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APOSTOLIC HISTORY AND THE GOSPEL

Biblical and Historical Essays

presented to

F. F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS AND THE MODERN MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

A. F. WALLS

I

There is no telling what may happen when people begin to read the Epistle to the Romans. What happened to Augustine, Luther, Wesley and Barth launched great spiritual movements which have left their mark in world history. But similar things have happened, much more frequently, to very ordinary people as the words of this Epistle came home to them with power.¹

The explosive effect of the Epistle to the Romans has been as marked in the missionary movement as anywhere else. The number of nineteenth century missionary sermons and appeals based on Romans 10:14 f. alone is beyond calculation. A district secretary of the Church Missionary Society at the middle of the century² sees this section as the climax of the epistle. The opening has proved that Jews and Gentiles are equally guilty in God's sight, and thus in equal need of salvation; Paul goes on to state the method of salvation, justification by faith; and then to prove the importance and propriety of its publication to the Gentiles; and by the section 10:11-15, "binds all who have the gospel to send it to them".³ Half a century later, A. T. Pierson, one of the formative influences on the movement of the 80's and 90's which transformed the size and nature of the European and American missionary forces, was characteristically speaking of Romans 10 as "The unparalleled missionary chapter of the Bible" and, equally characteristically, dividing its content alliteratively as The Market for Missions, the Message of Missions, the Methods of Missions and the Motive for Missions.⁴

Another theme beloved of nineteenth-century preachers was that of Romans 3:29 "Is he not the God of the Gentiles also?" — or, as W. Y. Fullerton insisted, "God is the God of the heathen also".⁵ But this affirma-

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans TNTC* (London, 1963), p. 60.

² John Johnson, *Sermons I* (London, 1850), pp. 113 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴ A. T. Pierson, "The Market for Missions" reproduced in *Missionary Sermons: a selection from the discourses delivered on behalf of the Baptist Missionary Society on various occasions* (London, 1925), pp. 185 ff. The sermon was originally delivered in 1903.

⁵ W. Y. Fullerton, "The God of the Heathen Also", *ibid.*, pp. 299-310. The sermon was delivered in 1909.

tion proceeds directly from the argument of 1:18 f. about the universality of God's wrath,¹ and the section, especially that which refers specifically to the pagan world (1:18-32) has not unnaturally had a history of its own in missionary thought.

The Christian view of non-Christian religions reflects traditions of thought which have come to be denominated respectively those of "continuity" and "discontinuity",² the one stressing God's activity in the world outside the sphere of Scripture or church, recognizing or seeking points of contact between the Biblical revelation and that other activity, as certainly God's own; the other stressing the radical difference between God's redeeming actions in saving history and any system whatever of human thought or life, seeing religion in itself under the judgment of God, sometimes denying any affinity between that revelation and "religion" at all.³ Both traditions are very ancient, going back to the earliest Christian centuries, arguably both to the New Testament.⁴ The representatives of each, with their favourite Scripture passages, have ever claimed to represent the mind of the New Testament; and, further, have supported their views with a wealth of empirical evidence about non-Christian religious thought and life.

II

Romans 1:18 ff., save for the modern debate about the nature and extent of the knowledge of God implied in 1:20, has not been an exegetical battlefield between the traditions in the way provided, for instance, by the missionary content of the Iconium and Areopagus addresses in Acts.⁵ Its special place in the missionary movement is due to the fact that at various times people saw there, or thought they saw there, the non-Christian world that they themselves knew; and at other times, assuming these verses to give the origin of non-Christian religion, they were puzzled to account for other features of non-Christian religion which did not apparently accord with such a picture. That Paul's intention in the section as a whole is to show the whole world under judgment has hardly been in

¹ It is inappropriate to argue here the old question (for Calvin discussed a form of it) whether 1:18-3:20 is in fact a digression. See C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans, BNTC* (London, 1957), p. 33.

² These terms were popularized through the discussions at the International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras, in 1938: see especially *The Authority of the Faith* (Tambaram Series I) (London, 1939). Behind the discussions lay Hendrik Kraemer's preparatory volume, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London, 1938). See also C. F. Hallencreutz, *Kraemer towards Tambaram: a study in Hendrik Kraemer's Missionary Approach* (Uppsala, 1966).

