and transmitting the Holy Spirit, of which he read in the Christian Scriptures, came within the region of belief only after visiting Mr. Venkasami Rao" (1946a:50).

The Master's teaching was all about life, and he claimed to have been given the authority to initiate a new stage in the evolution of mankind. There was not much teaching involved and no concern about change of religious affiliation. Chenchiah's fascination with the movement lay in perceived similarities with biblical teaching on the new life that entered into history through Jesus towards a consummation transforming all of creation. He clearly approved Master C.V.V.'s critique of traditional views of maya and yoga in favor of a hoped for positive transformation in life.

A very different study was presented by Rev. I. Saadat-Ullah of Mahatma Gulab Chand or Baba Anand (1947) of Varanasi. A description of the "Temple of all saints" was first presented, noting the prominent place of Jesus and Mary among the pictures of saints, and the statue of Baba Anand in the background of the guru himself. The guru's story was then told, stressing his early contacts with Christianity through school and Sunday school, his impressive credentials as a journalist and newspaper editor and the 22 years of his renunciation. Saadat-Ullah's conclusion was, "I can say without fear of any contradiction that he is a Christian at heart though unbaptized.... there can be no doubt that he loves the Christian religion" (Saadat-Ullah 1947:56).

Another Hindu close to Christ and Christianity was introduced by Chenchiah in "A Talk with Sriman T. V. Kalyana Sundaram Mudaliar" (1952i). Mudaliar was an old friend of Chenchiah but they were not in contact for years even when Chenchiah saw a book of poetry on Christ by Mudaliar. Recent contact revealed that Mudaliar had come under the influence of Ramalingaswamy (1823-1874), through whom he became convinced on sin and atonement. "The last word he spoke as I took leave of him, was what our country needs is a conviction of sin and repentance in ashes and sackcloth. Strange words from a Hindu..." (Chenchiah 1952i:13).

Chenchiah also published three obituaries of Hindu leaders. Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) he hailed as "a great spiritual beacon light....Ramana Maharshi demonstrated by his life two great truths that need demonstration in our day – one – that God exists and the other that union with Him is blissful" (Chenchiah 1950e:1). A discussion of Ramana's death by cancer followed, with the suggestion that vicarious suffering is a needed understanding in light of karma.

Philosophy professor M. Hiriyanne was remembered as "one of the vanishing group of Hindus to whom philosophy was not so much knowledge as a discipline of life which contributes to life" (Chenchiah 1950k:4). Sri Venturi Prabhakara Sastri was a friend Chenchiah met in relation to Master C.V.V.; "himself cured by the loving touch and power of his guru, he spent his life in the service of the suffering, lavishly giving of his gift of healing" (Chenchiah 1951o:3). These tributes are indicative of Chenchiah's approach to Hindus and Hinduism which is the focus of the next chapter.

These various studies of Hindu personalities bring an entirely different flavor to perceptions of Hinduism in *The Pilgrim*. There is still a strong element of comparison with Christianity, and even of an apologetic for Christianity, but there is also an awareness of a dynamism that cannot be found in merely textual study. However, the double reification separating Christianity and Hinduism discussed in this thesis is assumed throughout. Reified constructs of the Christian and Hindu religions exist alongside an understanding that separate Hindu and Christian communities are necessary developments from those religious constructs.

2.3 Sociological Studies

The study of Hindu personalities could be considered a type of sociological analysis, and there are a few (notably few, if the personality studies are removed from consideration) sociological papers. The very first paper in *The Pilgrim* (following Appasamy's opening editorial) was an analysis of rural development work in light of Hindu teaching, "based entirely on personal observations during a brief visit to one village" (Whyte 1941:4). F. W. Whyte was a student at the 1941 Benares Institute program when he wrote this brief paper.

Chiraigram was one of the chosen villages for rural reconstruction and Whyte was impressed that there was definite development, improved education and sanitation, etc. But his paper was mainly questioning the divorce between religion and development; "there has been no direct religious dynamic behind all this transformation in the village itself" (Whyte 1941:6). Gandhi's example and students from Banaras Hindu University played a role in the changes, but the only philosophical appeal was self-interest, and Whyte was skeptical of this as providing a lasting transformation. He also pointed out that Chiraigram was a mono-caste village, and the impact of secular development approaches on caste (and Hinduism) would be complex.

A. J. Appasamy recounted the process involved in "A Day of Expiation for Sins" as performed by a Brahmin friend with whom he was reading the *Bhagavata Purana* in Sanskrit (1943h). The details of the ceremony need not be outlined here. Appasamy and his friend knew of no book in English or Sanskrit which described the ceremony which had been learned by word of mouth.

R. C. Das presented a number of careful sociological studies, particularly his three papers on Varanasi and his analysis of the strength of Hinduism lying in the home, temple and pilgrimage centre. The fact that students in the Benares Institute programs, as noted above, were taken on visits to cultural and religious sites in the holy city illustrated a clear awareness of the importance of sociological observation.

A final noteworthy sociological paper was a report that Chenchiah wrote on a kathakali performance (1949e). He shared his initial resistance to attending, outlined the events of the performance and the Puranic story rehearsed, and his enthusiastic conclusions. ("I witnessed

the performance wide-eyed for three hours and would have remained for two more, had not the task-master of a university insisted on my correcting law examination papers...."
(Chenchiah 1949e:22).)

The importance of a sociological approach to understanding Hinduism was highlighted in an article on "The Teaching of Hinduism in Theological Schools" by H. C. Lefever (1943). His introductory paragraph made the point quite forcefully:

My own experience as a student of Hinduism in the West forces me to the conclusion that what is called "Hinduism" in theological schools and colleges is often insufficiently related to the actual life of the average Hindu. The teaching of Hinduism in these institutions is still far too greatly influenced by the trend of Orientalist studies in the West during the last century and the Western study of Hinduism is still too largely under the influence of Vedic scholars like Max Muller, for whom Hinduism meant either the religion of the Aryan settlers in ancient India or what they deemed the rank idolatry and priesthood of the present day Indian villager. So the teaching of Hinduism in theological schools and colleges has been and still is to an inordinate extent concerned with the Vedas and the Vedanta. I do not say that this teaching is without value, but I contend that, especially in relation to the syllabus in theological schools where men are trained for the village ministry, this branch of Hinduism should occupy a very minor place in the future evangelist's study of the Hindu people, and should always be subservient to the practical end of enabling the student to understand the actual Hindus among whom he will have to work. (Lefever 1943:12)

Lefever proposed the study of Hindus rather than Hinduism, and wanted to cover the historical development of different Hindu peoples, various local expressions of Hinduism both religiously and socially, and political trends. This appeal for a holistic approach towards understanding individual Hindus resonates with overall trends present in *The Pilgrim* and the CSSH. It pointed to breaking free from the reified world religions paradigm, but the most sincere effort towards such a break was that of Chenchiah, which foundered as detailed in the next chapter of this thesis.

2.4 Thematic Studies

A final category of Christian studies of Hinduism in *The Pilgrim* needs to be considered, which is thematic studies.¹⁹ Two of the themes discussed were broadly Hindu, being on neo-

¹⁹ Obviously there is room for overlap between textual, personality, sociological and thematic studies, but this outline demonstrates the types of analysis undertaken. *The Pilgrim* also contained four papers by J. N. Farquhar (1861-1929) which predate the focus of this study (the four papers found in 5:2, 6:4, 7:1,3); a paper on the Indus Valley civilization by Rawson (1:2), papers by Hindu writers to be noted in the next chapter, and papers on

Hinduism and village Hinduism. C.S. Paul's brief discussion of Neo-Hinduism (1943) touched on Swami Vivekananda but mostly considered S. Radhakrishnan's suggestion that mysticism is the future religion. Paul was not comparative or apologetic in relation to Radhakrishnan and Christianity, but did close with focus on neo-Hindu opposition to conversion.

M. M. Frost's study of "Some Aspects of Village Hinduism" (1943) very confidently defined three varieties of rural Hinduism, one being the traditional Brahmanical, a second being syncretistic wherein

Non-Aryan gods and goddesses, primitive in origin or local in emergence, have been taken up into the Hindu pantheon and acquired a new status, the worship at such shrines being gradually conformed to the orthodox type, and the god being given some genealogical connection with its [Brahmanical Hinduism's] central figures. (1943:84)

The third type of rural Hinduism is what Frost focused on,

The primitive stuff itself, non-Aryan, older than the Upanishads, older than Hindu philosophy, the early pagan worship of India's most ancient peoples, living on still in remote villages that have remained untouched by cosmopolitan culture....This type of paganism is of world-wide range, and the Indian form has features in common with the early cults of other agricultural peoples.... (1943:85)

This earliest type of religion was further broken down into three aspects; "the fertility cults are perhaps the most characteristic and certainly the most ancient" (Frost 1943:86). Protective practices and cults of the spirits of the dead were the other two types. There are descriptions of various ceremonies that would define this paper as a sociological study, yet the simple optimism in defining types and dating practices places the author in a classic Orientalist frame.²⁰

distinctly Christian themes, including five testimonies of converts from Hinduism to Christianity (A. S. Appasamy-Pillai in 1:1, Pandita Ramabai in 1:2, Narayan Lakshman Harshe in 2:1 (this in what is ostensibly a review of a study of Dnyaneshwar by J. F. Edwards, but after brief comments on the book the paper is all about Harshe's story as told in the book), H. A. Krishna-Pillai in 4:1,2 and G.V. Job in 10:2) and six other papers (J Sandegren on the question of whether God can suffer (3:2), an anonymous piece on Christian contemplative prayer (3:3), R. M. Clark on the Ezour Vedam supposedly authored by R. de Nobili (5:4), Ashananda Nag's apologetic response to Hindu use of Western higher critical studies against the historicity of Christ and Christianity (6:1,2), V. Chakkrai on Indian Theology (8:1) and P. Fallon on Christology (9:2); some of these papers briefly touch on comparative or apologetic interaction with Hindu concepts).

²⁰ Ronald Inden makes a romantic view of the Indian village one of the cardinal points of Orientalist understanding of India, along with caste, Hinduism as a religion, and divine kingship. Cf. Inden 1990:132:

Many of the early orientalists, envisioning an original Aryan religion and society that were more or less isomorphic with an original Aryan language, believed it to be the living descendant of the Aryan village.

Frost's purpose was clearly apologetic, as the closing section of the paper proposed that God as creator as in the Old Testament presented the power sought by such Hindus in practical need, while redemption in Christ in the New Testament was the reality of which "in the dim light of paganism he sought redemption by blood-sacrifice" (Frost 1943:93).

Three other authors dealt somewhat similarly with folk religious aspects of Hinduism. Margaret Kennedy briefly described ceremonies related to Sitala Mata, the goddess of smallpox. After describing a number of situations where she encountered children with smallpox and the ritualistic responses, she concluded that

They have a firm faith, though on powers that are evil and that definitely hold them in the darkness of ignorance and superstition, and that faith can only be broken down when a stronger, higher faith becomes theirs. (Kennedy 1946:20)

C. G. Diehl contributed two papers on magic, the first little more than a collection of incidents with some reflections on different aspects of the magic/religion involved. He concluded his collection of incidents by remarking that

To look out for magic in South India seems to be like plunging into a sea without any shore. We have just dipped our hand in its water. (Diehl 1944:60)

His second paper (1945) was quite the opposite extreme, with no reference to Indian practices but just general reflections on religion and magic.

H. C. Lefever contributed a paper also dealing more with folk religion, but with a much more academic approach. This was a review of a study of Sasta and the Sabarimala pilgrimage. Lefever lamented that

Very little research has been made into the origins of Sasta worship of which the Sabarimala cult is a part. This is doubtless due to the over-emphasis laid, especially by Western scholars, on Vedic Hinduism, village Hinduism hardly yet claiming the respect of scholars and appealing to them as worthy of serious study. (1944:31)

Lefever's paper was a review of a new book on Sasta worship by L. K. Balaratnam. Lefever focused on origins, outlining possible Puranic origins, an alternate theory of an adaptation or apotheosis of the Buddha, and Balaratnam's preferred idea that the god should not be traced

Looking upon it with a condescending fondness that borders on the romantic, they supposed the Indian village was analogous with the post-tribal, agricultural village of the Teutons or Germanic branches of the Aryans in ancient and medieval Western Europe....The ancient Aryan village still survived there.

to either of those sources but to traditional Tamil sources. Lefever suggested still other theories before commenting that "It would however be almost certainly idle to attempt to add to the already existing galaxy of legends and traditions concerning the origin of Sasta-Aiyyappan" (1944:35).

Lefever concluded suggesting that the main value of the book lay in its detailed description of the pilgrimage. His reticence regarding theories about the origins and antiquity of Hindu practices contrasts strikingly with the approach of M. M. Frost above, and illustrates again the breadth of Christian approaches to Hinduism in *The Pilgrim*.

Another book review discussed ashrams, but the review was of a Christian book which promoted ashrams for Christians.²¹ M. G. Samuel outlined the main thrust of the book and then offered seven criticisms before commending the basic ideas of the book. His objections were that the book was too sanguine about ashrams mitigating caste inequality, an anti-organizational mentality was pressed too far, the focus on middle age as the time for religious enquiry was harmful to youth, the focus on rural quietude was opposed to the urban ministry of Jesus, the focus on poverty did not fit the new economic realities of modernity, the criticism of the church was too severe, and Christian doctrines were expressed with less than orthodox clarity.

