

*The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*  
Hendrik Kraemer. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1963

### Introductory

This book was written at the request of I.M.C (International Missionary Council) for the World Missionary Conference that was held at Tambaram in 1938. At the time Kraemer was Professor of the History of Religions at the University of Leiden, Holland. Born in 1888, Kraemer was raised in a Reformed Church orphanage in Amsterdam. The strict and oppressive spiritual routines moved him, as a 15 year old, to seek spiritual growth through personal Bible reading, culminating in a decision to serve as a missionary. This he did for 14 years in Indonesia, translating the Bible and encouraging the autonomy of young Indonesian churches. He survived a Nazi concentration camp and became an internationally recognized Christian leader. He died in 1965.

### Overview (see *Epilogue*, 443-5)

This book limits itself to "the problem of the fundamental position of the Church as a witness-bearing body and of the evangelistic approach to the great non-Christian faiths." It focuses on *the primary need* of the Christian church in all its aspects, including missions, *for a radically religious re-orientation*.

A universal and abiding change in methods of approach can only be effected by the living voice and personal contact, not by books. Every important region depends on able, knowledgeable men to regularly sow the seed of new principles and methods.

Kraemer identifies three key needs for Christian missions:

1. A deepening and vitalizing of the religious and theological background of missions and the Christian churches.
2. A determined effort to build strong indigenous Christian churches that manifest the quality of fellowship peculiar to the community of believers in Christ.
3. A genuine evangelistic or apostolic spirit. This involves a commitment to "a work of long and persevering moral and religious persuasion."

History provides a heartening lesson: "the Gospel can spread under *any* circumstances, provided a living and ardent faith burns in the hearts of men."

### Chapter 1. A World in Transition

Kraemer insists, "The essential nature of the Church is that is an *apostolic* body", that is, "it ought to be a bearer of witness to God and His decisive and creative and redeeming acts and purposes" (2).

#### *The Western Crisis*

Kraemer maintains our times are especially characterized by the almost complete replacement of all absolutes by relativism. Yet people starve and degenerate without ideals. So the world "bristles with idealisms, noble and ridiculous, pure and demonic" (8) - idolatrous pseudo-absolutes (race, nation, classless society, a 'holy' or 'eternal' country) showing people cannot live on relativism alone. But when all is relative, "nothing is really worth-while, because it has no foundation in Eternity" (10).

Human autonomy inevitably leads to immanentist thinking, ending necessarily in anarchy and lawlessness, since "the only valid and indestructible law can be the Law

from above and not from within" (10), e.g. 19<sup>th</sup> century idealistic immanentism, assuming the identity of thinking and being, replaces God with human consciousness as the only starting-point for human thought, e.g. Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*.

Existential philosophy and modern psychology regard all systems as projections of the mind. Consequently: "Relativism is... *the* decisive and dominant reality of modern life, although to a great extent subconscious and subterranean" (12).

Many feel justified in seeing religion as a product of ignorance and fear because of the way popular religion, including popular Christianity, resorts to magic when knowledge and skill prove unable to deal with danger and uncertainty. Independence from religion is encouraged by the way modern science replaces religion in finding solutions and mastering life.

As Communism, Fascism and National-Socialism all illustrate, de-religionized man remains a religious and metaphysical animal. The frantic fanatical, self-made absolutism characteristic of these movements represent "a desperate endeavour to overcome relativism", since "[the] absolute is a life-necessity for man" (16). The development of pseudo-absolutes inevitably follows the rejection of God.

So the Church in the West "is standing in a pagan, non-Christian world, and has again to consider the whole world its mission field" (16-17).

#### *The Eastern Crisis*

The relativity of all truth characterizes Eastern religions, excepting Islam. While the Japanese and Chinese easily absorbed Indian-originated Buddhism, given a common Eastern acceptance of the relativity of all truth, the meeting of the East and the West creates a crisis of *earthquake* proportions, because of the ineradicable "foreignness" of the West. Western technological superiority is the seismological centre.

In contrast to the passivism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the East energetically strives to retain its own identity. The latent dynamics of Islam, Buddhism and "the great Eastern idealistic systems" may become world-factors (21).

Nationalism has led to atomism, not individualism, replacing "the old sacred bonds of family and clan", along with associated moral and religious values. But in the East conformity to religious customs and practices is an essential precondition to religious relativism. Further, modern forms of rationalism and humanism are welcomed because of the way they seem to offer liberation from degrading and life-stifling religious systems. Since "certainty about Truth is man's prime life-necessity", it is likely that as "the traditional attitude of aristocratic relativism" falters, will result in "a desperate surrender to false absolutes."

#### *The Crisis of the Church*

The tension between the Church's essential nature and its empirical condition means the Church is always in a state of crisis. As a divine-human society it "is not one of the many religious and moral institutions that exist in the world" (25). As an incarnated empirical human institution it simultaneously witnesses against an evil-dominated world, while also witnessing to it being God's creation and object of saving grace. The Church experiences crisis between the world and divine orders, but is often

unconscious of this because unless it realizes its nature and mission (often effected via failure and suffering), then it behaves as if it was just a religious and moral institution.

Kramer maintains that the Church in its present crisis has to face two main facts:

1. *Increasing secularization.* The *Corpus Christianum*, the "indissoluble unity of Church, Community and State" in Medieval Europe has been shattered, with the Church seeming irrelevant to most people.
2. *The necessity for a fundamental re-orientation of the Church to the world.* The Church must go "to the bottom in its criticism of and opposition to the evil of the world" and "to the bottom in its identification with the sufferings and needs of the world" (30).

## Chapter 2. Whither Missions?

It is healthy to see Christians themselves leveling the most severe condemnatory criticism of its own behaviour. This contrasts with the defensive compromise characteristic of its response to modernity.

For the first time in history the Church is a world-wide community. The strategical emphasis of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, was followed by the unequivocal disavowal of all spiritual imperialism at the 1928 Jerusalem Conference. Now the Church needs to move away from a colonial to a global mindset, in tune with the movement towards some kind of common world-culture.

The Church needs the Gospel realism that is deeper than the cynical and pessimistic realism of modern man, taking man and God radically and seriously. In the past a minority in the Churches have borne responsibility for the missionary task. For the Church to become a living body the majority must grasp this vision, e.g. not large individual gifts but financial contributions from the total membership are needed.

Religious liberty has become a major problem for Christian mission, because some States subordinate all institutions and others, like Gandhi, protest against religious conversion. The resurgence of the great non-Christian religions provides another reason for reconsidering missionary principles and methods.

US Christianity illustrate this need, being characterized by humanistically-driven pragmatism, with a missionary mindset reflecting "the spirit of conquest and reform." Consequently, instead of seeing non-Christian religions as "domains of life outside Christ and His Revelation" they are rather assessed as either real or potential allies. A "noble and this-worldly idealism" must be replaced by "the apostolic obligation towards God and the world."

Missionary principles and methods must also be questioned given (1) the meagre results achieved in effecting the naturalization and indigenization of Christianity, and (2) the autonomy and independence of indigenous churches.

However, a balanced view is needed in evaluating the last 150 years of missionary endeavour. The results are both disappointing, yet amazing. First, it must be appreciated that "the change of religious alliance in great and self-conscious civilizations... is a process of many centuries" (51). Second, Western penetration into

Africa and Asia involved wrong ideas, opposing modern Western individualism against Eastern communal conceptions of religion.

Kraemer points out that the unequivocal lesson of history is "that the change in religious belief of whole peoples and civilizations is not and cannot be, in this complicated world of still more complicated human beings, the pure result of religious and moral persuasion alone" (53). He further observes "that it is always mass-conversion which raises a religion in a certain period from the status of a conviction of many scattered individuals or various groups to that of a recognized, formative agency of the religious and cultural life of a whole nation or group of nations" (53).

Roman Catholic Missions in India during the period of Portuguese-Spanish colonization and in Japan in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, adulterated the usual historical process - which involves "the decisive acceptance by a whole nation of a definite religion as its spiritual home" (54) - by consciously applying political coercion with all usable means.

The Eastern mind, which only conceives of religion in communal terms, could not understand Christianity, given its separation from autonomous Western civilization in the modern period. Further, the short-lived power and success of Western civilization in the East was attributed to Christianity so that "missions and Christianity share heavily in the discrediting of Western civilization" (55). Although in reality in autonomous and neutral modern states Christianity is but a sphere, the average Easterner, naturally treating life as a unified whole, continues to identify Christianity with Western civilization, thinking that to become a Christian is to become a European and this is repellent.

It is an oversimplification to explain the lack of Christian success in the East as due to either a constitutional disinclination of the Eastern mind to accept the Gospel, since this is applicable to the human mind everywhere, or to missiological syncretism, since the process of Christianization "is far too vast a thing to admit of one cause" (56). Yet "the obstinate tendency to remain true to the original type certainly is an evident characteristic of" China, Japan and India (57).

But after allowance has been made for "the peculiar conditions under which modern missions are labouring and the false tracks that have been followed through ignorance and blindness, the results are in many respects amazing" (57). We are now back to the original missionary scenario that confronted the Church, namely to work by purely religious and moral persuasion. But we are also in an utterly unique situation, that of planting Christianity "in a cultural world of an unparalleled continuous longevity and radically different from the cultural world in which Christianity originally grew up and became the dominant religion of the West" (58).

The Corpus Christianum is a deflated ideal and, given the separation of Church and State, an impossibility anyway. After all, "the Church must be a community in which faith, worship and life are not expressions of 'custom,' but in which the truth revealed in Christ is the criterion of faith and life, transcending all other criteria and authorities" (58). Christianity must necessarily conflict with the East because it urges "the pre-eminence of loyalty to religious truth above loyalty to the rules and requirements of the community" (58).

So, in conclusion, the great need is that of a “fundamental re-thinking of missionary principles and methods, enlightened by past failures and successes, drawing support from what deepened knowledge through modern research can teach us, but above all re-discovering the true missionary motive and purpose”, that is, “the certitude of having the apostolic obligation towards the world of witnessing to Christ and His new Kingdom” (59), “the divine commission to proclaim the Lordship of Christ over all life” (so Kagawa; 60).

### Chapter 3. The Christian Faith and the Christian Ethic

The last chapter ended by noting that “a crisis of missions is a crisis of faith” (60) which is now taken up by Kraemer who emphasizes not only the Church’s need for a clear consciousness of its faith, but the urgency and importance of translating that faith in a manner that will speak to contemporary people amid the modern crisis and the partial disintegration and partial reconstruction occurring among the great non-Christian religions.

However, Kraemer observes, “A faithful and compelling translation is only possible through a vital knowledge of the original” (61). So in order to translate its faith the Church must first know it.

In its real substance this faith is not rooted in religious and moral ideas, nor in a pessimistic or optimistic evaluation of the world, but in revelation. Kraemer understands revelation, as a connected series of divine acts. He insists that this revelation is to be distinguished from the ideas and concepts derived from it. (61)

He contends that the Bible is the only legitimate source from which to derive our knowledge of the Christian faith in its real substance. This is for two reasons:

1. It is in the Bible that we find the witness of the prophets and apostles upon which the Church is built.
2. After the intensive critical examinations of religion which have marked the modern period it is now accepted that the only way to properly judge a religion is to consider its source material.

Kramer finds the Bible to be both radically religious and intensely ethical. Yet the ethical is subordinated to the religious because the Bible is radically theocentric. Kraemer observes that the “Bible offers no religious or moral philosophy” and contends that the intense religious realism of the Bible is such that it “proclaims and asserts realities” and does not intend to present a “world view”. Rather it “challenges man in his *total* being to confront himself with these realities and accordingly take decisions” (64-65). Pascal, on the night of his conversion, wrote in his famous *Mémorial* the words: “God! The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! The God of Jesus Christ! *Not* the God of the philosophers and scholars.” This illustrates that “the essential message and content of the Bible is always the Living, eternally-active God, the indubitable Reality, from whom, by whom and to whom all things are” (64-5).

Given this biblical realism the problem of divine transcendence and immanence in relation to the world is irrelevant. This problem only arises in either pagan religious naturalism, where it remains vague as to whether God and the world are one universal stream of life or distinct; or from religious philosophy, “which always has some sort of religious monism as its starting point” and is also ultimately derived from pagan

religious naturalism (66). Biblical realism confronts man with a unique and radically different transcendence and immanence. (66-7)

Similarly, biblical realism overcomes the problem of creation. The Bible never ventures into philosophical debate as to whether the world is eternal or is to be explained by the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*. Rather, true to its theocentricity, the Bible relates creation, as it does everything, to the Reality, God himself, declaring the world and man to be created by God's will:

#### *The Christian Faith*

The Bible itself has no theory about anything. That is, the Bible is purely religious and not at all interested in metaphysics, philosophy, or even theology and, along with this, has no theory about revelation. Biblical realism is unique in the way it treats revelation in a radical and absolute manner (1 Cor 2:9-10), while consistently maintaining the genuine meaning of revelation (Mt 16:16-17). Kraemer observes, "God was truly revealed in Jesus Christ, but at the same time he hid and disguised Himself in the man Jesus Christ" (70). The hiddenness of God is clearly indicated by the universal and perpetual revulsion against the Incarnation; while the revealedness of God is seen in the fact that flesh and blood cannot reveal this but only God himself (Mt 16:16, 17): "The essential, absolutely unique feature in the revelation of God in Christ is that, contrary to all human conceptions, God's revelation is an offence to man" (70).

All philosophy, all idealistic religion, all consistent mystical religion, all moralism are man's various attempts at self-redemption and instinctively they reject the truth that God and God alone can work redemption.

So at the same time that we are faced with God's revelation in Christ, we are also confronted with the revelation of man. That is, man essentially wants to be god and this is supremely seen when man finds God or the Eternal Mind in himself. The Cross, while being God's grace simultaneously, is God's judgment since it reveals not only God's love but also natural man's blindness to God's revelation and refusal "to recognize that the divine grace, as manifest in Christ, means the divine judgment on man" (71; 1 Cor 2:8).

Natural man always misconstrues Christian revelation. When revelation is "conceived in an intellectualist way, as a special way to knowledge, as a communication of divine truth about divine things, as an extraordinary form of epistemology" (71) then faith is no longer its correlate but *gnosis*, with revelation becoming "a supernaturally prolonged gnosis. One of the most disastrous misinterpretations of the Christian faith is this intellectualist distortion of faith, "the besetting sin of all doctrinal orthodoxy" (72), which results from an intellectualist conception of revelation.

An aristocratic attitude results when revelation is wrongly correlated with *gnosis* because a body of "revealed" truths can be divulged or kept secret. But those who respond to the revelation of God's wonderful deeds (Acts 2:11) in faith are compelled to witness: "Christianity is in a very emphatic sense a witnessing religion, because it is *the* religion of revelation and faith" (72; Acts 1:8), with witness, along with faith, being inherently correlated to revelation.

Revelation is not concerned with the mystery of God's being or Essence but with God's redemptive Will. It is not religious speculation about God but it presents him as the One who commands and therefore requires man's obedience.

There are various ways of describing the heart of the Christian faith:

1. Christianity is *the* religion of the Incarnation. This stresses that an *act* of revelation makes the Christian faith possible; that what is revealed remains a mystery. The truly amazing thing about the Incarnation is that this doctrine of God really becoming man is proclaimed precisely by that religion which affirms an indelible distinction between God the Creator and man His creature, which all religions that assume the essential identity of God and man indignantly reject (74).

The Incarnation also stresses that empirical man and the empirical world are realities of infinite worth to God since in Christ God is revealed as suffering to redeem man and the world.

2. Christianity means justification by faith. Romans 1-8 presupposes that the moral perfection of God requires the moral perfection of man. Therefore Christ is the crisis of all religions and philosophies because they are all clumsy or magnificent evasions of the fact that it is impossible for sinful man to correspond to God in his perfection. Only God can make the impossible possible in Jesus Christ. Further, assurance of salvation can only be gained after such radical questioning and with such a radical answer (Rom 8:38, 39).
3. Christianity is *the* religion of reconciliation and atonement. Man wanted to be "like God" and so his natural relation to God, his Lord and Maker, has been destroyed. By speaking of reconciliation and atonement stress is laid on the need for God to take the initiative to restore the natural relation; on the indispensable need for forgiveness. Not surprisingly, this moralism of a "radically religious conception of forgiveness of sin, in which divine holiness and divine love, divine judgment and divine forgiveness are a vital and indissoluble unity" is vulgar in the eyes of a self-respecting and self-reliant humanist who views forgiveness as "a tame, external moralism and compassion with human weakness" (76-77).
4. The Christian faith is the announcement of the Kingdom of God. All problems in all spheres of life in this broken and disordered world reflect the underlying root of all evil, namely the disavowal of God's will, the rejection of divine rule. Man cannot create the Kingdom of God, nor an ideal society. Only God is capable of creating the new order and therefore must take the initiative which he has done in Christ, by his saving Will.
5. The Christian faith is a new way and quality of life. The peculiar nature of this way of life stresses that God as Creator and as Renewer stands at the beginning of Christian faith. For a new and real relationship with God, not moralism or intellectualism, is the reality.

Ordinary human thinking is inclined to embrace Voltaire's blasphemy: "It is his job to forgive" (79). But God's love is radical: "His holy condemnation of sin and the sinner is a sign of His love, because disregarding the reality of sin would be indulgence, not love. It would mean destroying holiness, on which depends the validity of all moral

life... Only if one takes holiness seriously, can one take sin seriously and understand that sin is, by its nature, irreparable" (79).

Unquestionably, the best way to outline the Christian faith is to express it *as it appears in the radical realism of the Bible* and, indeed, this is universally the need of the hour. In the context of world-wide confusion really good Christian theology will only emerge with "an open, honest and courageous *religious confrontation with and orientation upon the concrete realism of the Bible*" (83). It is this which exposes our total being to the claim of biblical revelation.

There is a rich variety of approach, expression and experience in the New Testament. But all authors share *the same orientation point*, namely, the radical realism of Biblical revelation. For "by the same orientation towards the same God, the same Christ and the same Spirit, and on account of the same experience of salvation and participation in the same expectation, the unity is unmistakable" (85).

#### *The Christian Ethic*

As for the Christian faith so too the Christian ethic "is embedded in the same sphere of concrete religious realism, and is... radically religious and theocentric" (85). All other ethical systems are fundamentally anthropocentric not theocentric or Christocentric. Indeed, they are all eudaemonistic - seeking man's highest good. Sometimes this is noble, idealistic and possibly ascetic as is the case with Platonic, Stoic, Kantian, Hindu and Buddhist ethics. Sometimes it is of a lower grade, sensualist or utilitarian. All are individualistic, excepting for primitive societies which are collectivist but still seek the happiness of man "by the maintenance of the equilibrium of life as authoritatively established by the ancestors" (86).

It is a distinctly Christian obligation to minister to human need. However, "the Christian ethic as contained in Biblical realism neither has its prime motive nor its ultimate end in a *summum bonum* or in the happiness of man", but in doing the will of God. Consequently, the Christian ethic "is never the application of abstract principles belonging to a moral order", as Augustine captured it: "Love God and do what you like!" (87).

The "Christian ethic is the crisis of all ethic and ethics" (88). The Christian ethic entirely negates self-regard and self-assertion. For this reason, "the inveterate legalistic turn of the human mind in all questions regarding morals" construes it as rigorism. But this is a great parody because it is man's delight to do God's will in the sphere of Biblical realism.

In both the Gospels and apostolic writings the religious and the ethical are intertwined (e.g. Phil 2:12-13). The backbone of the Christian ethic is the inseparable connection between what God has done (the indicative) and therefore what man must do (the imperative); but it is not a moralistic imperative calling for man's heroism since it is based on the objective reality of salvation wrought by God.

What is the Christian social ethic? The previous discussion yields the following conclusions:

1. There is no ready-made political and social or international program that can be derived from this radically religious ethic. The Kingdom of God is a transcendental,

supra-historical order of life. Since the absolute and perfect can never be realized in the relative and imperfect the Kingdom of God cannot be realized in any social, economic, political or cultural order. Rather the realm of God's will "*works as a ferment and an explosive* in these relative spheres" (93).

2. Since Christianity is a radically religious not social movement, the New Testament provides no definite guidance regarding political, social, cultural and economic spheres. But it erroneous to conclude the New Testament ethic is individualistic, for it is the very opposite, "the ethic of a new Kingdom, of a new order of life" (94).

The strength of the Christian ethic consists in the "elasticity of ever-new confrontation and decision" something that is "inherent in its prophetic and radically religious character" (95). Christian ethics is characterized by freedom and flexibility regarding social ethics. It is to be noted that:

1. The "ethic of the Will of God contains very important implications for social and political and cultural life".
2. The "concrete application of these implications will have to be concretely found through the judgment of faith in the different concrete situations of life and history, and yet will always, on account of sin, remain imperfect and broken?".
3. The "decisions and pronouncements in the New Testament are, by virtue of the nature of the Christian faith and ethic, never laws for any other generation of Christians. They are temporary solutions" (e.g. the political ethics of Rom 13), "full of suggestions to us, who have to live out the Christian ethic in a different period of history" (98).

