

Early Protestant Views of Hinduism: 1600 - 1825

*Norvin Hein
Yale Divinity School*

The question of the Christian view of Hinduism remains as acute as ever for the church today, externally and internally. In foreign missions there is no consensus on this matter, and within Christian lands certain forms of Hinduism stand almost alone in power to attract respectful attention of thinking western people to eastern religion. Our greatest modern books on Christianity and the non-Christian religions are based primarily on Hinduism or deal prominently with that faith. Their authors could not have done otherwise.

This paper attempts to make a historian's contribution to the discussion of the problem. It undertakes a survey of how Protestant writers have described and interpreted Hinduism during the earlier part of the three and a half centuries in which Protestants and Hindus have been in contact. We shall confine our attention to authors who were avowedly Christian in training and occupation, who were acquainted with Indian religion at first hand, and who wrote on Hinduism in some detail. We stop with the year 1825 because our present tradition of Protestant missions in India was well-begun by that time, and the nature of Protestant thinking about Hinduism thereafter is likely to be relatively well known to students of the history of missions. The time of pristine impressionability among Protestants was then past, also. Distinctive attitudes were already established. Some were of recent formation, and some had been long developing in generations of writers whose works we seldom hear of, and almost never read. Our concern here is with those early books, now yellow and crumbling, whose influence upon us calls for recognition precisely because it has been forgotten.

First Fruits
THE ACADEMIC OPEN PRESS OF ASBURY SEMINARY

We do not foolishly suppose that this survey of past attitudes will enable us to produce, by totaling and averaging, the definitive Christian view of Hinduism, or be in itself the creative reconsideration of the matter which our age demands. But fresh thinking begins with self-knowledge. Discussion of the direction we should take will be more pertinent and productive when we realize that we travel in tracks worn deep by our predecessors, know where the grooves of inherited predisposition run, and why.

Protestant interpretation of Hinduism begins only with the seventeenth century. Only after the defeat of the Spanish Armada had upset the Iberian control of the seas could groups in Protestant lands dream of organized communication with India. Between 1600 and 1618 commercial companies were formed in England, Holland, and Denmark to establish trade relations. The first Protestants in India were not missionaries but merchants and diplomats engaged in commercial negotiations. But with the trading fleets and ambassadorial parties came chaplains. Being men of literary education, and having a personal interest in religion, these clergymen sometimes turned their pens from writing sermons to describing the non-Christian religious life they saw about them. Therefore our chronological account of treatises on the “Gentiles” of India begins with the writings of the chaplains.

1. EDWARD TORRY, 1590-1660.

The Reverend Edward Terry, just out of Oxford, took a chaplaincy with a fleet of the East India Company and served in India for three years with the diplomatic party of Sir Thomas Roe, at the court of the Emperor Jehangir. When home again, he wrote up his India experiences and presented them in 1622 to Prince Charles. When this account was printed in 1625 in Samuel Purchas’ *Pilgrimes*,¹ Protestantism received its first eyewitness account of Hinduism from one of its own. His chapter on the “Gentiles,” though a sensible document, is neither very extensive nor very profound. With no helps save his two eyes and a smattering of Persian, he managed to get into his notes only a miscellany of observations on external Hindu life and customs. The Hindu widows practice of burning themselves alive

¹ Samuel Purchas, *Pilgrimes* (London, 1625), II, 1464-1482; published again in Terry’s *A Voyage to East India*, 1655, 2nd ed. 1777. Translated into French in 1696 and into Dutch in 1707. Also in William Foster, ed., *Early Travels in India* (Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. 288-332.

with their husband's bodies -- a "hellish sacrifice" -- drew his shocked attention, like that of all western visitors since the earliest times. The rest of his reporting is unexcited and unexciting. Terry confesses that he has not gotten far with the religious doctrines of the Brahmans. These priests, he says, are illiterate, and "scarce know what they hold." Consequently he is helpless to give an account of what he calls the twenty-four sects, whose beliefs "had oftentimes filled me with wonder, but that I know Satan (the father of division) to be the seducer of them all." Despite this reference to the devil, Terry's general description of Hinduism is not hostile. Neither is it much given to applying Christian standards of criticism. At the end of the chapter he enters his one specific complaint, from the standpoint of a man of the Renaissance:

The summe is that both Mahometans and Gentiles ground their opinions upon tradition, not reason; and are content to perish with their forefathers...never ruminating on what they maintain, like unclean beasts which chew not the cud.²

2. HENRY LORD, B. 1563.

Henry Lord was chaplain of the East India Company post at Surat from 1624 to 1629. In 1630 he published his *Display of Two Forraigne Sects in the East Indies*,³ dealing with the Parsi faith as well as with the "Banian religion", or Hinduism. This work is the first full-scale treatise on Indian religion written by a Protestant. In his introduction Lord tells us how he gathered his data: he approached certain Brahmans of Surat through interpreters and by their assistance made his collection "out of a book of theirs called the SHASTER, which is to them as their Bible..." Fourteen chapters follow which claim to describe the contents of their books of ceremonial and moral law and to set forth the teaching of the Hindus regarding the creation of the world by "the great God," the peopling of the earth with men of the four castes, the history of the ages before and after the Flood, and the future judgment of the world by fire.

² Foster, op. cit., p. 325.

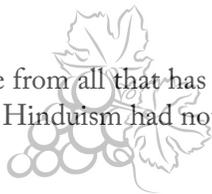
³ (London, Francis Constable, 1630). Republished in French, Paris, 1667, and in English in Bernard Picart, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Several Nations of the Known World*, III, (London, Nicholas Provost, 1731, pp. 273-308; in Awnsham Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, VI (London, 1732), pp. 299-342; and in John Pinkerton, *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World*, VIII London, Longman etc., 1811, pp. 523-555.

In reading Lord's pages one senses that he has listened, more or less, to the relation of some genuine cosmological material from the puranas: the many unrecognizable proper names in his text have an Indian sound, and he weaves a number of authentic Hindu concepts into the fabric of his tale. But it is clear enough that Lord did not understand the half of what was told him, and that he made good what he had missed with the help of the Bible, the classics, and a mind filled with seventeenth-century ideas on the origin and history of religion. He imposed upon the mass of material which he had assembled a form which he borrowed from the Pentateuch, and turned out as his final product a fabulous, convivial cosmological romance. It served as an effective piece of recruiting literature for the East India Company for many a day.

Purusha and Prakriti, the two primordial principles of the Samkchya philosophy, appear in Lord's fantasia as the Adam and Eve of the Hindu Genesis, the parents of four sons who begat the principal castes, Brahma is the Hindu Moses, and in the midst of a dark cloud on Mount Meru (his Sinai) he receives the *sastra* from the Lord God Almighty! When he undertakes to give the content of those sastras he actually describes the visible moral and ritual observances of his own time, and presents some pages of relatively sober and factual observation. On the whole the book is an excellent example of the human tendency to force strange ideas through the die of established concepts and understand the utterly new in terms of the familiar.

Mr. Lord tells his tale with such gusto that he seldom pauses to register a reaction to what he relates. He offers a refutation of Hindu vegetarianism and tee-totaling, but on the basis of the classics rather than Christian principles. He says in his brief conclusion that the study of these superstitious fictions show "how Satan leadeth those that are out of the pale of the church, a round, in the maze of error and gentilisme." The chief profit to be gained from it is "to settle us in the solidnesse of our own faith, which is purged of all such leuties..." *The Dictionary of National Biography* says that Lord dedicated the original edition to the Archbishop of Canterbury, expressing a hope that His Grace might see fit to suppress such idolatries.

The reader will recognize from all that has been said that in 1630 grave and responsible writing on Hinduism had not yet begun.



First Fruits
THE ACADEMIC OPEN PRESS OF ASBURY SEMINARY

3. ABRAHAM ROGER, D. 1649

Intensive Protestant study of Hinduism begins with the work of a Dutch Calvinist minister named Abraham Roger or Rogcrius, Roger was the first chaplain of the Dutch East India Company's station at Paliacatta (Pulicat) north of Madras. He served there from 1631 to 1641, spent five additional years in Java, and retired to Holland in 1647. Two years later he died leaving an unpublished manuscript. Through the efforts of his widow it was published posthumously in Leiden in 1651 as *De Open-Deurc tot hot Vorborggen Heydendom*.⁴

Roger had developed a happy and fruitful cooperation in Paliacatta with a Portuguese-speaking Brahman of the place named Padmanābha. Though Roger was not entirely ignorant of Tamil, evidently he was in no position to use its literature. Again and again he acknowledges in his book his total dependence on his Brahman friend for extensive areas of information. Roger contributed a wide curiosity and a thoroughness and fairness of mind, and produced a book which honors both its collaborators. A model of comprehensive and compact information, it is still profitable reading for those interested in traditional South Indian Hinduism.