Despite these criticisms Samuel promoted both Christian ashrams and this study. He also was quite negative about Indian Christianity; "It is a fact that the Christian community is stale" (1942:76); "In the church service there is no room for meditation (1942:77);

The pioneers of missions in India did not care to adapt the religion of Christ to the Indian environment. Had they tried to do so they could not have missed the method of asramas. (1942:77)

This paper, particularly in the last quotation, reveals a utilitarian *possessio* outlook similar to that present in A. J. Appasamy's writings. Ashrams can be implemented by Christians for their own purposes, and should be. Whether Samuel developed his *possessio* thought further than just the development of Christian ashrams is not evident in this one book review.

²¹ The book is *Asramas Past and Present* by P. Chenchiah, V. Chakkrai and A. N. Sudarisanam, Indian Christian Book Club, Madras (1941). The spelling "asrama" is occasionally used but this thesis follows the more common spelling of "ashram." The Sanskrit sibilant here is aspirated, yet not so strongly as an English "sh;" thus the room for debate on the proper transliteration of that consonant.

E. C. Dewick wrote on "The Hindu Conception of the Divine Indwelling" (1944), a paper much more comparative than the title indicated. Hindu focus on the immanence of God was contrasted with a biblical focus on transcendence, with care to show that both traditions have both concepts in their teaching. Yet in the end a rather simplistic "Hindu conception of Divine Immanence" was found wanting even though "it contains many things that are true, and some things that may be of service in supplementing or correcting inadequate conceptions that are current in popular Christianity" (Dewick 1944:158).

A similar comparative approach was evident in papers on the related themes of the sage and the guru. Ashananda Nag's analysis of the emancipated man and the sage drew on both Hindu and Buddhist sources and concepts, and made comparison with Graeco-Roman constructs as well. The focus was on detachment and individualism. Stating that "only in a few places in Brahminical literature are we told that the emancipated man or the sage strives for and is interested in the redemption of his fellowmen," Nag concluded that "the redeemed man of the Christian faith does not scorn and abhor that supreme passion love" (1945a:16, 18).²²

J. Russell in a three part series on the guru gave a more detailed analysis and comparison. His opening sentence made his concern clear; "In the attempt to interpret Christianity in the thought forms familiar to India there is a danger of confusing Christian ideas with ideas foreign to the gospel faith" (1945:13). Russell was careful to point out the various meanings of guru, and developed his exposition particularly with analysis of the guru as teacher and the guru as divine. He gave a large place to yoga and in the end concluded that monistic tendencies overwhelm theistic concepts in guru phenomena.

The religious quest that starts by seeking God outside oneself ends by finding that reality within oneself. The lives of many gurus are filled with a God-consciousness that attracts others too to a God-filled life. The beginning of their religious quest is undoubtedly based on a theistic view of God. During this period they pour out their lives in devotion to a personal God or a God-embodying spirit. All *bhakti*-literature in India is the result of such lives of devotion....But when such *bhaktas* finally discover the truth in Hinduism, it is mostly that the creature-creator idea was an illusion. Both the Vedantic monism or pantheism and the [Saiva] Siddhantic idea of human

²² The Bhagavad Gita emphasis on concern for the welfare of all (5:25, 12:4) is one of a number of places to begin balancing out Nag's presentation. Cf. R. C. Zaehner,

Total detachment from the world is not incompatible with a general benevolence. This particular phrase [*sarvabhutahite ratāḥ*; concern for the welfare of all] probably originated in the Gita. It gained immense popularity and is endlessly repeated in the didactic portions of the Mahabharata. (1973:215)

manifestation of the deity are much too strong in Hinduism to leave unpolluted any pure theistic trend in Indian thought. This fact when examined in the light of Christian revelation indicates that Hinduism proper is absolutely incompatible with the Christian gospel. (Russell 1946:7)²³

The mention of "Hinduism proper" places Russell in the Enlightenment tradition of reified abstract conceptions of religion. His positing absolute incompatibility between Hinduism and Christianity is reminiscent of both the dominant nineteenth century missionary paradigm and Kraemer's perspective. This position is representative of many contributors to *The Pilgrim*, and makes it no surprise that those who sought hybrid developments, learning and borrowing from both Christian and Hindu traditions, were rather vehemently opposed. That will be abundantly illustrated in the following chapter on *The Pilgrim* under P. Chenchiah's editorship.

3.0 Conclusion

Christian thought on Hinduism in the mid twentieth century was diverse and conflicted. There is evidence of tension with the received paradigm of world religions, yet that was also the working perspective of all writers. Kraemer's critical approach to Hinduism as a false religion and the contrasting fulfillment position were both clearly still influential but neither could be considered dominant. The lack of a dominant paradigm allowed for diversity of perspectives, and seemed even to allow space for new and creative explorations of the meaning of religion and the Hindu-Christian encounter. The potential of such groping for new paradigms is most evident in the work of P. Chenchiah, an analysis of which follows.

²³ Interestingly, Russell still concluded that in a secondary sense the Christian can be a guru; and Christ has a guru role, but he is much more than a guru; finally, "not without much misunderstanding, but with the greatest religious significance we can say that to a Christian the guru is the church" (Russell 1946:10). This again shows the vast differences in perception between various contributors to *The Pilgrim*, as R. C. Das and Chenchiah (for example) would not have put the church in place of Christ as guru.

7. The Failed Revolution of P. Chenchiah

The Pilgrim under Chenchiah was radically transformed. The first issue he produced (8:1) followed what had become the pattern for *The Pilgrim* contents, with an editorial and three papers. The second issue began the revolution, with editorial notes expanded to cover nine sub-points, five brief articles by Christian writers and three reviews, two of Christian books. Chenchiah's third issue (8:3) had only one article, written by a Hindu; a letter written by a Hindu; editorial notes on three topics, reviews of three Hindu books and a report on a conference of Christian sadhus.

Chenchiah himself was overwhelmingly the main writer during the time he was editor. Fourteen issues were released under his control, and in only one of those (8:3) did he write less than half of the contents. *The Pilgrim* had been a voice for Protestant Christian thought on the encounter with Hinduism, but that ceased under Chenchiah. There was more material written by Hindus than by Christians other than the editor; and if the contributions of R.C. Das are also discounted, there was very little material at all from Christians.¹

1.0 Circulation Problems of *The Pilgrim*

Chenchiah was clearly working to create an interreligious journal, or perhaps a dialogical magazine that would impact both Christian and Hindu thought. He wrote an appeal to members that was printed on the inside cover of his first issue that provides insight into *The Pilgrim* at that point and what he dreamed it would become.

We have in mind plans for making *The Pilgrim* larger and more varied. We intend to introduce new studies in Hinduism, Christian study of Hinduism and fellowship of religions. We cannot carry on these changes without a very much larger circle of readers and larger space – at least [one] hundred pages. The government, however, in view of paper scarcity, has sanctioned only thirty pages....Since the sanction of the government permits us to print 300 copies we can increase the membership to 250

¹ Das wrote seven contributions, other Christians only eight, one item each from eight people. Four of those eight were in Chenchiah's first two issues; the other four were a letter, a report, an article by Chenchiah friend G. V. Job and an article by Roman Catholic Fr. Pierre Fallon. This presumably reflects Chenchiah's lack of respect for traditional Protestant thought on Hinduism, and surely must have contributed to the opposition to his work.

leaving 50 copies for exchange and for sending sample copies to persons who are likely to become members. The editor was supplied with a list of sixty members only as on the rolls in 1948. (Chenchiah 1949a:unpaginated)

Clearly the CSSH was not in good health, with only sixty members. Improvements would not be drastic, but not for lack of effort by Chenchiah. Already in his second issue Chenchiah listed nine magazines, most Hindu, that had agreed to exchange issues with *The Pilgrim*.² His third issue upped the ante on the goal for subscriptions, apparently again related to government policy;

We are pressed for space. We are allowed 30 pages....We need 500 subscribers to increase the number of pages to 50....We hope that with the cooperation of the readers to be able to announce by March 1950 – that the required number of subscribers i.e. 500 are enrolled. (Chenchiah 1949i:31)

In March of 1950 Chenchiah expressed the desire to print the subscriber list in the next issue, but that did not happen. "If the response is what we expect it to be," he wrote, "we hope to increase the number of pages" (Chenchiah 1950a:unpaginated). The next issue was increased to 46 pages, but without explanation. This same subscription blurb for the first time made clear that Chenchiah was writing for both Christian and Hindu readers; "This year, our effort will be to make *The Pilgrim* more serviceable to all – Christian and Hindu...." (Chenchiah 1950a:unpaginated).

By September of 1950 Chenchiah could announce the membership drive completed, and the new total as "a number about which we cannot be enthusiastic. When we remember our target is 500, we are not even half way up" (Chenchiah 1950g:unpaginated). A year later he informed his readers that 50 to 60 had not replied to a subscription response card that he needed in hand (this about means of payment of the annual dues). The next issue (December 1951) had even more dire news; "To be self supporting we need to double or triple our subscribers urgently. We appeal to every one of our subscribers to secure another this year" (Chenchiah 1951m:unpaginated).

² The nine are *Vedanta Kesari*, *Aryan Path*, *The Theosophical Movement*, *Kalyan Kalpathara*, *Kalyana*, *Sanmarge*, *NCC Review*, *Guardian* and *The Way of Christ* (Chenchiah 1949h:31). Beginning in 1951 Chenchiah attempted a review of both Indian Christian and Hindu magazines, at that time including four Christian (*Guardian*, *NCC Review*, *Seeker*, *Way of Life*) and seven Hindu (*Vedanta Kesari*, *Journal of Oriental Research*, *Aryan Path*, *Theosophical Movement*, *Kalyan*, *Kalyana Kalpataru*, and *Divine Life*) periodicals (Chenchiah 1951k:32-34).

The question of self support having arisen is a hint that outside pressure was now being applied on Chenchiah. The next issue (11:1) included his announcement that the pages had been cut to 24 due to lack of subscribers (Chenchiah 1952a:1). The following issue would be Chenchiah's last, and he expressed his appreciation to those who assisted in "efforts to make the *The Pilgrim* a power in the religious field" (Chenchiah 1952h:7).³

The issue after Chenchiah resigned (11:3, September 1952) indicated that membership stood at 100 (Das 1952e:15), which was the number stated a decade earlier in issue 2:2 (Appasamy 1942c:17). Chenchiah's experiment in dialogical interaction with Hindus via *The Pilgrim* magazine had fallen flat. "Every Hindu scholar I approached readily responded and entered into the spirit of *The Pilgrim* and enthusiastically helped," he wrote in closing (1952h:7). But his views and practices were simply too radical for the Protestant Christians of his time.

2.0 Chenchiah's Teaching

As the focus turns to Chenchiah's writing it is immediately apparent that he was not a systematic thinker. There is no paper outlining his perspective on Hinduism, or even his view of Christianity. His position on any topic needs to be discerned from various short pieces, where often acerbic comments illuminate his perspective.⁴ Paradox is everywhere apparent as well, and pretty much every statement needs to be guarded or balanced with another statement approaching the same topic from a quite different angle. If the result of this analysis is not a neatly tied up package, that will reflect a faithful presentation of the thought of Chenchiah.

The nature of Chenchiah's writings and views indicate that a direct approach to his thought on Hinduism is not advisable. His broad perspective on religion will first be addressed, followed by the related topic of cooperation between religions which contributed greatly to his problems with fellow Christians. This will provide the basic framework for understanding his views on both Christianity and Hinduism; the former of importance as it accounts for his problems as editor of *The Pilgrim*, the latter of course being the major focus of this thesis.

³ Reasons for Chenchiah's resignation will be outlined later as they are related to his position on Hinduism.

⁴ This rather sober and staid thesis will crackle into life at the biting wit of Chenchiah, another characteristic of his writing.

2.1 Chenchiah on Religion

Chenchiah vociferously promoted a progressive and reformist view of religion. In his own words,

Religious outlook has changed profoundly in two respects in the shift of emphasis; 1. From other-worldliness to life in the world; 2. From individualistic to social. If religions refuse to face social and economic problems, they die. (1950c:8)

A similar sentiment was expressed in a review of a book on sociology; "A religion that is a drag on social progress stands self-condemned" (1951q:24). Here Chenchiah ended up an advocate for religion in the face of secularist assumptions.

Whether ethics should or need be detached from religion admits debate and considerable difference of opinion. While on the one hand religion has acted as a conservative force, often stereotyping lower ethics, objective appraisal shows that the higher values of ethics arose with religions and religious revivals. If we do not accept the facile verdict that the factors with which religion works are purely imaginative, the call is not so much for positivism as for progressive religion. (1951q:24)

"Progressive religion" obviously would unsettle, at least to some extent, traditional religion. Chenchiah was not one to subtly unsettle; his preferred approach was all out attack. "The hope for those embedded in orthodoxy lies in violently kicking against the walls of their abode that threatens to be their grave" (1951e:2).⁵

The history of Christianity and Hinduism in their long perspectives teaches us that the freedom of spirit is never a danger to religion and the true danger comes from solid structures of words and *samskaras* in which we seek to imprison the Spirit. (Chenchiah 1950p:25)⁶

An apt image further made the point.

Let us remember that ideas and ideals cannot do any good till we reduce them to practice, any more than a prescription can do any good till we get the medicine prescribed and take it. We have all in religions become worshippers of prescriptions. We need become takers of medicine. (1950d:11)

⁵ Chenchiah's wit is apparent in this short piece. Sastri had commented to Chenchiah that "You are in the position of a drum. You are thumped on both sides. Hindus go at you for your Christianity, and Christians, I dare say, for your sympathy with Hinduism." Chenchiah's response was "I don't mind how hard they thump if only they drum some music out of me" (1951e:2).

⁶ With more venom Chenchiah similarly referred to "the festering ulcers and wounds religion breeds when it institutionalises itself and fails to be a real power" (1952g:3).