It is a radical misconception to think that the "other-worldly" character of the Christian ethic amounts to a quietistic sanctioning of the *status quo*. The prophetic and radically religious character of the Christian ethic leads to the sober realization that "the world and all its spheres of life, the Church and individual Christians included, are full of sin and perversion, often to a satanic degree" (99). In this complex world, the Christian's practical decisions "despite his belonging to Christ, will mostly turn out to be what must be honestly called, in the light of the Christian ethic, exceedingly poor approximations" (99-100). However, the Christian, as God's co-worker in a world immensely loved by God, is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. Yet people, including Christians and the Church, experience a "natural drag...towards resignation to or conformity with things as they are" (100). But this "deceptive guise of humble piety" is exceedingly fatal. So, despite his inadequacies, the Christian needs to be propelled into action by the prophetic Christian ethic which in every sphere of life involves an obligation towards concrete obedience to God's Will and which also places the world and all it contains under the judgment of God's Will. It is in the immensely compassionate mind of God that Christians find a "never-dying source of inspiration and humility" (100).

#### Chapter 4. The Attitude Towards the Non-Christian Religions

The Christian religion revolves around two poles discussed in Chapter 3: the special and revolutionary knowledge of (1) God and (2) man. The root-problem concerns the relation of the Church and the Christian religion to the world and its spheres of life and behind this root-problem always lies a question that in various forms asks: "What do you think about man, his nature, his possibilities, his achievements?"

This is important to recognize this for two reasons:

1. The non-Christian religions "are not merely sets of speculative ideas about the eternal destiny of man", a misconception of their nature that comes naturally to the modern mind given the departmentalization of religion in the modern world. Rather, when we consider the Christian attitude towards non-Christian religions we are necessarily pronouncing "upon the relation of the Christian faith to culture, state, society", that is, "to the world and its spheres of life" since non-Christian religions are "all-inclusive systems and theories of life" (102).
2. It highlights our need when discussing the attitude of Christianity towards the non-Christian religions to express "the whole problem in terms of the problems of general revelation and natural theology". This in turn raises other questions: "Are nature, reason and history sources of revelation in the Christian sense of the word? If so, what is the relation of the Christian revelation and its implications to the body of human self-unfolding which takes place in philosophy, religion, culture, art, and the other domains of life?" (103). The Church's answer will depend on the concrete circumstances of a given historical period and which aspect of the Church's obligation, living solely in obedience to God's Will, must be operative in this given period.

Two conditions must be kept in mind as we seek to develop a Christian attitude towards the non-Christian religions:

1. Christianity "is built on the prophetic and apostolic witness to a divine, transcendental order of life that transcends and judges by virtue of its inherent authority the whole range of historical human life in every period" (104).
2. This attitude, whatever form it assumes (of renunciation, reserve or intimate relation) must be *positive* since the world is the domain of its Creator and God has set the Church *in* this world *for* the world.

It follows that Christianity's relation to the world is dialectical, combining a fierce "yes" and, simultaneously, a fierce "no", reflecting the "yes" and "no" of God who judges the world, yet simultaneously claims it for his love.

In discussing "the great missionary problem of the attitude towards the non-Christian religions" (104) some considerations need to be kept in mind:

1. For the "younger Churches", immersed in a non-Christian world both numbers-wise and culture-wise, this attitude involves a judgment and evaluation of the entire "cultural, social and political structure and heritage of the people of whom they physically and spiritually are a living part" (105).
2. The detailed modern studies of other religions has made impossible the attitude of regarding one's own religion as unquestionably superior. Now the question *What is truth in religion?* is more urgent and more obscure.

With respect to this second consideration Christianity insists on divine revelation as not only its own source and basis but as "the standard of reference for all truth and all religion" (Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12). If this conviction is diluted or invalidated then "missions inevitably must lose their vital impetus" (106). Truth is not to be determined on the basis of the psychological, cultural, social or moral value a religion has to offer. The only possible basis for truth is the faith that God has revealed *the Way* and *the Truth* and *the Life* in Jesus Christ and wills that the whole world know this.

The science of comparative religions does bring confusion and anxiety, but it also brings benefits, enabling us, for example, to look empirical Christianity in the face, seeing that "Christianity as an historical religious body" (not Christian revelation and its reality) "is thoroughly human, that is, a combination of sublime and abject and tolerable elements". When we do this we will deeply appreciate that it is offensive to speak glibly of the superiority of Christianity. While it is possible, with respect to the historical manifestation of Christianity, to point to certain traits which indicate superiority to other religions there are other traits for which the same can be argued for non-Christian religions. What does make Christianity unique among religions is that radical self-criticism is one of its chief characteristics, since even it must bow to the absolutely sovereign Will of God. "The feeling of superiority is essentially a cultural, and not at all a religious, product; and decidedly not a Christian one" (109). For a feeling of superiority results from a definite sense of achievement and Christian revelation makes it impossible and unnatural to think in such terms (1 Cor 1:30-31).

Summarising, there are three points of crucial importance:

1. The "attitude towards the non-Christian religions is to be seen in the context of the general problem of the relation of Christianity to the world and its spheres of life." Here we affirm our conception of man and his faculties but pass judgment on our fellow-man and his aspirations, attainments and aberrations.
2. We are confronted with the question of normative truth. The most fruitful and legitimate way to analyse and evaluate all religions is to investigate them in the light of the revelation of Christ.
3. The "character of this faith and the nature of the divine truth of revelation consists not in general ideas but in fundamental conditions and relations between God, man and the world" (110). The Christian, therefore, obscures his message when he boasts of "his" superiority by being a Christian and of "having" the truth. Rather he should "boast in the Lord" and rejoice gratefully and humbly in his mercy.

From the standpoint of Christian revelation another question needs to be addressed: "Does God - and if so, how and where does God - reveal himself in the religious life as present in the non-Christian religions?" (111)

This is a more difficult to answer than might appear. However, scientific research and critical thinking both teach there is no 'natural' religion. There is only a universal religious consciousness in man, which produces many similarities.

Man's condition is dialectical, of divine origin, yet corrupted by sin and rebelling against the divine will, as eloquently stated by Pascal:

What a chimera man is! What a novelty, what a monster, how chaotic, how full of contradictions, what a marvel! Judge of all things, a stupid earthworm, a depository of truth, a heap of uncertainty and error, the glory and refuse of the universe (112).

Indeed, "the universal religious consciousness of man has everywhere produced also the most abhorrent and degrading filth that perverted human imagination and lust can beget" (113). Christian revelation is unique in speaking clearly of this dialectical state in which people say yes and no at the same time to their true destiny and relatedness to the eternal. In contrast to all other religions it revolves around the poles of divine

judgment and divine salvation in providing the divine answer in Christ “to this demonic and guilty disharmony of man and the world” (114).

#### *The Problem of Natural Theology*

The Apologists and Fathers addressed the problem of universal religious consciousness either by assuming diffused reason (*logos spermatikos*) in the non-Christian world or denouncing the non-Christian religious world as the product of demonic forces.

Aquinas produced the best attempt at synthesizing the religious life of mankind and Christian revelation. However, not only did he wrongly regard natural theology as a necessary preliminary to revelation, but also, due to Aristotelian influence, he had an intellectualist view of revelation as a set of supernatural truths inaccessible to reason (e.g. the Trinity). *He treated the opposite of grace as nature rather than, as biblical realism makes clear, sin.* This inexorably led to philosophical monism, that is, the placement of natural man’s religious life and Christian revelation on the same horizontal plane. Consequently, the “natural theology” of Roman Catholicism sacrifices the “unique character of Biblical religion... to the exigencies of all-inclusive harmonistic thinking” (115).

With no standard of reference as norm, comparative religion treats all religions “as more or less worthy vehicles of divine revelation” and, in reality, “this means the denial of all revelation, because the fundamentally relativist trend of modern thinking excludes all possibility of taking the idea of revelation really seriously” (118). It is charged that it is detestably proud for Christians to think God would “limit” his revelation to Israel and leave other peoples destitute. However, the “relevant question is not, Who owns revelation? Neither Christians, nor Jews nor non-Christians can pretend or boast to be in possession of it”. Christians are not saying, “We have the revelation and not you” but rather, gratefully and humbly, “It has pleased God to reveal Himself fully and decisively in Christ; repent, believe and adore” (119).

Barth doesn’t deny that in order for people “to hear God’s Word” there must be something common between them and God. But “he rightly asserts the discontinuity of ‘nature’ and ‘grace’ or ‘reason’ with ‘revelation’ by rejecting all natural theology.”

Brunner’s protest against Barth has its necessity and legitimacy. For “the perception of Divinity (*sensus divinitatis*) operative in mankind, asserted by Calvin, is in the religious realism of the Bible no object of discussion, but a working hypothesis that goes without saying.” So while there are many possibilities of error we must talk about natural theology. Barth has sharpened our eyes for the unique and *sui generis* character of the realm of revelation and salvation. But we must also “learn to talk in a new way about the realm of fallen creation (nature and reason) – that is to say, in a deeper, more realistic, freer way than has been the case in the past” (121).

However, two things are no longer permissible:

1. To call “sublime religious and moral achievements the pure and unshakeable evidences of divine revelation of the same sort and quality as the revelation in Jesus Christ”. God himself, in his plan of salvation, has exercised self-limitation when he became flesh in the specific, historic man, Jesus Christ. The *sui generis* quality and significance of this revelation is indirectly indicated by the way God’s special revelation in Christ “contradicts and upsets all human religious aspiration

and imagination". When philosophies and religions protest against cardinal elements of the Christian faith they confirm Pascal's observation, that "the God of the philosophers and the scholars... is *not* the God and Father of Jesus Christ" (122).

2. To view "the glimpses of revelation and the religious intuitions of mankind as a preceding and preparatory stage for the full revelation in Christ". Because the revelation of Christ is *sui generis* the Gospel must not be treated as an essential fulfillment, "the highest development and budding forth of the religious forces and seeds in mankind". For the Cross "is antagonistic to all human religious aspirations and ends, for the tendency of all human religious striving is to possess or conquer God, to realize our divine nature (*theosis*)" (123).
  - a. Propitiatory sacrifices in other religions is "an ultimate measure of insurance, and therefore of self-assertion. There is no road from that to the reconciliation in Christ, which revolves around the poles of radical divine judgment on sin as self-assertion, and of exclusive divine effort to reclaim man. To talk here of fulfillment would mean to destroy all insight and discernment" (124).
  - b. The fact that the Kingdom of God "is realized in the suffering and self-abandonment of the Saviour and can be entered, not by miraculous mythical deliverance, but by faith alone, that is, by obedience to the Will of God" (125) sets it at odds with expressions in other religions of the "longing for and the expectation of a world of perfect harmony of bliss... and of a Divine Saviour and Mediator to bring and realize it" (124).

The missionary and the Christian takes both sides of the dialectical condition of non-Christian religions seriously because Biblical realism does so too. Inspired by this Biblical realism, the attitude towards the non-Christian religions combines down-right intrepidity and radical humility:

One will often meet representatives of the non-Christian religions who justly fill one with deep reverence, because they represent in their whole life an extraordinary degree of devotion to the reality of the world of the spiritual and eternal. Nevertheless, in the light of Christ's revelation it is a disturbing thing that such highly-developed spiritual personalities often do not show the least comprehension of the greatest gift of Christ - the forgiveness of sins (129).

### *Points of Contact*

A good missionary is expected to eagerly search out points of contact. Many considerations make this a legitimate and necessary quest:

1. The "perennially disturbing and central problem of man" is his search for God, even as he "tries to kill it in himself" and this creates an undeniable point of contact for the Gospel, which to deny is to deny the humanity of man (130).
2. Biblical realism's presentation of God as "deeply and strenuously concerned about man and the world" is reflected in its passionate anthropomorphism and the Incarnation, showing "God wants, even passionately wants, contact with man, and thus through the act of His revelation shows His belief in the possibility of contact." It would make the Gospel void and meaningless to dismiss this, the strongest argument for the existence of the point of contact in man (131).
3. The factuality of point of contact is also indicated by our common humanity, a common psychological apparatus characterized by "our common capacity for religious and moral experience, effort, achievement and failure, our common aspirations, needs and dreads" (131).

The problem of the point of contact is always surrounded by confusion:

1. This has been aggravated by the Barthian "thunderstroke": "There is no point of contact" (131). This adds to the confusion because what Barth means by this is easily misunderstood. For what he really means is: "There is no point of contact that theology can locate." Yes, "the fact that faith in God's revelation occurs pre-supposes that it can be communicated to man and apprehended by him as revelation coming from God", but only in the fields of psychology and pedagogy can the question be addressed "as to what this point of contact is and how man can act in regard to it" (131). But the net effect of this Barthian position is to make preaching, religious education and instruction, missions, theological discussion and instruction all look rather absurd.
2. While a surer grasp of points of contact does facilitate more effective mission "it has, of course, the same tendency as all human instruments, to induce us to entertain a delusive trust in these points of contact as the real *agents* of missionary results in the sense of previously unbelieving people coming to believe in Christ. The sole *agent* of real faith in Christ is the Holy Spirit (132).

Once we acknowledge that the grace of God alone can cause the "blind" to see, "that there are no bridges from human religious consciousness to the reality in Christ", then our thinking is purged of many delusions:

1. The delusion of building too great hopes on our methods.
2. Expecting success to come from our psychological and theological approaches.
3. Expecting success to come from our dogmatic correctness or liberalism.
4. Treating "point of contact" as if it were "an idea or disposition in the religious consciousness from which faith and conversion to Christ and His gifts and demands can be developed", in contrast to John 3:8 and 1 Corinthians 3:7 (132-133).

The "point of contact" is not merely a theological problem but also a vast pastoral problem and hence cannot be treated by systematic theological reasoning alone. The paradox is that the religious worker has the obligation and privilege to do his utmost to use all means, "seemingly working as if all depended on his sincere devotion to the task", while ever aware "it is 'God who makes the seed grow' and that only 'the Day will show what the nature of his work is.'" Thus at the core of the problem of the point of contact is a parallel dialectical structure involving divine grace and human responsiveness, noting that "the fact of human responsiveness does not impair the exclusive causality of grace in the whole process" (134).

Where are the concrete points of contact to be found by the missionary amid the various religious conditions in which he finds himself?

It is a misguided pursuit to try to come up with a catalogue of points of contact for every religion, e.g. based on similarities concerning the concept of God, man, soul, redemption, expectation of eternal life or the precedence of the community over the individual, etc.

Religion is never "an assortment of spiritual commodities, that can be compared as shoes or neck-ties" because "every religion is an indivisible, and not to be divided, unity of existential apprehension." While attaining *intellectual* command of material demands breaking down a religion into particular conceptions, "missions have to do

with religions as thriving and living realities" (135). Consequently, real insight requires application of a "'totalitarian' approach to a religion and its constituent parts" (136).

The light of revelation in Christ exposes all religious life, whether lofty or degraded, as under divine judgment, since it is *misdirected*, thus turning all 'similarities' (points of contact) into 'dissimilarities'. The revelation in Christ says "no" to every point of contact, denying its development would lead to apprehending the revelation in Christ. But it also, dialectically, says "yes", uncovering in the misdirected expressions of religious life "the groping and persistent human aspiration and need for 'the glory of the children of God'" (137).

To illustrate: Some have elaborately argued that the Chinese 'high-god', Shang-ti, and sometimes presented, has personal traits seemingly offering a point of contact for preaching the personal God of Christian religion. This is mistaken:

- It is arbitrary and sterile to take such an artificially-isolated element which loses touch with the whole living system of religion (see above).
- It is a misconception to assume that the characteristic nature of the God and Father of Jesus Christ can be described as theistic (see above).
- It is a naïve evolutionist and rationalistic presupposition that Shang-ti will prepare the way for the higher "theistic" conception of God. Indeed, we see little concern in Chinese culture for personality in the Divine. Only confrontation with Christ can awaken this, not intellectual reasoning.
- Buddhist treats the transiency of man and the world with unparalleled seriousness among religions. But though the Bible in its realism also stresses transiency there is no point of contact here since the Buddhist idea of transiency only has meaning in a void, God-less universe. By contrast Biblical realism speaks of the transiency of people in a real world being due to God's sovereign action.

The main conclusion is this: **Points of contact can only be found by antithesis.** Dialectically, we must discover "in the revealing light of Christ the fundamental misdirection that dominates all religious life and at the same time the groping for God which throbs in this misdirection, and which finds an unsuspected divine solution in Christ." Further, this antithetical approach "is not meant as a negative way of condemnation, but as a deeply positive way of dealing realistically with the dialectical reality of the religion of mankind" (139).

A second conclusion is that the quest for concrete points of contact must involve "a 'totalitarian' interpretation of religion and avoid intellectual delusions. This does not involve measuring religions "with the rod of current Christian dogmatism and dogma" - "one of the worst forms of intellectualism." Rather, the missionary must himself remain permanently open "to the criticism and guidance of the Christian revelation" and "to the reality of the non-Christian religion with which he has to deal" (139).

There is only one point of contact which, if it really exists, leads to many points of contact, namely **the disposition and attitude of the missionary** (140):

As long as a man feels that he is the object of interest only for reasons of intellectual curiosity or for purposes of conversion, and not because of himself as he is in his total empirical reality, there cannot arise that humane natural contact which is the indispensable condition of all real religious meeting of man with man (140).

Consequently, to a considerable extent the problem of the concrete points of contact is a problem of missionary ethics and not merely a problem of insight and knowledge.

### Chapter 5. The Non-Christian Systems of Life and Thought

Some classifications of world religions:

1. Saviour-religions and legalist/ceremonial religions.
2. "Primitive" (nature-religions) and "civilized" (culture-religions).
3. Mystical and moralist religions.
4. Prophetic religions of revelation and naturalist religions of trans-empirical realization:
  - a. Religions of revelation: Christianity, Judaism and Islam (partially).
  - b. Naturalist religions: all other religions.

Externally all religions can be called religions of revelation, even the "primitive" ones, since all rely on some sacred book or sacred text considered as a kind of revelation, e.g. the primeval revelation of primitive religious myth; Hindu *Vedas* which are "seen" by the divine rishi's; Buddhist *Dharma*; the *Adigranth* of Sikhism; even with Shankara the way of knowledge becomes known via revelation.

But only in the three religions of revelation above is the centre of gravity found in the fact or notion of revelation, whereas for all other religions revelation is a subsidiary notion and very different to what the religions of revelation mean by it. Naturalist religions are mystical in their core with revelation involving "supreme moments of religious experience" (143). It is especially Christianity where "*the search for supreme religious experience is utterly foreign to Biblical realism*, because the emphasis falls exclusively on what God does and reveals." In this Biblical realism revelation is "always an objective act of God, in which *His* will and *His* mind in regard to the condition of man and the world and their need become revealed and claim absolute and unique validity" (143). Religious experience is but the human correlate and never an end in itself. This is true too of Islam, though in "a very reduced and very qualified sense" (144).

#### *The Naturalist Religions*

The religions of Africa and Asia do not merely "represent different concrete bodies of religious theory and practice, but at the same time are cultures and civilizations" (147). A great number of tribal culture- and life-patterns in Africa and Asia, plus the great civilizations of India, China and Japan are under consideration. The three great and representative creations of the human spirit in the history of mankind are the Indian, Chinese and Western civilizations, with Japanese civilization, with respect to its cultural history, belonging to Indian and especially Chinese civilization.

Unlike the civilization of the West the civilizations of India and China are characterized by unbroken continuity. A chief reason accounting for this is that while the West has repeatedly broken *on principle with the authority of tradition* they never have: "the authority of tradition has remained throughout their history one of their immovable foundations" (148).

Both the Indian and Chinese civilizations are classic examples of the phenomenal outgrowth of the "primitive" apprehension of the totality of existence. The "unbroken

sway of the authority of tradition" is one of the many traits demonstrating this. Here "primitive" is not derogatory and means "one of the great representative human apprehensions of life" of which there are three expressions:

1. Indian and Chinese civilizations involving the apprehension of the totality of existence.
2. Western civilization continuing and developing the rational apprehension that first broke through in the Greeks.
3. The prophetic apprehension of Biblical realism.

