



PROTESTANT VIEWS OF HINDUISM, 1600-1825

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A paper presented at the Third
Biennial Meeting of the Association of
Professors of Missions at Naperville,
Illinois, June, 1956, revised.

Among eastern religions, Hinduism manifests an unusual power to produce intellectuals and to draw the respectful attention of prominent western thinkers. Because of this, many Christian theologians have seen the problem of the relation between Christianity and the non-Christian religions as epitomized in the problem of Hinduism. Writers of prominent books in this field--Hendrik Kraemer, James N. Farquhar, Rudolf Otto, Albert Schweitzer, E. C. Dewick and others--deal with Hinduism predominantly or at least prominently and seem to assume that if Hinduism could be seen in the proper perspective, our difficulties with regard to the status of the non-Biblical faiths could be solved. They arrange and analyze their data on Hinduism in the light of their various understandings of the nature of God and his way of acting in the world, and in accordance with their theologies they set forth their comprehensive views of how the Christian faith and its great rival came into being, and of the value at which each should be rated. Their interpretations are helpful to those who share their respective theological starting-points but to others they are unconvincing. There is consensus neither among the workers in the mission fields nor among the Protestant churches in the West. An ecumenical view of Hinduism, based upon the totality of Christian insight into that faith, is still to be formulated.

The aim of the present article is to bring to the current discussion an awareness of the historical origin of our present debates. We shall bring out into the light again the long-forgotten books of the first Protestants to be confronted by Hinduism and we shall trace the development of Protestant interpretation of that faith through the first two centuries of contact, considering

all authors who were acquainted with Indian religion at first hand, who were of Christian training and occupation, and who wrote on Hinduism seriously and in some detail. We shall follow this stream of literature up to the year 1825, by which time the present tradition of Protestant missionary activity was well begun, the age of pristine impressionability had closed, and the attitudes toward Hinduism characteristic of the later missionary movement were well established. The nature of Protestant thinking on Hinduism from that time onward is relatively well-known. We undertake to discover in whose hands the attitudes typical of the nineteenth century were formed, and how.

We do not foolishly suppose that any survey of past views will enable us to produce by totalling and averaging a definitive Christian evaluation of Hinduism, or will be in itself the creative reconsideration of the matter which our age demands. But fresh thinking begins with self-knowledge, and self-knowledge requires recognition that we travel in tracks worn deep by our predecessors. Our discussions of the direction we should take are more pertinent and productive if we know where the grooves of inherited predisposition run, and why.

Protestant reports on Hinduism begin only with the seventeenth century. Only after the defeat of the Spanish Armada had upset Iberian control of the seas could groups from Protestant lands dream of travel to 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 chaplains came with the trading fleets and the ambassadorial parties. These clergymen were men of literary education, and, having a personal interest in religion, they sometimes turned

their pens from the writing of 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 certain writings of the chaplains of the various companies of merchants.

did they use the word "gentiles" or "gentes"?

1. Edward Terry, 1590-1660.

The Reverend Edward Terry, just out of Oxford, went to India in 1616 as chaplain with an East India Company fleet and served three years with the embassy of Sir Thomas Roe at the court of Emperor Jehangir. At home again in England, he wrote up his Indian experiences in 1622 and presented them to Prince Charles. When his account was printed three years later in Samuel Purchas' Pilgrimes,¹ Protestantism received its first eye-witness account of Hinduism from one of its own.² The information in his chapter on the "Gentiles" had been assembled with no help save that of his two eyes and a poor smattering of Persian. It is a miscellany of notes on such aspects of Hindu life and customs as he had chanced to observe. It is a sensible document, if not a deep one. 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." He reports that the Hindus are divided into twenty-four sects holding different opinions, but admits his inability to give an account of their beliefs, "which had oftentimes fild me with wonder, but that I know Satan (the father of division) to be the seducer of them all." Thus the theory of demonic origin appears as a presupposition in the first of all Protestant writers on Hinduism.

2. Henry Lord, 1563-16. ?

Henry Lord, onetime student of Magdalen College at Oxford, 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 religion of the Parsis and also with the "Banian religion", or Hinduism. In the introduction Lord gives his account of how he gathered his data. He approached certain Brahmans of Surat through interpreters and by their assistance, he says, he made his collection "out of a booke of theirs called the SHASTER, which is to them as their Bible..." Six of the fourteen chapters which follow claim to describe the Hindu codes of ceremonial and moral law, but actually report the rituals and moral practices visible in Surat in Lord's own time (and thereby provide most of the book's sober factual information).