Thus, true religion for Chenchiah centered in vital personal experience lived out in society. In a review of a tribute to Wordsworth Chenchiah affirmed that

As pointed out by the author, the one point where religions meet (or ought to meet) is Realization – to be written in our opinion in capital letters. (1952e:19)

Yet this must not become an elitist enterprise for the few, as emphatically stated in an appreciative review of a Chinmayananda book.

The greatness of a religion lies as much if not more in its capacity to raise the morality and conduct of the masses and influencing the contemporary climate of life than in the extent of custom and ritual. We can forego a few tall giants if we can add an inch or two to the stature and height of average man. (Chenchiah 1952f:23)

Chenchiah's impatience towards orthodoxy and organized religion did not necessitate his rejection of the standard paradigm of various world religions. But his lack of concern for that outlook in favor of an activist transformational approach did set him up for undermining the traditional reified categories associated with religion.

2.2 Interreligious Cooperation

With this practically-focused view of religion it is no surprise that Chenchiah advocated interreligious cooperation. In announcing his resignation as editor of *The Pilgrim* he stated that "Brotherhood of religions is part of my creed" (1952g:3). He also quite explicitly stated that his advocacy of Christians and Muslims and Hindus praying together was the major cause of offense to other Christians (1952g:2).⁷ In self-defense he pointed out that none of his views were ever hidden, and none had changed.⁸ And this is clear as even in the first issue of *The Pilgrim* he edited he issued a call to "fellowship of religions" (1949a:unpaginated).

⁷ The actual pressure to resign came from international sources, as this biting paragraph explains.

The Christian in committees or outside soon develops a diplomacy. He adds to the innocence of the dove, the wisdom of the serpent. He is not altogether a lamb among wolves. When he does not like you he does not say it to your face. He used to do once, but now he has found a better way. He passes a resolution of appreciation and cuts off the sinews of war. This exactly happened. I am told on good authority that some in the committee threatened to withdraw subscriptions and some subsidies, if my policy continued – a threat which drives any secretary of any Indian Christian association into panic. Like Arjuna, he lays down his arms, shakes and sweats in fear. (Chenchiah 1952g:2)

⁸ Note another witticism, with a definite bite:

My views – which some disapprove – are the result of the convictions of a lifetime – just as the views of the conservatives which I disapprove – are the result of many lifetimes. (1952g:2)

Chenchiah perceptively noted the artificiality of religious distinctions in India, and this undoubtedly contributed to his advocacy of religious cooperation.

We all suffer from a fairly common misconception that men and women in India can be classified as exclusively Hindus, Christians and Muslims for purposes of preaching and studying. As a matter of fact the modern Hindu, Christian and Muslim are composite beings sharing almost the whole of secular life and about eighty per cent of mental life in common. (1949k:2)⁹

This perspective explodes the reified categories of world religions as well as the politicized constructs of Hindu and Muslim and Christian communities in India.¹⁰ But how can such a viewpoint be understood or lived out under the shadow of those imposing paradigms? Chenchiah did not succeed any further than R. C. Das in actually breaking free from these constructs.

One issue of *The Pilgrim* was focused on religious cooperation:

We intend to devote this issue of *The Pilgrim* mostly to advocate the desirability of cooperation of religions in the new national set up of India as a true means of their full realization....Our object in this issue is two-fold; 1. To stress the importance of the study of comparative religion – for the formation of universal faith. 2. To point out in what common practical efforts religions have tried to draw together and cooperate. (Chenchiah 1950b:1,2)

The issue goes on to discuss parliaments of religion, common celebration of festivals and common prayer and worship. There is acknowledgement of the danger of syncretism, although this is never defined or discussed.

The danger of spineless and nerveless syncretism is always present and should be avoided. But it should be remembered that cooperation between religions and fellowship of faiths is offered for definite action and facing realities of life. This common corridor of action is not a substitute for Christianity and Hinduism and Islam any more than a street or public place is a substitute for a house or home. (Chenchiah 1950c:10).¹¹

⁹ Chapter one section 2.3 discussed multiple religious belonging in slightly different terms than Chenchiah uses here.

¹⁰ There is also here, however, clearly an acceptance of the Enlightenment construct of religion as a compartment of life, with most of life being secular and religiously neutral, which I critique in chapter one section 2.2.

¹¹ Similarly, Chenchiah rejected the notion that all religions are the same but did not see that this necessitates avoiding parliaments of religion which are called with that in mind (1950n:20).

In practice this amounts to the mutual *possessio* model presented in this thesis. One is at home in Christianity or Hinduism or Islam as that reified construct is generally accepted and communities on those lines are accepted in India. But on the streets and in corridors of action there is interaction and cooperation; leaving the image, there is interreligious dialogue and action, there is comparative theology and the mutual transformation of dialogue partners who take possession of the best of other faith traditions and return home to share the fruit of interreligious encounter.

An example of Chenchiah's proposed practical cooperation was presented in a call for a united religious front in electoral politics.

In all the past elections religion has played no part save in indirectly supporting obscurantism and conservatism. Religions can no longer decline the task of guidance without forfeiting their hold on the thoughtful electorate....Religions can no longer maintain an ascetic isolation without renouncing their primary function of building up or taking part in building up individual and national life. A world renouncing religion will in its turn be renounced by the world. (1951i:1)

The paper goes on to suggest that "religions cannot take sides except where the issues are clearly moral and the choice is predetermined by their essential principles and spirit" (1951i:1-2). Agreed points would be the importance of voting and the importance of electing people of character and determination. Regarding political parties, Chenchiah expressed regret that the only true Gandhians, the Sarvodaya group, would not contest elections. He appealed for the election of Sarvodaya minded candidates, with a goal of transforming "the government machine" which had "not changed since the British" (1951i:4). A more organic, more hands and feet government system needed to be put in place.

On the more theoretical level of religious cooperation Chenchiah put forward a proposal for a body of Hindus and Christians to work together on an Old Testament for India. He suggested a group of eighteen Hindus and Christians work together on the Puranas with three goals.

(1) To collect materials for the working out of an Old Testament for India – (i.e.) Hinduism built on the pattern of the Old Testament with an eye on those elements of Hinduism which lead up to Christ. (2) To investigate and find out in what branches of Hinduism, Puranas express development and advance over the previous state of Hinduism....(3) To get a composite picture of Hinduism that may serve as a guide to the modern Hindu, as it was intended in Puranas to offer to the Mediaeval Hindu.
(Chenchiah 1952c:10)

There is no suggestion that any such group ever met, but the radicality of Chenchiah's reform agenda for religion is certainly apparent.¹² It is also apparent that Chenchiah's Christianity was not that of traditional orthodoxy despite a definite slant towards a fulfillment perspective evident in this quotation. Since Chenchiah certainly approached Hinduism as a Christian it is necessary to understand his rather singular view of Christianity before turning to an analysis of his understanding of Hinduism.

2.3 Chenchiah on Christianity

In his opening editorial for *The Pilgrim* Chenchiah spelled out his goals for *The Pilgrim* and in the process presented his perspective on Christianity, a fascinating synthesis of critique and hope. The procedure of his argument throughout this paper will be followed, with evaluation at the conclusion. It should be noted that in opening he aligned himself clearly with the stated purposes of the CSSH;

The Pilgrim has a vision and vocation. First and foremost it seeks as the official organ of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism to promote true scholarship in Hinduism which will give to the Christian an understanding of the Hindu mind and Hindu religious psychology so that Christ may be presented to the Hindu in an appealing and arresting manner....It will be our constant endeavour to present Christ to the Hindu and Hinduism to the Christian. (Chenchiah 1949b:1)

In this paper Chenchiah privileged the Indian Christian in a way that hardly seems consistent with his radical critique of Christianity in India.

There have been till recently two persons involved in this transaction [the Hindu-Christian interface] – the missionary – Catholic and Protestant who brought the Christian message to India and the Hindu to whom the message was given. With the passage of time and by the fruition of missionary effort a third person has arise, the Indian Christian who represents the jewel of redemption wrought by Christ set in the golden casket of the heritage of Hinduism. The Indian Christian should be the embodiment of Indian Christianity and our programme will be to give body, features, language, utterance to Indian Christianity. Indian Christians alone can put the majesty and magnitude of Christian salvation in an idiom intelligible to the Hindu.

¹² There is no hint in this article that Chenchiah actually wanted to dispense with the Old Testament of the Bible and use this new compilation instead, although he spelled out specific relations between existing OT books and various Puranic topics. This striking proposal appearing in the issue before Chenchiah's reluctant resignation suggests that this, and perhaps even a misunderstanding of this, more than the issue of interfaith prayer that he identified, lay behind the Christian reaction that forced his resignation. Chenchiah's position on the Old Testament is discussed in Thangasamy 1966: 30-31, 156-163, where his appreciation for aspects of the Old Testament is clear along with his belief that a new compilation like the one proposed here is a feasible and worthwhile project.

Indian Christianity has been undeservedly a term of reproach, an occasion for warning and admonition. All fears vanish if we remember that Indian Christianity has its anchor in Christ. It sums up the devotion and loyalty of the Indian to Christ. Far from toning down the Christian message or obscuring the features of the Nazarene, Indian Christianity welcomes Jesus into the Indian heart to be the indwelling Lord. Indian Christianity as a blueprint consists of new lines of Christian thought and activity.... (Chenchiah 1949b:1-2)

From this foundation Chenchiah went on to talk about the need for Indian Christian theology and Christian yoga. "We need to shift Christianity in India from creed to conduct, and from conduct to new life," he suggested (1949b:3). Next he focused on Christian literature, suggesting that the "Indian Christian has done very little in this field" (1949b:3). Service of the nation in all aspects was then considered, with the comment that "every problem has a Christian solution (i.e.) a solution which uplifts and enlarges man" (1949b:4).

Having spelled out his vision and hope, Chenchiah then critiqued the current situation in Indian Christianity.

Indian Christians have not shown any initiative in originating and maintaining institutions. Depending too much on foreign help they have lost self help.....Barrenness prevails in social and religious fields. One reason for this state of affairs seems to be poverty. The very fact that religion cannot move without money in [the] modern world shows how far Indian Christians have moved away from true sources of power. Before [the] Roman state became Christian the Christians were among the poorest in the state but spiritually most powerful. Spiritual power and Holy Spirit do not go with money. (1949b:4)

Finally a closing exhortation about Indian Christians and Hinduism.

Our idea of studying Hinduism means much more than scholarly studies of Hindu scriptures. It means a study of the Hindu mind and aspirations in the world of today. It means study of Hinduism in and through [the] Indian Christian who is at [the] same time a Hindu and Muslim Christian. The programme we have sketched for *The Pilgrim* may, even as a first sketch, appear to be ambitious. But with Jesus, whose unsearchable riches are barely used for humanity and with the willing cooperation of bhaktas East and West, why should we not be ambitious for the Kingdom of God? Jesus had great dreams about man and why should we not dream great dreams for Jesus and His Kingdom. (Chenchiah 1949b:4-5)

Chenchiah's understanding of Christianity entailed a string of paradoxes. Wildly romantic descriptions of the privileged position of Indian Christians accompany descriptions of the spiritual poverty of those same people. Christianity is discussed in traditional terms as a

superior religion with answers to all problems, then redefinition comes into play; the very essence of Christianity needed to be shifted to an experiential focus, Christianity was equated with that which uplifts and enlarges humanity, and Indian Christians are called Hindu and Muslim Christians. Further paradoxical statements could be developed from Chenchiah's comments on Christianity, but that is not the focus of this study.

There can be no doubt about Chenchiah's central concern, however, which fits with what has already been outlined of his view of religion. Christianity is mostly about life. The creed to conduct to new life formula quoted above is presented repeatedly throughout Chenchiah's writings. Much of his thought and terminology in this area was not markedly different from historic Christian teaching.¹³

Yet Chenchiah tied this new life in Christ into the practice of yoga, and it seems a yoga that is not yet in practice but only to be developed by Indian Christians in association with Hindus.

Christianity embodies a type form or personality – new to creation – first expressed in Jesus. No creed or belief can change us into the figure and image of Jesus. Since Holy Spirit does not seem to operate of itself as a procreating agency, we have by investigation, prayer and search, to discover the condition of its operation. Yoga of Christianity will be the science of Holy Spirit – the technique of reproducing Christ in the Christian. In the general outlook there appears one difference between Hinduism and Western Christianity. The Catholic Church in its disciplines planned at the level of self-control and conduct – corresponding to *yama* of Hinduism.¹⁴ The Protestant discipline was philanthropic and institutional. It seeks to control life by and through changes in the environment and by regimentation of will and emotion. None of them endeavour to reach down to the level of the spirit. Yoga stands for change of life-power and not of environment or psychical apparatus of life. Christian yoga reaches beyond conduct, control and discipline to new life, creative life, new spirit – Holy Spirit. Indian Christian yoga will be, unlike its philanthropic, ascetic disciplines, an experiment in the new life of Holy Spirit. Assisted and encourage by Hinduism and science, Indian Christianity will venture into untrodden fields of experiments in Holy Spirit. (1949d:7-8)

¹³ For example, in Christmas thoughts for 1951 he wrote that

From the cradle comes the answer. Unless man is recreated with new instincts and impulses and unless God becomes Emmanuel – God with us and in us, the old humanity with greed and sin will go to annihilation down the path of wars – driveling about peace. No inventions, no U.N. Councils, no dollar plenitude can save humanity. (1951n:1-2)

But then a few lines later comes a more edgy comment; "Our redemption lies not in worshipping Jesus but in reproducing him" (1951n:2).

¹⁴ *Yama* is self-restraint in Patanjali's yoga system, the first of eight steps.