In tribal religions, though each is an autonomous living unity with its own peculiar characteristics, we can identify the following main features of the "primitive apprehension" of life:

1. *The absolute interdependence of all spheres of life.* There is a total absence of conscious differentiation and specialization between the economic, social and religious spheres. This inter-relatedness "is governed and maintained by the rigid and unassailable authority of tradition", a past-orientation which looks "to the authoritative example and doctrine of the ancestors" (150). Rites, myths and manifold regulations of life aim at justifying the existing order "by strengthening tradition and heightening its authority" (151). Life is highly corporate with a dominating concern "to preserve and perpetuate social harmony, stability and welfare." It is this purpose which primarily informs religious cults and magic practices, since there is a deep-rooted dread lest the harmony and equilibrium of the existing world-order be disrupted. A natural disaster or birth of twins or breach of tradition sets in motion *corporate* and strenuous religious activity towards restoring the harmony since, given absolute interdependence, the *whole* order is under threat - "the fertility of their fields, their health, the security of their families, the stability and welfare of their tribe" (151).
2. *The "totalitarian" type of thinking* which animates and undergirds this differentiated and interdependent pattern of life. That is, a type of monistic and religious thinking in which the whole of reality, despite all its distinctions, is essentially an unbroken, primeval unity. It might be called emotional thinking since, in contrast to modern scientific thinking, the primary intent is to master the world *by classificatory systems*. All the classes which comprise the range of reality - gods and man, natural phenomena and social institutions, animals and plants, etc. - are not analysed and isolated but are given a place and rank and a defined inter-relation in the whole cosmic-human order. "*One of the fundamental laws in this type of thinking is that the macrocosmos (the world, 'nature' as we would say) and the microcosmos (man) are correlative entities that co-exist in an uninterrupted process of living inter-relations and inter-correspondences*" (152). Other universally-known principles of this cosmic, classificatory thinking are:
  - a. The division of reality according to dualistic principles, e.g. masculine and feminine, light and dark, cold and hot, etc.
  - b. Classifying reality in terms of five or nine cosmic regions - derived from the centre and the four or eight points of the compass. "The centre represents totality and the points of the compass represent the relatively independent, but ultimately dependent regions of life, which are rigidly inter-related" (153). So five and nine belong to the most sacred numbers.
3. *There are no really antagonistic and opposite principles and realities.* Contrasts exist - light-dark, etc. - but these are all discounted in primeval totality and have their *due* and *legitimate* place in this totality.

4. They are religiously *relativistic*. No irrevocable religious or ethical absolute is possible. To them "the prophetic nature of the religion of Biblical realism" is utterly foreign.
5. Their thinking is *naturalistic* (man and nature are essentially one) and *vitalistic* (it becomes "the object of religion and its practice" to perpetuate and strengthen individual and corporate life as virtual "concretions of the immanent vital urge of the universe"). Consequently, religion can either give rise to (1) "a magnificent and noble quest of eternal, imperishable life" with the "titanic moralism" which so often characterizes forms of "higher" mysticism; or (2) it becomes "the cloak for the crassest materialism and sensualism." While gods with personal traits often occur - as we would expect from such monism - really the relation of man and the Divine is an interplay of forces. There is no real idea of a personal God. It is this *naturalistic monism* which is the key to understanding "the deepest roots of the primitive apprehension of the totality of existence", whether in its crude forms among so-called primitive peoples or in the highly developed and elaborate forms in India and China.
6. *The course of nature is cyclic* - "it is eternal recurrence, a swinging between the two poles of life and death, which are opposite, but only in a relative sense. Life really springs from death because there is no real death, for there are actually only *aspects* of totality" (156). Hence the absence of any absolute contrasts in this primitive apprehension of existence.
7. They are religiously and ethically *eudaemonistic*. That is, religion and ethics are always the means to an end, the *summum bonum*, which is absolute happiness attained through the ultimate realization of life (vitalism). In practice the result can be either (1) noble asceticism and admirable self-conquest, or (2) sensualism or libertinism.
8. *They involve respect for tradition and conservatism*. These features of Indian and Chinese civilizations are grounded in this inherent identification with nature and its cyclic law of life, since: "Nature means eternal recurrence and repetition" (157).

#### Conclusions:

1. Note the overwhelmingly *social* aspect of this type of religious life: "The social order is a reflex of the universal order and is correlated to it" and vice versa, with religion employing practices aimed at preserving the harmony of the social and universal order, to which conformity is "a fundamental and indispensable law of life" (157).
2. Note the deeply *naturalistic* aspect: "Nature and its course are *the pattern*" (157).

This primitive apprehension of existence, in its totality and natural tendency, "stands entirely opposite to the world of Biblical realism", given its insistence on God as Lord and Creator and its radical treatment of human rebellion against God's pure and perfect Will as sin. Consequently, it will not do to treat this primitive apprehension of existence or any other form of apprehension of existence as simply available human psychological structures, as many authors do. For the essence of man is that "he is a willing, desiring and striving being, which means a being who chooses and decides." So he is not essentially a neutrally thinking being but a responsible being.

#### *Hinduism*

Hinduism defies definition, being characterized by polymorphous complexity. It is "a vast jungle of religious cults, sects, institutions and tendencies, including every possible variation of human religious expression" (158-159).

The seeming absence of all consistency is even manifest in its foundations. Every Hindu belongs to one of hundreds of castes and has to live according to the *dharma* of his or her particular caste - "the peculiar type of behaviour that is one's cosmically and socially predestined lot" (159).

All Hindus accept the *Vedas* as sacred and authoritative - literature almost totally ignorant of the central gods of Hinduism - Shiva and Vishnu. Also the *Vedas* venerate gods such as Indra and Varuna who are now entirely forgotten. Further, the sacredness of the cow - one of the pillars of modern Hindu *dharma*, is unknown in the *Vedas*. Another paradox is this: the four *Vedas* could hardly be more life- and world-affirming, yet "the ferment that pervades Hinduism and the *Upanishads* in its roots and its branches is a radical life- and world-denying temperament" (159).

This immense complexity is explicable because Hinduism is "the outstanding and characteristic embodiment of the primitive apprehension of existence and of naturalistic monism." "It is as wide, as polymorphous, as full of fierce contrasts and fine shades, as capricious, as Nature is." The fact that the *Vedas* either ignore or contradict "the most fundamental tenets of Hinduism" is not inconsistency but a lucid example of *Hindu consistency*. That is, it is capricious and indifferent to a criterion just as nature is capricious and lacks any criterion.

As Heimann has shown: "Indian civilization, religion and thinking in its entire rich development never abandons the magic circle of the innate assumption that man is essentially one with all the other parts of Nature" (161). Yet Hinduism has two criteria, though they are necessarily relative:

1. Natural - the biological fact of being born a Hindu.
2. Social - the social fact of belonging to a caste.

The highest ideal of India, and also of the great religious civilizations of China and Japan, is to return to Totality as the primordial condition of all existence, conceived as the serenest possible bliss as expressed by the terms *kaivalya*, *advaita* and *moksha*.

The ingrained naturalistic monism of Hinduism means:

the rules that one is Hindu by birth and that the most characteristic and indispensable attribute of a Hindu is to live according to the *dharma* of his caste, have never become dissolved even a little, and never can be... (162).

Because Hinduism is so deeply rooted in naturalistic monism it never has eliminated or vanquished magic. Indeed, only the prophetic religion of Biblical realism, on principle, has radically eliminated magic from religion. It is not surprising to find Hinduism involving bizarre Tantric cults with their sexual aberrations. Yet, the same naturalistic monism that gives rise to this also gives rise to "the great methods of salvation, replete with religious and ethical fervour". Consequently, it is not feasible to identify Hinduism either with Tantrism or with these great religious phenomena.

Hinduism is prolific in its production of gods, reflecting the fertility of nature, since everything can virtually be *made* an object of worship. These gods, whether exalted or

repellent, represent always some aspect of cosmic and natural totality. So they are never fundamentally different from man:

1. They are also mortal. They are subject to the law of *karma* but because of a good *karma* they enjoy a finer and longer state of bliss than is humanly possible. Within naturalistic monism this is wholly logical since:
2. The power above all gods is never a god but *karma* - the tyrannical lord and creator of all existence; or ultimately *avidya* - the state of ignorance about the real nature of man and the universe.

The cosmic natural process of Hinduism does not permit an idea of real transcendence. Hinduism is "seeped in an atmosphere of immanence" (163). The Ultimate Reality equals the Primordial Oneness of Being in the Totality, so the plurality of the cosmic and natural process naturally tends to become the unreal.

In Hinduism human life has four aspects (*caturvaga* - the four ends of human life):

1. *Artha*: man as an acquisitive being with the economic consequences and obligations this involves.
2. *Kama*: man in his sensual and natural needs and demands.
3. *Dharma*: man under social and ritual rules founded on the sacred authority of tradition, with each man and group of men subject to his or their peculiar *dharma* and with caste and *dharma* indissolubly connected with each other.
4. *Moksha*: man engaged in life- and mind-training to achieve salvation.

Whereas in Christianity relativism becomes "a conflict full of dangerous tension", the naturalistic background of Hinduism means "that relativism in the realm of religious truth is not felt as a matter of life and death, but on the contrary as a symptom of delightful richness" (165).

The great ways of *moksha* illustrate eudaemonistic ethics. The aim is deliverance from *samsara* - the suffering of existence. Hence the maxim *ahimsa* regarding abstaining from giving harm to others in thought, word and deed. The benevolence, gentleness and regard for the whole kosmos that permeates the purer forms of Hinduism and Buddhism has soteriological roots. For avoiding the infliction of suffering expresses the desire to lessen one's chances of rebirth.

*Moksha* shows the *anthropocentric* tendency of naturalism. It is an end pursued by a minority, not the majority. This minority incorporates into Hinduism ingenious techniques of *yoga* for deliverance. All error and misery is traced back to *avidya*, "ignorance about the sole reality of the Primeval Oneness of Totality (Sat) and about the deceptive unreality of the plurality of the cosmic and natural process (*maya*)." It is the evaporation of this ignorance that brings deliverance, resulting in monistic bliss (*ananda*), "in which man realizes his deepest reality" (166).

God or the Divine never really exists. Since there is no God ultimately the only thing that exists "is human consciousness moving in sovereign solitude over the void abyss of void existence" (166-167). Consequently, Hinduism is radically anthropocentric.

The same fundamental naturalistic monism underlies Chinese and Japanese apprehensions of life. So expressed in Taoism, Zen-Buddhism and many Buddhist schools is "the same aristocratic mysticism, founded on the contrast of the Total

Oneness and of Plurality, which is virtually no contrast, because Plurality is unreal phantasmagory." Hence the anthropocentric thrust of Zen Buddhism "to realize Buddhahood in oneself and to discover it in everything" (168).

These three great Asian religious civilizations not only evince forms of aristocratic mysticism but also of soteriological mysticism, revolving around faith, a Saviour and a Mediator. These examples of pietistic religion are adopted as the "ways" by multitudes of people. Hence the many forms of *bhakti*-religion in India, of Pure Land or Ching-tu Buddhism in China and Yodo-shu (Jodu-Shun) and Amida Buddhism in Japan. Such forms involve many startling similarities with Christianity.

Ramanuja is the great *bhakti*-theologian who:

1. Protests against the absolute monism of Shankara.
2. Vindicates fellowship with and loving faith in the personal living Ishvara, who is a reality and not in the sphere of *maya*, as in Shankara.
3. Proclaims divine grace and not speculative gnosis as the means of salvation.
4. Gives many conversion/revival testimonies reminiscent of Christian Pietism.
5. Makes faith the central concept, even struggling over the relationship of faith and works.

Ramanuja radically breaks away from classic Hindu ideas about God, the soul and the world. For to him the world is real, not *maya*, so that the soul and human consciousness are also real. To him Ishvara is not a god-representation but the sole and personal God and Saviour and this forces him to discriminate clearly between God, man and the world. The essential identity of Brahman and Atman in Hinduism is construed by Ramanuja as the dwelling of God in the soul, the enjoyment of which becomes the ultimate quest. Consequently, Ramanuja's *bhakti*-religion involves expressions of the wretchedness of sin, a profound longing for divine grace, trust and faith in Ishvara's all-conquering love, the experience of being divinely elected and being set apart to live for and worship Ishvara, the experience of being delivered through faith and of absolute surrender to Ishvara.

But there are radical differences between *bhakti*-religion and Biblical realism:

1. *Monism is inescapable*, although Ramanuja intends otherwise. This results from basing his system upon an interpretation of Hindu Scriptures, with the result that God is not the Creator in the radical sense of this word.
2. *The world is relatively independent from man, and unimportant*, e.g. there is no hope of a new heavens and earth. There is no sense of the world being "the real place where man, by divine ordinance, is set to live and to work" (171).
3. *Bhakti*-religion is *fundamentally anthropocentric*. For the *exclusive* creator of all religious experience and thinking is the need of the soul for deliverance. There is no concept of God loving and reconciling the world. Consequently, moral exertion and religious experience is exclusively individualistic.
4. Faith is a *means of salvation*. In *bhakti*-religion grace, forgiveness and even Ishvara himself are essentially means to satisfy the soul's need for salvation. Sin is an obstacle to the fellowship of the soul with Ishvara in which salvation consists, not an expression of the human will's rebellion against God's will.
5. The ethics of *bhakti*-religion is *exclusively individualistic and essentially eudaemonistic*.

6. *The compassion (karuna) of God* is emphasized, by which God disregards sin and on the basis of which people claim to be entitled to have fellowship with God. By contrast, the theocentric world of Biblical realism stresses the holy love of God and maintains the integrity of God's holy Will. The soteriology of Biblical realism stresses the word reconciliation, whereas *bhakti* soteriology stresses the word *prasada*, divine favour.

### *Buddhism*

Buddhism is the most radical system of self-deliverance ever devised. Its cardinal presuppositions (*karma, samsara, moksha*) are thoroughly Hindu. But it is one of the few systems to have been excommunicated by Hinduism. The reason for this is not because of deviating doctrines, but because Buddhism had a different *dharma*, which *excluded conformity*. For Buddhism rejected one of the two indispensable foundations of Hinduism, "its social conception of religion as a common *dharma*" (174).

Buddhism is a superb example of aristocratic soteriology. The originality and power of Buddhism consists in the extreme intensity with which it treats the transience (*anitya* or *anitta*) of all existence and the supreme need to escape from it. There is no role for "the doctrine of the pure, imperishable Essence (Brahma)" since the Ego, the soul (*atman*) is non-existent (*anatman, anatta*). The sole producer of so-called existence is *karma* and its fetters are shattered in one stroke and deliverance achieved by apprehending non-self with all its consequences. *Nirvana* is indefinable but is bliss pure and simple because given non-self there is no definable goal to be formulated.

Original Buddhism was the religion of monks who strived for salvation through "a solitary and relentless process of moral self-conquest and intellectual emancipation from the slavery of ignorance, the root of all evil." Once it was deemed necessary to incorporate laymen "in this religion of lonely world-forsakers" Buddhism was forced, "against its dominant motive, to enter into relation with the world" (174).

Whereas under Hindu transiency lies a deep thirst for life, in the even greater stress on transiency found in Buddhism the thirst for life is one of the cardinal shackles in the famous chain of the Causal Nexus of Existence. Further, because Buddhist soteriology is exclusively anthropocentric its ethics are strongly eudaemonistic, a means to an end.

The great missionary religion in Buddhism is Mahayana Buddhism which opens up the way to salvation to everyone, employing "all the devices of religious psychology, speculation and practice, and not less the whole arsenal of magic" to achieve "the highest maximum of soteriological effect" (175). The normal goal of deliverance from *samsara* is transcended by the new goal, "the great Vehicle", namely to become a Bodhisattva, personally becoming a Saviour and Deliverer. "The Bodhisattva-ideal is *the* apotheosis of anthropocentric self-assertion in the guise of a religion of grace and divine deliverance" (175).

The Buddha side-stepped the question of the relationship of his teaching with naturalistic monism and the primitive 'totalitarian' apprehension of existence. But the various schools of Mahayana Buddhism do "weave the monistic pattern of the relation of the absolute to the phenomenal", with Nagarjuna's school moving towards extreme

illusionism and nihilism, maintaining that “of no thing or idea can one state its being or non-being, not even of the Buddha or of the way of deliverance” (176).

Consequently, Mahayanist naturalistic-monistic thinking leads to absolute relativism. The so-called “second turning of the Wheel of Dharma” is the view that all is void and illusory. This relativism is justified by treating each of the different Buddhist theories and ways of soteriology as accommodated truths, with each being an authoritative standard, in its own sphere, “for a certain stage of human development and insight into the absolute truth” (176).

In Japan the Tendai and Shingon schools are examples of idealistic monism, operating, however, in the realm of naturalistic monism, with key Japanese Buddhist leaders hailing Hegel’s synthesis of Being and Non-being as affirming Mahayanist philosophy.

Earlier Kraemer noted that a characteristic of the primitive “totalitarian” apprehension of existence is the classifying of reality in terms of five or nine cosmic regions - derived from the centre and the four or eight points of the compass. Kraemer observes, “The groups of Dhyani- and Manusya-buddhas and of Bodhisattvas, in most cases with Vairocana or with the Adibuddha in the centre or at the top, follow the pattern of the sacred numbers of the primitive classificatory systems” (176).

Another characteristic is the absence of any really antagonistic and opposite principles and realities. Further religion can become “the cloak for the crassest materialism and sensualism.” Both of these latter characteristics are seen in the masculine-feminine dualism involved in the Shakti cults and Tantric systems of Vajrayana Buddhism. Sexual duality as the starting point represents “the urge for the Oneness of the Totality” and the consequence is the incorporation and sanctioning of “elaborate systems of erotic and orgiastic magic of all kinds”, a negative expression of the eudaemonistic soteriology characterizing Mahayana Buddhism. For here Buddhism’s “lack of a real criterion and authority” involves a “disastrous tendency to become the justifier of all, even the basest, things” (177).

Kraemer comments,

Buddhism began as an heroic rigoristic moralism, exclusively inspired by the thirst for deliverance and therefore indifferent to all metaphysics; it became by listening to the lure of unvanquished naturalistic monism and by the anthropocentric orientation of its soteriology the most consistent and unscrupulous exponent of this monism, and a huge syncretistic religion (177).

Pure Land Buddhism represents *bhakti*-religion and has developed most profoundly in Japan (as Amidism or Jodo-shu) rather than in China. It arose in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in Japan, reacting against the scholastic Buddhism of Tendai and Shingon, seeking a simpler and purer way to deliverance from *samsara*. The founder of Jodo-shu, Honen Shonin, wanted to open this for lay people.

Honen Shonin taught that the Buddha taught two ways to deliverance. The traditional way emphasized holiness (*shodo*) and self-deliverance (*ji-riki*). But Honen Shonin maintained it was also possible to achieve Buddhahood through the way of the Pure Land (*Jodo*) and deliverance by a Saviour (*tariki*), namely Amida Butsu (Amitabha). The path to deliverance through faith in and invocation of Amida Butsu (namu Amida Butsu) is easy and passable since the merciful Amida Butsu opens the way to all who

call on his name with sincere faith and a desire for deliverance in their heart. Amida Butsu had himself acquired Buddhahood after suffering for sinful humanity and then created the Pure Land of Bliss for those who believe in him. Believers stand on the rock of Amida's Primordial Covenant, when he made this vow:

When at my achieving Buddhahood any living being in the ten worlds, who desires to be reborn in my Paradise, invokes ten times my name, trusting to my Vow, if he does not become reborn there, I will not enter the state of perfect enlightenment (179).

Honen's pupil Shinran puritanised this religion, founding Shin-shu. He emphasized that Amida works salvation and that contrary to original Jodo-shu, good works are of no effect, simply faith in him. Other similarities with Lutheran Protestantism are Shinran's discarding of asceticism, saint-worship and many popular religious practices, especially his denunciation of magic. The central religious principle is that of reliance on Amida's Vow with the ethical life an expression of gratitude to Amida for his mercy.

But it is incorrect to think this Amida Buddhism is a duplicate of Christianity in Buddhist garb. The former's emphasis on faith is presented as an *easier* way and this spiritual opportunism radically contrasts with Biblical realism in which "everything centres in the eternal validity of God's holy Will and God's sovereign opening of a way where there is no way at all." In Amida Buddhism "[faith] is a means to work salvation, and not the organ by which man apprehends and recognizes that God has in Christ restored the right relation between Himself and man." Consequently, in Amida Buddhism the *tariki* remains a *ji-riki*. Amida Buddhism lacks the theocentrism of Biblical realism since "Amida is important in so far as by him man satisfies his need of salvation." Amidism is an exclusively anthropocentric soteriology since Amida, far from being "the Creator, the God of holy love, who reconciles man unto Himself by His act of revelation in Christ" is instead "exclusively the compassionate Saviour, who exists for the succour of man's helplessness" (180).

Shinran has no concept of sin and the sinner being unable to abide in the presence of a holy God. Consequently his *sola fide* is totally different from that in Biblical realism. Shinran's soteriological gospel, being exclusively anthropocentric, confines faith to being "the sole and ultimate psychological instrument to acquire salvation" (181).