The first twenty chapters of the book describe the life and manners of the Brahmins. First we have an almost modern sociological description of the caste hierarchy and of the contemporary sects of Brahman householders and sannyasis. We are told what the Brahmins' prerogatives and incomes are, their customs in childhood, marriage, and keeping house, and their funeral rites. The second half of the book details the Brahman beliefs: on God and on the gods; on Vishnu's incarnations, the cosmic ages, man's soul and the afterlife; and it describes the manner in which Hindus build temples, observe their festivals, and go on pilgrimages. Through Padmanābha Roger is able to append to his work a translation of the *Vairāgyasatakam* of Bhartrihari -- the first Sanskrit work to be translated into any European language.

⁴ (Leyden, Françoys Hackos, 1651), New Dutch ed. by W. Caland, ('s-Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1915), German tr., *Abraham Rogers Offne Thür zur dem Verborgenen Heydenthum* (Nürnberg, J.A. Enders, 1663. French tr. by Thomas La Grue, *Le théâtre de l'idolatrie, ou la porte ouverte pour parvenir a la cognoissance du paganisme cache* (Amsterdam, Joan Schipper, 16707. Abridged English version (unreliable in text and translation) in Bernard Picart, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Several Nations of the Known World*, III (London, Nicholas Provost, 1731) pp. 309-364.

Roger's first and fundamental accomplishment was his success in breaking through the barrier of mutual irritation and contempt which separated Christians and Brahmans throughout all this early period. Almost all writers of the time complain of how arrogant and aloof are the proud Brahmans, and of how few of them are educated well enough to be informative even if they are willing. In Padmanabha, Roger was fortunate in finding a broad-minded, intelligent and cooperative pandit of better-than-average education. At only a few points did his information fail. The account of the four Vedas which he gave to Roger bears no relation to the facts: Padmanabha could not read the Vedas and was misinformed about them himself. Also, being exclusively a Vaishnava and a theist by education and conviction, he gave Roger no hint that a powerful non-theistic monism exists among Hindus. Thus he left Roger with a too-simple certainty that all Indians adhere to a monotheism much like our own:

No one must think that these heathen are just like beasts. On the contrary, we should testify to the opposite. Navigation has made known to us that there is no people so brutal and deprived of sense and judgment that they do not know that there is one God, and have no religion. Thus those pagans also recognize one God. We have said in Part I Chapter 3 that the Vaishnavas say that Vishnu, who is also named Perumäl and a thousand other names, is the sovereign God; but the Saivas say that it is not Vishnu but Isvara, whom they name by a thousand names also, that is the sovereign God; so that they acknowledge not only that there is one God, but that there is one sovereign God who is sole and unique, with none superior to Him or like Him.⁵

Much water was yet to go over the mill before any European would become familiar with the total range of Hindu theologies and philosophies and be in a sound position to discuss whether Hindus are or are not believers in the One God.

Roger's descriptions are starkly factual; he does not inject evaluations into them. Yet when a strong criticism is called for, he neither hesitates to make it, nor lingers to scandalize over it. In the twentieth chapter of Part One he gives full descriptive details of how Brahman widows are burned. "An inhuman cruelty!" he exclaims, "One can't even

First Fruits

⁵ From La Gruo's French version, pp. 139–141, cf. Caland's Dutch text, p. 86.

think without horror of these cruel and frightful things. Yet they are true, and are practiced in that place!" then he goes on to the next topic.

Roger in no place explains what his views are on the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism. The devil is not mentioned anywhere as Hinduism's special patron.⁶ Perhaps death deprived Roger of the opportunity to explain his theological perspective. One Andreas Wissowatius, Netherlands lawyer and friend, provided a theological introduction to the first edition in which he credits the Hindus with a natural knowledge, but not a saving knowledge, of God. Though the doctrine we find in this introduction is not out of keeping with the general tone of Roger's text, we have no assurance that it expresses his views.

4. PHILIP BALDAEUS, 1632-1672

The Reformed clergy of the Netherlands produced in the next generation a worthy successor to Roger in Philip Baldaeus. Beginning in 1656 he served as chaplain to the Dutch forces engaged in wresting dominance from the Portuguese in Indian waters. From 1661 to 1666 he was settled down at Jafna as pastor in charge of the churches of that northern outpost of Ceylon. He published in 1672 an extensive and valuable account of the historical events in which he had been involved; his *Naauwkeurige Beschrijvinge van Malabar en Choromandel en het Eylandt Ceylon, nevens de Afgoderije der Oost-Indische Heydenen*.⁷ The final part of this work is, in itself, a major treatise on Hinduism. It is primarily a compendium of myths of the more important gods of South Indian polytheism. The ten *avatāras* of Vishnu -- and especially the Krishna incarnation -- are described in detail. For the first time, we find a synopsis of the story of the Mahābhārata.

⁶ La Gruo's French edition of 1670 shows in its frontispiece a scene of the devil hovering in the air and rejoicing over a widow burning. Roger was not the source of this picture, of course. Neither was Roger responsible for an interpolation, existing in the English version only (p. 347), saying that Hindu marriage is no better than prostitution because it is not sanctified by Christian rites.

⁷ Amsterdam, J. J. van Waesberge, 1672). Modern Dutch edition of the portion on Hinduism by Albert Johannes de Jong, *Afgoderije der Oost-Indische Heydemon* ('s-Gravenhagc, M. Nijhoff, 1917). German tr., *Wahrhaftige Ausführliche Beschreibung der Berühmten Oost-indischen Küsten der Malabar und Coromandel* (Amsterdam, van Waesberge, 1672). Slightly Abridged English translation in Awrsham and John Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, II [London 1704], pp. 562-901.

There is a great deal more of confusion in this book than in Roger's, because Baldaeus was drawing upon a multiplicity of sources instead of one, and had no better linguistic equipment than his predecessor for resolving conflicts in what he heard. Baldaeus complains that the press of ecclesiastical duties left him with little time for study of the Malabar (Tamil) tongue, and in consequence "...I was forced to be content with what part thereof I could attain..."⁸ He says that in preparing his work he has made wide enquiries with the help of a Ceylonese member of his church named Francis de Fonscca; and he has consulted much with a Bengali Brahman who resided in Jafna. Also he uses certain "Portuguese histories" left on the island by his Jesuit predecessors. He knows Roger's book and comments on its information. Occasionally he cites the published comments of other Europeans regarding Indian customs.

The Bengali Brahman was his source for an ample account of all the sports of Krishna, more or less after the Bhagavata Purana. His tales of the other gods show many a departure from the classical literary versions that must have been picked up from the local traditions. About the content of the Vedas he can neither add to, nor subtract from, Roger's misinformation. Like Roger also, he has heard of no level of Hindu thought above the mythological. He is at a loss in writing Indian names. They come to him from at least the Sanskrit, Tamil, and Malayalam languages, and they come in the disguise of romanizations that sometimes represent Portuguese sound values and sometimes Dutch. He is therefore found referring to Parasurāma as "Prassaram" and "Siri Parexi Rama" on the same page,⁹ and hesitates between Dasserat, Daseratha, and Daexareda as the name of Rāma's father. He does not recognize that "Ramtzander" is identical with the "Ram" whose career as seventh incarnation of Vishnu he has just described. Not knowing adequately any of the languages which contribute to this Babel, he can not avoid confusions of identity nor develop a consistent system of spelling Indian names.

But even after noting all these shortcomings, we must still credit Baldaeus with adding significantly to Europe's knowledge of Hinduism. He ranks with Roger because he used Roger's method, continued his virtues, and added no shortcomings of which Roger would not have been guilty in the same circumstances. These two men, together, represent the maximum achievement that was possible, humanly speaking, by the method of enquiry in a foreign language. They effected what industry, carefulness, and good judgment could accomplish under this handicap.

⁸ Churchill, op. cit., p. 663.

⁹ ibid., p. 858.