This surely was dreaming great dreams for Jesus and his kingdom! Serious analysis of this proposal is outside the bounds of this thesis, but the question must be raised here as to whether what Chenchiah has in mind here should really be called "Christianity" at all. It certainly is very different from all known historic Christian traditions. This reconceptualization of Christianity was present in another stunning Chenchiah claim, that "every true Christian should be a faith healer" (1951p:20).¹⁵

A final point to note related to Chenchiah's teaching on Christianity is his critique of the Christian approach to Hinduism, which will introduce his positive teaching of what he considers a proper Christian understanding and approach. In a highly commendatory review of R. C. Das' booklet *How to Present Christ to a Hindu* Chenchiah presented this critique:

Much of the thinking on this matter [evangelism among Hindus] suffers from alien modes of thought and approach and from institutionalism of an incurable nature. Very little contribution has come from the convert who is competent to speak with inside knowledge. Colossal ignorance about [the] Hindu mind stands as an impassable barrier in evangelism. The missionary methods brought over from historic churches were not even adapted to Indian conditions. World conferences, by making evangelism and its methods dependant on the theory of right relation of Christianity to non-Christian religions have added confusion to confusion. (1950m:18)¹⁶

This is mild criticism compared to the stinging words of his resignation editorial. It had been suggested that as editor he had not focused enough on "popular Hinduism," to which he responded that R. C. Das had contributed papers on such topics. But he understood a more sinister connotation to be involved in the charge, and it brought forth his ire.

What zealous Christians whether Indian or foreign mean by popular Hinduism is just the matter which *Mother India* dealt with. They delight in the cesspools of Hinduism and should like to report about the drainage system of the Hindu faith. Fortunately or unfortunately two can play this game. It is not in Hinduism only that prostitution, idolatry, and religious immorality exist. The Hindu opponent can retort and *Mother India* easily produces *Uncle Sham*. My objection to this kind of religious propaganda is that it does not become the dignity and decorum of Christianity. It savours of street

¹⁵ In relation to this claim, note Chenchiah's testimony and suggested explanation for personal failure in this area related to his Hindu friend, V. S. Narasimhachari, a contributor to *The Pilgrim*:

I have struggled before the Throne of Grace not for his life but for his health as long as life was given, believing full well that it is the desire of Jesus that no child of God should suffer from disease. But my prayers were not answered, probably because I have not reached that level of spiritual life where a Christian can draw upon God's great resources. (1952b:2)

¹⁶ In light of this general comment about the colossal ignorance of Christians towards Hinduism it should be noted that Chenchiah made a clear distinction between Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians, saying "The Catholic study of Hinduism is progressing as rapidly as the Protestant study has declined" (1951c :23). See also Chenchiah 1949m:20-21 for a similar statement.

brawl and hooligan brick-brat, back alley fight which compromises the nobility of Christianity. The charge we urge with zest against other religions comes home to roost. It is smelly and unsavoury – this fight with stink bombs. We would advise Christians in the interest of religious cleanliness and sanitation to avoid it. For expounding this type of religion an old time catechist with his invincible armour of ignorance alike of Hinduism and [the] spirit of Jesus would be a suitable editor. Educated men ill-suit the job. I for one freely confess, I am thoroughly unfit for it. (Chenchiah 1952g:4)

These attacks on Christian ignorance and Christian focus on the worst aspects of Hindu practice are only what would be expected from Chenchiah. Chenchiah was a voice for a radical fringe of elite Indian Protestant Christianity. Elite Indian Protestants wanted to be part of mainstream Indian society, but were satisfied with current church patterns and not concerned with adapting Hindu/Indian patterns as suggested by Das and Chenchiah and their associates. Non-elite Protestants had little information or concern related to the entire topic.¹⁷ Radical engagement with elite and modernizing Hindus was a worthy agenda, but it could hardly be the entire agenda or the only valid concern for followers of Jesus in a civilization as complex as India.

2.4 Chenchiah on Fulfillment

Chenchiah's position on the fulfillment approach to Hinduism is subtle and needs careful analysis. The data of Chenchiah in *The Pilgrim* is quite definitely positive towards fulfillment. In a stimulating statement in his first Easter editorial Chenchiah suggested that Christ does not fulfill Old Testament prophecy nearly so neatly as many Christians believe, then claimed that "Jesus, it may be asserted with greater amount of truth, fulfilled universal mythology" (1949d:1). More directly related to Hinduism, in an obituary for Ramana Maharshi Chenchiah suggested that "Siva swallowing Kalakuta for saving the world was the myth of which Christ taking the suffering of the sinful on the cross was the fulfillment" (1950e:2).

In an analysis of different ways to study Hinduism Chenchiah referred to study "by liberal missionaries, who present Christ in an acceptable manner as fulfilment of Hinduism" (1949d:3). This might be interpreted as less than an endorsement, but that would be the most

¹⁷ This distinction regarding elite Indian Protestants is based on Mallampalli, see chapter one section 4.2.2.

natural reading. Similarly, without specific reference to fulfillment, Chenchiah endorsed the approach of J. F. Edwards, which is a fulfillment approach.¹⁸

The remaining reference to fulfillment in Chenchiah's work in *The Pilgrim* is of a different type, and perhaps suggests that Chenchiah has in mind something other than the traditional position.¹⁹ In an editorial he referred to "the Indian Christian who sums up in himself all Hinduism representing the living past, which survives and continues in Christ" (1949d:2). Later in that same paragraph he spoke of "what in Hinduism survives and operates in the true Christian life and how the Hindu in the Christian offers a medium of interchange of ideas and views between the Hindu and the Christian in an effective manner" (1949d:2). Here the fulfillment (summing up) of Hinduism is in people who integrate Hinduism into their life in Christ. The phrase "the Hindu in the Christian" is quite like a phrase earlier noted, "a Hindu and Muslim Christian" (1949b:4-5).

Chenchiah did not spell out what he meant by such phrases; he was undermining the paradigm of conflicting world religions and seemed to be challenging the reified communalized religiosity of India as well. Yet he was identified with Christianity and slipped into the world religions terminology frequently. As an activist impatient with organized religion it is perhaps not surprising that Chenchiah lived with these unresolved tensions.

2.5 Chenchiah on Hinduism

In a short piece in just the second issue that he edited Chenchiah outlined four standpoints from which Hindus study Hinduism and five standpoints of outsiders. Here are the four Hindu types.

¹⁸ In this review Chenchiah looked at three ways of evangelism. One involved "repeating the latest slogans of the West...so superficial...does not deserve serious attention." The second suggested way was practically ruled out; "The method of the Holy Spirit so much in evidence in the apostolic age depends upon our possession of Holy Spirit and our capacity to use Him in evangelism. Both these facts may be doubted." The third he called "the educative method...which also emphasizes the primacy of Holy Spirit in evangelism" (1949f:25). Possibly a measure of criticism towards fulfillment was suggested in that the primary method from the apostolic age is not available to today's spiritual dwarfs, and in that he did not specifically mention fulfillment despite that being overwhelmingly present in the book.

¹⁹ His comment that "Hinduism has some features which have no parallel in other religions" (1952c:12) suggested that while some aspects of Hinduism might be fulfilled, there are other aspects that do not parallel anything in Christianity. Moving outside of *The Pilgrim* it becomes apparent that this is indicative of Chenchiah's position as his more anti-fulfillment comments are outlined in Job 1938:appendix42 (Cf. Thangasamy 1966:33-35).

1. By orthodox Hindus standing in the historical tradition.
2. By modern Hindus who live in a world environment and are conscious of problems and issues that never confronted tradition.
3. By those who feel that the message of Hinduism should be presented to the world as a gospel.
4. By those liberal Hindus who feel that Hinduism to suit modern life should be reinterpreted in the light of ancient and modern illuminations of Hindu and other religions. (Chenchiah 1949d:2-3)

There is no exposition of these points, so it is not clear how numbers 2 and 4 above are necessarily different. Presumably the "reinterpretation" of point four is considered more radical than anything under point two, which presumably would entail only new applications. Clearly, proponents of both points two and four could easily embrace point three as well. There is tacit acceptance of the world religions paradigm throughout, particularly in the phrase "Hindu and other religions."

The five standpoints for outsiders to study Hinduism were

1. By Orientalists interested in the past of Hinduism as antiquarians.
2. By scientific scholars interested in the religious phenomena as a whole – (i.e.) by students of comparative religion.
3. By missionaries of various types – orthodox and conservative to show how inadequate and erring Hinduism is and how much it stands in need of Christianity; by liberal missionaries, who present Christ in an acceptable manner as fulfilment of Hinduism.
4. By theosophists to ascertain the ancient and esoteric wisdom Hinduism contains.
5. By modern leaders of thought who feel that religion should be replaced by science in India. (Chenchiah 1949d:3)

Many comments can be made on this division. Orientalists as antiquarians, missionaries not among either the Orientalists or the scientific scholars, all theosophists and modern secularists clearly outside of Hinduism. Perhaps Chenchiah would object that he was speaking in generalities and this is treating his divisions as water tight.

The question of most relevance is how Chenchiah would have viewed himself in this schema. He made no value judgments after outlining these standpoints, but merely stated that "a comprehensive study of Hinduism would include all these viewpoints" (1949d:3). He then went on to list another three points that he called "three directions in which Hinduism may be studied by those who do not belong to Hindu tradition" (1949d:3). These three were

1. In contemporary exponents of Hinduism; Sri Rama Krishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramanamaharishi, Sri Arabinbo, Master C.V.V., Sri Radhakrishnan and Dr. Sarma.
2. From the standpoint of inter-religious school – who believe in religious cooperation work, prayer and worship between religions as the right medium for transmitting values in each religion to other religionists.
3. In the Indian Christian converts of Hinduism who embody in themselves a living synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity. (1949d:3)

There are two serious issues to raise regarding these three points. The first is the privileging of Chenchiah's own position as a convert. An *a priori* claim, not even to have special insight but to be rightly an object of study, does not impress. Surely Chenchiah was aware of converts who ridiculed Hinduism under the "popular" or "cesspool" approach that he so despised.²⁰ That this privileged position was not granted by either Hindus or Christians is clear from Chenchiah's own story about being beaten like a drum from both sides (1951e:2, footnote 5 above). Chenchiah had every right to speak for his hybrid Christian-Hindu synthesis position, and to critique orthodox traditions from that standpoint. But this does not support a claim to special insight into Hinduism and Christianity due to that particular synthetic position.

A second problem is that the interreligious school seems to be reduced to activists, and thus distinct from the comparative religion scholars who seem to be affirmed on the first list. These three directions in which one can study are thus all quite antithetical to traditional textbook learning, yet despite Chenchiah's bias for religion being about life and social transformation he never openly opposed textual study and even wrote on the Isa Upanishad in *The Pilgrim* (Chenchiah 1944).

In summary, the three lists Chenchiah presented for study of Hinduism do not provide much practical guidance for making sense of the complex category "Hinduism" that still to the present is commonly used in varying and often contradictory ways in different contexts by different people with different agendas.

²⁰ Note that in *Rethinking Christianity in India* Chenchiah stated that "There was a type of convert in the past who hated Hinduism and surrendered himself wholeheartedly to what he supposed to be Christianity" (Job 1938:49). That such converts were and are not entirely a thing of the past is clear; note Maharaj 1984 for a recent example and Koshy 2003 for the striking story of Bakht Singh (1903-2000), a contemporary of Chenchiah who became a sectarian Christian of rather severe orthodoxy who certainly surrendered wholeheartedly to what he supposed to be Christianity. Singh ignored rather than mocked Hinduism, presenting a Bible-centered faith that split many churches but also touched many Hindus. Maharaj 1984:145 clearly associated Hindu deities with demons.

Apart from the concerns in these lists about the Hindu religion and its study Chenchiah was concerned about the psychological or emotional component in religion and religious studies. His one major article on this topic was practically focused ("The Psychology of the Hindu Mind and the Presentation of the Christian Message," 1949c) and specifically stated that "We are not attempting to construct a picture of the Hindu mind. That task, a vital one, may be undertaken sometime in the future" (Chenchiah 1949c:13). But a general picture of Chenchiah's concepts in this area can be pieced together from this paper, with important supplementation from two other short articles.

The point of the article was clearly articulated, and is not particularly controversial.

Much of the Christian preaching does not enter the Hindu mind either because it is alien to its ways of thought or because it fails to evoke memory or association on which the meaning and appeal of words and ideas depend. The Hindu does not reject Christianity. Often he simply does not understand it. (1949c:11)

Expounding further on this topic Chenchiah moved into more precarious areas, and used terminology that clashes with current sensibilities.

Mind has different shapes and forms depending largely on the past history. The racial and the national mind has evolved out of racial history. (1949c:11)²¹

Similar ideas were stated nearly two years later in a review of a booklet on Tamil and Sanskrit theological terms.

Words are repositories of social psychology and have profound value and appeal by reason of their capacity to stir up emotion....Such a study [of how words in this booklet were chosen] will be a contribution to comparative study in meanings of words and their association with racial psychology. (1950c:21-22)

The next issue of *The Pilgrim* brought further comments on the same lines, again in a book review.

This is a book after our heart because it works out the theory we have been advocating in *The Pilgrim* that the true and fruitful approach to Hindu and Christian theology is

²¹ The succeeding paragraph to this one not only summarized again the point of the article but also illustrates again Chenchiah's telling wit.