Further, in Biblical realism "God's act of salvation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ is a real historical act" with "God, the Creator, and the world, His creation" being objective realities. By contrast, Amida and his Vow are purely mythological, so that Shinran's soteriology "remains, fundamentally speaking, a projection of human desire for salvation" (181).

## Chapter 6. The Non-Christian Systems of Life and Thought (continued)

### *China*

China and Japan have been influenced enormously by India and its Buddhism. However, the civilization that is China's original creation, as epitomized in Confucianism and Taoism, is also an expression of the primitive apprehension of the totality of existence, vividly illustrating its two outstanding tendencies, that is, being strongly naturalist (especially Taoism) and strongly social (especially Confucianism) in conception and outlook.

Kraemer identifies as China's characteristic and outstanding achievement an "exquisite spirit of harmony" (183). In China the interdependent unity of the naturalist

and social apprehension of religion is peculiarly strong. This is because Confucianism aristocratically assumes the interdependence of the primordial cosmic order and the social and political order, so that religion, as a divinely-sanctioned social order to which everyone must conform, was intimately related to the State and its symbol, the Emperor. Unlike India, religion was not linked to caste and nor was it confined to family or clan. As a result Chinese civilization has a level of common sense and aristocratic reserve and restraint that is lacking in India. For in China the strong focus on man as a social and political being involves the need for discipline to ensure he functions harmoniously in the totality, whereas in India social thinking is superseded by caste and the religiously-established superiority of the Brahman caste.

"The highest category of the Chinese apprehension of the world and of life is Totality, or the Primeval and Eternal Order (*Tao*), which is the moulding principle of the universe" (184). This is expressed by antithetic, yet complementary rhythms, e.g. Yang and Yin, macrocosm and microcosm, corresponding with and counterbalancing each other. The meaning of the natural and human world is to preserve the harmony of this primeval rhythm. "The law of nature and the law of human social life, namely morality, are essentially one. Man and the cosmos are one undivided unity of life" (184). Consequently, the primeval Totality or Order (*Tao*) is realized in the ordered life of man and vice versa. It follows from this that there are two key commandments in Chinese ethics:

1. Live in harmony with *Tao*.
2. The traditional rules and etiquettes through which society and state function reflect - or ought to - the behaviour of the cosmos. (184)

In both Taoism and Confucianism the norm of ethical striving and aspiration is provided not by the Will of God, "but the ideal of the 'Perfect, Holy Man' whose inner being is one with *Tao*, and that of the 'Noble Gentleman'" (185). So naturalistic is the apprehension that a transcendent norm of ethics is impossible. Consequently, since Chinese civilization is thoroughly humanistic, Chinese ethics express human wisdom, never a personal divine Will. But, given the idealism of harmony, good and evil are not real contrasts. "Good" is defined by whether it promotes harmony or not. This profound eudaemonism, "everywhere the child of a naturalistic-monistic apprehension of existence, permeates all Chinese ethics", so that "it is impossible to see the irreparable rent of sin that runs through [the moral order of human life]" (185). This philosophy is entirely incompatible with the concept of God as wholly independent of nature or man, since in Chinese civilization both nature and man are *aspects* of Totality, which expresses itself in man and nature. Consequently, the idea of a transcendent God-Creator who acts in history is abhorrent to the Chinese mind. Instead, the Chinese mind naturally and inevitably conceives of an impersonal, *super-divine* entity - an "ineffable, indefinable, immutable Essence" which lies outside all activity, not belonging to "the sphere of the world, of nature and man." This stands "in irreconcilable contrast to the voluntaristic conception of the God of history and in history embodied in Biblical realism" (186).

In Chinese mythology the natural anthropomorphic habit of human thinking produces gods with personal traits without really involving a personal conception of God. Indeed, the real gods are those "holy" or "noble" men who attain complete harmony with the natural and moral world order (*Tao*).

Confucius was the father of a "remarkable synthesis of naturalistic-monistic universalism and social ethics that aspired to turn out ideal sons and ideal subjects, but above all ideal emperors and officials." This philosophy particularly involved ancestor worship and a theocratic conception of the empire, though "theocratic" is realized in an immanent way, with the Emperor being "the *pontifex maximus*, the mediator between heaven and earth, by whose mediation and virtue (the, that is his harmony with the world order) the natural and social process functions rightly." Confucius used history to produce models for imitation: "illustrious examples of men, such as the great mythical emperors of antiquity who had realized this ideal" (187). Confucianism's profound humanism is also reflected in its strong belief in education and the educability of man, presupposing man's natural goodness.

There are three factors which together make Confucianism the climax of static conservatism:

1. Its rooting in the traditional view of primitive apprehension.
2. The naturalist and universalist inspiration made the cyclic and rhythmic course of nature its secret pattern.
3. It was animated by the ideal of conformity to historically fixed ideals.

Taoism ranges from mysticism to the occult, magic and sorcery and is as chaotic as nature itself. Natural monism must be destroyed in order to destroy Taoism, but the far more influential Confucianism, despite its strong rationalistic tendency, has "not made any effort to break the chains of this bondage to magic and the like", for its roots also are "deeply sunk in the soil of naturalistic monism" (189). Further, the aristocratic moralism of Confucianism is at odds with the real concern for one's fellowman, especially the less privileged, which is only found in Biblical realism, where the love of man is derived from the love of God.

Buddhism was a "foreign" religion to China and its "principles of world denial and denial of the family were an insult to the Chinese cultural self-consciousness" so that it "never succeeded in supplanting or weakening the position of Taoism and Confucianism" (189-190). Buddhism was often persecuted in China but given the relativism of its own thought the reasons were political rather than expressing concern with religious truth. Consequently, Buddhism also experienced protection and "has enriched enormously the capacity for speculative thinking, and has stimulated and deepened artistic expression" (190). Though the monasticism of institutional Buddhism opposes the strong patriarchal ideals the monistic naturalistic apprehension of existence implicit to the Mahayana Buddhism which penetrated into China gelled with the presuppositions of Chinese universalism. The worship of Kwan-yin and Buddhist care with funeral rites have helped Buddhism find a firmly established place in Chinese life.

### *Japan*

Japan has been profoundly influenced by Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism merging these with Shintoism. Japan, supremely among naturalist religions, is characterized by strong prophetic reformers driven by forces greater than themselves (e.g. Honen, Shinran and Nichiren) - to effect the salvation of men or the glory of their nation. These are conspicuous for their absence in the histories of China and India. Japan, as a religious civilization, "wholly belongs to the sphere of naturalistic religion and the primitive apprehension of existence" (192). The soteriological or nationalistic motivation of Japanese Buddhist reformers stands in contrast to the theocentric

character of the prophets of Biblical realism, for whom the Will of the Lord and his glory are the preeminent issues.

The whole outlook of Japanese life is permeated deeply by the feudal spirit of loyalty of the vassal to his liege, intimately linked to the spirit of manly vigour and strong discipline expressed in the Samurai and his code of Bushido, in the spiritual heroes of Zen Buddhism and the many scholars and officials who serve as models of probity and rectitude. Shinto is a "primitive" tribal religion characterized by cults of nature and of ancestors and many myths. In Shinto mythology gods are divided into terrestrial (e.g. those belonging to the conquered tribes of Yamato) and celestial (e.g. those belonging to the conquering nation of Kyushu). Being descended from the Sun-goddess Amaterasu of Kyushu the Emperor all cults are under his guardianship so that his ruler-function is called *matsurigoto*, signifying cult-observance. The fervent and ambitious patriotism and naturalism of the Japanese nation has its mythological and metaphysical foundations in Shinto. Whereas the Chinese theocracy is a product of the cyclic movement of nature the Japanese theocracy is isolated from this, with the Japanese nation and dynasty conceived as the central and decisive divine act. "Shinto expresses in mythological forms the self-deification of the Japanese nation, not the sole Lordship and sovereignty of God the Eternal, as is the case in the theocracy conceived in Biblical realism." Shinto is unique as "the only primitive religion that has maintained its independent existence as an institutional religion" (195).

Buddhism has carried more significance for Japan than for China, though it came to Japan from China. Eventually the Emperor became a Buddhist while remaining the head of all cults, e.g. Prince Shotoku Taishi (593-621). All civilizations that have grown on the basis of naturalistic monism and the primitive apprehension of life, as is the case with Japan, place particular importance not on the doctrines and tenets or truth of a religion but on its nature as a "way of life" (*dharma, nomos*) which serves the welfare of the community. On this basis religions are tolerated and granted equal rights.

The procreative force of Japanese Buddhist thinking has been the problem of the relation between illusory phenomenal reality and absolute transcendent Reality. Tendai Buddhism was founded by Dengyo Daishi in the ninth century and understands the absolute to be related to the phenomenal as water is to a wave - "inseparable, indistinguishable, and yet not one." The phenomenal world exists only in human consciousness. Yet the inseparability and indistinguishability of the absolute and the relative means that "[one] psychic moment contains all three thousand worlds" and the attainment of Buddhahood "means the realization of the identity of the Absolute with human consciousness" (198).

The Japanese correspondent to Tantric Buddhism is Shingon which sees the phenomenal and the absolute as united in Mahavairocana Tathagata or Dai Nichi Nyorai. This means that the phenomenal world and the world of the absolute are identical and everything becomes a mirror of reality.

Japanese Buddhism is dominated by idealistic monism arising from the naturalistic monistic foundations of Mahayanism and all products of idealistic monism justify every type of spiritual life.

Zen Buddhism "is the most radical simplification of the way towards deliverance that can be imagined" (199). Discarding intellectual and philosophical speculation, study and ritual techniques and the authority of sutras and masters Buddhahood, involving the rapturous experience of enlightenment (*bodhi, satori*), is realized simply through severely-disciplined contemplation (*dhyana, zen*). Zen is rooted in naturalist religion since Buddhahood is the essence of everything and identical with universal life. All idealistic and vitalistic monism is anthropocentric and conforming with this Zen Buddhahood is the realization of self.

Nichiren (13<sup>th</sup> century), seeking religious certitude and the unification and strengthening of Japan, also, with aggression and intolerance, sought simplification by maintaining the achievement of Buddhahood through belief in the Lotus Sutra as the purest embodiment of the eternal Buddha or Cosmic Soul. Nichiren's "reform movement is virtually Japanese national self-consciousness in Buddhist garb, a Buddhist counterpart of Shinto in its nationalist aspect" (200).

### *Syncretism*

It is a worldwide opinion, among intellectuals and the illiterate, both in place and time that "all religions are ultimately one." Ancient religions and naturalist non-Christian religions are all deeply imbued with this conviction, with the only exceptions being the religions of revelation.

Kraemer speaks of "a bewilderingly indiscriminative assimilation" in Syrian, Japanese, Chinese and Indian religious practices. Chinese universism affords an example where the average man is neither a Confucianist, Buddhist or Taoist but participates alternately in each. He is a religious pragmatist.

All who adhere to one of the naturalist religions have a deep-rooted indifference towards dogma and doctrinal differences. The inherent unity of all these religions results from them "being products of the primitive apprehension of existence and their naturalistic monistic framework" (203). All these religions are characterized by syncretism and religious pragmatism and it would be abnormal if this were not so. This is not capricious or unprincipled, given the nature of these religions, but only consistent.

The connotation of "syncretism" as "the *illegitimate* mingling of different religious elements" (203) could only grow in a Christian atmosphere, being the result of 17<sup>th</sup> century theological controversies in Protestantism which implicitly assumes an absolute standard of reference. But in naturalist religions syncretism has no connotation of being illegitimate and a more adequate term, lacking any value judgment, is amalgamation.

All naturalist religions are anthropocentric being concerned with the *realization* of an end or purpose man has set for himself, whether base, decent or exceedingly noble, e.g. "one's wishes for a good life, consisting in riches, ease, and many children; for rebirth in better conditions of life; for the entrance into Amida's Paradise; for communion with God and experience of His exquisite love; for enlightenment and final deliverance" (204).

"Religion, in its many positive forms, necessarily belongs in this sphere of naturalist religions to the domain of human *psychology*. It is sought primarily for its experience-value, not for its truth-value" (204). Therefore, in naturalist religions it is the quality and nature of religious experience which is *the* standard of measuring the value of a religion. That is, the approach is basically pragmatic.

While there is latitude towards doctrine, with the civilizations of India, China and Japan having "been profusively creative in the field of doctrine and metaphysical speculation" (205), the doctrines of naturalist religions are expressions of relative truth. "Yet, in practice, this fundamental relativism behaves itself as a militant absolutism" (206).

The moral systems of naturalist religions also belong to the relative sphere, being means, whether noble or dubious, to an end. It is a "deep-rooted universal conviction in the East, that the acceptance of the absolute antagonism of good and evil is a rather childish and narrow-minded idea and that the only conception which behoves him who really 'knows' is the '*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*' (above good and evil)" (206).

In the realm of religious truth naturalist religions are remarkably tolerant and yet extraordinarily intolerant with respect to the social aspect of religion. Observance of, and conformity to, the traditional religious behaviour of the group is absolutely obligatory. Typically, so-called "religious" persecutions have little to do with religious doctrine or truth but rather spring from political or social motives. It is therefore better not to speak of tolerance for religious truth but rather of truth-equalitarianism or, even more appropriately, truth-indifferentism.

Real tolerance "presupposes the combination of unswerving obedience to, and vindication of, the authority of absolute and evident truth with acceptance of the liberty of others to reject it or to adhere to other convictions, even though they be considered erroneous." Real tolerance recognizes that "truth can only be really obeyed in perfect spiritual freedom" (208). Anything else involves disobeying and misunderstanding the real nature of truth. It is an intellectualist concept of truth that breeds all doctrinal intolerance. The apostolic model is that of being obedient and joyful *witnesses* rather than *possessors* of the truth that God has mercifully revealed and seeking to persuade others to accept and obey it.

Naturalist religions are permeated by the spirit of syncretism, relativism, pragmatism and subjectivism. These are incarnated in practical forms in the life and practice of millions and in the various rationalized forms of the many religious philosophies. In the case of the latter truth exclusively belongs to the sphere of absolutely pure Essence, with man in his essence being one with relationless Essence, thereby excluding the possibility of a real relationship between the Divine and empirical man. From this standpoint of Pure Essence all naturalist religions are characterized by sameness. To the extent that all naturalist religions are accommodated truths, all is different. Consequently, legitimately co-existing together are monism and pluralism, polytheism and monotheism, being equally true and equally false.

The above shows that there is an abysmal difference “between the ontological apprehension of Ultimate Reality in the naturalist religions and the voluntarist apprehension in Biblical realism” (210).

<i>Naturalist religions</i>	<i>Biblical realism</i>
The Ultimate is relationless, actionless, blissful Pure Essence.	The “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” yearns for relationship with his prodigal sons and constantly acts and creates anew.
The world is an endless series of variegated process that are simultaneously fascinating and disgusting - all is ultimately unreal and meaningless.	The world is God’s creation, “enigmatically perverted by sin, but yet God’s working place, led by Him to its consummation, desperately real, and the place of responsible decisions between God and man” (210).

The enigmatic “exclusivism” of Biblical realism meant that “amidst the tolerant and conforming mystery-cults Christianity alone stood “intolerant” and nonconformist. Radhakrishnan can only regard the Cross as not an offence or stumbling-block to the Hindu by interpreting it in a reductionist manner that sees it as love rooted in self-sacrifice while strongly rejecting the central theocentric motifs of atonement and reconciliation.

#### *Some Debated Questions*

1. Is it right to make a contrast between the spirituality of the East and the materialism of the West?

The view that the East is ‘spiritual’ is nourished by the overwhelming place of religion in life. But religion is founded on naturalism and vitalism. So:

...religion is both the organ by which man’s sublimest achievements in the religious and moral quest are expressed and also the garb in which the unbridled, materialistic instincts of life try to obtain satisfaction (212).

Much of the religious life of mankind is crass materialism, with religious worship and its objects, along with magic, expressing “human self-assertion in religious disguise” and “human exploitation of the so-called ‘divine’ world” (212). Really then the vitalism in religion is universally materialistic and the naturalistic core of religions that spring from the primitive apprehension of existence actually generate and preserve this materialism, with accompanying “higher” systems of mysticism and religious philosophy justifying and sanctioning materialism, given their relativistic concept of religious life.

2. Can the Japanese and especially the Chinese really be said to be religiously minded?

Writers typically are divided as to whether the Japanese are deeply religious or not, with most characterizing the Chinese as irreligious due to their pragmatism and humanism.

“The pragmatist, conformist attitude towards religion which is the rule in China ... certainly does not testify to a deeply religious mood” (214), in contrast to India where the pragmatist and conformist attitude to religion is also very common. But really all

people, everywhere and always, are simultaneously religious and irreligious - religious, as those created for God; irreligious, as those who have fallen away from God through self-assertion. This universal dialectical condition means that at a fundamental level there is barely any difference "between the massive pragmatist religiosity of the East, in which the natural secularism of the human heart is wrapped up in a religious garb, and the outspoken a-religious secularism of modern man" (214).

The present world context is one involving *the destruction and reconstruction of life-and thought- systems*. In this context "the leap from the state of a superstitious, religion-ridden Eastern villager to that of a de-religionized, modernized and secularized one is perhaps not as great as is usually supposed, because under the thick veneer of religion he often is already an outright secularist" (215).

Humanity is characterized by both religious and a-religious irreligion, since nowhere are people *sincerely* religious, in the ultimate sense of "sincerely." For this is only possible when a person recognizes "the prime human necessity of being in the right relation to God, his Creator and his Lord" (215). Only the prophetic theocentric religion of Biblical realism gives birth to the radical sincerity which alone can overcome universal irreligion.

### *Islam*

Though it is a branch from the prophetic stock of Judaism and Christianity it has become, like Roman Catholicism, a syncretistic religion incorporating "theocratic and legalistic Islam, mysticism and various sorts of popular religion, in which the naturalist vein of the primitive apprehension of existence shines through" (216).

Islam is distinguished from naturalist religions by the prophetic message proclaimed by Muhammad as the direct revelation of God and its derivation from Judaism and Christianity. It overstates the case to dub Islam as a Christian heresy given the independent self-consciousness it has possessed from the outset.

In its main, genuine structure Islam is a simple religion with a concise creed: There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Apostle. In its constituent elements and apprehensions Islam is a superficial religion. In keeping with the nature of Islam as a religion involving absolute surrender to God it "might be called a religion that has almost no questions and no answers" (217). It deals unsatisfactorily with the problems of religious and moral life.

Islamic revelation, *wahj*, is externalized and fossilized in a set of immutable divine words, the *Quran*. In Biblical realism, however, revelation means God is "constantly acting in holy sovereign freedom, conclusively embodied in the man Jesus Christ... The foundation of Islam is not, The Word became flesh. It is, The Word became book" (217). This externalization and fossilization of revelation is one of the great marks of superficiality.

Superficiality is also expressed in Islam's clumsy, external conception of sin and salvation. In a facile and unconvincing manner it speaks of the *tabula rasa* of the human mind at birth. Obedience in surrender to the God of Omnipotence is the core of Islam. But obedience in fellowship with the God of Holy Love is the core of Biblical

realism. The eventless relation between God and man in Islam stands in sharp contrast to the eventful relation of Biblical revelation.

Superficiality is also expressed by the way Islam sidesteps the problem of the part played by faith and works in salvation merely distinguishing between intellectual faith and inner conviction. So in dogmatic controversy "this important religious and moral problem of faith and works took the aspect of the relation between inward and outward conformity to Islam as a religious, social and political community", being dislocated from the deeper religious questions as to the significance of faith and works in the problem of salvation.

The riddle of Islam is that despite its superficiality it grips its adherents more tightly than any other religion. Even nominal Moslems are willing to die for Islam or to kill a man deemed to be a defiler of Islam. This is often dubbed "Moslem fanaticism" by Europeans and contrasts with Christianity in which it is only possible and reasonable for dedicated believers to become "martyrs" for the faith.

Also the riddle of Islam is that though so superficial and unoriginal (considering its origin and material) its adherents believe it possesses absolute religious superiority.

From this superiority-feeling and from the fanatical self-consciousness of Islam is born that stubborn refusal to open the mind towards another spiritual world, as a result of which Islam is such an enigmatic missionary object (220).