³ Cf. on this whole question K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik I/2*, especially c. 17 (= *Church Dogmatics I: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, part 2 [Edinburgh, 1956], pp. 280-361); A. Th. van Leeuwen, *Christianity in World History* (London, 1964).

⁴ P. Beyerhaus, "Religionen und Evangelium, Kontinuität oder Diskontinuität?" *Evangel. Missions Magazin* 3 (1967), pp. 118-135.

⁵ Cf. B. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Uppsala, 1955).

doubt; that the specific details of 1:22-27 reflect a view of contemporary Graeco-Roman society in decadence has usually also been recognized. But what is the relation of these particulars to the general principle? Is Paul simply describing how the seamier side of contemporary pagan society came into being? Or is he describing the origin of all non-Christian religions – perhaps even of religion itself? Does he assume the wilful rejection of an universal primitive monotheism? And – given an answer to any of these – how are the phenomena of non-Christian religion actually in view at the time to be accommodated to it? It is such questions as these, or rather, the assumed answers to them, which underlie much of the debate arising from Christian evangelization.

For the early Christian missionary thinkers, it was not Romans 1 which expressed the most important Christian contact with the non-Christian world. For them pagan society and pagan popular religion was at least broadly similar to that which Paul knew; and the most liberal of them had no desire to declare affinity with it. Justin, who is quite prepared to believe that Socrates and anyone else who spoke according to *logos*, and insofar as they did so, were Christians before Christ,¹ is also certain that the gods of the street corner are demonic parodies, the direct result of wicked impositions by evil spirits.² Such thinkers were much more concerned to maintain their affinity with the philosophical tradition, which for them represented the glory of their inheritance, and which rejected popular religion as strenuously as they did; in fact, it was a mark of the Logos at work in Socrates that he defied popular religion and, like the Christians, was branded an atheist for doing so.³ Justin, in fact, has reached a place where many another missionary was to come over the next eighteen centuries: he has concluded that there is more than one type of non-Christian tradition. There is that which is palpably devilish; there is that which is compatible with the Gospel and strenuously opposed to what it opposes.

The long period during which Western Europe was almost insulated from the non-Christian world meant that, apart from Jews, the only non-Christian peoples of whom most Christians, at least in the countries which became Protestant, knew much were those same Greeks and Romans, brought to life again by the new learning. Paul's catalogue of loathsomeness could be amply documented from other sources ("Of these abominations thou hast with Lactantius, Eusebius and Augustine", says Calvin).⁴ Other sources also revealed that some pagans stood aloof from these abominations: Calvin's first major work, after all, was a commentary on Seneca. But with no regular living contact with a self-consciously non-Christian society, it was easy for Reformed Christians to separate, as the early apologists did, the philosophic from the religious tradition of

¹ *Apology* I. 46.

³ *Ibid.*, I. 6.

² *Ibid.*, I. 5.

⁴ In Rom. 1:23.

classical paganism. Romans 1:18 ff. indicated how "idolatry" – i.e., all religion outside Israel and the church – took its origin.

III

When, in North America, contact with a non-Christian people was resumed, there was little reason to question this judgment. As the colonists looked upon the Indians – often with a desire for their salvation¹ – they saw the darkened heart changing the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image, the bodies given up to lust and dishonour plainly enough.² There was not even a Seneca. The connexion between ancient and modern heathenism was also apparent:

Let us inquire into the records of *antiquity*, let us consult the experience of all ages, and we shall find, that those who had no guide but the light of nature, no instructor but unassisted reason, have wandered in perpetual uncertainty, darkness, and error. Or let us take a view of the *present* state of those countries that have not been illuminated by the gospel; and we shall see, that notwithstanding the improvements of near six thousand years, they remain to this day covered with the grossest darkness, and abandoned to the most immoral and vicious practices.³

Despite the clear manifestation of the "invisible things of God" some ancient heathen denied his existence, while the rest worshipped His creatures, and "even the most despicable beings in the order of nature".