We do not realise that in our preaching we are trying to convey Jewish ideas – products of Jewish history to a Hindu who stands at the opposite pole of the thought-world through the medium of a Western preacher who does not understand the Jew or the Hindu by reason of his peculiar national bent. (1949c:11)

through type words which, as it were, perpetuate by holding in deposit the march of thought in religion. Betty Heimann, we are told, has attested the fact that the Indian terms must always be studied together with the verbs from which they are derived....This study of words is as thrilling as archaeology. Layers beneath layers of meaning are unearthed and we see not merely the result but the process of thought stage by stage. (1951a:14)²²

Chenchiah was making an important point here, but the way he developed and formulated it leaves much to be desired. "Racial psychology" is not politically correct terminology currently, and for good reasons. Adjusting this to "cultural conditioning" resonates with current understanding. More substantively, Chenchiah seemed to be affirming a singular Hindu psychology.²³ But Chenchiah himself drew rather extreme distinctions between orthodox and reformist Hindus; as will be seen shortly, he saw a wide gap between theistic and advaitic Hindu positions; not to mention (which does not appear in *The Pilgrim*) the development of hindutva or what is now often spoken of as "Hindu fundamentalism" and Dalit activist positions.²⁴ Perhaps there is legitimacy in seeking a common "Hindu psychology" among these vastly divergent positions, but there is certainly just as much legitimacy in suggesting various types of Hindu mindset.

The theory of "type words" is also suspect at best. Not wanting to go too far off on a tangent, the theory of Betty Heimann can be noted briefly.

Thus I became an Indologist, more than ever convinced of the necessity for associating together philology and philosophy; for these unique geographical and historical conditions of India must serve to account for her characteristically ambiguous linguistic forms of expression. Thus every student of the ancient Indian texts is compelled to be a synthetic thinker, while only the philologically trained interpreter will be in any proper position to grasp the manifold diversity of both the underlying rational meanings and the irrational interconnections of almost every Indian term without exception.

(1937:17)

²² Chenchiah's fascination with words was also evident in a column he began entitled "Samapada Chaturanga," which he described as a word equivalency game. This column with different word studies and associations appeared in seven of the 12 issues of *The Pilgrim* which he edited, beginning with volume 9 number 1.

²³ Cf. the closing words of Chenchiah's review of R. C. Das' booklet *How to Present Christ to a Hindu*, which he suggested "...gives a correct picture of the Hindu religious psychology – very rare to get" (1950m:19).

²⁴ Chapter one section 4.3.3 introduces these phenomena. Nathuram Godse who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 was associated with Hindutva. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was banned for a short time following that, so Chenchiah was well aware of this developing variety of Hindu nationalism despite his lack of reference to it. Similarly, Chenchiah could not have been ignorant of B. R. Ambedkar's role in developing the constitution of India or of his Dalit activism, despite the silence of *The Pilgrim*.

Without diverging too far from the central point, this historical perspective on lexical semantics was very popular through the 19th century but was quite exploded by F. de Saussure in the twentieth century as he demonstrated that words have meaning in their immediate context and their historical development is only of significance in that context if the speaker is aware of that history of meaning (Ullmann 1963[1951]:141ff).²⁵ The viewpoint of Heimann and Chenchiah could also be considered an example of an exaggerated focus on mysticism common in the Orientalist paradigm of East versus West.²⁶

Despite these rather severe objections to Chenchiah's position on "Hindu racial psychology" it still seems that he is making an important point in an inadequate way. Despite the false simplicity of the Orientalist dichotomy of West against East, no one would suggest that there are no East-West differences. The facile rationalism of the modern West is now being exposed by postmodernism, and was almost incomprehensible to Hindus who faced it, particularly in its Protestant Christian expression.²⁷

More significantly in defense of Chenchiah's inadequate expression of this point there is the constant question of how to understand Hinduism. If historical and philosophical/theological diversity is too extreme for meaningful definition to rest on those foundations, the core of Hinduism (if a core is to be found at all) must rest in the socio-cultural realm. To suggest that there is a Hindu civilizational identity (as opposed to a Hindu racial psychology) is perhaps the most helpful way to think about "Hinduism," and this seems the point that Chenchiah is attempting to make despite the problems with his presentation.²⁸

Considering specifically theological or philosophical Hinduism, Chenchiah did not hide his bias towards theistic rather than advaitic thought. In an introduction to Madhwa's thought he called for more study of the theistic schools.

²⁵ I was introduced to lexical semantics in the field of biblical studies so should acknowledge my debt on this point to Silva 1994.

²⁶ Cf. King 1999:97:

...the continually enduring notion of the 'mystical East' ...a powerful image precisely because for some it represents what is most disturbing and outdated about Eastern cultures, while for others it represents the magic, the mystery and the sense of the spiritual that they perceive to be lacking in modern Western culture.

²⁷ Cf. Chenchiah:

One essential quality the Indian Christian misses in the Protestant church is the spirit. Doctrine occupies a too prominent place to permit the growth of the spirit. Its severe rationalism, though in a sense congenial, cannot develop the finer qualities of the soul. (Job 1938:93)

²⁸ This is the perspective outlined in chapter one section 3.4.

Western scholarship has largely devoted itself to archaic Hinduism – i.e. religion of the Sanhitas. The interest in Upanishads and in advaita of Sankara was of a much later date. The vast field of theistic Hinduism has not drawn the attention of Western research schools. Carpenter and Macnicol are the two names that occur to one's mind but anything like a systematic and critical study has yet to take place. We see no excuse for the missionary lack of interest in the study of Hindu theism. In South India every Hindu is either a Vaishnavite, Madhwa or Saivite. The number of pure advaitins was always limited. Madhwa's dualism has spread all over North India through Chaitanya and Vallabha – forming the living environment of Christianity in vast tracts of India. (Chenchiah 1949j:3)²⁹

A rather bitter critique of traditional advaita appeared in a review of a biography of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay.

The reviewer himself views Christ from a Hindu background and has believed and advocated that Christ himself reveals anew when looked at from Hindu heritage. Fully conscious that Christianity will take strange shapes and forms in India, he finds it difficult to understand not so much Upadhyay's Christianity but his Hinduism which pivoted on three points; (1) Unchanging God; (2) the caste system; (3) the iconic worship. This interpretation of Hinduism has not the approval of practically all great men of Bengal and has been more or less renounced by his colleagues in Hinduism. Any day I would take the interpretation of Hinduism from Ramakrishna and Vivekananda – who had the true Hindu instinct than from Upadhyay. Vivekananda might defend Sankara but preferred a more humane interpretation of it by Paramahansa [Ramakrishna]; he may defend caste and idolatry in public but followed neither in private. Upadhyay's love for caste, iconography, extreme advaitism are not so unintelligible from the Christian as from [the] Hindu standpoint. (Chenchiah 1949g:28)

The interpretations suggested here of Upadhyay and neo-advaita are debatable, but the present point is Chenchiah's position against advaita. This is most clear in a satirical attack on advaita which perhaps succeeds in being humorous, but surely also was offensive to those who espouse the advaita position.

Many have fallen besides man. Advaita believes not so much in the fall of man as in the fall of God. Maya is the psychological fall of Brahman. It is a sort of schizomatism (*sic*) in the mind of God – a sort of neurosis of divided personality. The Brahman thinks it is many while it is one, thinks it is ego while it is really etherish *sat*. Advaitism sets about to cure Brahman of the melody [*sic*; malady], restore him to health and normality. (1951j:5)³⁰

²⁹ Chenchiah habitually used the spelling adwaita or adwaitin, which I have edited to the more commonly used advaita/advaitin.

³⁰ This paper goes on to also speak of the fall of the priest and the poet, the latter being particularly mourned with the rise of science. The closing line perhaps softens the attack on advaita; "So I, rescuing Sankara and Shelly from the back regions of the library, began reading them both" (1951j:6).

Chenchiah's preference for Vivekananda's neo-advaita over classical advaita has already been noted. His ambivalence towards the modernized neo-advaita is apparent in two comments on Swami Sivananda. Again with a humorous note (again rather offensive humor) Chenchiah analyzed that

We agree that the strength of the Sadhuji was in his organizing capacity and the appeal of his message was in this, that with Ramakrishna Mission he advocates a practical advaita and an advaita which faces social, political and spiritual problems of our new-born democracy. He asked his audience to bring to bear the insights of advaita on our secular life. He stressed also the necessity of purity and honesty in public life. We wish he had exercised the prophetic function of judging our people by the ideals they profess to honour – more emphatically. There is no use telling our opportunistic leaders, unprincipled politicians, heartless black-marketeers, greedy bribe-takers that they are masquerading Gods. It would have been more chastening if they are told what they are – dogs – before we can dig into them the idea of what they may become, i.e., men like god. We wish the Sadhuji laid the whip of moral indignation strongly on their backs. They need it and it may turn out to be good medicine. If sanyasis like Sivananda – who are above popular approbation or disfavour do not give them home truths – who will? We need prophets of the type in the Old Testament among us today. (1950j:3)

A later review of a Sivananda book on his south Indian tour (which included Chenchiah's account quoted above) presented a more positive picture.

A religion with yoga as its spine and social work as its life breath, a message which meets the complex conditions of today, an outlook friendly to other religions is exactly what India needs and we are glad to note Swamiji gave it in good measure. (Chenchiah 1952j:17)

This makes apparent again that Chenchiah's focus was on the practical aspects of religious faith, even though he clearly had strong opinions regarding advaita.

One of Chenchiah's significant innovations as editor of *The Pilgrim* was to publish writings by Hindus in the journal of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism. This was a significant step in dialogical interaction, although perhaps not altogether innovative since R. C. Das had been using Hindu teachers in the Benares Institute sessions for many years. An analysis of the Hindu contributions, however, again raises some serious questions.

The vast majority of contributions were written by V. S. Narasimhachari (two papers on Madhwa philosophy, one (two parts) on advaita and one (two parts) on *viśiṣṭadvaita*). Chenchiah introduced Narasimhachari in the issue that contained his first article.

Mr. Narasimhachari belongs to the liberal Madhwa school and has nothing of sectarian separatism in him. He puts religion to the test of meeting personal and national problems. He makes a practical approach to Madhwaism and eschews the dogmatic way. We think we are right in saying that he holds that all religion should be tested in the light of later and present experience. (1949j:4)³¹

It is surely not a coincidence that the main Hindu contributor to *The Pilgrim* held views of religion that pretty much match those of Chenchiah himself. That this clearly identified liberal Madhwa advocate contributed major articles on opposing schools of Vedanta (both advaita and *viśiṣṭadvaita*) were explained by Narasimhachari rather than by exponents of those positions) is disappointing. The value of Hindu rather than Christian contributors to *The Pilgrim* is all but negated if the Hindu writers expound on positions which they personally reject.³²

Chenchiah's exchange program brought Hindu periodicals for his review, and he did not hesitate to pass judgment on the contents of these publications.³³ How representative of Hindu traditions the popular Hindu press was is a question that must be asked. Very definite sectarian approaches, generally not academic (see criticisms below), are most likely to be present in such productions. This is a legitimate part of the Hindu mosaic and Chenchiah did not hold back his criticisms, which were occasionally philosophical, at other times about tangential points, and not without flashes of his biting wit. These examples will be quoted in the order they appeared in *The Pilgrim*.

Emancipated thinkers of the type of the Swamiji have to consider whether the time has not arrived for Hinduism to discard the whole karma theory or modify it radically. The dominance of law is waning even in the physical world and we should not impose its archaic tyranny on moral and mental life. Hinduism has nothing to lose but everything to gain if it cuts this umbilical cord. (Chenchiah 1950f:38)

These chapters, by apt quotations show that the Aryans of the Vedas are a people of a high and complex civilization. In the place given to women, in the high valuation of partnership in marriage, they are easily the superiors of the moderns. We wish the author had not wasted his time in showing that aeroplanes are mentioned in the Rigveda on the basis of texts which speak of heavenly boats. (Chenchiah 1950h:19)

³¹ This clearly represents the fourth of the four Hindu standpoints for study of Hinduism quoted above. Any hope that Chenchiah would be anything like objective towards those four standpoints is clearly exposed; he supported liberal and reformist Hindus.

³² Two other major papers appeared in *The Pilgrim* by Hindu writers. One was on the yoga of Master C.V.V. by V. Venkataramana Rao (*The Pilgrim* 8:4) and the other on the Theosophical Society and interreligious cooperation by Shankar Rao (*The Pilgrim* 9:1). These papers were also from modern reformist traditions.

³³ See note 2 of this chapter.

We have observed that our religious papers demand from the nation very little of heart-searching and very little of honest *self examination*. (Chenchiah 1950i:21; italics original)

In all books of this nature, and this book is no exception, elaborate defences are entered into and attempts are made to commend the reasonableness of [the] caste system and the concept of *samsara*. When expounding the Hindu scriptures to non-Hindus these efforts, usually of the nature of a *tour de force*, may well be omitted as they rarely carry conviction. The doctrines of karma and caste hardly solve any problem but add to the complexities of [the] religious situation. Both represent outmoded outlooks on life. They are axiomatic to the Hindu and at the best problematic to the modern Hindu. It is better to treat them as belonging to the *yuga dharma* [era-bound duties] and not to *sanatana dharma* [eternal duties]. (Chenchiah 1951b:18)³⁴

The personal experiences consist largely of miraculous experiences quite the reverse of what [Ramana] Maharishi would have wished and not in illumination of sense of ego which one expects. (Chenchiah 1951d:33-34)

There is hardly anything in the contents of this book to justify the somewhat pontifical attitude taken [by] Pandit Chaturvedi towards the West that is still groping in the darkness of materialism. There is enough grovelling in materialism in India for Mr. Chaturvedi to assail the West Sancho Panza wise. Let him expend his missionary zeal to save India from engulfing corruption – of which he as an M. P. ought to be aware. (Chenchiah 1951f:23)

The author does not preach the shallow and cheerful gospel which sadhu adventurers in America who are more after American dollars than after the spiritual welfare of Truman's countrymen have made current, that yoga is everybody's purchase for ten dollars. He rather deters than encourages you. Says the sadhu, "the act of taking the Kundalini *sakti* upward is an adamantine task – It may take years of hard and ardent work or may be a life-long struggle." All this may be endured if the prize is physical immortality. But Sadhuji assures us that when Sakti joins Siva, the *sadaka* quits the mortal coil in twenty one days. One may hesitate to enter a path that seems to lead us to a pleasant and even cheerful suicide – politely called *samadhi*. (Chenchiah 1951g:24-25)

The Kundalini force has not been submitted to scientific tests. It was not found in Patanjali. Its functions though asserted are not subjected to experimental verification. The fact that the mind is associated with the brain alone rests not on assertion but on the proved fact of lesions of the brain impairing the mind function and memory. Memory is affected by brain injury. If as the author maintains the seat of the memory is *muladara* – piles [hemorrhoids] should in some measure effect memory. Science rests on proof and verification and not assertions. (Chenchiah 1952d:18)

³⁴ Chenchiah contributed an article focused on caste to *The Pilgrim* edited by his successor Immanuel. His position is clear in this statement from the closing paragraph.