Baldaeus' treatment of Hinduism is generally objective, and at critical points, kindly. In relating certain Krishna-myths he often ignores a sensational alternative form of the story, or a scandalous interpretation which was surely known to him. He makes no capital of such opportunities. Like other Europeans, he yellows a little at the sight of devout Hindus obtaining and sipping cow's urine, and is shocked by various uses of dung: "The Malabar women, the otherwise pretty cleanly, yet are so intoxicated to this Superstition, that they cleanse their Chambers and their Cisterns with Cowdung."¹⁰ (From the first, the Indian uses of cow excreta degraded Hinduism in most Western eyes.) Baldaeus spares the Hindus any extensive expose of "that most barbarous custom" of sati, but uses the occasion to close "with a hearty wish, that these poor wretches, quite entangled in the darkness of paganism, may thro his mercy, and with the assistance of such magistrates as ought to keep a watchful eye over their actions, be in time brought to the true knowledge of the Gospel."¹¹

Baldaeus seems to regard the Hindus as monotheists in some sense, since he asserts there is no nation that does not acknowledge a God or Supreme Being.¹² He considers that various Hindu teachings show that in the past some confused report of Jesus Christ has been heard in India: the fact that Brahmā is regarded as creator of the world, determiner of the duration of created things, Son of God, possessor of a human nature, and Governor of Angels;¹³ the similarity of certain infancy tales of Krishna to the Biblical flight into Egypt and the murder of the innocents;¹⁴ the belief that "Ramtzander" delivered his people from the giants, and that the Buddha is invisible and was born without father and mother.¹⁵ He does not label any part of Hinduism as the work of the devil. Although he does not discuss the theological status of Hinduism, in these respects he evidences a rather positive view.

However, in one interesting instance he prefers to interpret a similarity between eastern and western belief as evidence that paganism has crept into Christianity, rather than that paganism possesses Christian

¹⁰ Churchill, op. cit., p. 895.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 901.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 830.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 891.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 868.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 888. (Though Baldaeus lives on the coast of Ceylon, he lists the Buddha among the incarnations without a flicker of recognition nor does he identify anywhere the dominant religion of Ceylon.)



truth. Narrating how Draupadi in the Indian epic purified herself of the guilt of polyandry by passing through fire, he comments that "...it is evident, that the Pagans ascribed to Fire a purifying Quality; from whom the Jews question less took that Doctrine, and the Roman Catholics their Purgatory,"¹⁶ Doughty Protestant that he is, Baldaeus sees proof here that Jews and Catholics are in some degree pagan!

5. BARTHOLOMAOUS ZIEGENBALG, 1683-1719

Ziegenbalg, the first Protestant clergyman to come to India exclusively for mission work among the Hindus, was born in Germany and educated (briefly) at Halle. He arrived in Tranquebar on the Madras coast in 1706 as a missionary of the Danish Lutheran Church. He lived and worked there continuously, save for one visit to Europe, until his early death. His fame as a pioneer Protestant missionary is widely known. It is little known that he was the author of several studies of Hinduism which are a landmark in the technique of Indie studies.

In one of his earliest letters from India, published under the title "Of the gross and blind idolatry of the Malabarians". Ziegenbalg shows that he has perceived at once the importance of getting a thorough knowledge of the prevailing religion.¹⁷ He sat down to a program of intensive study. Two years later, in 1708, he showed the first fruits of his efforts by sending home to Europe translations of three books of moralistic proverbs from the Tamil: the *Nidawunpa*, the *Kondei Wenden*, and the *Ulaganidi*, with introductions written by himself.¹⁸ His *magnum opus* followed in 1711, the *Ausführliche Beschreibung des Malabarischen Heidenthums* -- a comprehensive survey of the literature, beliefs, and cultic practices of the Hindus of the Tamil country.¹⁹ Two years later he supplemented this general study with another major work, the *Genealogie der Malabarischen Götter*, - which deals especially with the South Indian pantheon and its mythology.²⁰

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 386.

¹⁷ Ziegenbalg, *Propagation of the Gospel in the East*, tr. Joseph Downing, 3rd ed., (London, 1718), pp. 19-25.

¹⁸ W. Caland, ed., *B. Ziegenbalg's Kleinere Schriften* (Amsterdam, Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Decl XXIX, No. 2, 1930.)

¹⁹ Caland, ed., *Ziegenbalg's Malabarischen Heidenthums* (Amsterdam, Verhandelingen (etc.) Deel XXV No. 3, 1926)

²⁰ Wilhelm Germann, ed., (Madras, the editor, 1867).

Though for special reasons Ziegenbalg gained little credit by these writings, they represent a great advance over everything that had been written by Europeans up to his time. Complete mastery of an Indian language made the difference. He says in his *Ausführliche Beschreibung...* that when he first arrived he trusted Baldaeus for his information on Hinduism, but soon found him to be almost always incorrect in his use of names and often erroneous in his facts, for the obvious reason that he had only a weak knowledge of the Malabar language. Determined not to be guilty of the same failing, Ziegenbalg applied himself strenuously to the study of Tamil, collected a sizeable Tamil library, and spent his time in it night and day. Now this work, he says in his introduction, is not a *Sehmierewerek* taken from other authors, but everything in it has either been heard orally again and again from intelligent Hindus in their own tongue, or it has been translated into German word for word from Tamil books.²¹ He could have made the same boast in the introduction to every writing of his save his first letter. The chapters of his major works often contain a topical anthology, practically, of selections translated from Tamil religious literature. Here we find reporting that rests on a new and wider base. Europe had never received from India before anything so extensive and so accurate in its information. Roger had been a man of judicious mind and was a man of great orderliness and industry, but even he had looked in upon Hinduism from outside the gates of literacy. Ziegenbalg knows Tamil only, but it is seldom that he attempts to tell of things beyond the Tamil heathendom and the Tamil gods. His one venture into the field of Sanskrit literature -- his attempt to outline the content of the four Vedas -- is a total failure. The philosophical *darsanas*, including the very name of Vedānta, seem to be unknown to him. But in his own field -- the popular religion of South Indian polytheism and of the great theistic sects -- his books have not even now lost their worth.

Very few persons during the past two hundred fifty years have read his volumes or even known of their existence. The first to be printed, the *Genealogie der Malabarischen Götter*, appeared only in 1867 after a century and a half of neglect. His other mature works have waited until the present century to make their appearance in a learned journal. None have been made available outside their original language. In short, these books, which might have advanced western knowledge of Hinduism by something like a century, were suppressed until the age of their greatest usefulness had passed. Apparently this loss was caused by the narrow-mindedness of the superiors in Denmark and Germany to whom he sent his manuscripts. Professor A. H. Grancke wrote, after reading his *Genealogie...* that

²¹ Caland, ed., *Ausführliche Beschreibung...*, p. 14f.

printing the book was out of the question: missionaries are sent to root out heathenism, not to spread pagan nonsense in Europe.²² Similar comments must have sent his other manuscripts to the dusty files rather than to the printer. It is hard to say what may have been in the minds of those who buried those works. They may have been disturbed by the praise which our author accords the Hindus in certain matters, which we shall notice later. They may have feared the books would encourage fantastic theological speculation. They may have merely failed to see the importance of such publications for the mission enterprise.

Whatever the home authorities may have thought, Ziegenbalg wrote as a devout Christian and missionary, for the sake of the progress of the gospel. He says in his introductions that he writes in order that his successors may know how to communicate with the heathen effectively so that the mission leaders at home may understand the problems of mission work and contribute their advice; and so that European Christians may sympathize with the heathen in their plight and be moved to share the gospel with them. He is not content merely to write detached scholarly descriptions of Hindu beliefs and practice: his Christian evaluations precede or follow. He does not permit his pronounced attitudes to blur his power to discern the facts, however, and he does not attack any aspect of Hinduism unless he has seen it clearly and perceived in it a genuine opposition to an essential point of Christianity.

Though Ziegenbalg never deals with the theological problem of Christianity and Hinduism intensively and systematically, many scattered comments indicate that he was a man of some theological concern. He provides us with more material than any other Protestant of our period.