This was the state of the Gentile nations when the light of the gospel appeared to scatter the darkness that overspread the face of the earth. And this has been the case, so far as has yet appeared, of all the nations ever since, upon whom the Sun of righteousness has not arisen with healing in his wings. Every new discovered country opens a new scene of astonishing ignorance and barbarity; and gives us fresh evidence of the universal corruption of human nature.⁴

For the preacher of missionary ordination sermons, viewing the Amerindians from without, this was no doubt enough. But those who penetrated more closely into Indian society, while unequivocal in their affirmation of human depravity, saw other factors also. So early a missionary as John Eliot (1604-1690), a man living close to the Indians and learning their language, is struck by the fact that this people, although idolatrous

¹ R. Pierce Beaver, *Church, State and the American Indians* (St. Louis, 1966); "American missionary motivation before the Revolution", *Church History* 31 (1962), pp. 216-26.

² Joseph Sewall, *Christ Victorious over the powers of darkness . . . preached . . . at the ordination of the Reverend Mr. Stephen Parker* (Boston, 1733). Reprinted in R. Pierce Beaver, *Pioneers in Mission: the early missionary ordination sermons, charges, and instructions* (Grand Rapids, 1966), pp. 41-64 (see p. 47).

³ Ebenezer Pemberton, *A Sermon preached in Newark, June 12, 1744 at the ordination of Mr. David Brainerd*. An edition published in New Haven in 1822 has been reprinted in R. Pierce Beaver, *Pioneers in Mission*, pp. 111-24 (see p. 113).

⁴ Pemberton, *op. cit.* in *Pioneers in Mission*, p. 114.

and immoral, did believe, despite first appearances, in the Deity; that they believed also in the immortality of the soul, and an eternity of happiness or misery – they even had a tradition of one man who had actually seen God. Eliot, like several of his Puritan colleagues, came to the conclusion that the Indians were a remnant of the ten lost tribes of Israel. This would also explain their food taboos and purification rites, and their story of a general deluge. Over the years an idea with breathtaking implications grew in him: might not the Amerindians be only a fragment of the Semitic peoples who had broken away from the rest? Might not the peoples of India, of China, of Japan also be descended from the ten tribes? Alas then, why do they not all talk Hebrew? Eliot can speak only for his own language, but at least its grammatical frame is nearer to Hebrew than to Latin or Greek. Perhaps Chinese, Japanese, the Indian languages, are all degenerate forms of Hebrew. Perhaps – far more important – the conversion of the Indians, of which his own labours were a pledge, is but the sign that God is going to break eastward for the conversion of Israel, the ten tribes as well as the two?¹

It is easy to laugh at the enthusiasms of this lonely missionary; but he is grasping at a rationalization of a fact of experience. On a simple reading of Romans 1:18 ff., Indian religion ought to be unrelievedly idolatrous. The presence of other elements can be explained as survivals in debased form of part of the Jewish revelation. Not only so, but in other parts of the world – India, China, Japan – traces of the same redemptive revelation may be found. By elimination, only in Africa, and among other Hamitic peoples, will Romans 1 apply in all its rigour as a picture of religion.²

At a later period, Jonathan Edwards, a warm supporter of missions and no stranger to the Indians himself, again finds the truth of Romans 1:18ff. confirmed by his own observations:

The doctrine of St. Paul, concerning the blindness into which the Gentiles fell, is so confirmed by the state of religion in Africa, America, and even China, where, to this day no advances towards the true religion have been made, that we can no longer be at a loss to judge of the insufficiency of unassisted reason to dissipate the prejudices of the Heathen world, and open their eyes to religious truths.³

Whence, then, come such approximations to “religious truths” as any of these may have? Edwards answers, from outside. Heathenism since the fall has been so dark that such a custom as sacrifice for sin could not

¹ This aspect of Eliot's thought is well documented by S. H. Rooy, *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition* (Delft, 1965), pp. 230 ff.