Caste had a purpose – that of stabilizing, integrating and protecting society against external shocks and internal revolutions. The verdict of impartial judges has been that it served this purpose very well. Like all institutions it has outlived its purpose, and has to yield its place to new social formations. (1953:21)

All of these criticisms seem to place Chenchiah in the Christian tradition of assuming a superior Christian position from which to judge Hinduism. But Chenchiah's bitter criticisms of Christianity and exuberant praise of other aspects of Hinduism negate that interpretation.³⁵ Three examples of the latter seem the right way to close this analysis of Chenchiah's position on Hinduism. The first is a mere passing comment in light of the Christian view of suffering, as Chenchiah refers to "the dominant note of Hinduism – joy" (1949c:12). That alone would be enough to set Chenchiah apart from traditional Christian critics of Hinduism, but note a second example as well.

If we can stress one hopeful feature of the present as a distinct contribution to life we would mention the importance of technique – the method of implementing ideas in actual life. The earlier centuries contributed to life by discovering and stating higher values and ethical concepts. The time has come to stress on how to realise these ideals. Hinduism has given primacy to realization in religions and has developed the technique of yoga. (1950d:10)³⁶

Finally, in exuberant praise of Ramana Maharshi, Chenchiah spoke in a tone rare for a Christian who affirmed the centrality of Jesus among all religions.

All India – men of all religions and communities in India – are mourning the passing of Ramana Maharishi. A great spiritual beacon light – brighter than the Karthika Deepam of Tiruvanamalai has been to all seeming put out and we are all poorer for it. Ramana Maharishi demonstrated by his life two great truths that need demonstrating in our day – One – that God exists and the other that union with him is blissful. (1950e:1)

Chenchiah did not present a systematic picture of his perspective on Hinduism, but his praises and criticisms added up to a respectful dialogical approach that was implemented without hiding his central conviction that the new life and new society rooted in Jesus was the goal to which modern life rightly aspired.

3.0 Conclusion

Chenchiah's approach to religion was modern and pragmatic. He did not critique the framework of world religions but sought to actively break down the walls between the

³⁵ Enough has been made of Chenchiah's criticism of Christianity and orthodoxy, but note also this gem; "Every educated Christian, clergy or laity, is usually guilty of four or five heresies consciously or unconsciously" (1951h: 35).

³⁶ This article goes on to call for small groups of Hindus, Christians and Muslims to meet together to resolve practical concerns, appealing to Gandhian sarvodaya and gram-seva programs for example.

various religious traditions. He freely criticized Hindu and Christian traditions and sought dialogical encounter and synthesis in a manner that transcended the standard paradigm. He advocated hybridity and free borrowing of ideas and practices across religious traditions, and thus was a marginal figure like today's advocates of comparative theology and multiple religious belonging. Yet he sought to remain centered on Christ, and his approach fits the *possessio* framework of this thesis. Yet his approach proved too radical for the Protestant Christianity of his time and his voice was silenced, at least as editor of *The Pilgrim*. Lessons from his probing towards a better paradigm for interreligious engagement will be drawn in the conclusion to this thesis after tracing the denouement of *The Pilgrim*.

8. The Twilight of *The Pilgrim*

Chenchiah's resignation as editor of *The Pilgrim* in 1952 was not quite a death blow to the publication and the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism, but it was another in a long series of setbacks. The society had never been able to grow a strong foundation, and despite Chenchiah's efforts (and his stated goal to reach 300 members) there were still only 100 members when he resigned (Das 1952e:15). Already in late 1950 (well into Chenchiah's editorial stint) the NCC had decided that the proposed school of Hinduism was not going to happen any time soon.¹

Chenchiah's radical theology, the prickly personality of R. C. Das, and the *avant garde* approach to Hinduism that both espoused clearly were deep problems undermining efforts to develop the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*. It is the position of this thesis that the CSSH as an attempt to develop an all-India society devoted to Hindu study and ministry truly died with the resignation of Chenchiah. *The Pilgrim* after Chenchiah was quite a different endeavor, as will be documented below.

1.0 R. D. Immanuel and *The Pilgrim*

R. D. Immanuel became the final editor of *The Pilgrim*. He was a Tamil Christian who had done doctoral work at Boston School of Theology in the USA, his work being later published as *The Influence of Hinduism on Indian Christians* (1950). He was professor of Philosophy of Religion and New Testament Interpretation at Leonard Theological College in Jabalpur. With Immanuel as editor, *The Pilgrim* virtually became the faculty publication of Leonard Theological College.

Nine issues of *The Pilgrim* are extant from Immanuel's editorial work.² The content of these issues is overwhelmingly the work of Leonard Theological College faculty. Contributions by

¹ See chapter 3 section 2.1. Despite this, an appeal for TWO schools of Hindu studies, one in the north and one in the south, appeared under Immanuel's editorship in *The Pilgrim* 12:3.

² Extant holdings include vol. 14 no. 1 from March 1955, followed by vol. 15 no. 1 of January 1957. It is possible that a vol. 14 no. 2 and perhaps a no. 3 were produced but are not currently extant. Vol. 15 no. 1 says it

people not associated with Leonard are easily listed. R. C. Das wrote two papers and three reports, and P. Chenchiah contributed a paper and a review.³ A brief letter by R. R. Keithahn was published (11:3), a brief devotional by Anjilvel Matthew appeared (14:1), an article written by a Hindu was reprinted from the newspaper *The Hindu* (12:3), and there was a paper by C. H. Diehl (12:2). *The Pilgrim* had *ipso facto* become the publication of a seminary faculty.

This is not merely a conclusion garnered from hindsight. Immanuel seemed clearly aware of what had happened, as is clear in the transition from *The Pilgrim* to a succeeding publication when the CSSH finally folded. There was a transition volume numbered vol. 15 no. 1 (Jan. 1957) which was headed *The Pilgrim: The Quarterly Magazine of the Indian Cultures Society*, which was followed by an undated vol. 1 no. 1 of *India Cultures Quarterly* which had been adopted as the official name of the journal of the Leonard Theological College in Jabalpur.⁴ Interestingly, the succeeding volumes abandoned the new numbering and went back to volume 15 in continuance of *The Pilgrim*.

There was clearly some debate, or at least lack of clarity, regarding the relation of *The Pilgrim* of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism and the new publication from Leonard Theological College. R. D. Immanuel remained editor throughout the transition, and there is no indication of any serious change in his editorial approach. In fact, Immanuel wrote in the new *The Pilgrim* (the only issue before the change of name to *India Cultures Quarterly*) that rather than something new, *The Pilgrim* "resumes publication of a magazine dedicated to the study of Indian cultures," and Immanuel "continues as editor" (Immanuel 1957:1).⁵

This clear evidence of continuity between *The Pilgrim* after Chenchiah and *India Cultures Quarterly* becomes even more striking when the dissonance between *The Pilgrim* under Chenchiah and *The Pilgrim* post Chenchiah is noted. Immanuel's first editorial after

"resumes publication," implying that there was more than just a one year gap between 14:4 and 15:1; very possibly the resumption was from a breakdown after vol. 14 no. 1, and all copies are extant (Immanuel 1957:1).

³ The contents of these contributions by Das and Chenchiah, where significant, were noted in discussing Das and Chenchiah in chapters 4 and 7.

⁴ "The editorial board shall contain the members of the faculty of Leonard Theological College, appointed by its principal" (Immanuel 1957:1)

⁵ In the first issue of *India Cultures Quarterly* Immanuel noted that the change of name "more nearly expresses the present aims" (Immanuel n.d.[1957]:1). The present aims, however, seem to have been the primary aims since Immanuel became editor.

replacing Chenchiah quite appropriately expressed regret that Chenchiah had resigned. He went on to explain that his acceptance of the role of *The Pilgrim* editor was because "no one else has offered to do this" (Immanuel 1952:1).

Immanuel went on in his first editorial to explain, grammatically speaking in the third person, his personal convictions and motivation for the study of Hinduism and in doing so clearly was distancing himself from Chenchiah.

One such conviction is that Christianity in its purity cannot be compromised with all that Hinduism holds. So, if he studies Hinduism it is not for the sake of finding out or working out a synthesis of the two religions. He just does not believe in eclecticism or the fusion of the best elements of Christianity and Hinduism. Only for the sake of knowing Hinduism does he study it. (Immanuel 1952:1-2)

Immanuel's juxtaposition of "Christianity in its purity" with "all that Hinduism holds" is almost without meaning. Presumably "pure" Christianity would refer to orthodox Protestantism, although even this assumption hardly makes the reference clear. "All that Hinduism holds" desperately needs some qualifying explanation, but none is offered. From this uncertain position Immanuel then rejects "compromise," "synthesis," "eclecticism" and "fusion" between the two religions. This is unmistakably in reference to Chenchiah's editorial position, heightened by the closing remark that suggests nothing is to be learned from Hinduism, but knowledge alone is the reason to study.⁶

2.0 Death of *The Pilgrim*

With a clear break in editorial policy between the third and fourth editors of *The Pilgrim*, and a clearly stated continuity between the last phase of *The Pilgrim* and the new publication *India Cultures Quarterly*, it is clear that analysis of the last phase of *The Pilgrim* properly belongs with the work that followed it in *ICQ* rather than with the work that preceded it. This thesis thus does not pursue its detailed analysis of the contents of *The Pilgrim* into the work of the fourth and final editor. *The Pilgrim* and the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism had effectively died with the resignation of Chenchiah.

⁶ The force of this last sentence is weakened a bit when the succeeding sentence refers to Immanuel's willingness to "appreciate the good things of Hinduism" (1952:2); but this is still far from Chenchiah's position.

9. Conclusion

The Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism was born out of the work of R. C. Das and the Benares United City Mission, an evangelistic approach to devout Hindus, particularly pilgrims and scholars in the holy city of Varanasi. Das and the BUCM were impressive enough to rally others to the cause of a national (even international) Christian society to study Hinduism so as to more effectively share the gospel of Jesus with Hindus.

The CSSH failed to establish itself, a failure closely if not completely associated with its failure to attain its goal of establishing a permanent school for the study of Hinduism. This study has documented that this failure was related to tensions in the BUCM, which folded nearly a decade earlier than the closure of the CSSH. Without a school, the CSSH ran short term study programs, almost entirely in Varanasi headed by R. C. Das, and had its largest influence through its quarterly publication *The Pilgrim*.

Pragmatism was central to the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*, as the purpose of the society was clearly defined as understanding Hinduism to enable effective evangelism. This pragmatic focus no doubt contributed to the lack of a clearly defined paradigm for thinking about Hinduism, and one could argue that Christian study of Hinduism has always been primarily from a pragmatic evangelistic and mission perspective.¹

By the mid-twentieth century theological and missiological thought had developed to the point where it was accepted that at the very least a Hindu idiom was needed in the communication of the Christian gospel. The development of indigenous or contextual or Indian theology thus became another pragmatic concern of Christian mission among Hindus,² closely related to evangelistic concern and likewise leading to neglect of focused concern about the nature of Hinduism.

¹ An example from the years of *The Pilgrim* is A. G. Hogg's *The Christian Message to the Hindu* (1947), which presented no perspective on Hinduism as such. It is odd that *The Pilgrim* never noted this book, but it appeared at the end of Moon's editorship and was no longer a new item by the time Chenchiah began his editorial stint.

² Marcus Ward's study of *Our Theological Task: An Introduction to the Study of Theology in India* (1946) is the striking example from *The Pilgrim* years, though this mainly dealt with prolegomena. Ward's study is discussed by Moon in *The Pilgrim* 7:1, as noted in chapter five of this thesis.

The Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism never proposed a definition for Hinduism and never collectively acknowledged that there was an issue regarding the meaning of Hinduism. The members of the society were very much people of their times, as all people at all times necessarily are. In their time Hinduism was spoken of as a meaningful construct, even though debates about its legitimacy and meaning were beginning to surface, particularly from the Hindutva direction which was barely acknowledged in the society's work.

The world religions paradigm where Christianity and Hinduism are considered as alternate faith expressions was thus assumed in the writings and teaching of the CSSH. The fact that this reified understanding had contributed to the social separation of Christians as a minority group among a Hindu majority was by most either not recognized or not a matter of concern. The Christians of the CSSH had moved beyond the early nineteenth century Enlightenment idea that Christianity, commerce and civilization all needed to be exported from the West, as they wrestled with developing expressions of Christianity within the Indian/Hindu civilization. But the Enlightenment construct of Christianity as a religion and the accompanying development of the world religions schema was not recognized as problematic. That Christianity in India had been constructed as an alternate community from "the Hindu community" was likewise not an idea that stirred objection or even analysis despite wrestling with this construct from some of the key spokesmen of the society.