How might this riddle of Islam be solved? By reference to the core of Islam (the aims of Muhammad) - the strength and weakness of Islam:

- a. Proclaiming God as the sole, almighty God, the Creator and the King of the Day of Judgment.
  - b. Founding a community (*umma*) ruled by the Law of God and His Apostle.
1. *God*.
    - a. Islam is radically theocentric engendering passionate awe as reflected in the common Islamic statements *Allahu akbar* (God is great) and *La sharika lahu* (He has no associate): "God's unity and soleness, His austere sovereignty and towering omnipotence, are burning in white heat within Islam" (220). In *kalam* (the science of dogma) the doctrine of God is the pre-eminent doctrine. Moslems protest against *shirk*, the unpardonable sin of giving God an associate (seen as polytheism). The sole object of meeting together is to join in an act of reverent adoration and worship of God.
    - b. There is a process of *super-heating* in the really religious concepts of Islam. Allah is "white-hot Majesty, white-hot Omnipotence, white-hot Uniqueness. His personality evaporates and vanishes in the burning heat of His aspects." These depersonalized aspects - though there is a personal connotation - are the real objects of religious devotion. "The surrender to Allah, the fundamental attitude in Islam, has that same quality of absolute ruthlessness. The ideal believer, the *abd* (or servant, as Islam says) is, so to speak, personified surrender and nothing else. God's Will becomes virtually august divine arbitrariness" (221).
    - c. "This hyperbolic theocentricity... derives from the fact that man has no real place in the relation of God and man... Man is entirely absorbed in the greatness and majesty of God and vanishes away" (221-222). God is too exalted to have fellowship with man, or to be his Father. The intrinsic unity of the religious and the ethical is destroyed by this hyperbolic

theocentricity and, as a consequence, such problems as that of theodicy and of the cry for a God of righteousness are entirely absent.

2. *Community*. The concept of the *umma* explains even more the tenacious grip of Islam on its adherents:
  - a. "The deepest, the most crucial problem of Islam is that its theocracy from the very first moment, when the *'umma* was born in Medina, has been a thoroughly secularized theocracy" (222-223). This theocratic character means that the *shari'a* (religious law) is absolutely central in Islam and that supreme theological discipline is the *fiqh* (religious jurisprudence), with the recognized religious leaders being the *ulama*, that is, those who know the *shari'a*. This *shari'a* "is virtually the regulation and sanctioning of a medieval society on the basis of revelation" (222). It wasn't primarily the Will of God but Muhammad's desire for more power which really inspired the theocracy. That is, Islam is an example of religious imperialism equated with secularized theocracy. So *shari'a* distinguishes between the *dar-al-islam* (the House of Islam) and the *dar-al-harb* (the House of War).
  - b. An even deeper problem is that this secularization of the theocracy has never been a vexing religious problem for Moslem thinkers, not even for Ghazali. Consequently, the impression is inescapable that "Islam is the religion of 'natural man' notwithstanding its strong religious elements." As Pascal summed it up: "Muhammad chose the way of human success, Jesus Christ that of human defeat" (223).

The above does not comprehend empirical Islam but it does give the whole *essence* of Islam. However, it is necessary to comment on the phenomenon of mysticism which has great significance in nearly all Moslem countries. It is erroneous to seek the roots of this in the Quran for "[original] Islam has no connection whatever with mysticism" (224). Indeed, Islam at its core is anti-mystical and unmystical.

Historically, as Christian populations were Moslemized they naturally took their religious propensities and tendencies with them into Islam. Ghazali, one of the deepest apologists of religion that have ever lived, "made mysticism in Islam from being a very important element in Moslem religious life into a recognized part of the great orthodox system", assigning to *shari'a*, *kalam* and mysticism each its proper place. The severe and fateful limitation of Ghazali was his bondage to the Islamic conception of revelation as the immutable words of God contained in the Quran. As a result "tradition (*naql*), not the living Reality of God, is the source and criterion of religious life" (225). So, notwithstanding his religion of the heart, Ghazali justified and sanctioned legalistic Islam as enshrined in the *shari'a*. Islam counters the modern world with a strengthened, though unjustified feeling of superiority, fed by a defensive attitude that avoids the deeper issues of the essential nature of revelation and of its being a secularized theocracy.

### *Judaism*

Kraemer admits that he lacks personal experience with respect to Jewish missions. At a general level he observes that Israel's religion is an important part of the world of Biblical realism and that Jesus was fully a child of Israel. But the history of Israel and the fate of Judaism demonstrates that revelation, as the self-disclosure of God, "is not a simple process of the divine mind communicating exceptional truth and insight to

the human mind, but is the profound and long-drawn-out struggle of God, who in His revelation is ignored and rejected by man" (227), with the Jews, in this respect, representative of humanity. But because the pith of Biblical revelation is the confession that Christ is Lord the Christian Church has as stringent a duty towards Judaism as it does towards the rest of the non-Christian world and, indeed, more stringent because:

1. The Jewish people and their history, more than any other people, are intimately related to revelation in Christ.
2. Millions of Jews live among Christians, constituting the most obvious objects of the Church's apostolic calling.
3. The empirical Church owes to the Jews a clear demonstration of what Christianity really means.

### Chapter 7. The Present Religious Situation in the Non-Christian World

The whole world is "in transition and revolution, in disintegration and in reconstruction.... All religions, without any exception, are in a time of great crisis." For two reasons political and economic elements play a significant part in this religious crisis:

1. Great changes in the political, economic and social structures of life necessarily impact severely on religions because all of them are virtually civilizations and unities of life.
2. In some cases these changes directly challenge the fundamental principles of these religions (e.g. Turkey, Persia, China).

But religions are not merely in crisis because of inward causes but also because of external causes, in particular the multifarious impact of the Western world: "the great world of primitive apprehensions of existence is assailed by another world that represents the rational apprehension and endeavour to master existence, and which is leavened more or less by the religious and moral impulses of Christianity which derive from the prophetic religion of Biblical realism" (230).

#### *The World of 'Primitive' Peoples*

*Institutional* and *organised* "primitive" religions, along with the "primitive", are passing away among tribally organised groups due to inescapable contact with Western civilization and its political and economic framework. This shatters or shakes the closely interdependent structures of material and spiritual life in tribal societies and also the mighty law of tradition is either abrogated or enters a process of acute devaluation. The moral and religious certitudes of the past are marooned because of the damage done to that from which they are derived, namely the "structures of social cohesion in relationships, in clan organization, in the hierarchies of sex and age-stages" (232). The harmony and equilibrium of life evaporates as one of the key pillars of their religious life, the connection with and worship of ancestors, is destroyed.

In addition, many millions who are not part of tribal groups are little different, given their ancestor worship, propitiatory rites, worship of demons, spirits and gods, observance of sacred times and sacred places, etc. But their greater tenacity is due to the fact that they gain prestige from being part of a so-called "higher" religion such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Though the intellectual and social vessels of paganism are shattered or cracked the sentimental respect for paganism remains strong, though diffused and disoriented. Modern civilization, notwithstanding its strength, having lost its metaphysical background, is unable to provide the new foundation and pattern of life which the devotees of paganism need and which can only really be provided through allegiance to the Gospel.

### *India*

The religious life of the masses has its touching aspects, notably expressions of the deepest yearnings of the human mind. Yet, on the whole, it is characterized by thralldom and bondage. The position of the guru in popular soteriological cults, who is unconditionally obeyed and believed and even worshiped as a god, evidences this. However, the complexity of forces for change in India make it extremely difficult to forecast with any assuredness the religious developments of the near future. Kraemer sees Hindu religious resurgence as essentially a resurgence of religious nationalism and believes this accounts for the fierce character it often evinces.

Kraemer observes,

The Hindu apprehension of life, expressed in the doctrines of *samsara*, *karma*, *maya* and the sole Reality of Atman, is still virtually unbroken and cannot afford a real basis for any activism whatever, except that of the individual struggle to escape *samsara* (243).

Kraemer gives a brief summary of Radhakrishnan's thought given his importance as a modern philosopher of Hinduism, observing that "his eclectic unorganic way of combining Hindu, European and Christian elements in a delusive synthesis affords probably the best symbol of the chaotic and confused state of religious thinking and life in India" (245).

### *China*

As in India so in China "the impact of the West has put in motion the same welter of old and new" (245). It took time but eventually two pillars of the Confucian order passed away: (1) the famous system of examinations (1905); (2) the Imperial House (1912).

Kraemer writes in the wake of Sun Yat-sen who pressed for Nationalism, Democracy and Livelihood. He also writes contemporary with Chiang Kai-shek's addressing of the so-called "national crisis". Kraemer is aware that young Chinese intellectuals are being profoundly influenced by the works of Lenin and Marx and notes the various groups comprising the left wing, all seeing "the great enemy in capitalism and imperialism, all of them thoroughly anti-religious" (248).

Kraemer observes that filial piety is in the process of breaking. He notes a utilitarian attitude towards the religious problem, with intellectuals not concerned with the salvation of the individual soul but with the "necessity to conquer the world anew by industry, science, techniques and political reconstruction." He comments, "Faith in science and in modern humanism, which are rightly felt by their inherent relativism and pragmatism to be akin to Chinese mind-patterns, is therefore in the present Chinese scene a phenomenon of more than semi-religious quality" (249).

In 1916 attempts were made to introduce Confucianism into the Constitution as the religion of the State but this was frustrated by the great resistance met from progressive groups and from Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Still, Confucianism "as an ethical life-pattern, as a habit and attitude of mind, as a distinct species of life-apprehension, is of course still deeply rooted in the life of China" (251).

At the time Kraemer wrote critics did not rate highly Buddhism's importance for modern China, rather regarding it as a decaying religion. But Kraemer suspects that "the pervasive, intangible influence of Buddhism is much greater than is often surmised" (253). The very instability faced by China makes Buddhism attractive through its stress on the transitoriness of existence.

Kraemer observes,

The indispensable condition for genuine social ethics is a profound belief in the reality of the world and of history. This problem of the reality of the world and of history, and of the foundation on which alone it can be solidly maintained, is one of the crucial problems for the great naturalist religions, which all tend by nature to a more or less unqualified illusionism (256).

### *Japan*

The West has impacted Japan differently from India and China, forcing "a break with a long-standing policy of determined isolation from the outside world" which previously expressed "the strong will of Japan to preserve its national integrity and independence" (256-257). Japan is distinct from all other countries in that, as a strong unified state due to prior isolation, it is determined to become increasingly strong and increasingly unified.

Kraemer observes various uncontrollable forces in Japan: "the rapid increase of the population, the effects of industrialization and urbanization, the tensions that arise from the adjustment to modern capitalism and to liberal ideals, and the communistic and socialistic leanings." He also notes "the mingling of fascist and socialist ideals about the structure of society in the imperialist and passionately nationalistic officers of the Army who emerged in the revolt of the 26<sup>th</sup> February 1937." He sees a nation that is "thoroughly agitated... desperately trying to master the mysterious and volcanic forces that have been released by the huge experiment of fitting the inherited structure of life into the new exigencies" (257-258).

In this context Shinto "has developed into a religion of which the core is a magnified tribalism, the glorification and deification of the collective Japanese self." At the threshold of this new period the masses lived "by a sort of vulgar religion, a mixture of Buddhist and Shinto elements, a blend of Shinbutsu" (258), with Buddhism in a decadent condition and its priests largely degraded. But the opening of the Meiji-era also meant the restoration of Shinto as an independent entity. It was Pure Shinto that largely led to the fresh exaltation of the Emperor after 1000 years of "shadowy existence under the Shogunate." Now all "kinds of fascism find their common centre in the conception of 'sacred Japan', a phenomenon arising from the function the Emperor plays as the high priest of the people so that as he worships his divine ancestors expression is given to "the divine creation of the people of Japan and its destiny" (259). The result is that "Shinto has become a militant theocratic imperialism, in which the religious glorification of the Japanese people stirs the passions of political megalomania to fantastic extremes" (260).

Kraemer traces the religious history of Japan from 1871 onwards when, by Imperial Decree, Buddhism and the cult of the Kami (the people following Kodo, the way of the Emperor) were declared separate religions leading to a few years of persecution of Buddhism. Then in 1975 a new policy, allowing for a qualified degree of religious liberty, discriminated between State-Shinto (Jinja Shinto) and the purely religious Shinto of the "sects". While Jinja Shinto was emphatically declared to be no religion, but merely a means of promoting and reinforcing national unification, the fact remained "that the strongly religious nature of this product of artificial bureaucratic domestication" (261) constantly broke through. Indeed, the ritual of Jinja Shinto shrines was full of old nature mythology, with the selling of amulets and the offering of sacrifices and prayers and with the people themselves patently regarding the shrines as places of worship.

At the time Kraemer wrote Buddhism in Japan was considerably weaker than it formerly had been, though, noting signs of a "revival", he comments that "Japanese Buddhism is unquestionably the most alert part, intellectually, of the whole Buddhist world" (265). Kraemer notes a number of considerations which throw doubt on whether this revival has genuine strength and identifies internal problems which "revolve around the struggle for the recovery of a purer Buddhism, free from the shackles of the complicated scholasticisms that are so common in Mahayana Buddhism" (267). Nevertheless, Kraemer does not conclude that Buddhism has had its day noting the "many hidden resources" in Buddhism which make it difficult to predict how it will fare in future times.

### *Islam*

Islam is the only non-Christian religion to experience "a great extension of its territorial and spiritual dominion amongst the 'primitive' peoples" (268), though, in the main, without any systematically organized missionary activity. Kraemer predicted that in "the very near future Africa and those parts of Asia (especially the Dutch East Indies), which were formerly occupied by the various tribal religions, will be wholly ruled by the two great religions, Christianity and Islam..." (269). Consequently, it is the crumbling of the 'primitive' tribal religions that has provided Islam with a great opportunity for expansion.

The modern extension of Islam is due to three main reasons:

1. Western impact has made the tribes religiously homeless and in need of a new spiritual home.
2. The tribes typically encounter the average Moslem as a merchant or lower government agent, unobtrusive yet very self-assertive.
3. Islam makes very moderate religious and moral demands.

The extension of Islam does not incorporate these tribes into a higher religious civilization but into "the stagnant and sterile religious community that Islam has become in the last centuries" (269).

No other world religion "has fostered in its adherents all over the world such a unity of theological attitude, cultural solidarity and theocratic-political sentiment as Islam has." For Islam, as a divinely-sanctioned medieval *Corpus Islamicum*, to adapt and adjust to the modern world means "not so much reform as revolution" (270).

Kraemer compares the responses to the West of conservatives who absolutely reject European culture and those Moslem apologists who argued "that the leading ideas of Europe corresponded with the essence of Islam, if understood the right way and cleansed from the rubbish of many retrograde traditions" (271). However, one of the most amazing and unexpected outcomes of World War 1 was the "recovery of political independence with the ensuing cultural activity in the Arabic-speaking Moslem world" (272), especially the renaissance of Turkey and Iran. Kraemer predicts "that the strenuous occupation with national, political and economic problems will strengthen in the Moslem world the pragmatist valuation of Islam as a religion" (274). Perceptively, he anticipates this will lead to both a stiffening and hardening of Islam and a deviation from genuine religious questioning.

For Moslems in countries with foreign governments Christian missions (*tabshir*) are always identified with colonization or foreign rule (*isti'mar*), and with increasing vehemency, precisely because Islam, being essentially political, becomes a highly explosive instrument in the movement of protest and not an object of truly religious and moral concern or reform. In independent Moslem countries Christian missions are assessed in terms of whether their activities accord with nationalistic goals or not.

Kraemer observes that in nations such as Syria, Palestine, Transjordan, Tunis, Morocco and India "a great many of the intellectuals... are as private persons indifferent to all religions, but in their public life are staunch and passionate defenders of Islam as the symbol of group-solidarity" (276). Kraemer surveys the state of Islam in the Egypt and Turkey of his day, acknowledging the future is uncertain in both cases. For example, commenting on the secularization of Turkey, while noting that Islam is prized for its unitary value (so that to insult Islam or Muhammad is severely punished) he comments: "Yet, to ring the death-knell over [Islam in Turkey] would certainly be too rash in this present world of startling revolutions" (280). Similarly, he states, after reviewing the veiled secularization of Iran under Riza Shah Pevlevi: "Again we have to repeat that the future of Islam and of religion in Iran is unpredictable." With acute insight he warns,

The moral emptiness of secularism must in the long run, when the nationalist elation and tension have diminished, become manifest and reveal its devastating aspect. Islam has been tamed and clipped, but not eliminated. Dictatorial rules are by the nature of the case full of quick and startling results, but they are uncertain because they depend on incalculable personal elements (282).

## Chapter 8. The Missionary Approach

The previous chapters have prepared the ground for what is now the proper subject of the book.

Lessons learned:

1. It is erroneous to approach all non-Christian religions as being totally black. The inertia of these religions is also accompanied by natural vitality and tenacious strength and the primitive apprehension of existence that underlies these religions has produced good as well as evil.
  - a. Christianity must not be identified with a particular "Christian" civilization. There are in fact many striking similarities between historical Christianity and other religions, with "startling correspondences in psychological experience and theological expression" (285), all standing to demonstrate

that all people are essentially religious beings. In all religions, including empirical Christianity, whether naturalist, mystical or moralist, are to be found the most sublime and most degraded expressions.

- b. The major difference between historical Christianity and other religions is that the latter develop apprehensions inherent in and fundamental to those religions, whereas historical Christianity involves misapprehensions of the prophetic religion of Biblical realism. In all religions, including Christianity, high and pure expressions of religious and moral life plus appalling and abject phenomena are natural, being expressions of man's double nature. Consequently, it is a distortion, arising from a distorted view of human nature, to either overstress the horrible depths of these religions or to overstress the heights of these religions. For Christians to adopt a mentality of superiority is not only absurd from the standpoint of cultural history but also violates the very foundations of essential Christianity in which the Gospel treats the real believer in Christ as a forgiven sinner.
2. Non-Christian religions are primarily complex civilizations and social structures. Consequently the missionary enterprise must recognize that:
    - a. Social structures are often unusually tenacious.
    - b. The decline or survival of religions is more dependent on political, social and cultural factors than upon factors concerned with direct religious experience (remembering "religion is a complex cultural, political and social entity" [287]).
    - c. It is improbable that non-Christian religions will be overthrown by an effort to replace them with Christianity. This will only happen because of the collective working of constituent political, social and cultural factors and this lies beyond human ability to effect.
    - d. It is simplistic to conceive of the displacement of the dominance of another religion by Christianity as a victory of truth over error, since this can only be effected by the working of many political and cultural factors.
    - e. Consequently, all missionary work must aim to provide a "clear and persevering witness in words and acts to Christian truth and life and the building up of living Christian communities, trustfully leaving to God what He will do with the work of His servants. Modern missions must strive for a purely religious revolution through moral and religious persuasion" (287-288). After Constantine and in the Middle Ages the victory of Christianity as a *social* phenomenon was successfully sought, with Roman-Greek paganism and various kinds of West European heathenism being overthrown largely as a result of political and cultural measures and revolutions. The essential tenor of modern missions means that it is inconceivable to try to repeat this.
  3. Through the witness and activities of missions, the religious, moral and social outlook in the non-Christian world has to a considerable degree become permeated and leavened by "Christian" ideas, ideals and standards.
    - a. Modern expressions of the ancient religions incorporate many ideas and motives gleaned from Christianity. Further, "Christian modes of worship, or religious education, nurture and propaganda are freely used and assimilated" (288). "This *indirect* influence of Christian missions on the

religious and on the whole social and cultural, and by virtue of that, even on the political, evolution of the modern East is really enormous" (289).

- b. It is naïve to think that such permeation is something with which missions should be satisfied or that it constitutes embryonic Christianity since this "tacitly assumes that conscious and exclusive loyalty to Christ and to what His life, His words and His work mean, is the natural outgrowth of idealistic attitudes and ideas" (289). At complete odds with this is the fact that the prophetic religion of Biblical realism is the "crisis" of all religions, philosophies, idealisms and worldviews, without exception.
- c. Many non-Christian peoples are willing to acknowledge Christ as one of the highest religious figures of human history, yet will not acknowledge him as the Lord of life and will reject him as such, even as they continue to venerate him, as Gandhi did.
- d. As merely a permeating religion, Christianity can never be "the dominant moulder of religious and moral life", since, *socially* speaking, it must be "the officially recognized and dominant spiritual force" or "a clearcut, self-conscious religious entity" (290). Notwithstanding legitimate criticism of institutional Christianity it is a simple fact that "it is impossible to keep the essence of our religion alive unless it works through some human institution." To be the "more or less influential factor within a people and a civilization" Christianity must be "the tacitly recognized spiritual authority" either as "a different religion or life-apprehension."
- e. The permeation of Christianity actually has "the effect of stiffening the mind against religious change" instead "of predisposing the mind in its favour" (291). For the "great non-Christian religions have utilized the permeation of Christian ideas and ideals for their own internal and external strengthening", so that these do not provide stepping-stones to Christianity. So, for example, it was erroneous to dub Gandhi and Tagore "unbaptised Christians" (Heiler). Rather, the Christian elements in their thought-world have made them "invigorated Hindus", who incorporate "an unmistakable element of irritation in their attitude towards Christianity".

A break with one's religious past is a necessary consequence of *deciding* for Christ and the world he stands for, something that goes beyond merely having a sympathetic attitude towards Christ's person and teaching. Recognition of the real implications of the permeation of Christianity is necessary to guard against "vain expectations and wrong missionary directives" (292).