² Eliot, however, did not base his missionary work upon this theory, or advocate or practise any restriction of evangelization to his supposed “Semites”. The call to preach Christ took precedence over all speculations as to how He would bring in His kingdom. Cf. Rooy, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

³ Jonathan Edwards, *Works* (1817 edition) VIII, p. 193.

have originated there. It *must* have been derived from the Jews. In the paganism of the old world, Plato, though a lesser philosopher than Socrates, yet knew more than he about true religion. The reason is that Socrates, unlike Plato, never left Greece, and was thus less open to outside influences.¹

On such an explanation of those elements in non-Christian religion which cannot be ascribed to wilful blindness, it would be, of course, in the devil's interest to isolate peoples as far as possible from infectious contact with revealed religion. And Edwards argues that this actually happened: America was first peopled by the direct action of the devil. Satan, alarmed at the success of the gospel in the first three Christian centuries, surprised by the fall of the heathen Empire in the time of Constantine and fearing that his kingdom might be completely overthrown, led the Indians away into America so that he could keep them for himself.²

IV

Meanwhile, in contemporary Europe, far away from the real heathen, the genteel debate about “natural theology” was going forward. The argument of the *consensus gentium* acquired fresh importance. “No nation without belief in God”, said the theologian; and the sceptic made answer, “How do you know?”

The evidence of the Jesuit missionaries from China became an absorbing interest. On the face of it, it represented a triumph for orthodoxy, and for the presence of “natural” religion; for here was a people which had allegedly preserved the knowledge of God and obeyed a pure morality for more than two thousand years. Leibnitz, whom we do not usually think of as a herald of the missionary movement, wanted Protestant missionaries to teach revealed religion to the Chinese who had preserved natural religion so effectively. In the end, of course, the other orders defeated the Jesuits on the interpretation of the Chinese texts, and this particular source of evidence for natural theology (which was in any case inconveniently proving too much) passed out of view – though attention was always available for accounts by travellers of the beliefs of non-Christian societies.³

Only a small part of the debate about China was concerned with the exegesis of Romans or any other apostolic book; nor, despite the undoubtedly sincere plea of Leibnitz for a Protestant mission, was it really conducted with any idea of doing anything. The Chinese, like the Tahitians later, were being called in to help solve a European problem. By contrast,

¹ Works VIII, 188 ff. Cf. Rooy, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

² Rooy, *op. cit.*, p. 300 f.

³ On views of paganism, cf. F. E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, Mass. 1959); on the European debate on the Jesuit evidence, cf. E. L. Allen, “Missions and Theology in the Eighteenth Century,” *HJ* 56 (1958), pp. 113–22.

the members and agents of the missionary societies which began to form by the end of the century, were desperately concerned with action: action for the salvation of the souls of those to whom they went. The terms in which men spoke of non-Christian religions were transformed as a result. For one thing, the Evangelical Revival, which underlay the new movement, had brought a more radical view and more vivid sense of the nature of sin; for another, earnest men were transmitting accounts of what they actually saw.

And what they saw was not usually a grave, distant, polite people preserving over thousands of years the knowledge of God and pure morality – the terms of the earlier eighteenth-century debate – but human sacrifice, the immolation of widows, the pictorial representations of *lingam* and *yonni*, cult prostitution, the victims crushed beneath the car of Jagannath. The picture of Romans 1:18 ff., in fact, emerged again, less from a theory of religion than from the effect of observation; and the words and phrases of Romans 1:18 ff. ring out time and again as missionaries view the religion of non-Christian peoples.¹ Further, just as the early apologists shared with the philosophical tradition much of the polemic against popular religion, so the missionaries in India had allies – liberal intellectuals with burning desire for religious reformation, like Rajah Ram Mohan Roy, and angry young men like some of Duff's early converts, rebelling against the traditional practices.²

Africa likewise recalled Romans 1 for many observers. David Jonathan East, one of a small host of writers on West Africa in the 1840's, produces an imposing account (based on travellers' tales) of African slavery, drunkenness, immorality and lack of commercial probity. He then quotes Romans 1:28–31. "What an awful comment upon this affecting portion of Holy Writ are the humiliating facts which these and the preceding chapters record."³ In another place, however, East recognizes that African paganism, though reprehensible, is in one respect different from that of Romans 1. Though African peoples have images, they do not make images of the Supreme God: they simply ignore him for the subordinate divinities and spirits.