The more than two dozen voices heard through the pages of *The Pilgrim* demonstrate the complexity of interreligious encounter in mid-twentieth century India. The world religions paradigm was never in question and communal expressions of faith identity in India were entrenched, yet a variety of expressions of the meaning of Hinduism and of Christian approaches to Hindu concerns were manifest. Fulfillment ideas were still vibrant, but apologetic approaches focusing on Hinduism as a false religion were not rare. Many angles of approach to Hindu phenomena, from textual to biographical to sociological studies, with concern to understand or with a focus on comparison with Christianity, contribute to a stimulating record of interreligious encounter.

The main spokespersons for the CSSH had all themselves experienced the change of theology and community entailed in conversion to Christianity from Hinduism. R. C. Das was a convert from a low caste who rose through education to elite status and embraced the concerns of the elites of Indian society in relation to nationalism and progress. Das did not

renounce or run from his identity as a Namasudra, but was marginalized from his birth community by embracing communitarian Christianity; geographical distance from Bengal for the second half of his life meant further isolation from his people. Das was uncomfortable in Indian Christianity and grappled with inadequacies in the world religions paradigm. His expression of what I have called a *mutual possessio* model of interreligious relations was in the context of his being personally trapped both ideologically and communally in the Protestant Christianity of his time.

Among the three main subjects of this thesis A. J. Appasamy had the least direct experience of Hindu life as it was his father who converted to Christianity. But Appasamy grew up with an awareness of his father's ongoing interaction with both Christian and Hindu faiths and communities. Appasamy was far the most comfortably rooted in the Indian church among the three subjects studied, and that perhaps accounts for his less radical approach to Hindu topics. His utilitarian approach to taking possession of what he appreciated from Hindu traditions failed to wrestle with Hindu traditions taking possession of Jesus.

Appasamy as first editor of *The Pilgrim* was a strong voice for a fulfillment approach. There was a decidedly triumphalistic Christian tone to *The Pilgrim* as Appasamy's fulfillment paradigm placed Christianity distinctly superior to Hinduism. Yet Appasamy also allowed other viewpoints to be stated. R. R. Keithahn (1942) presented a positive perspective on Hindu guru Ramdas to the point of teaching that Christians needed to learn from Ramdas rather than fulfill something lacking in Ramdas' Hindu life and thought. On the opposite extreme, A. J. C. Selvaratnam (1942) in the immediately preceding issue claimed to discuss suffering in Hindu thought yet never moved beyond Vedic writings and claimed that therein there is "no hope but [rather] despair" (1942:37). Second editor J. S. Moon approached Hinduism from an apologetic viewpoint, yet also allowed for a wide range of opinions to be expressed.

P. Chenchiah embraced Christianity with his family as a teenager but had little patience for organized religious systems. He called Christianity back to Jesus and in fact went well beyond that with a call for a new humanity to emerge in union with Christ through yoga. Chenchiah's focus on interreligious activity undermined the communal framework of politicized religiosity in mid-twentieth century India, but proved an elitist experiment that left no impact on the church or society. Chenchiah was deeply creative in his interreligious

constructs and actions, yet also found no way to transcend the world religions paradigm and communitarian expressions of religious identity.

Multiple influences led to the collapse of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism. Relational and missiological tensions had carried into the society from the Benares United City Mission. The proposed school of Hinduism entailed numerous options that could not find consensus agreement, such as where to locate it, how it would relate to existing theological schools and who would actually be responsible for maintaining it. Even before Chenchiah revolutionized *The Pilgrim* with new content and direction the school of Hinduism project was dying.

Chenchiah's position on interreligious engagement ("brotherhood of religions") was not acceptable to the missions on which the CSSH depended for livelihood. When he felt his freedom as editor of *The Pilgrim* being curtailed he resigned. Chenchiah as editor had become almost the lone voice of *The Pilgrim*, and his sudden resignation left a void that was filled by the faculty of Leonard Theological College in Jabalpur, who continued the publication in their own particular direction which continued well after *The Pilgrim* was officially closed.

The circulation of *The Pilgrim* was never wide, with a struggle to maintain even one hundred subscribers. Its influence does not seem to have been very significant. Extant copies are hard to locate, it has not been widely referenced in later studies of the Hindu-Christian encounter and it has never been the focus of a study until this thesis. The fact that *The Pilgrim* did not hold to a single perspective on Hinduism or a clearly defined approach to the Hindu-Christian engagement makes it impossible to trace its influence on later thought.

At the same time it can be affirmed that *The Pilgrim* gave voice to an important perspective on the Hindu-Christian interface. Having been launched within a few years of Hendrik Kraemer's influential *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, *The Pilgrim* presented on the whole a very different perspective. It is certainly significant that two of the three Indian Christians who lead the way in *The Pilgrim* were born in Hindu families, and the third was the son of a Hindu convert. Rarely did Western missionaries show the sympathy for Hindu traditions that these men from Hindu families did; more rare still was it for Indian Christians at that time to appreciate Hindu insights.

It cannot be proven that the CSSH and *The Pilgrim* contributed significantly to the more positive Christian perspectives on Hindu traditions that developed in succeeding decades, but there is also no reason to question this. Despite a reaction against the perceived as extreme approach of Chenchiah, the dialogical engagement of Benares Institute programs and the respectful interaction with Hindu issues present in pages of *The Pilgrim* were received with appreciation by the Indian Christian world.

At the current time a positive perspective on other faiths is commonplace among Christians, particularly in ecumenical Christian circles. The pluralistic approach to religions that relativizes any special role for Christianity or even for Christ is promoted by many Indian Christians (see Samartha 1991 and Vandana 1999 for example). In this setting it seems odd that *The Pilgrim* allowed for radical openness to Hindu insights while still affirming a central role for Jesus and a priority towards evangelizing Hindus.

The Christo-centrism and evangelistic approach of the CSSH in the current climate are perceived as narrow, triumphalistic and hegemonic. This thesis suggests that this is a valid critique of the fulfillment approach and classical *possessio* positions. But the *mutual possessio* approach suggested in R. C. Das' writings should transcend the barriers of religious labeling and ecclesiastical compartmentalizing. All participants in dialogue will take possession of insights and forms from other traditions and will welcome dialogue partners to "plunder" their own traditions.

This is not suggested as a path to universal agreement and unity; quite the opposite. It would, however, contribute to a realigning of interactions. The inadequate world religions paradigm has been the dominant idiom of this thesis, quite by necessity as the focus is a Christian society for study of Hinduism. But a key conclusion of this thesis is the inadequacy of that paradigm. A *mutual possessio* approach blurs the lines between Hindus and Christians as an R. C. Das, for example, in many ways appears to be Hindu and is quite happy to be identified as a Hindu. His Christocentrism, however, is offensive not only to many Hindus but also to pluralistic Christians, thus redefining the lines of agreement and encounter.

This thesis thus presented R. C. Das and P. Chenchiah as exemplary figures for the Christian engagement with other faiths. Their weaknesses were not glossed over, but their general approach is commended. Das and Chenchiah sought an honest meeting of Christian and

Hindu persons, an honest listening to ideas and goals, a serious grappling with issues of the inner life and of human society. Insights from various Hindu traditions and various Christian traditions were welcome in the dialogue. Both Chenchiah and Das were convinced that Jesus would end up central as such dialogical encounter proceeded.

Chenchiah and Das were not only Christocentric but also engaged in this dialogical encounter as Christians. They were uncompromising and unpretentious in their Christian profession, yet as this thesis has demonstrated, in their encounter with Hindus they were advocating a dialogical development that stretched beyond the normal meaning of "Christian." Both were concerned with introducing Jesus and his way into Hinduism rather than converting Hindus out to Christianity, a position very similar to that of William Miller and Kandaswamy Chetty some decades earlier. None of the proponents of this concept developed this idea in a systematic way, except to express hope that "Christian" principles would infiltrate "Hinduism" and bring transformation.

This thesis has documented recent scholarship that explodes the categories of "Christian" and "Hindu" as meaningful for academic discourse. Alternate paradigms and terminologies are not yet established, and a definitive solution to this problem is not in sight. The problems accompanying these reified religious categories are compounded in the Indian context where a reified construct of sociological religiously-based communities has also developed. The Miller-Chetty and Das-Chenchiah positions need to be translated into an idiom that is meaningful in light of current insights.

In the early twenty-first century there is now striking new terminology where it is not deemed strange to speak of "Hinduisms" and "Christianities," and there is much to commend in these neologisms. Perhaps "a Christianity" will develop that will look more Hindu than some types of modernizing Hinduism? Perhaps "a Hinduism" will develop centered around Jesus Christ as guru and savior? The Miller-Chetty and Das-Chenchiah traditions will not care about the labels and will not promote the changing of labels and sociological identities related to dialogical encounters within and across faith traditions. Perhaps the successors of Chetty and Chenchiah will somehow transcend the reifications that so distort present discussions? The final result, if such is possible, of the interreligious quest of what we still call Christianity and Hinduism is still far off; *The Pilgrim* introduces noteworthy pioneers from whom valuable lessons can still be learned.

But the stimulating engagement of Das and Chenchiah with Hindu traditions went beyond what was acceptable in the Protestantism of their time. Perhaps coming from other spokespersons the concepts may have received a better hearing, but Das' relational problems and Chenchiah's disregard for orthodoxy were a bad platform for presenting a controversial case. Chenchiah resigned his editorship under pressure, and Das resigned his position as secretary in solidarity with him.³ *The Pilgrim* would not continue to explore creative hybrid expressions of discipleship to Jesus.

The Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism and *The Pilgrim* continued on for a few more years, but the demise of both was quite inevitable. There had never been a groundswell of interest in Christian study of Hinduism. The fringe group who showed interest splintered due to differences. The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS), which garnered the support of the National Christian Council, initially made efforts to promote the study of Hinduism.⁴ But by the mid 1960s concern with Hinduism as such was in rapid decline, as noted by the third director of CISRS, Saral K. Chatterji.

In tune with the march of events in the nation, during mid-sixties and the latter half of the decade the CISRS concerns became more sharply focused on social, political and economic structures....In the study of religion as well as Indian Christian theology the perspectives came to rest on the aspirations and life situations of the weaker sections. (1983:viii,ix)

The CISRS was thus well placed to play a significant role in the development of Dalit theology, which from its origins in the early 1980s has become a dominant theme in Indian Protestant theology.⁵

The issue of "Dalitism" in relation to "Hinduism" thus arises again. Dalit theology today often stresses its late development due to earlier attempts at developing Indian Christian theology in relation to Brahminical categories. Protestant theologian M. E. Prabhakar states the case quite bluntly.

³ Das' resignation is noted on the unpaginated inside front cover page of vol. 12 no. 2 where Chenchiah's resignation is announced.

⁴ The first head of CISRS was P. D. Devanandan, whose basic outlook related to Hinduism is noted in chapter one. For a summary of Hindu-Christian dialogue events associated with the CISRS in its early years see Robinson 2004:24-27.

⁵ Dalit theologian Sathianathan Clarke in the CISRS journal traced the roots of Dalit theology to 1981; "Arvind P. Nirmal inaugurated the movement that is now called 'Dalit theology' at the Carey Society valedictory function in April of 1981 with his lecture entitled 'Towards a Shudra Theology'" (Clarke 1997:84). "Shudra theology" would not even be technically Dalit, but I will not critique here that aspect of Clarke's analysis.

Indian Christian theology, in the context of nationalism, was seen as expressing Christian faith in the thought-forms and life-styles of Brahminical Hinduism, accepted as the mainstream cultural tradition of Indian society. However, within the context of the resilience, adaptation, changed configurations and persistence of caste in Indian society, it becomes clear that the assumption and practice of Indian Christian theologians ignored the cultural and ideological orientations of the caste system. National culture as conceived by Indian nationalists or the indigenising efforts within Indian Christianity do not reflect the history, culture, religion and aspirations of the several minorities including dalits and tribals. (Prabhakar 1993:42)⁶

A critique of this type comes close to suggesting that *The Pilgrim* was engaged in an inappropriate activity that merely furthered the hegemony of higher castes over lower. It is granted that the pioneering stage of Indian Christian theology mainly engaged Brahminical concerns.⁷ Throughout this thesis it has also been acknowledged that the CSSH was an elitist Christian enterprise that quite naturally related primarily to the elites of India. My concern is that this not be formulated as an either/or proposition, where either elite or dalit contexts are engaged at the expense of the other.

Appasamy and Chenchiah from forward caste families quite naturally sought to take possession of their heritages. Neither in their teaching could be considered promoters of forward caste hegemony, as even this thesis documents. R. C. Das' situation is more ambiguous. Did he wrongly leave his Dalit heritage and sell out to Brahminical concerns? There is room for such an accusation, but there is no doubt that Das would have adamantly refuted it. He took possession of his Dalit heritage, but also took possession of Christianity while also embracing much from the Brahminical heritage of India. *Mutual possessio* affirms the serious engagement with all traditions and cultures, with sifting and synthesizing as hybrid expressions of faith and culture develop. This process in dalit contexts will cause some to affirm their *jāti* traditions, others to adapt what might be called more Western traditions, and others to relate with aspects of the Brahminical heritage. I do not see simple categories of right and wrong in this, but the freedom of individuals and communities to develop as they see fit in the dynamic dialogue that underlies *possessio*.

⁶ A similar analysis was provided by Roman Catholic theologian Felix Wilfred who defined two distinct stages of Indian theology, with gentler tones and more appreciation for the earlier focus on "concepts, categories and symbols drawn from our cultural tradition and history" while still strongly affirming the more recent focus on "the socio-political situations prevailing in our country" (1993:viii).

⁷ Robin Boyd's standard survey of Indian theology is clear evidence of this (Boyd 2005[1969]).