4. The "only valid motive and purpose of missions is and alone can be to call men and peoples to confront themselves with God's acts of revelation and salvation for man and the world as presented in Biblical realism, and to build up a community of those who have surrendered themselves to faith in and loving service of Jesus Christ" (292). This is the apostolic motive.
  - a. All other motives and purposes are secondary and of varying importance. If they take the place of the apostolic motive then mission work becomes untenable and, in the long run, will die due to its lack of valid foundation. Such other motives, if they usurp the apostolic motive, "transform the Christian Church into a goodwill agency for the diffusion of refined and cultured idealism, which has lost all intrinsic relation with the central apostolic consciousness that we are to be witnesses to God and His

revelational dealing with man and the world" (293). Further, if the foreign religious civilization refuses our help, notwithstanding the nobility and charitableness of spirit in which it is offered, then, "from the standpoint of secondary motives and purposes that have been converted into primary ones, no valid answer to this argument" (293) can be given. It remains subjectivistic and subject to competitive counter-claims from other religious civilizations if we contend in an invalid absolutist manner that "Christ is the only way by which men can reach a satisfying experience of God" or that "the central concern of Christian mission is to be found in 'the highest spiritual interests of mankind'" (294).

- b. The apostolic motive bypasses questions of superiority in the field of cultural achievement or psychological religious experience, since it purely stands on the objective and plain reality of God's revelation in Christ, so that "it is quite immaterial whether the world asks for it or not" (294). Only the apostolic motive purges us from all kinds of superiority-feeling. "It is clear as daylight that once the cardinal fact is grasped that the apostolic theocentric apprehension is the only valid Christian apprehension, the Christian Church has not only the right but also the duty to take conversion and evangelization as prime necessities for mankind" (295).
- c. The prophetic and apostolic character of Christianity is lost when emphasis is laid on "sharing religious experience" and social service, in substitution for evangelization, since these presuppose a concept of religion as having primarily a psychological, cultural and immanent value.
- d. There are particular difficulties associated with the concepts of evangelization, proselytism and conversion, that explain much of the confusion and opposition they arouse:
  - i. Much that goes by the name of evangelization, proselytism or conversion is not to be identified with apostolic obedience and witness since it "often looks more like the mishandling of another man's spiritual life, although it springs from the conviction of missionary obligation" (297).
  - ii. All over the world non-Christian religious systems are "in a stage of re-assertive consolidation that reveals itself in a hyperbolic sentiment of group-solidarity" (297). Being naturalistic in character they don't understand the radical meaning of Christian conversion. Further they stress the necessity of religious conformity as an expression of group-loyalty.
- e. While "sharing religious experience" and "social service" are invalid as definitions of the real missionary motive and purpose they are valid and valuable as methods of approach and as expressions of the Christian mind. There are particular reasons why these approaches are often so stressed (though they must never be confused with the motive and purpose of mission):
  - i. The dread of all superiority-feeling.
  - ii. The desire to have spiritual give and take which feels like real human contact.
  - iii. An aversion to "dogmatic" religion and many expressions of a too one-sided emphasis on preaching.
  - iv. The need to demonstrate in practice that being a real Christian involves a new quality of life.

### *General Remarks on Approach*

The unchangeable revelation of Biblical realism is the standard of reference for the religious life of all mankind. This clarifies our approach towards non-Christian religions and clarifies the problem of the point of contact, delivering us from delusive endeavours, such as trying to find a starting point towards Christ and Christian truth in "higher" or seemingly kindred elements of other religions.

So, for example, the practical monotheism and theism of the *bhakti*-religions provides no real point of contact for Christian theism:

1. The practical monotheistic theism of the *bhakti*-religions is a secondary and inorganic growth. For the determining factor in every religion is its total religious apprehension, which in *bhakti*-religion is anthropocentric, soteriocentric and not theocentric.
2. Christianity is no religious philosophy with a theistic God-idea, but demands total, unshared allegiance to God as Lord who is not promoted "as the most satisfying conception of God, which is the end of religious philosophy" (300).
3. Faith and grace in Christianity and the *bhakti*-religions are embedded in a totality of religious apprehension entirely different from each other.
4. The fictitious similarity serves more as a barrier than a bridge, with the *bhaktas* showing no more inclination to accept so-called kindred Christianity than others, revealing the great gulf that is really there.
5. Pandita Ramabai, after her conversion to Christianity, "deprecated all adaptation and assimilation and exclusively stressed the contrast, by virtue of her deep religious sense" (300).

While, fundamentally speaking, there is no point of contact, there are great opportunities of practical, *human* contact occasioned by the religious needs and aspirations in these great religious systems.

When we are speaking about the approach of Christianity, as a total religious system, to non-Christian religions, as total religious systems, then there is only difference and antithesis. This must be so because they are radically different. "To minimize this results in a weakening and blurring of the true character of Christianity" (300). "To remain true to its essential character is also to-day the unbreakable law for Christianity" (301) just as this was the principal cause of its victory in the ancient world when it rejected all other gods and proclaimed the absolute monarchy of the One Living God.

However, the aggressive, controversial attitude towards the non-Christian religions formerly adopted by the modern missionary enterprise, in its obedience to this exclusive character, "was a wrong intellectualist expression of a right intuition" (301). It created "the least favourable atmosphere for a deep and humane religious encounter", being inevitably interpreted as offensive pride and deservedly being met by irritation and counter-aggression. Consequently, on religious and psychological grounds this aggressive, controversial attitude must be entirely abandoned:

1. On the religious ground: the apostolic nature of missions implies a radical humility that does not treat God's revelation in Christ as our religious achievement or possession, but as God's free gift. So we gratefully and persuasively urge people to surrender to the Lord.

2. On the psychological ground: "it is unwise and unfair, and therefore arouses opposition on the part of deep-seated loyalties."

However, it is an over-reaction against this aggressive controversial approach to adopt a "sympathetic approach of tracing similarities and trying to build bridges on the assumption that Christianity is the crown of the best in the non-Christian religions" (301), for this is pure fiction, overlooking the radical difference between the Christian revelation and other religions.

This is also a huge psychological mistake. While it is necessary for the missionary to show open-mindedness and genuine sympathy for the best in other religions, to assume that Christianity is the crown of these religions actually involves a hidden feeling of superiority, which is rightly sensed as condescension. Even if the Christian judgment about their religion was fair and right, non-Christians naturally think this judgment is unfair - the exact opposite of what this mode of approach is trying to achieve.

We need another approach which, on the one hand, steers away from "the aggressive and controversial assertion of the Christian claim of paramount exclusive religious truth" and, on the other hand, from the "sympathetic" approach of Christianity as crown and fulfillment.

This approach is the evangelistic approach, provided by "the announcement of the Message of God which is not adaptable to any religion or philosophy, and which yet has to be presented in a persuasive and winning manner so as to evince the real Christian spirit of service to God and to man." This evangelistic approach has three aspects: evangelism, adaptation and service.

1. Evangelism
2. Adaptation (next section)
3. Service (Chapter 10)

### Evangelism

For the missionary as a living human being to approach any other human beings he must understand their religious and general human background. This means:

1. He is obliged to present Christian truth in a way which relates itself to the particular reality in which they live. This requires of the missionary or evangelist self-denying training which aims at a translation of meanings and not of detached words. It follows that an open and truthful rather than an antagonistic attitude is demanded, since the dominant motivation is to win people for Christ.
2. He will, as he presents Christian truth, remember they are primarily human beings like himself rather than non-Christians and that, therefore, he must address himself to the universal problems of aspiration, frustration, misery and sin.
3. He will remember that Christian truth is vitally related to all spheres and problems of life, the most common and trivial as well as the most elevated.
4. He will generally avoid controversy, but not completely. He will avoid intellectualist/irreligious controversy which feeds bitterness and estrangement. But there is a higher form of controversy which he will not avoid for the sake of the moral, religious and intellectual prestige of Christianity. Jesus Himself in a very rewarding and stimulating way employed a method of controversy which penetrated to the depth of things. But this too presupposes a "real knowledge of, and sympathy with, the people among whom one works" (305).

5. He will know that the exquisite purity of the Message and even a great compass of knowledge and insight will prove largely impotent unless, by what he himself really *is*, he inspires trust and confidence. "We may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, we may have such absolute faith that we can move mountains from their place, but if we have no love, we have *nothing*" (307).

#### Adaptation

At conversion Paul counted his religious past and everything else as "loss compared to the supreme value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3:8). Yet this does not imply that Paul despised his religious past. Indeed, Kraemer sees Paul speaking veneration his religious past in this same passage. So he comments:

However, this does not imply that Paul despises his religious past. He speaks with great reverence about it in the same passage, for although "for Christ's sake" and in comparison to the supreme knowledge of Christ it is "veriest refuse," in itself it is the world of human moral and religious endeavour, in which it becomes manifest that man, though fallen, is still related to God and has still the Law of God written in his heart (308).

[To capture Paul's total perspective here we need to note also the following references: Rom 3:1-2; 7:7-12, 14; 9:3-5; 10:1-2; 11:1; Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14-15, 42-43; 14:1; 15:22-29; 16:13; 17:1-3, 10, 17; 18:4, 7-8, 19; 19:8; 21:17-30 (note carefully verses 21 and 24); 22:1-3, 12; 23:1-8 (note especially verse 6: "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee"); 24:10-21; 25:8; 26:1-8; 28:17; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 1:14; 1 Tim 1:8]

#### Both Paul and John

expressed and formulated the essential meaning and content of the revelation in Christ against the background of, and in conflict with, the moralistic and legalistic conception of religion in Judaism, and with the naturalistic and Gnostic mysticism of the paganism of the time. So it is obvious and legitimate that Christian truth must be at present expressed against the background of, and in conflict with, the moral and religious content of the non-Christian religions...

Adaptation in the deepest sense does not mean to assimilate the cardinal facts of the revelation in Christ as much as possible to fundamental religious ideas and tastes of the pre-Christian past, but to *express* these facts by wrestling with them concretely, and so to present the Christian truth and reveal at the same time the intrinsic inadequacy of man's religious efforts for the solution of his crucial religious and moral problems.

In the light of the revelation in Christ all of "the central religious problems that crop up in all civilizations, religions and periods of history" can be categorized as follows:

1. The primitive or naturalist apprehension of the totality of existence: The universal religions of traditional and social cohesion and of mysticism, with all real mysticism being the child of the naturalist apprehension.
2. The rationalist and idealist apprehension of the totality of existence (a variation of the primitive apprehension, with a strong independent character): All forms of idealism in the shape of ethical or religious monisms.
3. The prophetic apprehension of the totality of existence: All forms of moralism and legalism.

All of these attempts to apprehend the totality of existence are "somehow conceived as a way of salvation" (309). The New Testament revelation in Christ is expressed in terms that reflect engagement with these attempts. Not that Peter and John identified adaptation as a special problem. For them what mattered was the

"*expression of the revelation of Christ and what it meant*" (309; Kraemer's emphasis). So, in appropriating language from the Old Testament, Judaism, Greek philosophy, Oriental Gnosis and the mystery religions, there is no assimilation to these elements, nor even an intentional refutation of them, simply a vigorous presentation and formulation of the revelation. For example, "the Logos-idea, the offspring of monistic religio-philosophical thinking, was used to express the Incarnation, the scandal of all monistic religious philosophy" (309).

All of these erroneous ways of salvation disregard the deepest human problem, "which is that God alone can solve it and that the only adequate way is the wayless way of man's recognition and apprehension of this divine solution by faith" (310).

It is as Paul is entirely absorbed in expressing the truth that he reveals gulfs and bridges though he himself is not directly intending to do so. That is, as Paul employs terms used, for example, in mystery cults he is doing so to forcefully express *the opposite character of the prophetic religion of revelation* (311; Kraemer's emphasis). So 2 Corinthians 3:18 appropriates terms borrowed from the sacramental rites and mystical experiences in mystery-cults which involved the initiate having a vision of the mystery deity that resulted in oneness with the deity. Yet Paul uses these terms to express the opposite since they don't become God or Christ, but, remaining distinct, "receive and partake in the glory that shines forth from Him" (311). Nor for Paul is this "the achievement of religious virtuosi", but a gift to all believers.

Similarly, Romans 6 uses terms of death and resurrection that are strongly redolent of ideas and practices in mystery religions, yet to express the very opposite of what these mystery religions were seeking. Instead of being deified or transmuted into a higher kind of nature, Paul uses these terms to teach that "to believe in Christ is to become a quite new moral and religious being as the old self has died, free from slavery to sin, and the new self has arisen, alive to God in Jesus Christ" (311-312).

So, being out of step with this New Testament model, Pandita Ramabai's avoidance of Indian religious terms in her Bible translation was unnatural and mistaken. Christian truth experiences incarnation as it freely uses the ideas and thought-forms of other religions to express itself, though it will always fall short of the New Testament example in this.

Kraemer asks why the problem of adaptation and of the indigenization of Christianity in modern missions should be such a burning issue. Adaptation was not a conscious problem for Jesus and the Apostles. This was not because of an eschatological outlook which made the New Testament situation and our situation irrelevant to each other. Indeed, the very prophetic and religious radicalness of Jesus and the Apostles caused them to bend all things into tools for their witness and message. But another reason why adaptation was not a conscious problem was because Christianity was entirely new. Consequently, adaptation and indigenization has now become an arduous problem for modern missions.

For the Christian Churches of the West have grown up in cultural environment which is in various ways allied with Christianity as brought and interpreted by the Western Christian Churches. This means that in both content as well as form it is utterly foreign. Since non-Christian religions identify community and religion they "inevitably

regard as foreign every religion that is no product of the soil and of its own history" (314).

Adaptation is a very urgent problem for modern missions for these reasons, plus "the fact that the Europeans who are the bearers of Christianity belong to the politically, economically and culturally dominant race of foreigners" (314).

Kraemer laments the lack of real creativity and the expression of a high degree of impotence in addressing this problem. Western missionary agencies have shown a great lack of imagination and of flexibility of mind. "They consider their own theological approach, their own forms of ecclesiastical life and of worship, etc. in the main those that are *normal* for the African or Asiatic Christians as well" (316).

Further, there are anti-adaptationists who hold that the unique and final character of Christianity precludes all modifications to fit or please another cultural and social situation. But this

simply means to identify one's own peculiar theological and ecclesiastical rigidity and lack of cultural and mental imagination with the eternal validity of the Gospel, and to overlook the solid fact that all our Western Christianities, theologies and ecclesiastical forms are adaptations and consequently relative, and often not very successful, expressions of the Biblical religion of revelation. It is a truly remarkable and pathetic fact that those who are the champions of the eternal and absolute validity of the Gospel perpetrate so easily the fatal mistake of raising the relative, historical expression, the earthen vessel, to the status of the absolute divine act and gift. It is one of the most subtle forms of idolatry (316-317).

Yet many enthusiasts for adaptation and indigenization inadequately deal with the theological, psychological and sociological problems that are inherent. Instead of using indigenous ways "to bring Christian truth to its most vigorous and clear expression", they recast Christianity into an indigenous philosophy of life. In this way supposedly compatible Christian elements end up sanctioning the dominant elements of the pre-Christian apprehension of existence.

Typically, such adaptationists, reflecting their aversion to institutional and dogmatic Christianity, simplistically treat Christian ideals and ideas as if they were disembodied. It is naïve to assume indigenous Christians have the creativity to develop their own expression of Christianity the constitutes a valid expression of the Biblical religion of revelation. Further, it must be remembered that Christianity in Africa and Asia does not enter a social and cultural vacuum. So the problem of adaptation is inescapable. In order that the religion of revelation be expressed in indigenous forms that are a true and vigorous expression of its real character, it is necessary that there be

a deeper conception of what is implied in obedience to and ambassadorship for Christ, for wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor iii. 17), freedom not to do what one likes, but what He likes (318).

Christians in the Younger Churches are seeking "an indigenous expression of Christianity that will deliver their religion from the blighting curse of foreignness" (318). In understandable exasperation, there is an unfortunate tendency for them to become preoccupied with the complaint of foreignness rather than with the expression of the essential Christian religion. Often, when they try their own way of expression cardinal and essential elements of the Christian revelation become confused with

cultural idiosyncrasies of the West or with mythological crudities. Due to a religious past that rebels against the prophetic character of the Christian religion and a lack of religious and theological guidance the repudiation of one's own native religion and the consideration of incarnation or reconciliation is sidelined.

Nationalistic motivation also seriously undermines adaptation. They so prize the cultural and religious heritage of their beloved country that for them adaptation means amalgamation of indigenous and Christian elements. The tendency is for the cardinal life-apprehensions of their cultural and religious heritage to remain the dominant tendencies, subject only to some modification due to Christian influences. They are more concerned with saving and rehabilitating their higher cultural and religious heritage than in "trying to find the way for a vigorous translation of essential Christianity through indigenous means" (319). Syncretism is one result of this general religious confusion.

Some thoughtful Eastern Christians, especially in China and Japan, are more cautious towards programs of adaptation or assimilation. In China the question is asked whether adaptation is to ancient or modern China. For the very small number of Japanese Christians, immersed in an urban culture, it is essential to have a clearcut, well-defined conception of Christianity to prevent their own assimilation to the overwhelmingly non-Christian atmosphere and to maintain their Christian self-consciousness.

But most indigenous Christians in Africa and Asia don't bother about the problem of adaptation and the foreignness of Christianity. Objectively, their indigenous and spontaneous faculties of religious expression are indeed handicapped by the problem of foreignness, as they are "obliged to move in the awkward and uncongenial framework of Western modes" (321). But they don't bother because they cherish these Western modes as a precious tradition and a symbol of social prestige. Since these were key elements in the religion of their pagan past, these two apprehensions are primitive.

Kraemer notes two other features that must be considered to understand the problem of adaptation:

1. Sincere attempts around the world to adapt the expression of Christianity to environmental conditions with respect to evangelistic approach, forms of worship, architecture, institutional forms and theological formulations.
2. More unintentional adaptation is occurring than intentional, both in praiseworthy and deplorable ways.

The problem of adaptation is how to genuinely translate Christianity into indigenous terms in such a way that its relevancy to their concrete situations becomes evident. This presupposes both "a thorough grasp of what Christian truth is and of the material in which it must be expressed" (323). The first sweeps away "the religious confusion in which missionary thinking is ensnared" and the second "frees us from our timidity and enslavement to our traditional ways", teaching "us to utilize the many instruments that lie ready to hand in the religious, social and cultural traditions of the non-Christian world" (323).

All adaptation and indigenization is grounded in religious inspiration, not intellectual syntheses (as per Heiler's theoretical attempt). The latter must be related to an actual development of the spiritual life. The former involves new religious insights and attitudes seeking for characteristic expression. *Right* cultural syntheses are not the product of premeditated intellectual constructions but "always the result of a long and living development" (324).

The problem of adaptation emerges in the stress of concrete life and the crucial point is as per the point of contact. That is, it cannot be formulated in a catalogue or guide book, but presupposes an

apostolic urge to pave the way for Christ and stimulate the growth of communities consisting of Christian men and women, who in the way they express Christianity are not clumsy imitations of Western Christianities, but have the flavour of their own environment (324).

Non-Westerners differ profoundly from Westerners in the ways they feel and express things. Chinese, African and Asian minds are synthetic and not analytic, concrete and not abstract, with a fondness for expression in metaphorical language, in proverbs and parables.

Christian theology has always freely used the various thought-patterns available, e.g. Platonic and Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic-coloured Aristotelian philosophy:

To witness to and express the revelation in Christ means practically always to do it in a language that has a radically different religious background and tendency, because this is in every concrete instance the language that is available (326).

The real problem is not the use of the rich religious and philosophical terminology of the great non-Christian religious civilizations, but *how* to use it. To avoid using such terminology is not only to be at odds with the New Testament model and despise the natural medium, but also to fail to recognize that truly converted indigeous Christians will bend these inadequate and often uncongenial terminologies into tolerable tools.

Unquestionably, there are great dangers in all this. Because Christian truth is incommensurable, all human speaking about it is speaking in "foreign tongues". The Apologists in the first centuries illustrate how the use of religious and philosophical foreign tongues may just as much distort and falsify the revelation in Christ as express it. For their main concern was to justify Christian truth before the judgment-seat of Greek thought and to show it cohered with the best in pagan thought, rather than to express the revelation as pithily as possible. So they ended up producing a religious philosophy that placed monotheism in the centre.

For example, Origen was preoccupied with the mythological and mystic trend of Platonic thinking rather than with the trend of Biblical realism. While emotionally he was a Christian he was intellectually more than half a pagan.