¹ Some representative works describing Indian religion may be cited: William Ward, *An account of the Writings, Religion and Manners of the Hindoos*, 4 vols. (Serampore, 1811), 2 vols. (London, 1817) ("It is probable, indeed, that no heathen nation has made a single idol in honour of 'the living and true God', and that direct worship to Him was never offered by any heathen", I, p. xiv); Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia* (London, 1811), and *An Apology for promoting Christianity in India* (London, 1813); A. Duff, *India and Indian Missions, including sketches of the Gigantic System of Hinduism* (Edinburgh, 1839). On the attack on idolatry, cf. K. Ingham, *Reformers in India, 1793–1833* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 33–54.

² George Smith, *The Life of Alexander Duff* (London, 1881), chapters 5–6. For the view of Hinduism of an Indian convert, cf. e.g. K. M. Banerjee, *Dialogues on the Hindu Philosophy* (1861); Nehemiah Goreh, *Rational Refutation of the Hindu Philosophical Systems* (Calcutta, 1862; repr. Madras, 1897).

³ D. J. East, *Western Africa; its condition and Christianity the means of its recovery* (London, 1844), p. 71. The work is based on a collation of earlier writings.

Thus it appears, that if they have not "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image, made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things – they have, in their view, excluded him from the government of his world, and substituted in his room the wild creatures of their own imaginations, identifying these professedly spiritual existences with what is material, and oft times grossly absurd."¹

African paganism thus demonstrates the principles of Romans 1:18 ff., but identity in detail is not demanded.²

V

As the nineteenth century proceeded, such missionary views came into contact, and sometimes collision, with new patterns of thought. There was the new interest, itself partly a result of the missionary movement,³ in the literature of Eastern religions. There was the regnant hypothesis, held with all the intensity of a new found faith, of the evolution of religion. There was the whole new science, with evolution as its basis, of anthropology, and *The Golden Bough* to link them all together.

There were many points of conflict. The missionary affirmation of the idea of a supreme God was immediately suspect; for animistic peoples who had not reached the appropriate stage, such a conception could only be a missionary invention. The charge was quite unjustified, for, on the reading of Romans 1 which most early missionaries had, there was no need to invent a High God in any non-Christian religion. They found the High God in African religion because he was there, not because their theology demanded his presence.

As the evolutionist doctrine gained repute, the rival doctrine of a primitive monotheism, from which all non-Biblical religions were descended, was more clearly enunciated, and Romans 1:20 ff. was its prime source. Sir Monier Monier Williams, an influential Sanskrit scholar and himself a devout Evangelical, argued that, just because of the original monotheism behind all religions, one could expect to find fragments of truth.⁴ No longer was it necessary to presuppose borrowing from Jewish sources to explain every acceptable element in non-Christian religion. At

¹ East, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

² The existence of a conception of a Supreme God in African traditional religion, spoken of but not regularly worshipped, was frequently recognized by early nineteenth-century observers. Cf. J. Beecham, *Ashantee and the Gold Coast* (London, 1841), chapter 7.

³ The greatest name is, of course, that of Friedrich Max Müller, certainly no pillar of evangelical orthodoxy or pattern of missionary zeal; but Sir Monier Monier Williams, Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford from 1860, was closely associated with the missionary movement, and James Legge, Professor of Chinese there from 1875 had been a missionary with the London Missionary Society in China. Missionary reports, studies and researches were undoubtedly a major contributory factor to the discovery by the West of Eastern religious literature.

⁴ M. Monier Williams, *Indian Wisdom, or Examples of the religious, philosophical and ethical doctrines of the Hindus* (London, 1875), pp. 143 f. (4th edn., p. 132 n.).

one point he went further, and declared that some of the essential doctrines of Christianity were present in germ in all religions, awaiting the development and fulfilment which only Christianity could bring.¹

It was possible, however, to affirm a primitive monotheism without drawing all these conclusions. Principal (later Bishop) Moule, a deep influence on scores of the new type of missionary who went out in such numbers in the 1880's, gave exegetical backing to such a view.² The great Johannes Warneck was among those who observed in paganism a memory tenuous and not understood, of the primeval revelation:

Dispassionate study of heathen religions confirms Paul's view that heathenism is a fall from a better knowledge of God.