Ziegenbalg's attitude toward Hinduism remained always quite negative at the central point. He never regarded Hinduism as a whole as anything other than a corrupted and ineffective system of religion which does not effect man's salvation and which ought to be replaced. His letter of September 2, 1706, mentioned above, shows that he arrived from Europe with a predisposition toward a severe view of Hinduism: he says he is writing "to lay open the folly and falsity of their worship" and to give "a short smack of their ridiculous theology"-- which he does, on the slender basis of his reading and his first impressions, until he tires of rehearsing "so much of this useless trash." The garbled information and callow judgments of this letter soon came under Ziegenbalg's own critical re-examination. In his later writings he does not allow sharp and sweeping

²² Wilhelm Germann, ed., *Genealogie...*, p. vii.

condemnations of this kind to stand alone. But he remains ever a staunch evangelical Christian championing the true religion against a false one. In the introduction and conclusion of his last work, his *Genealogie...* of 1713, he wishes to make it clear to his readers that he does not write about the gods because he is happy to spend his time with such foolishness, but because it is a necessity of his work. He despises those gods, prays that God will annihilate them and bring the heathens from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to Himself.²³ The popular polytheism he finds particularly offensive, with its imputation to God of trivial and sinful mythological doings which offend against the divine justice, wisdom, truth, and holiness. Truly the heathen must be blind when they bow down and worship the perpetrators of such deeds!

At some points Ziegenbalg's later attitude was more exclusive than the one with which he came to India. In the above-mentioned letter of 1706 he was inclined to think that the Hindus might have heard of the Holy Trinity, because they attribute to Brahmä a human nature and other characteristics of Jesus Christ. Their beliefs about the incarnations of Vishnu, too, indicated to him "that this deluded people have heard some imperfect Rumor of Christ, but talking it all in a huddle, have interlaced it with a World of Fables and Fictions." The *kalki* incarnation that is yet to come indicated, he thought, some imperfect notion of the Day of Judgment.²⁴ But when he wrote his introduction to the *Nidiwunpa* two years later he could no longer agree that the Christian God could be referred to by a trinity of any such personalities as Brahmä, Vishnu and Siva, lewd and quarrelsome as they are.²⁵ And regarding the allegation that it was for the salvation of men that Vishnu became incarnate, that god's motive in taking the form of the Dwarf was to take away Mahäbali's kingdom by trickery, as he read the story in a Tamil book. Thus his earlier tracing of certain Hindu beliefs to a source in God's revealed Word did not stand up under the test of study as far as he was concerned.

Yet we have not done justice to Ziegenbalg's rich and sophisticated insight if we report only that in the end he rejected the rightfulness of Hinduism's claim upon men. In the seven years of his study and writing, his acquaintance with Hinduism went deep. He became aware of the vast variety within that faith, of the need for separate judgments, and of the inhumanity of absolute generalization.

²³ Germann, ed., *Genealogie...*, pp. 3, 288.

²⁴ Ziegenbalg, *Propagation of the Gospel in the East*, pp. 19-25.

²⁵ Caland, ed., *THE KLEINERE SCHRIFTEN*, p. 22.

Again and again Ziegenbalg sought to counteract European prejudice by testifying to the great accomplishments of the “Malabarians” in the virtues. He writes in 1703 that he is sending his examples of the Hindu moralistic literature in order to show how far the heathen have been able to go in the ethical life unaided by the Word of God.²⁶ He hopes to change the notions of Europeans, he says, who generally think the Malabar heathens are a very barbarous folk, a sort of *schwarze hunde* knowing nothing of erudition or moral propriety.²⁷ Such conclusions are drawn from outward appearances only, and are based upon ignorance of their language. Ziegenbalg confesses that when he first arrived among them he could not imagine that their language might be a rationally structured one, their social life a very human one guided by civil and moral law. He was gradually freed of such notions, he says, as he started to read their language. And when he gained full competency and discovered they followed the same philosophical disciplines the learned of Europe had known, and possessed regular written authorities in theological matters, he was astonished, and worked eagerly to become thoroughly instructed in their heathenism.²⁸ As a result of these studies he has been convinced that the Malabar people equal the ancient Latin and Greek heathen in knowledge of the moral law -- indeed, quite surpass them.²⁹ The books which he is forwarding, he says, will give adequate evidence of this. Also he can say from observation that they are very sympathetic toward travellers and the poor. Everywhere they have built special houses to provide these needy people with rest and alms. At some monastic establishments the poor are fed in thousands. The quantity of alms the Malabar people give puts Christians to shame. They believe alms-giving to be very important for salvation -- and they have such a great concern for their future blessedness that many give up property, house, and family and retire to the wilderness to do severe penances. Seeing what a high attainment they have made in the virtuous life without the aid of either the revealed Word or the peculiar support of the Holy Spirit, we Christians are warned of how much more shall be expected of us who enjoy every advantage!³⁰

Nor has Ziegenbalg found among the Hindus any atheist who denies there is a God and a future life.³¹ “Every one of those heathen

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 25, 53, 71.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁰ Caland, ed, ... *Kleinere Schriften*, p. 25f.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 23.



knows that there is one divine being by whom all was created and on whom all in heaven and on earth depends, and they hold this truth in no way in doubt. This Supreme Being or *Ens Entium* is called by them *Baräbarawastu*, a designation which may be read here and there in their books, and heard in their discourses.”³² He presents in translation a number of striking monotheistic passages from his Tamil books and then exclaims:

Where in the writings of the ancient Greek and Latin heathens does one find such convincing utterances regarding God? Why, when I first read such things in their books, I became quite convinced that by some chance their authors were Christians, since they not only reject the plurality of gods, but also criticize all the other heathenish ways and put them down as foolishness!³³

But his enquiries showed that those writers were esteemed highly by the Hindus, who regarded them as their own. They had traversed all the Hindu paths and had arrived at these opinions by their own natural light.

Ziegenbalg sets down here and there in passing his thoughts on how these truths regarding the nature of virtue and the existence of the One God came to be known among the Hindus. Evidently he never dismissed completely the idea that the Hindus may yet have some small remnant of the primeval revelation of Genesis, or that they may have received in the course of history some remote influences from the people of the Biblical faith. We still find the idea in the introduction to his *Genealogie...*, where he invites the reader to notice for himself what is preserved in the heathen traditions from the Word of God, “and how this and that Old Testament story and such-and-such scriptural articles of faith and godly truths have been turned upside down and distorted by the poets through the cunning of the devil.”³⁴ In all other instances Ziegenbalg discusses this problem in terms of a theory of natural light. In the introduction to his *Ausführliche Beschreibung...* he says that his readers will be able to perceive, in his description of Hindu beliefs and disciplines,

...on the one hand the devil’s great deception and the dreadful errors to which such heathens are given, and on the other hand how far they have been brought, by their light of reason, in the knowledge of God and of natural

³² Caland, ed., *Ausführliche Beschreibung...*, p.39.3

³³ *ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁴ Germann, ed., *Genealogie...*, p. 2.

things, and how they often put many Christians to shame in virtuous living, and often feel a much greater aspiration toward the future life than they.³⁵

Elsewhere Ziegenbalg adds that though these pagans do not have the true law, yet their consciences convince them that they should avoid sins and do good. Now if they were to do these things out of gratitude toward God and with faith in Jesus Christ, rather than in order to raise up their own righteousness, they could be called doers of truly good works. As it is, they are found wanting. But we Christians can see in them how much men can achieve by their natural powers and their natural light, and be ashamed.³⁶

Having seen how generously Ziegenbalg could praise certain doctrinal and moral achievements of the Hindus, we must now be sure to note how inadequately equipped he finds them on both these counts in the final analysis. He finds their impressive moral effort corrupted at the root, as we have seen, because it is self-centered rather than God-centered. Because the Hindus rely upon their own merits rather than on those of Christ, even their sincere urge toward virtuous life results in external propriety and civility only, and is ineffective.³⁷ Sunk in error, they cannot realize their own condition nor find their way out unless compassionate Christians communicate to them the light given by the Father in Jesus Christ.³⁸

With regard to true belief, the situation of the Hindus is no better. Hindu books mention the One God, and some Hindus therefore read about Him and talk about Him -- but there are very few who reverence and seek Him. They know the bare name, not the Being himself; they know the name Barabaravastu and can say that it represents the Being of All Beings. That is all. Their religious books prescribe the worship of the many gods only, and in their preoccupation with idols the heathen as a whole have quite forgotten the One God.³⁹ They say that the Supreme Being is too high to be troubled by the affairs of the many worlds and that He has therefore created inferior gods to be their rulers. The scriptures continue to draw a line between the *Ens Entium* and the created gods, but

³⁵ Caland, ed., *Ausführliche Beschreibung...*, p. 11f.