The terminologies and thought-patterns of the great religious philosophies that have evolved from the naturalist apprehensions of life exert "a strong pull towards presenting the Christian truth as a religious philosophy, e.g. a theistic or an ethical one" (328), something against which the prophetic religion of Biblical realism rebels:

The real programme is not to relate the thought of Christianity to the thought of India or China or another civilization, but to *express* it through these different heritages, and then see whether this in various cases may be called relating or not (328).

Those who substitute for the Jewish Old Testament the great documents of the non-Christian religions are guilty of a deep-seated religious and theological confusion. For the "naturalist-monistic apprehension of the 'higher' non-Christian religions stands in marked contrast to the prophetic apprehension embodied in the Old Testament" (328-329). Many who make this substitution find the notion of fulfillment appealing:

Of vital significance to this whole situation was the fact that, although being emotionally fervent and convinced Christians, intellectually many missionaries and indigenous Christian intellectuals has a more or less relativist conception of Christianity, springing from the environmental naturalistic apprehension of religion and from modern humanism and pragmatism (329).

But the Old Testament and the New Testament are indissolubly connected. The cardinal elements of New Testament faith are inexplicable apart from the Old Testament.

...it is...an adulteration of feeling and thinking to treat the documents of radically naturalist, unprophetic religions, which, because of their cyclic conception of life, lack all sense of the vital relation of God to history, as the introduction to the basic elements of the prophetic religion of Biblical realism (332).

The "foreignness" of Christianity is due to two factors:

1. It has been brought by Westerners who transplanted their Western approaches.
2. The presentation of Christianity follows "the dogmatical lines that have resulted from the trend of theological development peculiar to the West" (332).

But church planting in other parts of the world is not merely a problem of evangelistic approach, but "of continuing and building a historic Christian community" (333). It is important that the Younger Churches hold fast to the religious heritage of the Christian Church, but doctrinal rigidity and a lack of missionary and apostolic flexibility create a widespread and lamentable condition: "the unimaginative use of standard dogmatic terminology that is largely unintelligible to those who listen to it" (334). Those who communicate the Gospel must interpret or translate, that is, impart, "the content of the Christian revelation to those concerned, not in a way we find correct according to our doctrinal standards, but in a way that can convey *meaning* to their minds and consciences, and that expresses intelligibly the contents of the revelation" (334).

It is also high time "to become very serious about the terrible way in which the missionary agencies of the West hamper Christianity in the East by transplanting their denominational differences" (335):

To afflict [the Younger Christian Churches]... with our denominational accents and differences and make our Presbyterian, Anglican, Lutheran or other Catechisms the standard manuals for their religious imagery and vocabulary is a religious injustice, a missionary mistake, and an intellectual and psychological error (335).

Rather, Western missionary agencies need to adopt Ruth's towards Naomi: Your problems are my problems.

## Chapter 9. The Missionary Approach (continued)

### *Africa*

While tribal and “primitive” religions are found throughout Asia, in the Dutch East Indies and in Australia, Kraemer focuses attention on Africa, arguing it is a fitting paradigm for tribal religions for three key reasons:

1. Its great importance in the present period of world transition.
2. The very varied nature of missionary activity in Africa.
3. The tension characterizing the problems arising from the clash of Western civilization with primitive worlds and from missionary activity under peoples with tribal religions.

The present Christian approach with respect to African tribal and “primitive” paganism involves two great areas of life:

1. Paganism as a system of religious belief and emotion.
2. Paganism as a system of social structure and institutions.

In seeking to identify what should be the leading ideas in a Christian approach the following factors need to be borne in mind:

1. The extremely severe clash between Western civilization and the ancestral structure of life.
2. The contrast of the economic and political interests of black and white people, resulting in an incomparably bitter race problem in Africa.
3. The perception that Christianity is a foreign religion - the white man’s religion.
4. The recognition that the ancestral African structure of life involves many precious values.

In 1926 a conference at Le Zoute recommended that the Gospel be seen as “the fulfilment of that towards which the Africans groped in the past” (338). According to this view Africans have been gradually prepared for the Gospel. But it is a radical misconception of the true nature of the Christian revelation and of the nature of paganism to think primarily in terms of a *preparatio evangelica*.

The Le Zoute position is unwitting romanticism. “The deep emotional vein, that runs through it comes from having fallen in love with ‘primitive’ institutions, attitudes and capacities” (340). Rather”

... the dominating motive in the whole Christian approach has to be, How can we translate and transpose Christianity into living language and into living forms in this particular environment, *for the sake* of Jesus Christ and *for the sake* of what is implied in His person, His life and His work? (341)

But anthropological research has great value for Christian mission, via which the missionary body learns open-mindedness:

not for the sake of anthropology, but *for the sake of doing the missionary task well and making the Christian approach an intelligent, constructive one* (341).

Still, the missionary must keep in mind “the fact that the anthropologist has a different attitude and approach from his own” (342). The anthropologist “is prone to evince a strongly appreciative and often a conservative attitude, because to him a tribe is a cultural unit and he treats the object of his study in the spirit of a cultural biologist” (342). Against this Julian Huxley warns that, in a time of massive and

inevitable transition, "existing native institutions should never be fetishes, but ought to be made, if possible, stepping-stones" (342).

Unlike the anthropologist, the missionary is a revolutionary. This is essential because preaching and planting Christianity requires "a frontal attack on the beliefs, the customs, the apprehensions of life and the world, and by implication (because tribal religions are primarily social realities) on the social structures and bases of primitive society" (342). Consequently, peoples and societies and religions are not viewed primarily or solely cultural entities. They can not be viewed "with an air of indifferent or sympathetic detachedness". Rather they are all human groupings, spheres of life, which must be viewed in terms of their relatedness to God and what His revelation in Christ.

If missionaries do not make an energetic use of the results of anthropological research then they are not good revolutionaries, but blind ones. The Christian approach must combine three things:

1. A fervent apostolic attitude that confronts all peoples, societies and religions with the revelation in Christ as contained in Biblical realism, entreating them to surrender in obedience to it.
2. A "great self-denying effort to recognize the relativity of our own accustomed religious, cultural and ecclesiastical apprehensions and patterns" (343), which as such, are frequently inapplicable to the peoples we are seeking to reach.
3. An obligation to use "in a creative and imaginative way the mental and social means of indigenous expression that in the course of history have become their congenial modes of expression, or eventually to reject them", motivated by a desire "to find the best means for a vital expression of Christianity" (344). We don't make such choices on the basis of our own attraction or aversion to such means "for some reason *extraneous to this particular situation*" (344).

In utilizing the beliefs and expressions of people we seek to reach with the Gospel there are three major considerations to keep in mind:

1. When the apostolic concern is our prime motive of action we will not only be eager to unveil Christ and his significance, but also to seek in people's beliefs and expressions elements that can serve as a human starting-point.
2. It is false and disappointing in the long run, to build the whole structure of Christian truth on the *foundation* of vaguer "higher" notions about God and the fate of man. It is okay to use such ideas pragmatically but to use them as the *basis* of a more systematic explanation of Christian truth distracts the mind from the only valid point of orientation, the prophetic religion of Biblical realism.
3. While urgently seeking to show people that the Gospel addresses their actual needs, aspirations and frustrations, we must never forget "the most-needed approach is always a vivid presentation of God's dealings with man and the world as depicted in the Bible" (345). Wide missionary experience has shown that the creation story has the recruiting power of that which is the really new, in keeping with the "unerring instinct in man that the most important thing in a new religion is not that it is a further development or a more distinct affirmation of what he knew already, but that it is really something new" (345). It is not consciousness of sin or of the personality of Jesus that usually serves as the first avenue for understanding the relevancy of Christianity, but

the realisation of the unity of mankind through the One Creator. It is via a longer contact with the world of the Bible that consciousness of sin develops: "Not the consciousness of sin brings men to Christ, but the continued contact with Christ brings them to consciousness of sin" (345).

Tribal people think religion and morality mean "correct ritual and social behaviour, customs and laws, a moral and religious code of which the ancestors are the guardians. The tribe and the ancestors are a community of the living and the dead" (346). This communal conception presents opportunities and stumbling blocks for the communication of the Gospel.

In Biblical realism the Christian Church "is the true fellowship of believers in Christ, their Head", with the sacraments expressing such fellowship.

*Using* this communal conception of life leads us to devote attention to the building up of Christian congregations representing real fellowships under the authority of Christ, especially as Western impact is quickly causing the disintegration of tribal life.

The stumbling blocks arise from the pagan idea of religious and moral life as being thoroughly legalistic. It is a direct consequence of the social idea of religion that sin is only viewed in an external way. Further, an inevitable moralistic and legalistic attitude develops among pagan converts and missionaries as it becomes necessary to address the many problems that arise from ancestral customs and modes of life. A "fundamental law of the Christian approach is never to oppose an institution or a custom that provides for a natural and vital need (even if it manifests itself in an objectionable way) without finding a substitute for it" (347-348). Active co-operation with indigenous opinion is mandatory and facilitates educating the conscience of the congregation or the Church as they encouraged to find a concrete religious answer to the concrete situation in which they seek God's will for them.

Existing institutions and customs which supply a real need can be used as a vehicle for new ends and contents.

But real spiritual growth will only occur as decisions are made which "embody the voice of their Christian consciences *as they are and as they react to their confrontation with the Christian revelation*" (348). When indigenous Christians have a passive role while missionaries experiment there will be a lack of dynamic power.

The missionary debate as to whether the aim of missionary work should be the gathering of flocks of converted individuals or the Christianisation of the people involves the following considerations:

1. "The individualistic type of Pietistic and Methodist piety that were the originators of modern missions, and an absolute lack of insight into the communal conception of life and religion in the non-European world, led to the first standpoint" (349). Missionary thinking remains individualistic.
2. In pleading for the group approach no lowering of standards is recommended (as often is erroneously supposed or feared) but, on the contrary, its urge is to do more solid missionary work and to plant Christianity more firmly than is possible by conglomeration of isolated individuals, because it honestly recognizes the

impregnable fact that families, clans and tribes by their natural cohesiveness grow best into Christianity along the lines of communal response.

3. But, "in this group approach individual conversions continue to play a highly important and fruitful role. This is natural, because Christianity is essentially the religion of individual decisions, and there never can be an communal response that is really conscious of having decided for God and a new life until the individual consciences have been awakened and by virtue of this awakening *have appealed to their community*" (352).

There are two main principles which universally apply to the group approach:

1. It "must always be made in the spirit of a radically religious approach, the confrontation of the community with God in Christ, and not in the spirit of a sociological experiment" (352).
2. The paternal attitude of missionary agencies must be entirely converted into an attitude of co-operation and guidance, for the group approach will flounder if the group concerned is not free, step by step, to make its own responsible decisions.

### *Islam*

In all ages Islam has been the teacher of patience with respect to missionary endeavours. It reminds us that truly Christian mission is "not primarily driven by motives of spiritual conquest or success, but by the urge towards faithful and grateful witness to Christ" (353).

There are two reasons for the exceptional stubbornness of Islam towards Christian missionary endeavours:

1. The "secret of the iron rigidity of Islam is that its real 'holy' and its real 'god' is group solidarity, conceived with passionate religious directness" (353). Enormous forces of fanaticism and devotion are inherent in the creed of group solidarity. Writing just before the outbreak of World War 2 Kraemer comments: "A very pertinent way to define Islam would be to call it a medieval and radically religious form of that national-socialism which we know at present in Europe in its pseudo-religious form. As with all militant creeds of group solidarity Islam evinces a bitter and stubborn resistance to any effort that might involve change of religion, or, to put it more adequately, to any break in the group solidarity" (353).
2. When Christianity meets with the other great non-Christian religions it is a meeting of strangers, but, by contrast, Christianity and Islam are acquaintances from the beginning. While Islam originally adopted a friendly attitude towards Christianity "as the valid religion of revelation for the 'nation' of the Christians", its prophet's own denunciations, viewed as divine revelation, led to Islam's antagonism towards Christianity. So essential to Islam is it to reject cardinal elements of Christianity that to accept Christianity is to recognize the error of Islam.

The missionary who responds to this situation with "the attitude of fear or disgust or hatred of Islam, does better to go immediately home and never come back. Nobody has a right to throw a stone at him, but it is certain that he can only do harm. Only if faith, hope, love and endurance, however much tempted, ever and again break through triumphantly will he perform his missionary obligation well" (354-355).

We must also come to terms with the fact “that the entrance to this impregnable religious citadel cannot be opened by presenting Christianity to the Moslem mind as the enrichment of its half-truths as to its belief in God, its veneration for Jesus, its logos speculation, its conception of fraternity, etc., or developing into full growth what is to be found, for instance, in the *Quran* about the Holy Spirit (*Ruh*) and the need for an intercessor” (355). It must be recognised that all of the elements in the *Quran* or in the creedal evolution of Islam that have some connection with Christianity have a totally different character and tendency precisely because “the axis of Islam is wholly turning on the idea of group solidarity under the aegis of Allah and the Apostle” (355).

The only response missionaries can make to this situation “is to explain patiently what, according to Biblical realism, these elements really mean, and wait for the results” (356). Undoubtedly, the best approach is “direct personal contact and study of the Bible in a spirit of human sympathy and openness”, treating the Moslem as a fellow-man with valuable insights to share, precisely because he is a living human being.

It is also wrong-headed to present Christianity to Muslims as a set of doctrines. This is because Islam itself is creedal and doctrinal to the core. So to present Christianity as a set of doctrines is to rouse the militantly intellectualist spirit of Islam, thus moving entirely away from the religious sphere. Throughout its history, Islam has lived alongside Eastern Churches, with their appalling expressions of petrified doctrinalism and ritualism. Consequently, “the Moslem world has been robbed of any opportunity to get an idea of the dynamic forces of Christianity” (357). From this it follows that to the extent that missionaries are able to follow through on their own initiative, they “must abjure all doctrinal approach and invite the Moslem to penetrate into the living world of Biblical realism” (357). This also presupposes “a real knowledge of Moslem ways of thinking and living and of the religious vocabulary of Islam” (357).

Some see Islamic mysticism as a promising entry point for Christian approaches. This makes some kind of sense since in Islam it is among the mystically-minded that the most sensitive spiritual people are to be found. There is also an affinity between Moslem and Christian Eastern mysticism. Further, Christians who emphasise the experience of communing with God are naturally attracted to this approach.

However, we must distinguish here between the practical and the spiritual. Practically, it makes sense to make use of such mysticism since the mystic’s preoccupation with communion with God constitutes a break from group-solidarity, the barrier of self-conscious pride for Muslims. But theoretically a double error is involved in treating mysticism or mystic orders as the domains of religious life in Islam which lead to Christianity:

1. Notwithstanding how widespread mysticism in Islam may be, it is wholly an alien growth in this religion. It is the exception and does not change the problem facing the missionary, namely the impregnable rigidity of the genuine Islamic system of faith and law.
2. Mysticism is a very complicated phenomenon, being “not only the most lofty form of religious life” in non-Christian religions, but also their most degraded form as well. Indeed, in Islam as in all religions “mysticism is one of the most sublime and most dangerous products of naturalistic monism” (359).

Kraemer distinguishes three types of mysticism, both being offshoots of naturalistic monism, and none of which occur in the prophetic religion of the Biblical realism:

1. Theopanistic: "man along the road of gnosis masters the rapturous certitude of his essential oneness with the Divine Essence and Ultimate Reality" (359). This is wholly antagonistic to the prophetic religion of Biblical realism.
2. Contemplative: striving for the beatific vision of God. This "is easily prone, in its Christian forms, to live principally in a world of religious apprehension that is foreign to Biblical realism, but preserves the Christian colouring by Christian ideas and imagery" (359).
3. Emotional: the soul pining and longing for the Eternal.

By contrast, in Biblical realism "the irremovable centre of religious life is the Divine Will" (360). But the mystical attitude is "a universal phenomenon in the religious life of mankind, and will always create in any positive religion, Christianity included, various forms of religious expression" (360). Here two cardinal points must be kept constantly in mind:

1. The mystical tendencies of religious life are as real as all other tendencies (legalist, moralist, dogmatic, ecclesiastical, etc.) and all of these tendencies must receive authoritative guidance from the prophetic theocentric religion of Biblical realism.
2. The similarity of the universal mystical attitude, found in all religions, must never be explained by a similarity between the fundamental religious apprehensions of the different religions (e.g. Christianity and Islam; Christianity and Hinduism or Buddhism).

At the time of writing Kraemer was uncertain as to whether the prospects of the Moslem missionary situation were brighter or gloomier, recognizing it was possible to adduce substantial reasons for either position. Kraemer goes on to describe some of the opportunities and problems confronting missionary endeavours in the Moslem world, observing that a grievous lack of unity among missionary agencies and rivalry between quarrelling Eastern Churches constitutes a great stumbling-block to a right approach.

### *India*

As far back as 1605 de Nobili discovered that Hindus identified Christianity with following the customs of the Prangui (Europeans). This is not only due to the unimaginative, rigid and dogmatically-bound mind of Western missions, but *at least as much* to the Hindu system itself.

Everyone born a Hindu has a primary and self-evident religious obligation to conform with those attitudes and customs that are peculiar to India and make up the predominately social religion we know as Hinduism. Many leading Hindu intellectuals are primarily committed to defending traditional culture and religion because they are the national heritage, not being truly committed to discovering true religion.

Hinduism is a social religion of group-solidarity and treats every religion as "foreign" that does not fit in with its socio-religious system. Hindu adherents are allowed to think what they like, but Hinduism is very intolerant towards any repudiation of socio-

religious customs and ceremonies. Christianity is necessarily at loggerheads with this attitude for two reasons:

1. As a prophetic religion it does not have a pragmatic or social conception of religion, but conceives of it primarily and emphatically in the terms of truth.
2. Hindu customs and ceremonies presuppose and imply religious apprehensions totally in accord with "naturalist" Hinduism, but absolutely incompatible with "prophetic" Christianity. Christianity find the fundamental "relativist" attitude of Hinduism revoltingly insincere, while Hinduism sees the fundamental "absolutist" attitude of Christianity as offensively exclusive.

Some necessary conclusions flow from this:

1. "The problem of adaptive approach can never be solved in the direction of combining the spiritual allegiance to Christianity with that to Hinduism in some form or conception" (367).
2. The search for adaptive approaches must not be motivated by the delusive expectation that the reproach of foreignness will die out. This will not happen until countless millions of Indians have become Christian, thus making Christianity an Indian religion
3. The diligent search for adaptive approaches is an urgent need:
  - a. Christianity must be translated and interpreted in terms and forms of expression that fit in with the Indian background.
  - b. India, "like every other country or people, has the elementary right not to be artificially pressed and choked in a foreign armour, but to wear its natural religious dress" (368).

The Christian claim for truth and exclusive revelation in Christ is easily misunderstood by the Hindu mind as an expression of contempt for other religions "and a lack of modesty in the face of the great mystery of Ultimate Truth" (368). Christians must not treat truth as though they possess it like a philosopher's stone, but must recognize it as the truth and grace revealed in Christ, so that Truth is bigger than any person can grasp, whether he is a Hindu or a Christian. Consequently, the only adequate attitude for the Christian to display before the Hindu is one of humility.

It is an illegitimate approach to present Christianity as the perfect form of mysticism; seeking to synthesise Christianity with Vedanta or Bhakti. Pursuing this path ends in "succumbing to the irresistible syncretistic spell of Hinduism" (369). Nor will it do, as Heiler has done, to treat such doctrines as the Resurrection, the Kingdom of God and the Church, as contained in Biblical realism, as corrections of similar ideas in Hinduism - this is simply not true. Again, it does not work to treat Christianity as the highest and most perfect specimen of mysticism. It is a misuse of John's Gospel to see the apostle John as a thorough mystic, as his doctrine of the incarnation makes only too evident.

"The prophetic religion of Biblical realism is neither mystical or unmystical, it is supra-mystical, just as it is supra-moral" (371). While it is important and interesting to compare and measure religious values, treating essential Christianity as perfected mysticism is incompatible with its revelational character. Further, this fails to appreciate the depth of mysticism attained in *Vedanta* and *Bhakti*. Since, as Enneads 1.ii.6 states, "the object is not to be free from sin, but to be God", it follows that to treat essential Christianity as mysticism is to disregard its real nature and structure.

There are many typically Indian modes of expression which, though not without its dangers, can be used as vehicles for Christian truth provided they are used to *express* essential Christianity and not to accommodate it, e.g. *dhyana* (meditative prayer), *ahimsa*, *yoga*, *shanti*, *ashram*, leading the life of a homeless wanderer/*sannyasin* as Sadhu Sundar Singh did, *kirtan*, chanting the Gospel in the Indian *purana*-style, etc. *Ashrams* have potential which as yet have not been realized. Many of these developed as means for a religion of self-realisation and self-deliverance, the very opposite of the prophetic religion of Biblical realism. But as means of human expression it is highly advisable to try to express Christianity in such typically Indian modes, notwithstanding the inescapable dangers. What matters is not that it is dangerous but that it is done for the sake of a vigorous Christianity.