The remainder of the chapters narrates what the Hindus are said to teach in their "Bible" regarding the creation of the world by "the great God", regarding the peopling of the earth with men of the four castes, regarding the history of the ages before and after the Flood, and the future judgment of the world by fire. In reading Lord's pages one becomes aware that a large body of Hindu cosmological material of a loosely Puranic type had been poured into his ears, and that he had struggled to assimilate it with uneven success. 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 that Lord did not understand the half of what was told him, and that he gave order to the unintelligible mass with the help of the Bible, the classics, and a mind filled with seventeenth-century ideas on the origin and history of religion. Purusha and Prakriti, the

two primordial principles of the Samkhya philosophy, appear in Lord's fantasia as the Adam and Eve of the Hindu Genesis. They are the parents of four sons who begat the principal castes. Brahmā is the Hindu Moses: in the midst of a dark cloud on Mount Meru (his Sinai) he receives the commandments of the śāstra from the Lord God Almighty! In short, Lord imposed upon the vague material he had assembled a pattern borrowed from the Pentateuch and turned out a rollicking pseudo-Biblical cosmological romance. It served as an effective piece of recruiting literature for the East India Company for many a day. On the whole it is an excellent example of the human tendency to force strange ideas through the die of established concepts and to insist on understanding the utterly new in terms of the familiar.

Mr. Lord tells his tale with such gusto that he seldom pauses for evaluative reflection on what he describes. He objects to Hindu vegetarianism and tee-totaling, but on the basis of arguments from the classics rather than Christian principles. The chief profit to be had from a study of their fictions and forgeries, he says in conclusion, is "to settle us in the solidnesse of our owne faith, which is purged of all such leuities..." The vain superstitions he has related show "how Satan leadeth those that are out of the pale of the church a round in the maze of errour and gentilisme."

From all that has been said above, the reader will perceive that in 1630 the serious study of Hinduism had not yet begun. These earliest treatises are of interest because we can see in them the nature of the pre-established evaluative concepts which were brought to the study of Hinduism before they were brought out of such study.

3. Abraham Roger, ? --1649.

Significant Protestant study of Hinduism begins with the work of Abraham Roger, a Dutch Calvinist chaplain in the service of the Dutch East India Company. Roger went to the East with as much special preparation as the Europe of his time could provide. As a seminarian he had studied at Walaeus' Collegium Indicum in Leiden, which trained pastors for the East Indies by study of the Malay language and introductory work on Islam and paganism.⁴ The Collegium Indicum may have given him a sense of the importance of a studious attitude toward oriental faiths. Roger served from 1631 to 1641 at the Dutch trading station at Paliacatta or Pulicat on the Coromandel Coast north of Madras. He retired to the Netherlands in 1647, and died two years later leaving an unpublished manuscript. Through the efforts of his widow it was published in Leiden in 1651 as De Open-Deure tot het Verborgten Heydendom.⁵

While in Paliacatta Roger had developed a happy literary cooperation with a certain Padmanābha, a Portuguese-speaking Brahman of that place. Though Roger was not entirely ignorant of Tamil, evidently he was in no position to use its literature directly. Again and again his book acknowledges total dependence on this Brahman friend for extensive areas of information. Roger's contribution was a wide and persistent curiosity and a rare thoroughness and fairness of mind. He cast into shape a treatise 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 describe the life and manners of the Brahmans. After an almost modern sociological description of the caste hierarchy, we read an outline of the principal sects of Brahman sannyasis and householders, the particulars of the

customary Brahman prerogatives and incomes, and a description of the Brahman customs in childhood, marriage, housekeeping, and funeral rites. The second half of the book mentions their beliefs regarding God and the gods, regarding Vishnu's incarnations, the cosmic ages, man's soul, and the afterlife. It describes the manner in which Hindus build temples, observe their festivals, and go on pilgrimages. Working with Padmanābha, Roger is able to append to the book a translation of the Vairāgyaśatakam of Bhartrihari-- the first translation from the Sanskrit to be published in any European language.

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 Padmanābha Roger was fortunate in finding a broad-minded, intelligent and cooperative pandit of better-than-average education. At only a few points did Padmanābha's information fail. The account of the four Vedas which he gave to Roger bears no relation to the facts. Padmanābha could not read the Vedas and was misinformed about them himself. Also, being exclusively a Vaishnava and a theist himself by education and by conviction, he gave Roger no hint that a powerful non-theistic monism exists among Hindus. Thus Roger exhibits a 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 these pagans also recognize one God. We have said in Part I Chapter 3 that the Vaishnavas say that Vishnu, who is also

named Perumāḷ and a thousand other names, is the sovereign God; but the Śaivas say that it is not Vishnu but Išvara, 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."⁶

Much water was 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 all Hindus are or are not believers in the one sovereign God.