³⁶ Caland, ed., *Ausführliche Beschreibung...*, p. 79.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 79, 235.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 39.

the common people worship every god as the highest.⁴⁰ Some so degrade monotheism as to say that there are three hundred thirty million gods!⁴¹

The omnipresent polytheism which dominates Hindu religious practice can be understood by Ziegenbalg only as a degradation wrought by the devil; "...these heathen have allowed themselves to be misled into polytheism by the devil and by their old poets, through whom they have wandered from the path of the One God to such a degree that they do not know how to find it again."⁴² Their belief in rebirth and their demand for superstitious wonders are the devil's cunning work to hold them back from conversion.⁴³ Satan has spared himself no trouble to extinguish the natural light of these people and to turn it more and more into thick darkness in which only small remnants of knowledge of the Divine Being remain.⁴⁴

Any effort to sum up and interpret Ziegenbalg's attitude toward Hinduism cannot fail to note that he ascribed practically the whole of Hindu religious practice to the devil. Such language means a most emphatic rejection, however one may look at it. It is the ultimate in negative evaluation.

Yet it needs interpretation. First, we must observe that there are aspects of Hinduism to which the condemnation does not apply. He does not impute a diabolical disposition to the Hindus themselves nor call any non-Christian an agent of the devil. Dupes of the devil they may be, but there is a difference. He does not question the sincerity of their intentions. Their situation is tragic rather than blameworthy. There is no indication that his relationships with the Hindus about him was ever rancorous. On the contrary, he can say of one with whom he was engaged in dispute, "I grew very fond of the man..."⁴⁵ So it is not Hindu persons that are demonic, but the greater part of their religious ideas and practices, Ziegenbalg's talk of the devil is not, as in so much of modern usage, a part of the language of angry personal abuse.

Another necessary observation is that he does not put the brand of the devil on quite the entirety of the Hindu intellectual system. Hindu thinkers are not wholly ignorant of the true God. There are points of light

⁴⁰ Caland, ed., ...*Kleinere Schriften*, pp. 10-13.

⁴¹ --*Ausführliche Beschreibung...*, p. 43.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ -- ...*Kleinere Schriften*, p. 21

⁴⁴ Germann, cd., *Genealogie...*, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Caland, ed., ...*Kleinere Schriften*, p. 17.

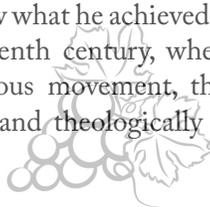
-- not bright nor adequate lights, nor are they set in central places, but they are *there*, and they are sufficient to keep the relationship between Christian and Hindu faith from being one of utter contrast between absolute light and absolute darkness.

Absolute contrast is prevented by yet another consideration: the devil's operations are not confined to India. Ziegenbalg acknowledges in one of his introductions that Satan is active in all four of the great world-religions; and although the Christian religion is founded on the Word of God and is the one true and holy faith, even in it the devil has caused Christians to divide into many quarrelsome sects which fall from one error into another.⁴⁶ This consideration does not seem to enter into his thoughts very persistently as he ponders the relation between Christianity and Hinduism at other times, but it is significant that he acknowledges at any time that the devil operates in the church to some degree as well as in the temple.

Therefore it would be a serious misrepresentation to say of Ziegenbalg that he held Christianity to be entirely of divine origin and Hinduism to be entirely of the devil. Not only does the devil operate in both, but the knowledge of God and the good which Hindus have achieved by their natural light is valid, even if feeble.

If Ziegenbalg's works had been used fully by Protestants, their attitudes would have been broadened as well as their knowledge. He applied to Hinduism a more reflective and persistent Christian criticism than had any of his predecessors. He made a perceptive distinction between a Hinduism that is higher and a Hinduism that is lower from a Christian point of view. His judgment upon the latter, while severe, was not unfair when properly understood.

Ziegenbalg hoped that his writings would be used as handbooks by succeeding generations of missionaries. Nothing more useful for the purpose was to be written for at least a hundred years. As things turned out, they were to lie in oblivion during the period of their greatest potential usefulness. Only now do we know what he achieved and how it was wasted. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Protestant missions expanded into a broad continuous movement, the Protestant effort to understand Hinduism factually and theologically made an independent start.



First Fruits

⁴⁶ Caland, cd., *Ausführliche Beschreibung...*, p. 9f.

6. WILLIAM WARD, 1769-1823.

After Ziegenbalg's time, his mission produced a well-informed student of Hinduism in Frederick Schwartz, but no new writings of importance in this field. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century great advances in general knowledge of Hindu culture began to be made in Bengal by a small group of enthusiastic Englishmen who had taken up the study of Sanskrit language and literature. Sir William Jones, Charles Wilkins, Nathaniel Halhed, Henry Thomas Colebrooke and others organized in Calcutta in 1764 an association of vast importance for the future of oriental studies, the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The contagious interest in the study of the classical Indian languages which this group generated spread eventually to the western universities, where it continues to this day. The founders of this society were Protestant by religion, but they studied the Hindu heritage primarily as historians and men of literature. They were neither active church men nor did they contribute much, directly, to the theological interpretation of Hinduism in the churches. Their movement was not anti-Christian, but many who were opposed to Christian missions for one reason or another found ammunition for their cause in the impressive classics of Hindu literature published by the Asiatic Society.

Until almost the end of the eighteenth century the Lutheran mission in Danish Tranquebar remained perforce the only Protestant mission in India. The British East India Company had refused through out its history to tolerate missionary activities in its territories, nor was any liberalization of this policy in sight as the century drew toward a close. However, in the last decade, William Carey managed to begin a quiet Baptist missionary activity in Bengal, and in 1799 William Ward, accompanied by Joshua Marshman, came out from England to join him. Ward had been in his childhood a printer's apprentice, then a proof-reader, and, after some years of self-education in these roles, a rather successful country editor. Now he became an essential member of the famous missionary trio of Serampore, contributing his special professional skills from 1800 until his death in 1823.

Ward's principal responsibility in Serampore was the supervision of the mission's extensive printing and publishing enterprises. But he became also the Serampore team's principal writer on Hinduism. He was fluent in spoken Bengali; he had a journalist's understanding of the importance of observing, enquiring, and taking notes; and he had at his disposal the help of numerous literate Hindus employed in the translating and printing work centered at the mission press. In 1811 he published his voluminous

and detailed *Account of the Writings, Religion and Manners of the Hindoos*.⁴⁷ The many later editions of this work bear the title *A View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindus*,⁴⁸ and usually include an extensive introduction summarizing and interpreting the material. Later, Ward expressed his general views on Hinduism again very forcefully in *Farewell Letters to a Few Friends in Britain and America on Returning to Bengal in 1821*.⁴⁹

Ward's *Account...* is almost an encyclopedia of the most varied information on the religious and social traditions of Bengal. The volumes include a history of India, summaries of major Hindu books, catalogs of Hindu deities, accounts of prominent temples, festivals, and pilgrimage-places. He describes the personal and family ceremonies, the castes, the major sects and monastic orders, and the schools of philosophy. As he acknowledges, his "translations" from Sanskrit literature are really English renderings of versions communicated to him in Bengali by his pandits. Usually they are paraphrases or summaries, perfunctorily done. In explaining Hindu philosophy, his information and also his aptitude are poor. He is often factually mistaken when he makes generalizations about the whole of Hinduism or writes of situations outside Bengal. But when he writes of the castes, customs, institutions, ceremonies and deities of his own province, he presents a rich collection of facts about the life and worship of the masses. Even in this field, however, his selection of materials is affected by an extremist attitude toward Hinduism.

In all of Ward's writings we find a deprecation of Hinduism, both theological and practical, of an intensity not to be found in any of his Protestant predecessors. It is not his hostility toward polytheism and idolatry that puts him in a separate category, for all shared by all. What makes him stand alone is the great difficulty he has in finding any mote of noble truth or any shred of redeeming virtue in any aspect of Indian thought and life that is in any way associated with Hinduism. The Hindus have "...no morality, for how should a people be moral, whose gods are monsters of vice; whose priests are their ringleaders in crime, whose scriptures encourage pride, impurity, falsehood, revenge, and murder;

⁴⁷ (4 v., Serampore, Mission Press, 1811).