In early days humanity had a greater treasure of spiritual goods, but neglected its knowledge and renounced its dependence until nothing remained but a dim presentiment.³ Not that all saw anything as formalized as a primitive monotheism in Romans 1. A. E. Garvie, a formative influence on several important missionary writers of the twentieth century, argued that the essence of Paul's argument had nothing to do with the origin of religions at all but simply with the "close connexion between false views of God and wrong standards of duty", and that the Roman society of which Paul was primarily speaking had, to common knowledge, suffered a decline.⁴

In fact, one arm at least of the missionary movement began to develop the line of argument indicated, though later repudiated, by Monier Williams. Long years of study of the classics of Eastern religions indicated that Christianity was in fact their fulfilment – the "crown", to use the expression of the outstanding protagonist of this school, John Nicol Farquhar.⁵ To pass from Duff's description of e.g. Hinduism to Farquhar's is to move to a different world. Yet each is describing exactly what he saw. Of course, time had brought changes – some of what Duff had

¹ M. Monier Williams, *Modern India and the Indians* (London, 1887), p. 234. For this position, which Williams eventually rejected, cf. E. J. Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil* (Uppsala, 1965), pp. 50 ff.

² "The believer in the holy Scriptures . . . will receive this view of the primeval history of Theism as a true report of God's account of it. Remembering that it concerns an otherwise unknown moment of human spiritual history, he will not be disturbed by alleged evidence against it from lower down the stream." H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Expositor's Bible) (London, 1893), p. 45. Cf. also his Cambridge Bible commentary (1879) on Rom. 1:21.

³ Quoted by S. M. Zwemer, *The Influence of Animism on Islam* (London, 1920). Cf. J. Warneck, *The Living Forces of the Gospel* (E.T. Edinburgh, n.d.), p. 98: "The heart of the heathen is like a palimpsest, the original writing of which is written over and become unseen. No one knows anything of the words of wisdom covered over there." Andrew Lang's theory of the High Gods, developed in opposition to the nature-myth school, took its origin from missionary reports. See W. Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion* (E.T. London, 1935), pp. 172 ff.

⁴ A. E. Garvie, *Romans*, Century Bible, *ad loc.*

⁵ J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (Oxford, 1913). See E. J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

seen had gone for ever. But the main difference lies in the fact that Farquhar had, as it were, met Seneca.

Farquhar's series "The Religious Quest" (the singular is significant) reveals the sources of change. Sydney Cave is thoroughly representative of the contributors when he declares that the first missionaries were disqualified from seeing the best in the non-Christian world because the sacred books were closed to them. When one looks at, for instance, the Saivite Temple in Tanjore one can understand the violent reactions of the pioneers; but the Hinduism we now face (1919) is very different from that of a century ago. "We are concerned with the 'Higher Hinduism'. Idolatry is doomed."¹

Such judgments and such a viewpoint on Hinduism was the fruit of the study of its literature. It is thus hardly surprising that when the World Missionary Conference of 1910 came to discuss "points of contact" and "preparation for Christianity" in the religions, it was on Animism, which has no literature, that there was most hesitation.²

As we have seen, Monier Williams came to retract his idea of a development of religions with Christianity as the crown; his last position stressed that a gulf – "not a mere rift across which the Christian and non-Christian may shake hands and interchange similar ideas in regard to essential truths" – lay between the Bible and the "so-called Sacred Books of the East".

Be fair, be charitable, be Christ-like, but let there be no mistake. Let it be made absolutely clear that Christianity cannot, must not be watered down to suit the palate of either Hindu, Parsee, Confucianist, Buddhist, or Mohammedan, and that whosoever wishes to pass from the false religion to the true can never hope to do so by the rickety planks of compromise . . .³

He spoke to the depths. For many missionaries the practical way of expressing an attitude to the religions came to be that, while elements of good remained, the *systems* stood condemned.

VI

It would be inappropriate here to take the story through Tambaram and beyond, though the Epistle to the Romans has always been in

¹ S. Cave, *Redemption, Hindu and Christian* (Oxford, 1919).

² *World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910: Report of Commission IV. The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions*. See especially ch. 2: "Some deny the existence of any point of contact, or preparation for Christianity in any of the beliefs and rites of Animism – it may be noted that these witnesses find practically no religious content in Animism. . . ." Cf. Warneck, *op. cit.*, pp. 85 ff. On the other hand, in 1900 an African Christian, the Rev. (later Bishop) James Johnson was telling missionary-minded students that Africa "is conscious of the existence of God, believes in that existence, believes in divine providence, believes that every good and perfect gift comes from above, from Him who is the Father of us all. . . Africa desires and intends to worship Him, but she knows not how to do it." (In *Students and the Missionary Problem* [London, 1900], pp. 74 f.).