Roger's descriptions are starkly factual and generally bare of evaluations. Yet when a strong criticism is called for, he does not hesitate to make it, nor linger to scandalize over it. In the twentieth chapter of Part One he lays forth in fearful detail the manner in which Brahman widows are burned. "An inhuman cruelty!", he exclaims, "One can't even think without horror of these cruel and frightful things. Yet they are true, and are practiced in that place!" Then he moves on promptly to the next topic.

Roger in no place explains what his theory may be on the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism. The devil is not mentioned anywhere as Hinduism's special patron.⁷ Death may have deprived Roger of the opportunity to explain his theological perspective. A theological introduction written for the first edition by Andreas Wissowatius, a lawyer and friend, credits the Hindus with a natural knowledge but not a saving knowledge of God. This view is not out of keeping with the spirit of the body of the book, but we have no assurance that it expresses Roger's own opinion.

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4. Philip Baldaeus, 1632-1671

The Reformed clergy of the Netherlands soon produced again, in Philip Baldaeus, another writer on India who was read by generations. After a good classical education, Baldaeus prepared for his work in the East with study under the direction of Robert Junius, graduate of the Collegium Indicum and advocate of the cultivation of oriental languages. Appointed to a chaplaincy by the Dutch East India Company, Baldaeus took ship to the Indies in 1655 and accompanied the Dutch forces which drove the Portuguese from Ceylon and the nearby coasts of India. He led a more settled life from 1658 to 1666 as a pastor residing chiefly at Jafna amidst Tamil-speaking people at the northern tip of Ceylon. Since the Dutch East India Company viewed its chaplains as having been appointed primarily to provide pastoral care for its employees, the first call upon Baldaeus' time was to preach in Dutch to the Europeans in Jafna, and then to make periodic tours to scattered Dutch posts on both coasts of India, and to serve as field chaplain with occasional military expeditions against the remaining Portuguese strongholds in Malabar. Meanwhile, in northern Ceylon where more than forty Roman Catholic clergy had been working in the days of the Portuguese occupation, he found himself the only ordained pastor to arrange for worship and religious education in twenty-four Tamil-speaking churches. He was aware of the importance of a knowledge of Tamil in carrying out this work, but his efforts to devote time to language study were frustrated by the press of his many ecclesiastical duties, and he confesses in his book that he is "not a full man, but scarcely a young in knowledge of the language."⁸ The modern editor of his work, who gave careful attention to the outline of Tamil grammar which Baldaeus prepared, assures us that any exaggeration in Baldaeus' estimate of his skill in Tamil is not in the direction of modesty.⁹ He was surely

unable to make direct use of Tamil literature. There is no evidence that he attempted any other Indian language.

Baldaeus returned to the homeland in 1666 and retired to quiet pastorates. In the town of Gervliet he put together a massive book which came from the press in 1672, a few months after his untimely death. Its title-page describes it as "An Accurate Description of Malabar and Coromandel, the realms bordering on the same, and the great island of Ceylon, together with a detailed and thoroughly-revised disclosure and refutation of the idolatry of the East Indian heathens, wherein their greatest mysteries have been faithfully brought to light from their own writings as well as from conversation with and residence with the most distinguished Brahmans and other Indian scholars of the law; there being added hereto a Malabaric grammar, very servicable for all who desire to associate with these people..."¹⁰ The greater part of the volume relates the decisive struggles between the Portuguese and the Dutch for control of the Indian seas. Since much of this portion of the book is written from the standpoint of an eye-witness or from personal acquaintance with the participants, it is a valuable contribution to Indian history. The part of the work which concerns us here, however, is the final portion entitled "Afgoderye der Oost-Indische Heydenen" (Idolatry of the East-Indian Heathens), which has separate pagination and title-page and is of book length in itself.

Baldaeus' Afgoderye brought to general European readers for the first time a substantial impression of the content of Hindu religious literature. By giving synopses of some length, he makes the Ramayana and the Mahabharata identifiable at last by more than the mere titles. An extensive central section provided Europe with

its first full account of the legends of the ten incarnations of Vishnu. The Krishna-myths, first narrated there in detail, called attention to Krishna as one of the foremost of the Hindu gods and revealed something of the character of his cult. Whereas Roger had brought to Europe his excellent observation of the South Indian social scene, his successor's contribution was of a different and supplementary nature. The Afgoderye is essentially a compendium of South Indian mythology, with its ultimate source in Indian literature.

Baldaeus is never very specific about his sources. But he mentions pointedly that he has Tamil books in his possession, and makes special reference to long conversations he has had with a certain Brahman. Thus he suggests that his writing rests upon personal research with primary sources, written and oral. His general title-page makes the claim openly, as we have seen. The separate title-page of the Afgoderye (apparently composed while the author was still alive) even claimed that the work which followed had been "traced out from their own Devagal or lawbook, translated from the Indian, and from other authentic and original manuscripts." With regard to these other manuscripts, Baldaeus acknowledges in his text that he has often referred (presumably only in a general way) to unnamed "Portuguese histories" that had been left in Ceylon by his Jesuit predecessors.