⁴⁸ Second edition, Serampore Mission Press, 1815-18; 3rd ed., London, Black Parbury and Allen, 1817; 4th ed., London, Kingsbury Parbury & Allen, 1822; Hartford, J. Huntington Jr., 1824. (from the 2nd ed.); 5th ed., Madras, J. Higginbotham, 1863.

⁴⁹ (N.Y., E. Bliss & White, 1821; 2 editions, London, 1821; Lexington KY., T. T. Skillman, 1822.)

whose worship is connected with indescribable abominations, and whose heaven is a brothel?”⁵⁰ “. . . amidst a pretty large acquaintance with the heathen in India, *I have never seen one man* who appeared to ‘fear God and work righteousness,’” says Ward. “Their throat is an open Sepulchre. (The impurity of their conversation is beyond description.)” “. . . their feet are swift to shed blood. (Oh, how strikingly is this exemplified in the eagerness with which the Hindoos go into the work of immolating the poor widows and other human victims.”⁵¹ They drag their dying relations to the river banks at all seasons without remorse; they burn their bodies there in an inhuman manner, “Nor do any Hindoos die with the hope of even temporary happiness, except those who drown or burn themselves alive.”⁵² They have never built an alms-house or a hospital, and they let their fellows die of want before their very doors.⁵³ “. . .in ignorance, in vice, and immorality the Hindoos are far below the most savage nations ...the Hindoo females have not a spark of maternal tenderness toward their off spring.”⁵⁴ They “. . .murder their own children, by burying them alive, throwing them to the alligators, or hanging them up alive in trees for the ants and crows before their own doors, or by sacrificing them to the Ganges.”⁵⁵ The Rajputs, all families, we are assured, butcher all their female children.⁵⁶ The Hindus do not affirm, as the Muslims do, that women have no souls, but they *treat* them as if they had none.⁵⁷ In view of the worship in the temples of “the lecher Krishna and his concubine Radhā”⁵⁸ and the existence in the shrines of the lewd emblem of Siva, it is not surprising “that a chaste woman, faithful to her husband, is scarcely to be found among all the millions of Hindus.”⁵⁹ “. . .fidelity to marriage vows is almost unknown among the Hindoos; the intercourse of the sexes approaches very near to that of the irrational animals.”⁶⁰

50 Ward, *Farewell Letters...*, (N.Y., 1821), p, 57.

51 Ward, *Farewell Letters ...*(N.Y., 1821), p. 37.

52 Ibid., p. 50.

53 Ward, *A View...* (3rd ed.), I, pp lvi, lvii, xcv.

54 Quoted from a pamphlet of Ward's by J. A. Dubois, *Letters on the State of Christianity in India* (London, Longman etc., 1823), p.148.

55 *A View...*, I, p. lvi.

56 *Farewell Letters...*, pp.6lf, 78f.

57 *Farewell Letters...*, p. 65.

58 *ibid.*, p. 52.

59 *A View...*, I, p. xxix.

60 *ibid.*, xcivf, cf. *Letters* p. 92.

Nor is there in Hindu thought, as distinct from moral life, anything true or good. Though the Hindus do believe in the unity of God, this belief has no place whatever in the actual religion of the country. They worship the 330,000,000 gods, and the general belief is that each of the many idols is a real deity.⁶¹ In all of India there stands not a single temple to the One God.⁶² Not even a distant allusion to Christian truth is to be found in their absurd philosophical systems. ⁶³Their greatest minds have been feeling after the Supreme Being for ages with complete ineffectiveness in knowing Him.⁶⁴

There is scarcely anything in Hindooism, when truly known, in which a learned man can delight, or of which a benevolent man can approve; and I am fully persuaded that there will soon be but one opinion on the subject, and that this opinion will be, that the Hindoo system is less ancient than the Egyptian, and that it is the most puerile, impure, and bloody of any system of idolatry that was ever established on earth.⁶⁵

In short, even such appreciations and acknowledgments as the staunch Ziegenbalg willingly made, Ward withholds.

The theological standing of Hinduism is discussed by Ward only in a few scattered remarks. However, they make his position fairly clear. He does not give a moment's consideration to any notion that a positive divine initiative may be at work in any sense whatever in Hinduism. The relation between Christianity and Hinduism, as he sees it, is at best analogous to the relation between the one true God and fallen man. Man rejected the doctrine of the divine unity and chose for his worship images suggested by his darkness and his passion.⁶⁶ "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?"⁶⁷ And yet in his view the idolatry of the heathen is not merely the work of man; Hinduism is a part of a revolt against God inspired by Satan, who leads an organized rebellion based on an alliance of

61 *ibid.*, p. 1f, xlviiii,

62 *Farewell Letters...*, p. 50.

63 *Farewell Letters...*, p. 88.

64 *A View...*, I, p. 1xxxvii.

65 *A View...*, I, p. ciii.

66 Ward, *A View...* (3rd. ed.), I, p. xiii.

67 *ibid.*, p. cii.



...Three mighty powers, marshaled under the prince of darkness, having for their subordinate leaders the Roman pontiff, Mahomet, and all the gods of the heathen.⁶⁸

Thus, Christianity is not merely as different from Hinduism as God is different from man: the two religions stand on opposite sides of the chasm which separates God and Satan. They are related only as opposites, Hinduism is demonic in toto.⁶⁹

Ward's picture of Hinduism had immense outreach and influence. His original volumes of 1811 were English-speaking Protestantism's first report on the subject from its first India missionaries. His *Farewell Letters* went through at least four editions in the 1820's, as noted earlier. Editions of *A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindus* were published at Serampore in 1815, in London in 1817 and 1822, at Hartford in 1824, and in Madras in 1863. The work had some critics from the start, but their voices in no way hindered its heavy circulation nor kept it from occupying a prominent place in the libraries of nineteenth-century missionaries. In his missionary manual of 1847, T. Phillips includes it on his recommended list as "...this work so well known and probably to be found in every missionary home."⁷⁰ Mr. Phillips acknowledges that Ward makes errors outside his field of special competence but upholds his work as being of unexcelled accuracy so far as practical Hinduism in Bengal

⁶⁸ Ward, *Farewell Letters*... (N.Y., 1821), p. 179.

⁶⁹ The demon theory seems to have been general at Serampore. In Joshua Marshman's *Thoughts on Propagating Christianity by mere Effectual among the Heathens* (2nd ed., Serampore, 1827, p. 6) we find:

"India has been, from the earliest ages, the seat of the grossest delusion that has over pervaded the mind of man. Here the prince of darkness has reigned in the most triumphant manner and from thence has he sent forth those streams of delusion, under the name of Buddhism, which, on the one side, have deluged Ceylon, Boutan, and Tibet, and, on the other, all the notions beyond the Ganges, even to China and Japan."

Henry Martyn's reaction on seeing in Serampore, for the first time, the public worship of an image, shows the views with which evangelical Protestants sometimes arrived in India in Ward's time: "I shivered at being in the neighborhood of hell; my heart was ready to burst at the dreadful state to which the Devil had brought my poor fellow creatures. I would have given the world to have known the language and to have preached to them" (J.N. Ogilvie, *The Apostles of India*, London 1915, p. 357.)

⁷⁰ T. Phillips, *The Missionary's Vade Mecum* (Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1847), p. 257.

is concerned. He feels it his duty “to defend the memory of so judicious and worthy a man from the charge of prejudice,”⁷¹ in the fifth edition of *Madras*, the writer of the introduction admits that the book cannot be altogether acquitted of being too prudish and condemnatory, but is inclined in view the author’s faults as those of immoderate expression rather than of substance: “Deduct something for the heat of controversy, and the Missionary’s views escape censure.” And he adds that the atrocities of the mutiny of 1857 have done much to substantiate Ward’s view of the Hindu moral character.⁷²

Since Ward was clearly an influential guide, it is important that we evaluate the temperateness of the guidance he gave. Were his verbal observations based solidly on his visual observations? Did he write with serious intent to describe with precision, and justly?