³ E. Stock, *History of the Church Missionary Society III* (London, 1899), p. 304.

the background, and occasionally, as in the controversy over 1:20, right in its forefront. The traditions of continuity and discontinuity will, no doubt, continue to lock horns in the missionary debate, and the Epistle to the Romans will continue to challenge, quicken and rebuke those who desire to declare the righteousness of God. As one reviews the place which the first chapter has hitherto had in the thought of the missionary movement, some features stand out which indicate its continuing relevance.

Christian evangelists have found themselves addressing men in societies with coherent patterns of thought – within systems of belief and activity. It has been convenient to provide names like “Buddhism” and “Hinduism” to cover numbers of these systems. The validity of this process is not a theme to discuss here; but at least we should not talk as if Paul used them himself. Perhaps too much of the debate about continuity or discontinuity has been concerned with systems. As a result, we have men, each genuinely describing what he saw, producing such different interpretations of “Hinduism” as those of Duff and Farquhar. When this is introduced into the context of Romans 1, we have one party inviting all to recognize that these non-Christian religions lie manifestly under the wrath of God for their manifest deeds, and another pointing to particular persons, books or doctrines, and saying in effect (as Bishop Ryle said of the necessity of baptism by immersion for Eskimos), Let those believe it who can.

Argument about which is the correct, or the more correct, picture of “Hinduism” is beside the point in the light of Romans 1:18 ff., for Paul’s concern here is not with systems at all, but with men. It is *men* who hold down the truth in unrighteousness, who do not honour God, who are given up to dishonourable passions. It is upon men, who commit ungodly and wicked deeds, that the wrath of God is revealed.

As systems, and ultimately the collective labels for systems which we call the world religions, have slipped into the place of ungodly men in the interpretation of Romans 1, so Christianity, also conceived as a system, has sometimes slipped into the place of the righteousness of God. The true system has been opposed to false systems condemned there. It has sometimes, but not always, been realized that “Christianity” is a term formally identical with the other labels; that it certainly covers as wide a range of phenomena as most of them; that, if the principalities and powers work within human systems, they can and do work within this one. Man-in-Christianity lies under the wrath of God just as much, and for the same reasons, as Man-in-Hinduism. It was the realization of this which saved the earliest generations of the modern missionary movement from the worst sort of paternalism. Man was vile everywhere, not only in Ceylon. The Christian preacher had the same message of *repentance* and faith for the non-Christian world as he had been preaching

in the Christian world;¹ for it was not Christianity that saves, but Christ.

This in turn relates to another point: the close connexion of Romans 2 with Romans 1. The “diatribe” form of Romans 1–2 has often been remarked, as has the indebtedness of the language to Wisdom 13–14 and its closeness to the normal, accepted Jewish polemic against idolatry.² The thrust of Romans 1 lies in Romans 2; not in the origin of paganism but in the hopelessness of the virtuous. And, before going on to show the free acceptance of men of all kinds through faith in Christ, Paul offers (Rom. 2:17 ff.) a satirical commentary on Diaspora Judaism’s understanding of its mission. Here was a busy, missionizing people: a guide to the blind, a light to those that sit in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children – the Wisdom of the opening chapters of Proverbs and the Servant of Isaiah 42 rolled into one – who yet for all their exaltation of the Decalogue, stole, committed adultery and sacrilege, and, as the Scripture said about the Jews of an earlier time, caused the heathen to blaspheme the name of God because of what they saw in his people. Some sharp things have been said from time to time to missionaries. Some of them are in the New Testament.

¹ Cf. e.g. Sewell’s sermon in Beaver, *op. cit.*, quoted above. The missionary preacher’s task is identical with that of the congregational minister.

² Cf. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 86, on 21:16: “We can almost envisage him as he dictates his letter to Tertius, suddenly picking out the complacent individual who has been enjoying the exposure of these sins he ‘has no mind to’, and telling him that he is no better than anyone else”.