It is necessary to state that Baldaeus was less than frank about the origin of his materials. After two hundred and fifty years of repute as a pioneer Indological scholar, he has been shown by a modern literary sleuth to have been a compiler and little more.¹¹ He could not and did not read Indian scriptures, and gathered little of his information by personal observation or oral enquiry.

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The fact is that he lifted at least two-thirds of his material verbally from two obscure old manuscripts on Hinduism, one in Portuguese and one in Dutch. Perhaps as the spoils of war, there had fallen into his hands a handwritten Portuguese treatise composed about 1603 by Father Jacobo Fenicio entitled "Livro da Seita dos Indios Orientais", and from this he translated in large blocs about a hundred pages of his Afgoderye. He copied most of the remainder of his treatise--also without acknowledgment--from a Dutch manuscript on the incarnations of Vishnu written at Surat by an unknown author about the year 1650. The fraction of the Afgoderye not from these two major sources is studded with excerpts from older published books of European travel and scholarship, all of which are carefully acknowledged! By modern standards of literary ethics the writing of the Afgoderye was almost pure piracy. We may be able to surmise how it came about. In the relative leisure of his Netherlands parsonage Baldaeus attempted to learn at last, from his collected papers, what he had wished to learn from the Hindus themselves. And he transformed the resulting compilation into his own work by wishing that it were.

In evaluating Baldaeus' contribution to occidental insight into Hinduism we must remember that we are appraising his historical function and not his literary morality. Writings which are highly dependent can be the means of diffusing important information. Baldaeus' book was not very original, but it brought to light from rare and close-held sources much of the religious lore of India and made thousands of readers aware of new aspects of Indian culture.

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The rudiments of a theological interpretation of Hinduism is found in the original Dutch edition's first chapter, entitled "Of the Universal Knowledge of God." The material found there is not borrowed from the published text of Fenicio at least, and may be Baldaeus' own. At any rate it is the theological reasoning which he approved and was willing to propagate. He opens the Afgoderye with an exposition of the nature and status of heathen religion as a whole, using as his base, it is interesting to note, the familiar data of the classical paganism of the Mediterranean world. Thus he assumes that paganism is the same wherever and whenever found, and that early Christian thought on the cults of Greece and Rome is quite applicable to the analysis and appraisal of Indian religion. He asserts that there is no nation that does not acknowledge a Supreme Being, and that the knowledge of God is innate in all men. He rests his thesis on the authority of Cicero, and of Romans I.19, and on the example of numerous pre-Christian classical writers who expressed clear belief in the existence of the One God. It is scarcely necessary, then, for him to make this claim specifically for the Hindus about whom he is about to write: "It is denied beforehand that the heathens should have no knowledge of God at all."¹²

He feels a need to explain the origin of the obviously polytheistic worship of the pagans. They knew very well by the light of nature, he says, that God is formless. But because they were not able to see Him with their eyes, they fell victim to a fraud of the Devil. Satan, aided by the pagan priests, convinced them that there were deities to be worshipped who had descended to earth possessed of subtle forms. Thus arose the damnable error of imagining gods other than the One God, and of worshipping creatures rather than the Creator.

Here, then, the theory of Satanic origin is applied to Hinduism in a serious theological context for the first time in our series of works. It is not used to explain the source of the total Hindu tradition, but the source of the most objectionable aspect of Hindu belief--namely, its polytheism. As Baldaeus proceeds with his extensive survey of Indian mythology, he passes over many a story that must have been pure fiction in his eyes without resorting to the conception of infernal inspiration. But in the final chapter of the book, when he tells of how three hundred widows of the prince of Pandi burned themselves alive on the day of his cremation, he burst out in a prayer that these people "may sometime come to the knowledge of the Truth and awaken from the snare of Satan in which they have been imprisoned."¹³ Thus, it is in the interpretation of gross theological error and atrocious social evil in Hinduism that Baldaeus uses the devil-theory.

That the Hindus have possessions that are not of the Devil Baldaeus makes clear not only through his general statements about the pagans' natural knowledge of God, but also by pointing out here and there certain Christian truths which he thinks he has found among them. "When they confess Vistnum, Ixora and Bramma as their God, one can see clearly here," he says, "that these people must have heard something about the holy Three-in-Oneness; and also something about Jesus Christ's becoming man, for these appearances can also be called incarnations."¹⁴ He sees other fragments of true knowledge among them in their infancy tales of Krishna, so similar to the Biblical stories of the Christ-child;¹⁵ in the fact that Brahmā is regarded by them as creator of the world, head of the angels, son of God, and possessor of human form;¹⁶ that