People of this generation may easily fail to realize how much ground for unfavorable report the religious life of India presented to a firm Christian one hundred fifty years ago. Hindu intellectual life and Hindu social morality were at a low ebb, all agree. For centuries both theistic and non-theistic religious groups had been devoting themselves largely to providing wholesale escapes and compensations for a people constantly frustrated by outsiders and by their own rigid institutions. The activities carried out in the name of the gods were often coarse in specific content, and in their function they were ethically non-constructive. To any Christian thoroughly trained in the biblical conception of God and His place in life, the views of deity implicit in the Bengal practices of 1800 could irritate like the intolerable defamation of a revered friend. “I have found no traces of God’s immaculate purity, or inflexible justice, in any part of the Hindoo writings, nor amongst the great number of intelligent Hindoos with whom I have conversed,” says Ward -- and those words could have been said after a considerable search; “How unworthy those ideas are of God, and how infinitely short they fall of the scripture idea of God, every person blessed with a Christian education is competent to decide.”⁷³ Ward perceived truly that the popular cults of Bengal in his time had little or nothing to do with morality, and he had a right to protest against what, to a Christian, can be only a dishonoring travesty upon the Divine nature.

But to charge that *no* morality is found among the Hindu people, or to imply that they had lived for centuries “in a state of perfect brutality

⁷¹ Ibid., p. xi, xii.

⁷² Ward, *A View...* (5th ed.), p. 11f (by W. O. Simpson).

⁷³ Ward, *An Account...* (1811), IV, pp. 275, 277.

and crime”⁷⁴ is quite a different kind of accusation. His many swooping condemnations of Hindu life as something wholly vile raises the question of whether Ward was an unbalanced emotional man, full of hostility in his general relationships.

Gross tendencies of this kind are not indicated by the common biographical material on Ward. John Clark Marshman, who is rather frank in his character sketches, and who certainly knew Ward well, writes of him as amiable, affectionate, habitually sweet of disposition, a man who “never made an enemy.”⁷⁵ He was the Serampore group’s foremost advocate of interdenominational fellowship among Christians.⁷⁶ Furthermore, he evidently had no deep hostility toward aspects of Hindu culture not connected with the doctrine, worship, and morality of the Hindu religion, because he joined with his associates in insisting that converts keep their Indian dress, food, domestic habits, language, and even their Hindu names. An intemperate, fanatical individual is not suggested by any of these facts.

On the other hand there may be significance in the fact that of all the Protestant writers we have studied he had the least formal schooling, and that even his primary education was obtained in editorial offices at a time when journalists wrote with pens dipped in vitriol. As a young sympathizer with the republican ideas of the French Revolution, Ward himself had written an editorial for the *Derby Mercury* for which the newspaper had been prosecuted. This brush with the law certainly proves nothing ignoble in the editorialist, but it probably does indicate a capacity for violent utterance.

As one would expect of a man of his background. Ward was aware of the processes and power of publicity, and he was capable of using selected material with a given propagandistic purpose in mind. While in England in 1819 he carried on a campaign directed toward the admirable end of procuring a measure for the legal prohibition of widow burning. As to means, “We must inundate England with these horrid tales,” he said, “till the practice can be tolerated no longer.”⁷⁷

There are indications in his book on the Hindus that here, too, he is working not in the scholarly spirit of impartial description, but with a

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ John Clark Marshman, *The Story of Carey Marshman and Ward* (London, Alexander Strahan and Co., 1864), pp. 196, 318.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 96f.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 293.

view to the maximum impact in a competition for the molding of opinion, “I fear a very unjust and unhappy impression has been made on the public mind,” he says in his 1811 edition, “by the encomiums which have been so lavishly bestowed on the Hindoo writings.”⁷⁸ He mentions his irritation with Nathaniel Halhed, who in 1776 in his *Code of Gentoo Laws* accepted the Brahman chronologies and set the rationalists of Europe to raving for years over the incomparable antiquity of Hindu culture. He protests at the fact that President Ezra Stiles of Yale College in America, though a devout Christian, was so taken in by this that he actually wrote Sir William Jones asking him to look for the books of Adam in India! Yet Ward approves of the work of the orientalist, basically his wrath is directed rather against persons who are using their discoveries to give substance to a rosy picture of the character of Hinduism in general, saying that the Hindu religion teaches sublime doctrines, inculcates pure morality, recognizes the One God and is not really idolatrous, etc., etc.⁷⁹

Now, current discussions in the press about the virtues of the Hindu religion had a significance for the missionaries in the little Danish settlement of Serampore that was more than academic. During the entire time in which Ward was working on his first edition it was illegal, technically, for him or any missionary to step across the boundary into British India. The view of the established merchants and empire builders was that mission work was dangerous to security, and they meant to see the policy of exclusion of missionaries maintained when the East India Company’s charter came up for renewal in Parliament in 1812. In a campaign of speaking, publishing, and pamphleteering, the old India hands were promoting the view that efforts to convert the Hindus to Christianity were not only impolitic, but also impertinent, since the Hindu religion was so lofty and its morality so refined that Hindus had nothing to gain from Christianity.⁸⁰ A journalist like Ward recognized the importance of impressing upon the English reading public the fact that the Hindus did indeed have need of Christian morality. Quite aside from the political crisis of 1812, there was a continuing need to justify the mission work in the face of the extravagantly eulogistic literature on Hinduism that had been put into circulation.

A missionary book giving due attention to the deficiencies of everyday Hinduism was required by truth itself at this time. Ward’s

⁷⁸ Ward, *An Account...* (Serampore, 1811), 1, 303.

⁷⁹ Ward, *A View...* (3rd ed.), 1, xcvi–ci.

⁸⁰ Marshman, *op. cit.*, pp. 214–238, gives the substance of the arguments used in these crucial debates.

writings were certainly effective in counteracting the romantic fictions about Hinduism that were current and in making Hindu shortcomings known. But when he had finished, had truth and justice been served? Or is the picture which he created as artificially distorted as the view which he demolished?

Ward's dark generalizations upon Hinduism aren't easily tested for factuality and fairness at this distance in time. Nothing is settled by our impression that he is an extremist in his judgments and reckless in his methods: we were not there. His accuracy and impartiality must be checked through persons who *were* there.

The first witness is Ward himself. The sweeping indictments quoted from the third edition of 1817 and from his letters of 1821 are summary statements upon aspects of Hindu life which he had described in detail in his *Account...* of 1811. By examining the body of factual knowledge out of which his accusations rise, we can note how fairly he draws his conclusions from the evidence.

Take for instance his accusation that the Hindus "murder their children, by burying them alive, throwing them to the alligators, or hanging them alive in trees for the ants and crows before their doors..." The reference to burying children alive seems to be a gratuitous exuberance. If any Hindus bury their children alive, he has not informed us of the practice in four exhaustive volumes which seldom miss a detail of this sort. His basis may be a reference to certain yogis and certain Vaishnavas who practice burial and whose widows were sometimes buried alive with their deceased mates.⁸¹ If so, his memory has confused the identity of the victims.

The allusion to throwing children to the alligators and to sacrificing them to the Ganges refer to a single practice covered in a section of the 1811 publication which says that mothers sometimes abandon their children to the river in compliance with a vow, and that the island of Gangā-sāgara at the mouth of the Hooghly is one of the places where this is done.⁸² "This custom is not commanded by any shastru, and is principally practiced by persons who come from the Eastern parts of Bengal, and from the vicinity of Midnapoor," he says in 1811. The crocodiles do not appear on the scene at all in this early version. Ward could not have witnessed the practice after 1802, because the British Government in that year prohibited such

⁸¹ Ward, *An Account...*, II, p. 561f.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 572-574.

sacrifices by law, and, as John Clark Marshman reports, "...they ceased at once without any disturbance, and with-out even a murmur."⁸³ Ward is aware of this fact, and recognizes in one note in his third edition, and elsewhere, that "This is now prevented by a guard of sepoy's sent by government." Nevertheless, in his frequent catalogs of the abominations of present-day Hinduism he continues to mention the sacrifice of babies at Ganga-sagara in the context of the present tense. Speaking in a letter of 1821 of the beastly callousness of the heart of the Hindu mother, he exclaims, "See the cow butting her horns, and threatening the person who dares to approach her offspring. See woman in India (at Saugur Island) throwing her living child into the outstretched jaws of the alligator!"⁸⁴ The alligators, introduced thus late into the scene, are used with tremendous effect in another letter which inserts a concessive "formerly" into the account, but goes on to transfer the force of the events into a current situation:

At Saugur island, formerly, mothers were seen casting their living offspring amongst a number of alligators, and standing to gaze at those monsters quarrelling for their prey, beholding the writhing infant in the jaws of the successful animal, and standing motionless while it was breaking the bones and sucking the blood of the poor innocent! What must be the superstition, which can thus transform a being, whose distinguishing quality is tenderness, into a monster more unnatural than the tiger prowling through the forest for its prey!⁸⁵

In a pamphlet Ward seems to have built up this story into something even more substantial, for in 1823 the Abbe Dubois quotes him as follows:

What must be the state of the female mind when *millions* are found throwing the children of their vows into the sea?⁸⁶

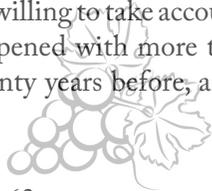
Thus we see that Ward is willing to take accounts of a practice which on his own testimony never happened with more than limited frequency and which ceased absolutely twenty years before, and to refurbish it with

⁸³ Marshman, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁸⁴ *Farewell Letters.* (N.Y. 1821), p.62.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁸⁶ Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 203.



now horrors and multiply it to the millions in order to create in his readers' minds a revolting impression of the current behavior of Hindu mothers.