Kraemer urges the value of using the modes of expression which belong to the "huge world of popular Hinduism and of the outcastes, characterized by "an extraordinary mixture of weird primitive religious rites and taboos, daemonism, polytheism, pilgrimages, austerities, dread of 'holy' men and places" and "vague notions of 'higher' Hinduism", all of which Kraemer sees as "centering around the desire to avert dangers and obtain some happiness" (376). Kraemer observes: "the greatest need here certainly is to effect a close and personal relation to Christ, who is stronger than the demons and the sole Lord to be obeyed" (376).

Kraemer also states "the fundamental law of building Christian congregations", namely, "that from the very beginning the Christians must not be treated as wards, but as a community that has to be trained to respond with its own moral and religious judgment to the newly discovered world of standards and truths" (377).

### *China*

Initially, Christianity was viewed as the forerunner of Western imperialism. Later, it was positively seen as a "chief mediator of Western civilization and as a champion of progress and new liberty" (378). Then through such influences as communism Christianity and missions were dethroned as champions of progress.

Kraemer ventures, "What is needed in China is not to adapt or assimilate the Christian revelation to Chinese ideas and ideals, because in its religious core it is inadaptable, but to penetrate into its real character and then express it in Chinese ways" (379).

Kraemer looks at various revival movements which since 1931 had made a great appeal to the minds of many Chinese Christians and finds a good deal of commonality with revivalist sects in Shintoism.

Kraemer seeks Chinese Christian intellectuals as having an outlook and approach towards Christianity which is pervaded by the "dominant humanist and ethical apprehension of life, which is the deep-rooted heritage of Confucianism" (381). This is associated with a tendency to see Jesus as mainly "the man who realized perfect goodness and perfect experience of God" and as "our perfect Guide and Model" (381). This is an ethical conception of Christianity which amounts to being "a Christianised edition of the Chinese humanist doctrine of the mean, of the ideal 'gentleman' who by his inner equilibrium and harmony, by the organization of his emotions and desires, and by his harmony with Tao, masters life" (381).

Kraemer sees China as disinclined towards systematic and corporate organization of religious life, because it only knows the family and the State as organized forms of life. There is also a strong aversion against theology, doctrine and theological distinctions. Further confusion was created by the fundamentalist-liberal controversy which misleadingly appeared to make various theological positions the objects of faith. Great damage is done to the healthy development of the Chinese Church when crudely intellectualist theology fosters an aversion to theological thinking.

Chinese Christianity has involved two main attitudes. One tends towards accepting revelation, the other towards humanism. The first encounter between Christianity and Humanism was in the Greco-Roman world. Inevitably, the second will be in China. At the time of writing Kraemer discerned the confrontation of Christianity with the Chinese heritage to be at a rather intellectual and artificial stage.

The condition of Chinese Christianity at the time of writing was summarized by the revival movements, the efforts for intellectual synthesis, the demand for social effectiveness in Christianity, and the aversion to Church and theology. Kraemer identified the need for Chinese Christians and missionaries to allow the radical theocentric apprehension in Biblical realism to lead to a faithful but characteristically Chinese expression, not to synthesis nor contrast. He also urged the need to build strong church communities that "exhibit a sincere feeling of responsibility towards the world on account of obedience to Christ" (387), so as to be so attain social effectiveness.

Sensing that the Chinese Government might restrict religious liberty, Kraemer also saw the possibility that in the near future Chinese Christianity would have to face the problem of its relation to the State.

He concludes by observing that though he has stressed the Christian approach towards Chinese civilization in its fundamental aspects "the life of the common people is still largely dominated by animism, shamanism, magic, astrology and practices of divination" (388-389) and that it is with this situation that the Church and missions have to deal.

### *Japan*

Before 1873 Christianity was a forbidden religion. Following the Edict that reversed this Christianity enjoyed great moral and social prestige.

There is a small amount of interest in the indigenization of Christianity:

1. The constituency of the Churches is mainly urban and bourgeois with the Western aspect of the Churches according with the Western aspect of Japanese cities.
2. There is a high % of intellectuals in contact with European theology. Indeed, most Christian and theological literature in Japanese is a translation of European and American works. This is not due to any Japanese tendency towards being imitative, but rather arises from the Japanese propensity to evaluate religion with respect to its ethical and social significance, to prize values above truth - a natural outcome of the naturalistic-monistic apprehension of religion in Japan.

3. The introduction of Christianity is of recent date at a time when Japan's energy has been devoted to absorbing Western culture.

But Japanese Christianity is markedly orthodox. This is a striking characteristic given that between 1873 and 1890 young Samurai were not attracted to Christianity because of religious motives but because they saw it as a means to strengthen the nation. Japanese Christians in their adherence to Biblical Christianity stand in contrast with Chinese Christians for whom Christianity centres around the Confucian ideal of the "Perfect Man" and for whom the notion of God incarnated in the man Jesus is problematic.

Because Japanese Christians are a small minority in a richly variegated and strong pagan environment there is a high percentage of Christians characterized by strong conviction. Japanese Christianity is also characterized by strong denominationalism. Arguably this is not as damaging as in other nations given the numerous and conspicuous sectarian divisions in Shinto and Buddhism.

Kraemer notes some evidences of an evangelistic spirit and observes that individualistic piety has been and remains a keynote of Japanese Christianity. Japanese Christianity is threatened by a religious nationalism which in Kraemer's day pursued "its totalitarian ideal with much greater relentlessness than was the case in the Roman Empire, and with means of organization and control perfected to a degree that the Roman authorities could not dream of" (395). Religion has always been the object of government regulation. While the government takes care not to repudiate the principle of religious liberty enshrined in the Constitution, it stresses the merely patriotic character of all ceremonies. All other loyalty is subordinated to the sanctities of religious nationalism; it being forbidden to protest against the concept of the Emperor's Divinity and the sacredness of Japan.

Japanese Christianity, still largely showing the marks of foreign importation, must learn to state the problem of indigenization in more courageous terms. This does not mean adapting its content to indigenous religious concepts, but to *express* it, that is, to interpret its real character and content in intelligible and familiar forms. The way for Japanese Christianity to meet the storm of religious nationalism is by focusing not on a set of religious tenets, but on Christianity as the prophetic religion of revelation in Christ and upon living a corporate life of Christian fellowship.

Almost all that has been said about Hinduism, "in its aspects as a popular religion, as a religion of fervent *bhakti*-piety and of contemplative mysticism, can be applied to Buddhism" (400). It is misleading to present Christianity in a Buddhist environment as an enrichment of values. This is a by-product, never the *purpose* of missions, which must be truth. Further, the way of "values" as a point of contact can be very illusory. The Christian missionary who thinks an enriched personality is the supreme value in human life is at odds with the good Buddhist who begins with the non-existence of personality and fundamentally aims to destroy the fiction of personality.

It is important to interpret Christianity to Buddhist monks in vital relation to the fundamental apprehensions of "higher" Mahayanism, but erroneous to present Christianity as a more perfect and complete edition of essential Mahayanism. The

naturalist character of Mahayanism precludes all possibility of comparison with prophetic Christianity. Indeed, it rejects the Christian conception of God as Creator.

#### Appendix to Chapter 9

Kraemer is deeply distressed by the policy pursued by the Roman Catholic Church towards the Shinto problem since 1936. In 1936 Roman Catholic Japanese were given express permission to regard ceremonies performed at the State-Shinto shrines as non-religious. This problem was treated as an important example of adaptation and accommodation and fails to see that Japanese religious nationalism claims to be the solely legitimate absolute for the Japanese people:

The fundamental religious issue is the choice between God the Creator, the sole divine Object of absolute obedience and adoration, and the man-made pseudo-absolutes, State, Emperor and Nation. Its setting aside in this way is an extremely deplorable victory of the calculating politician-mind over the religious sensitiveness of the follower of Christ (404).

#### Chapter 10. The Christian Mission in Relation to its Environment

The relation of the Christian Church to the world and its spheres of life demands first considering the nature of the Church and then the relation of Christianity to its material and cultural environment.

##### *The Nature of the Church*

The Shanghai conference of 1922 emphasised the need to develop an autonomous, indigenous Church freed from the control of foreign missions in financial, theological, ecclesiastical and cultural areas. It was the rising tide of nationalism that caused an acute and wholly justifiable awareness of the "foreignness" of Christianity.

In all nations where this applies the right of an indigenous church to be autonomous and independent is largely based on whether it is capable of financial self-support or not. It is now a pressing matter for missions to confront:

the problem whether their activity means the management of a spiritual enterprise in foreign parts or the stimulating support of and the cordial co-operation with a partner in the Universal Church for the sake of the expansion of Christianity (410).

Kraemer views as weak missionary and Oriental Christian initiatives towards a truly indigenous Christianity and also sees many missionaries are strongly averse to realizing a truly indigenous Christianity. At the heart of the problem lies the question, What is a church? For it is through becoming a real *Church* that progress can be made towards becoming an *indigenous* Church.

Kraemer observes the outspoken and clearly-defined aim of missions to found self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing Churches and to build up morally and religiously strong congregations. However, Kraemer also observes that missions "have been either evangelistically-minded, culturally-minded or Church-minded, according to the dominant interests of the supporters who were behind these different enterprises" (412). Although these tendencies in practice have never operated separately, there are preponderant emphases to be seen in different missionary agencies. But "the future progress of Christianity in the non-Christian world depends as much, or even more, on the strength and vitality of the indigenous Churches as on those of the missionary movement from the West" (413).

Kraemer notes that Roland Allen's ideas and those contained in the so-called Nevius method treated indigenous Christians wholly as instruments for a wide, successful and speedy expansion of Christianity. But the strong emphasis on self-support, as the symbol of real independence, and on evangelization, obscured "a still more essential feature of a Christian community, namely, that it, has to represent in faith, life and work the Christian conception of life, which means a well-ordered and Christ-centered fellowship" (413-414).

Culturally-minded missions, at a time when the Eastern mind was eager to absorb Western knowledge, ideals and methods, treated indigenous Christianity as but an adjunct to the great process of permeation.

Church-minded missions have meant at least two things: (1) determination by denominational points of view, with "indigenous" churches being copies of the different church orders that have developed in the history of Western Protestantism; (2) the denominational approach succeeded in building a Church, characterized by an ecclesiastical framework, without creating a real Church-consciousness.

To become a truly indigenous Church it is essential first to be conscious of what a real Church is:

Just as the prophetic religion of Biblical realism is a religion *sui generis*, so the Christian Church, according to the conception of the New Testament, is a community *sui generis* (415).

The Christian Church is not a welfare or goodwill society on a religious basis. It is not a voluntary society, but God's act through Jesus Christ. We must avoid viewing the Church in essentially anthropocentric terms, e.g. as an association of religiously like-minded people. For the Church is first and foremost a theocentric community, just as Christianity is a theocentric religion.

The ground of Christians' fellowship in the Church "is not their striving and their objects and ends, but God's calling and grace. The Church, according to the New Testament, is the fellowship of those who live by the divine miracle of the forgiveness of sins" (417):

It is essentially an interim-institution, living and working in this world... between the time when God revealed in Christ his plan of re-creating this often so hopeless world and the time when this re-creation will become triumphantly evident. If the Church is unconscious of its eschatological nature, it loses one of its most essential characteristics (418).

But:

To be exclusively aware of its heavenly nature without evincing any consciousness of its prophetic and apostolic relation to the world ends in sterile dogmatism and in the denial of its dynamic religious nature... The more it loses this consciousness, the more it becomes concentrated on self-maintenance and self-interest, and the more de-christianized and secularized it becomes (419-420).

It is this "radically religious and theocentric conception of Christianity as contained in Biblical realism" that "gives freedom and courage to use the heritage and to use it creatively and critically" (420-421). The most energetic way of being Christian and

indigenous is for a Church to do this, motivated by the impelling and primary goal of expressing the Gospel and its invariable essence.

The "indigenous has the right to be considered seriously and sympathetically as the vehicle of life-expression before any other possible vehicle" (421), just as a person communicates best in his or her own language:

It ought to become a fundamental law in missionary work that alien forms and methods of spiritual and ecclesiastical life (which are to the Western missionary the indigenous ones) are viewed with the same scrutinizing criticism as indigenous forms and methods are usually subjected to (421-422).

But the goal in seeking the indigenization of the Church is not that it be "accepted" and "recognised" in the country to which it belongs, for there will often "remain a great difference between *being* truly indigenous is life and expression and being *recognised* as indigenous" (423). For, it is "a characteristic of Christianity... that it does not conform to its environment in religious and in socio-religious matters" and that it is a minority. Until it becomes a strong and impressive minority it will always be regarded as objectionable in the non-Christian environment, no matter how indigenous it becomes, in the best and deepest sense of this word.

A great deal of anti-ecclesiastical bias among simple people is due to economic reasons and among intellectual people "to an unconsciously aristocratic attitude, which shrinks from identifying oneself with a community that consists largely of simple folk" (424). Both of these difficulties must be taken seriously, though they cannot be solved through a mere appeal to reason and intellect. Rather, indigenous Christians need a new religious apprehension such as may occur among simple and intellectual people alike.

Many groups of Oriental Christians tend to depend on support from foreign missionary sources. Missionary agencies typically take this their responsibility as stewards to mean they have the right and duty to control the way such money is spent. This causes a great deal of friction and misunderstanding between missions and Younger Churches and this is ultimately a deeply spiritual problem rather than a practical or business problem.

The need for such continuing external financial support is partly due to the setting up of a machinery that has failed to thoroughly consider indigenous economic foundations. But a genuine indigenous church is intrinsically an independent body, given that its only legitimate Head and Authority is Christ. As such it is the *fruit* of missionary labour, not the *possession* of missions. Therefore, "it is on the side of missions a serious and fatal misunderstanding of the nature of the Church to consider any indigenous Church in any stage of development to be in an inferior position because it receives financial support" (426). Support given by missionary agencies to indigenous churches must be viewed not as charity but as fraternal help, "which fact excludes the stipulation of rights, conditions or restrictions" (426). Consequently, Western missionary agencies must derive their orientation from confronting themselves with the dynamic conception of the Church of Biblical realism.

### *The Church in Relation to its Environment*

"The old world of restricted, rural and patriarchal relationships is not nearly so necessarily impersonal as is the modern industrial world, ruled by world economics and world finance" (427-428).

The prophetic religion of Biblical realism, in contrast to other soteriological religions, is not anthropocentric but theocentric. "... Asiatic soteriologies by their anthropocentric and eudaemonistic character all evince a strong world-denying tendency" (428). While historical Christianity has sometimes come under the influence of the same tendency, its innate world-affirming tendency has often broken through triumphantly. So, for example, history is not viewed as cyclical but as moving towards the end determined for it by the transcendent force of God's Will, effected via human forces. God is at work in people and the world and in human efforts to master life - the cultural sphere and the human 'values' arising from such endeavours. All human culture is an admixture of service to God and rebellion against God. The 'relative' nature of human 'values' and spheres of life and the disorderliness induced by the corruption of sin prevents according to them divine sanction. Yet "[all] cultural, social and political attitudes are always ultimately rooted in definite assumptions regarding the nature and the Will of God and regarding the nature and destiny of man" (429). So the Christian always begins with these assumptions in seeking to understand how the different spheres of life are related to Christianity and what his obligations are towards them.

Since the Kingdom of God is an operative yet transcendental reality Christianity will not and cannot pretend to realize ideal cultural, social or political conditions. To identify the Kingdom of God with any form of human society and culture is a disastrous confusion of human 'values' with divine standards. Further, the Church is called to transform the world by its witness and action, knowing that forces of evil are just as much at work in the world as the divine Will. Finally, the Church can never *promise* the solution of economic, social and political problems since it does not govern the economic and political factors involved.

True proselytism is an essential element of Christianity and Christian missions because Christianity is the prophetic and apostolic religion *par excellence*. Kraemer critiques Dr. White's claim that the supreme meaning of the Christian revelation and of Christ is the spirit of service and ministry, for this is to be "eternally imprisoned in a pragmatist and humanist conception of religion and of Christianity", which is radically out of touch with New Testament religion. "The core of the Christian revelation is that Jesus Christ is the sole legitimate Lord of all human lives and that the failure to recognize this is the deepest religious error of mankind" (433). Not to acknowledge him as such is to serve false gods.

All activities of the Christian Church and of missions in social service, education, rural reconstruction, medical work and so on must be seen as belonging intrinsically to the category of witness as preaching or evangelization. Only then do these activities get their right missionary foundation and perspective. The three natural expressions of the Church are witness, ministry and worship and these must be saturated with the spirit that is the essential characteristic of each. When this occurs the social and cultural activity of the Church will not be viewed as *accessories* to the Church's essential program of witness and proclamation of the Gospel, but expressions of its *nature*.

The social and cultural activity of the Church must never be identified with cultural propaganda nor done in a spirit of utopianism. Nor must it be assumed that "too great absorption in emancipating and civilizing action supplants the essential religious task of missions" (433-434). This only occurs when the above vision of the relationship between witness, ministry and worship fails to dominate the missionary enterprise: "The denunciation of 'activism' ought to give place to the right kind of activism" (434).

The contemporary world is very different to that in the first centuries of the Christian era. For due to the natural and social sciences Christians have at their disposal many means of tackling the problems of human life not then available, though these problems are of far greater dimensions.

It is no longer the case that missions are the pioneers and leaders in many fields of social and cultural service. So as missions of the future participate in various kinds of service they must aim to excel in creativeness of mind and the quality of their work.

Among many 'primitive' peoples the crucial problem is how to help them achieve highly painful but necessary social and cultural readjustment to the rapidly changing world around them. When missions launch a fundamental religious attack on these societies they inevitably become "partners in producing the destructive tempest that has been let loose through the impact of Western civilization on these peoples" (436).

While Christianity contains the forces of moral and spiritual regeneration this does not result *mechanically* from the acceptance of Christianity, but "must be inspired by the desire *to serve the true interest of the people*", not offering things as baits (436).

All over the world the problem of education on the mission field is at an acute stage. The missionary system of schools and education used to be an integral adjunct of the missionary enterprise. But in colonially-governed non-Christian countries and independent countries this system has become incorporated into the colonial or national system of education, thus subject to government and national agendas. The problem is how to preserve the vitally Christian character of such schools. Where there is still freedom for experimentation, missions and Churches need to be committed to ensuring committed Christian teachers and an intensely Christian atmosphere. But they also need to have an intelligent grasp of the necessities of change and adaptation to new conditions that confronts people in those countries, fashioning their education program to help here.

But where such freedom doesn't exist the focus must be on creating personnel who are committed to living and working together as a fellowship of Christian workers.

Similar problems apply to medical work.

Because Christianity in Asia and Africa is largely rural Christianity, rural evangelism will play a preponderant role in the future. But in the area of rural reconstruction it is important to appreciate that for many rural Christians in Asia and Africa there is increasing divorce occurring between their agricultural and social life and their religion, whereas in the pre-Christian period these activities were wholly intertwined with their religion. It is urgent to address how to relate rural Christian life, in its

agricultural and social aspects, to the realities of God the Creator and God the Redeemer, something that cannot be achieved merely by way of exhortation in sermons. Only when Christians live by the dynamic world of prophetic religion, the world of Biblical realism, can this problem be addressed so that they prevent the domain of God and of religion becoming isolated. But great attention must also be devoted "to elevating and purifying acts and forms of worship in family and community life" (440-441). Finally, "Christian festivals must become great moments of dramatic force in the yearly life of rural Christians" (441), when the great acts of God are celebrated.

### Epilogue

Kraemer recognizes that the most fruitful ways of approach to the great non-Christian faiths can never be fulfilled by writing books. For this demands the living voice and personal contact. Only in this context can the missionary body voice its doubts and objections and approaches be constantly enlivened by the effects of criticism and contact with concrete situations. Kraemer seriously recommends the following to responsible agencies:

*Every important region needs some men who on account of their ability and knowledge regularly sow the seed of new principles and methods (444).*

In facing the rising gigantic forces of obstruction and enmity, with the uncertain future this brings three things are needed:

1. A deepening and vitalizing of the religious and theological background of missions and the Christian churches.
2. A determined effort to build everywhere strong indigenous Christian Churches that manifest the quality of fellowship peculiar to the community of believers in Christ.
3. A genuine evangelistic or apostolic spirit.

Kraemer notes the spread of Christianity in the Middle Ages and during the time of the Roman Empire, notwithstanding massive obstruction, showing "the Gospel can spread under *any* circumstances, provided a living and ardent faith burns in the hearts of men" (445).

"Theology, history, psychology, anthropology must be exploited to achieve one aim and one aim only: to be a better instrument in conveying the conviction that God is speaking in Jesus Christ His decisive Word to individuals, nations, peoples, cultures and races, without any distinction" (445).