This affirmation of the legitimacy of the interreligious encounter represented in *The Pilgrim* is not meant to suggest that the CSSH had a proper perspective on "Hinduism" and "Dalitism."⁸ The inadequacy of the accepted paradigm for religion, Hinduism and Christianity employed by the CSSH is a fundamental point of this thesis. The Hinduism assumed by the society was conflicted, with a monolithic religion often in focus (a religion that included dalits whether the dalits knew or cared or not) and the massive diversity of local manifestations acknowledged at other times.

How much progress has actually been made in the half century since the close of the CSSH is a legitimate question. There has certainly been progress, as this thesis is indebted to research that has undermined the Enlightenment-based world religions paradigm that was assumed in the mid-twentieth century. But as the first chapter of this thesis documents, the Christian theology of religions discussion is largely still in the old idiom, with only the concept of multiple religious belonging challenging the established paradigm. The Christian discipline of comparative theology is also reticent on issues of Hinduism and Christianity, affirming that one should maintain one's allegiance to those reified constructs while necessarily becoming marginalized due to interreligious learning. The data of the CSSH calls for a more resolute abandonment of the world religions paradigm by Christians.

Among Hindus the issue of Hinduism has become a deeply politicized topic with the rise to political strength of advocates of the Hindutva position, the emergence of powerful dalit movements, and the growing economic strength of secular democratic India. The diaspora of Hindus internationally has also significantly contributed to the affirmation of Hinduism as a world religion, as well as to the approximating of Hindu realities to that reified construct (often referred to as the Semiticization of Hinduism).⁹ Prognosticating the future of these divergent movements and trends is far beyond the capacity of this writer. But this thesis is on record against the reified construct of religion and the reified communitarian understanding of Indian society.

⁸ This is an anachronistic use of dalit terminology; Prabhakar showed that the term was in use in the 1930s but only became popular in late 1960s and early 1970s (1993:39).

⁹ Romila Thapar, whose analysis of Syndicated Hinduism was noted in chapter one section 4.3.3, will suffice for documentation on this widely acknowledged point.

Their [Hindu diaspora] search is for a form of Hinduism parallel to Christianity or Islam and with an idiom comprehensible to these other two which they can teach their children (preferably we are told, through the equivalent of Hindu "Sunday" schools and video films). (Thapar 1997:77)

Nothing like *definitive* insights and conclusions can be drawn from a study of the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*, which after all did not particularly succeed and which failed to survive for even two decades. But *suggestive* insights are certainly present, and this thesis will close by paying tribute where it is due, noting insights that have since been developed toward general acceptance and some that still await further development along with numerous areas where further study of issues raised in this thesis is needed.

From a traditional Western mindset, *The Pilgrim* would need to be criticized for devoting itself to a study of Hinduism without ever seriously attempting to define what it meant by Hinduism. But this is rather a point to commend. An agreed definition and understanding of Hinduism is still elusive, and only a distorted picture could have been painted a half century ago if there had been an insistence to produce a definition. By allowing varying approaches and understandings *The Pilgrim* pursued an appropriate wrestling with a complex topic. It could be argued that *The Pilgrim* was least relevant where a simplistic understanding of Hinduism as "a religion" was assumed.

The interplay between Hindu and Christian thought and life in *The Pilgrim* was truly dialogical, and in a much deeper sense than often appears in modern official interreligious dialogue. True, it is really only the Christian side of the dialogue that is heard in *The Pilgrim*; but clearly these are Christian voices that have been deeply impacted by their interaction with Hindus and Hindu thought and life. Particularly in Chenchiah's contributions there is a clear call for an in depth dialogue that covers pretty much all of life, and not just the "religious."

Yet Chenchiah's failure to transcend the confinement of the world religions paradigm and communitarian dimensions of Indian life has been noted. Chenchiah and Appasamy are key figures in all discussions of Indian Christian theology, and those discussions need to integrate the tensions and problems related to their isolation within communitarian Christianity. M. M. Thomas evaluated the meaning and practice of community in India and its implications for Hinduism and Christianity, but his treatment is neglected and not brought to bear on the thought of theological pioneers who generally come in for reified theological analysis isolated from social and community realities.¹⁰

¹⁰ Thomas was quite insistent that non-communal expressions of discipleship to Jesus need to be developed. I have written on M. M. Thomas' position on community issues in Richard 2000 and focused on his differences

In particular the theology of A. J. Appasamy needs closer analysis in terms of its triumphalistic fulfillment perspective, particularly in light of the communitarian separation of Christianity from Hinduism just noted. Appasamy's transition from deep concern with Hindu issues to a church-centered and revival oriented focus also calls for focused study and analysis. Issues related to caste were never central in the CSSH or in this thesis, but that is an area worthy of a careful consideration and analysis.

R. C. Das has been an unstudied figure, largely due to the unavailability of sources. This thesis lays a foundation for analysis of Das in many areas, and I will be making Das' magazines and autobiography publicly available along with *The Pilgrim* in the near future. Das' perspective should be included in future discussions of Indian theology, Indian ecclesiology, and baptism and conversion issues, as well as numerous aspects of discussions about dalits and Christianity.

P. Chenchiah certainly kicked against the orthodoxy that wanted to entomb him, but as he failed to escape reified constructs of religion and community in life, so also in death he has thus far lost that battle. Chenchiah is interpreted as a proponent of Indian Christian theology who is studied in theological colleges, perhaps a worse tomb than that of orthodoxy. If Chenchiah's message of transformation of life, not worshipping Jesus but reproducing him, is embraced and experienced in non-communitarian associations of disciples of Jesus, his vision will be vindicated and he will be freed from his grave.

Herein lies hope for the ongoing Hindu-Christian encounter. Academic studies need to continue to wrestle with nuances of meaning suggested and promoted under the term Hinduism, and the problems and questions raised related to that construct need to be equally applied against the idea of Christianity and of world religions in general. In time, a better paradigm and new terminology will surely emerge. But both on the streets and in the homes (appealing to a Chenchiah image) of Christians and Hindus a new and better pattern of interaction can emerge apart from academic concerns about religions.

As a Christian I will address this from a Christian perspective, and allow Hindus to respond in their own chosen way. Christianity will no longer contribute to my identity except in so far

with Lesslie Newbigin on this subject in a later form of that paper in Richard 2007. Besides works referenced there, Thomas 1995 is an important paper.

as that is necessary in a world that still holds the world religions paradigm. I will still own a Presbyterian identity, as that is a historical construct with sufficient specificity to carry meaning; but interreligious encounter marginalizes me from that identity as well. I choose to be a follower of Jesus and the Bible who aspires to take possession of insights from all cultural traditions, but particularly from Hindu traditions since the course of my pilgrimage has brought me into that sphere.

Taking possession of Hindu ideas and practices under Jesus means he is guru as much as lord; but I am constrained from attempting a further spelling out of what this *possessio* means. As a Christian a hegemonic element is too near, and *possessio* too easily bleeds into artificiality. What the Hindu world will make of Jesus when he is freed from Christian religiosity and hegemonic mission thought and practice is a much more important matter. There will surely be no uniform response, any more than the Christian world has a uniform response to Christ.

But through the centuries and still today many Hindus find Jesus a compelling figure, and many surrender before him as guru and God. It is these disciples of Jesus from Hindu families who most need to be freed from reified conceptions of religion and communitarian aspects of following Jesus, who need to be encouraged that the way of Jesus is about *possessio*, and who need the lessons of history from William Miller and Kandaswamy Chetty and the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism and *The Pilgrim*.

The apostle Paul wrote to a weak group of disciples of Jesus among whom were not many mighty and not many wise, and in the midst of a conflict about leadership (including some claiming Paul himself as guru) he admonished them that "all things are yours...and you are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21-23). All the strengths and weaknesses of the Hindu heritage belong to the Hindu who follows Jesus, particularly specific aspects of the Hindu heritage in which he or she was raised. These are then also free to plunder various types of Christian and Buddhist and other heritages, as long as it is in the spirit of Christ with a crucified mind. This is what Appasamy, Das, Chenchiah and many of their associates in the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism sought to express and experience. Their failures, and ours, must not undermine this aspect of "dreaming great dreams for Jesus and his kingdom."

Appendix

The Pilgrim and CSSH in the International Review of Missions

The *International Review of Missions* repeatedly took note of the CSSH and *Pilgrim*, particularly in the early 1940s. Note for example the following references, listed by order of appearance.

January, 1940. *International Review of Missions* vol. 29 no. 113. "A Survey of the Year 1939." Pg. 40. Notes the start of School of Hinduism, Benares.

July, 1941. *Quarterly Notes, being the Bulletin of the International Missionary Council*. No. 71. "India." Pg. vi. Announces Benares Institute and *The Pilgrim*.

October, 1941. *International Review of Missions* vol. 30 no. 120. "International Missionary Bibliography." Pg. 586. Under "New Missionary Magazines" announces launch of *The Pilgrim*.

January, 1942. *International Review of Missions* vol. 31 no. 121. "A Survey of the Year 1941." Pg. 31. Notes the CSSH and *The Pilgrim*.

October, 1942. *International Review of Missions* vol. 31 no. 124. "International Missionary Bibliography." Pg. 496. Lists *The Pilgrim* paper "Benares: The Powerhouse of Hinduism" by R. C. Das.

January, 1943. *International Review of Missions* vol. 32 no. 125. "International Missionary Bibliography." Pg. 118. Lists *The Pilgrim* article "The Survival Values of Hindu *Bhakti*" by A. J. Appasamy.

January, 1943. *International Review of Missions* vol. 32 no. 125. "International Missionary Bibliography." Pg. 120. Lists *The Pilgrim* article "The Conception of Suffering in Vedic Thought" by A. J. C. Selvaratnam.

April, 1943. *International Review of Missions* vol. 32 no. 126. "International Missionary Bibliography." Pg. 239. Lists *The Pilgrim* paper "The Katha Upanishad" by A. J. Appasamy.

January, 1944. *International Review of Missions* vol. 33 no. 129. "A Survey of the Year 1943." Pg. 31. Reference to CSSH, *The Pilgrim* and the desire for a School of Hindu Studies.

July, 1944. *International Review of Missions* vol. 33 no. 131. "International Missionary Bibliography." Pg. 359. Lists *The Pilgrim* paper "Some Aspects of Village Hinduism" by M. M. Frost.

October, 1944. *International Review of Missions* vol. 33 no. 132. "International Missionary Bibliography." Pg. 474. Three papers from *The Pilgrim* listed; "The Hindu Conception of Divine Indwelling" by E. C. Dewick, "India's Road to Christ" by A. J. Appasamy, and "The Isa Upanishad" by P. Chenchiah.

April, 1949. *International Review of Missions* vol. 38 no. 150. "Editorial Notes." Pg. 261. A. J. Appasamy wrote an article ("Christian Theology in India") for this issue of IRM, related to which the editorial notes wrongly stated that he was "editor of *The Pilgrim*, the quarterly bulletin of the Christian Society for the Study of Hinduism." In fact Appasamy had resigned as editor in 1944.

Sources

1. Table of Contents of *The Pilgrim*

The table of contents for the extant issues of *The Pilgrim* which follows below is a close representation of the contents listed on the cover of each issue of *The Pilgrim*. At a few points corrections have been made and a few additions as well; see footnotes below for details. At times the title of an article on the cover differs from the title that heads the article; the list below uses what is in the original table of contents, while the References Sited uses the title (usually fuller) that appears with the article. The only significant change from the published list is that for the first seven volumes *The Pilgrim* only listed the article titles, whereas author information is also provided below.

Vols. 1-4 edited by A. J. Appasamy
Vols. 5-7 edited by J. S. Moon
Vols. 8-11 edited by P. Chenchiah
Vols. 12-15 edited by R. D. Immanuel

Extant holding of these issues are primarily at the United Theological College in Bangalore (complete vols. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8; and vol. 3:1-2; vol. 7:1, 3, 4; vol. 9:1-3; vol. 10:1, 4; vol. 11:2; vol. 12:1) and the library of the Delhi Brotherhood (complete vols. 4, 6, 8-10; vol. 3:2-4; vol. 5:1-3; vol. 7:1, 2, 4). Vols. 1, 2, and 11-13 are held at the Bishop's House, Cantonment, Varanasi.

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⁶ The title page for this issue is completely confused; the listing here represents the true contents of the issue.

Sources

2. The Benares Institute Notes of R. C. Das

The Benares Institute notes of R. C. Das are extant with Fr. Ishwar Prasad of Bharat Mata Ashram in Kurukshetra and in the archives at Bishop's College, Kolkata. A typescript copy with corrections of the many typographical errors is in my possession. There is no order in the original notes so the order in the summary here is not that of R. C. Das or the Benares Institute. The first item below lists 46 topics which do not correlate with the titles of the 32 papers. The number of pages in the original notes is indicated after each title, but there is broad and rather disorganized spacing throughout these sets of notes.

Summary of Contents

1. Various Topics (two pages)
2. Means of Obtaining the Best Knowledge and Experience of Hinduism (one page)
3. Varnashram Dharma (three pages)
4. Popular Hinduism (three pages)
5. Indian Culture (three pages)
6. Some Terms (two pages)
7. Scriptures (one page)
8. The Vedas (four pages)
9. Gods, Goddesses - God (five pages)
10. Idolatry (two pages)
11. Shree Krishna (four pages)
12. Avatar (Descent of Vishnu – of a God or Goddess) (one page)
13. Caste (four pages)
14. Maya - Karma – Rebirth (two pages)
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28. Modern Religious Movements in India (three pages)
29. Theosophy (two pages)
30. The Brahmo Somaj (three pages)
31. The Sikhs (three pages)
32. Syncretism (one page)

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