With regard to the hanging of children in the trees alive for the food, presumably, of ants and crows, we have descriptive coverage in Section 41 of the 1811 edition under "Exposing of children to be starved to death."⁸⁷ Newborn children who refused the breast, it appears, were in certain areas sometimes actually hung on trees in baskets for three days to live or die, before another attempt was made to suckle them. Regarding the frequency and distribution of this custom Ward says, "This is a barbarous custom, not commanded by any of the shastras, and wholly confined to the lower classes of the people," "The custom is unknown in many places, but, it is to be feared, it is too common in many others," Mr. Ward is well aware of how universal this practice is -- or rather is *not* -- but in the passage under discussion he allows the foreign reader to suppose that babies are thus fed to the birds and insects all over India.

We have noticed above Ward's remark that Hindus can have no morality because, among other reasons, their heaven is a brothel. We find a detailed description of the Hindu heavens in twenty-five pages of his work of 1811.⁸⁸ They contain no factual support for such violent language beyond a general remark that the happiness of several of the heavens consists of "sensual pleasures," and a repetition of the charge that these heavens "are houses of ill-fame" like the paradise of Muhammad. The details he gives of these celestial abodes are naive and morally crude, but they do not support his use of the word "brothel."

The complaint against Mr. Ward's methods is not that his charges are absolute fabrications, but that he does not hesitate to represent past abuses as present, the local as the universal, and the rare as the typical. He seems to make these misrepresentations knowingly; or it may be nearer the facts to suppose that in the moment of impetuous attack on what he hates he gives himself over entirely to his feelings; his scruples are submerged, like those of a boy in a snowball fight who packs into his misslies whatever casual stones he happens to scoop up.

In a criminal case, the accused may well be guilty as charged even though the prosecutor exaggerates or deliberately falsifies in order to get a conviction. Though Ward makes many charges that have next to nothing to them, may his overall generalization regarding an almost totally depraved

⁸⁷ Ward, *An Account...*, II, p. 574.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, pp. 279-282, 316-338.⁵ OF ASBURY SEMINARY

Hindu social life be a fair representation of the facts nevertheless? Let us introduce the judgment of a contemporary, the Abbe J. A. Dubois, whose *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* is still much read. In his *Letters on the State of Christianity in India* we find a treatise entitled “Vindication of the Hindoos, both males and females, in answer to the attacks made upon both by the Reverend _____.” Quotations from the unnamed cleric identify the object of the rebuttal as the Reverend William Ward, “...the severity with which he treats these poor Hindoos,” says Dubois, “is far from being a subject of edification to me.” Until recently, he goes on, “everyone regarded the Hindus as mild, sober, industrious, patient and submissive people with a reasonably high achievement in the scale of civilization; but now we have a shocking account of a people polluted by every kind of wickedness, barbarians in deepest ignorance and immorality, below most savage nations, nearer brute than human.” “I cannot disguise to you that their exaggerations and misrepresentations (not to use harsher terms) respecting the Hindoos have been to me a subject of scandal, and have, in several instances, roused my indignation to a high degree.” Dubois then admits that he has often denounced the Brahmans himself for their pride and imposture, and the common people for their monstrous worship, but this blackest picture of an entire people depraved below the brutes is pure malevolence: the ordinary Hindu is not inferior to the ordinary European in devotion to duty, sobriety, industry, patience, or peacefulness. Though several Rajput clans have practiced infanticide, the charge that every Rajput mother puts her female child to death is an odious slander. Throwing children into the sea and the like is a rare practice, now illegal. Hindu women suffer inequalities, but their position in the home is not that of a domestic animal, as Ward suggests; and regarding the charge that a chaste female is almost unknown among the Hindus, “I can confidently affirm that this shameful accusation is unfounded.”⁸⁹

Now, the Abbe may have had a natural tendency to disapprove of Protestants and all their works. And, having spent most of his life in Madras and Mysore, he may have witnessed a Hindu moral life less deteriorated than that of Bengal. But he had the confidence of many non-Catholics, he had travelled in India at least as widely as Ward, and he had been in the country seven years longer. And he considered Ward’s picture of the Hindus an outrage. That “Ward’s description was unreasonably hostile seems fairly obvious. Possibly no two judges could ever agree on the precise degree of distortion in his picture. Therefore let us conclude our discussion of Ward with two observations that are fairly objective and demonstrable. First, Ward’s injustice goes beyond mere immoderation of

⁸⁹ Dubois, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-208.

language; he often distorts his facts. Second, in comparison with all earlier Protestant writers he is an extremist in every sense of the word. In his total condemnation of Hindu moral life, and in his utter rejection of the possibility of any doctrinal truth in Hinduism, he was the most severe of the severe.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Six writers on Hinduism in the course of more than two centuries are not a great many. But the number of Protestant chaplains in India during this period was few, and the missionaries were fewer. In view of this fact, the accomplishment is not insignificant. Furthermore, save the two earliest, the writings were substantial.

In mastery of Indian languages our Protestant writers left room for improvement. The chaplains in their short terms in the trading posts had not time for great accomplishments. Our two missionary authors with their serious lifetime commitment mastered the local vernaculars to their great advantage, and ours. No Protestant worker acquired a knowledge of Sanskrit during this period, and for this lack alone the penetration of all our writers into Indian thought was superficial. Even the theologies of the relatively accessible theistic sects were necessarily presented without the aid of their basic theological documents.

Theological thinking on the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity is remarkable for its scarcity. Nowhere do we find two consecutive pages of systematic discussion of the problem. The most persistent idea is that Hinduism manifests Satanic influence in whole or in part. Roger and Baldaeus, alone, do not employ the concept, Ziegenbalg ascribes to the devil the polytheism and idolatry which dominate in Hindu practice, but finds a residue which must be attributed to a more constructive source. Ward finds in living Hinduism nothing but polytheism and idolatry, and nothing not of ultimate Satanic inspiration.

Baldaeus sees in Hinduism indications that revealed truths have been imparted at some time or other from the biblical faiths, and Ziegenbalg is willing to entertain the notion. But Ward, recognizing nothing remotely like Biblical religion in Hinduism, has no use for a theory that borrowing from revelation has occurred. Ziegenbalg alone holds an avowed belief in the universal human possession of a "natural light" which guides the Hindus positively in the moral life and enables some of them to comprehend the truth of monotheism. Since Ward the Hindus have

neither any moral sense nor any living monotheistic faith, he has no place for a theory of natural light.

The prevalence of the devil-theory gives the early Protestant views of Hinduism a rather harsh tone. But there are differences of great importance. The harshest in every way is the latest, William Ward, who can find no common factor or point of contact whatsoever between Hinduism and Christianity. Despite Ziegenbalg's powerful evangelical interest, it is he who develops the most appreciative theory of all. But Ziegenbalg's influence passed into quick oblivion along with his neglected books, and it was Ward's writings which were available for the reading of the nineteenth-century missionaries. We are part of a tradition that is under the remote influence, at least, of Ward. At the outset of our thinking we should understand how his descriptions are related to the objective facts of Hinduism, and how his interpretations are related to other Protestant interpretations.

(Suggestions and criticisms will be welcomed.)

--N. H.



First Fruits
THE ACADEMIC OPEN PRESS OF ASBURY SEMINARY