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# Dr. Kraemer's New Book

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One rarely comes across a book on the subject of culture and religion that is so serious in its purpose as Hendrik Kraemer's *World Cultures and World Religions*.<sup>\*</sup> This is of course characteristic of Kraemer, whose primary motivation in writing anything is evangelism. The author has demonstrated that no other way of life can be so concerned about the cultures and religions of mankind as Christianity. There are ever so many books on the subject written from humanist standpoints and we value them for the information they give, but no information comes to us without some interpretation or other. The author declares at the outset that 'this book is written from a definitely Christian standpoint and therefore ultimately will make an effort to offer a Christian interpretation' (p. 19). The pretension of humanism is that it is impartial and unbiassed, but the fact of the matter is that every standpoint has a faith behind it and therefore not truly unbiassed or impartial. The honest thing to do is to admit the bias and then give good and convincing reasons for the same. Kraemer announces 'I hope to show that to write and interpret from a distinctly Christian background, with a fair knowledge of the facts, about this fascinating meeting of cultures and religions is as biassed or unbiassed an effort as any humanist attempt pretends to be' (p. 20).

The larger part of the book is dedicated to elaborating the various aspects of the modern meetings of religions and cultures. These meetings call for a dialogue.

The author's thesis is that 'the dialogue between the great cultures and religions has still to begin' (p. 22). All that has been happening is merely a preparation of the ground. One gets the impression that the author is talking rather about the encounter of the culture and religion of the West with those of the East rather than the encounter between Christianity and the cultures and religions of mankind as such. However, in the encounter such as it is, the Christian criteria have to be employed. The author tells us that in this book his special concern is two-fold. 'First, to find some answers to specific Christian questions such as: *what*

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<sup>\*</sup>*World Culture and World Religions (The Coming Dialogue)* by Hendrik Kraemer. Lutterworth Press. 35sh. Pp. 376. Published October 1960. Proof copy received.

is it that the Christian Church, with her peculiar message and calling, will have to face? How should she face this coming dialogue? And also *how* should she express in that situation her inherent missionary nature, which under no condition can she ever surrender?' 'Second, to show the specific Christian ferment and dynamism in Western culture, even in its present secularized form, and to find out the fundamental orientation of the Eastern religions: cultural patterns with their patent contrasts and hidden affinities to the Christian West' (pp. 22-23). 'The central issue', he tells us, 'in this coming dialogue with the grand, elusive Eastern systems of humanist thinking will, it seems to me, be to vindicate the *personal* conception manifest in Jesus Christ, and the meaning and purpose of Man and the world in the light of God's self-disclosure in the historical Jesus Christ' (p. 23). This gives us the clue as to what we shall do in the coming dialogue; and, this gives also the clue as to what Kraemer is going to unveil in the pages of this book.

## I

The book contains twelve chapters with various titles. It is not possible to recount the names of all the chapters, but it can be summarily said that they all deal with the cultural and religious world scene of the last 150 years, when there have been 'invasions' of the West upon the East and vice versa, the special aspects of the resurgence of Asian religions since World War II, and finally (the two last chapters) 'the coming world-civilization' and 'the Terms of the Dialogue'.

There is a thorough discussion of the three factors that have been of decisive importance for the 'meeting' of the East and West, viz. the Western dominance, the work of the Western orientalist and the Christian Missions. The first and the third constitute, along with the spread of Western education and science, the 'invasion' of the East and the second is one of the key factors in the beginning of the Eastern 'invasion' of the West.

Some Eastern readers may be prejudiced against the author's appraisal of Western imperialism and colonialism, which are now on the way out. But it behoves the Easterners also not to be touchy about facts but to evaluate things objectively. No one can deny that Western dominance over Asia was not an un-mixed curse. Even Sardar Panikkar would not deny it. Kraemer writes, 'Western imperialism had a Janus head. The one face represented its conquest by power and subjection. The other face, however, reflects a quite different thing, viz. a spiritual conquest, which was source and stimulant of unexpected development. Magnificent as the Eastern cultures in many respects are, they would never have been able to develop from their own spiritual resources the peculiar dynamism which alone can generate such happenings as we witness at present. Their fundamental apprehensions and attitudes could not generate the new visions and

aspirations, which by the mysterious dispensation of history rather paradoxically proved to be the unintended gifts of Western "colonialism" (p. 67). The author points out two specific sides of the Western spiritual conquest. 'The first is what I propose to call the unbroken epic of Western oriental studies; the second may be called the broken epic of transmitting Western liberal culture and idealism combined with the work of social and economic uplift which became, besides administration, an integral part of the colonial governmental machinery' (p. 67). These two 'epics' are discussed extensively. The part played by Western Orientalist studies in making much of Asia, more especially India, discover itself, and arousing it to its true greatness, is explained at great length.

With regard to the permanent effect of the Western influence upon Asia there are of course different opinions in times of lasting cultural and social change. H. Dubois stands at one extreme end, arguing that no real change has or will come upon Asian Society. Reference is made to Dubois' pronouncement '(At the same time) I venture to predict that it (i.e. the Government) will attempt in vain to effect any considerable changes in the social condition of the people of India, whose character, principles, customs and ineradicable conservatism will always present insurmountable obstacles' (p. 76). It is pointed out that Panikkar (in *Asia and the Rise of Western Dominance*) rejects this view and yet believes that in spite of the really lasting impress of the West, 'Asian civilizations will continue to develop their marked individuality and remain spiritually and intellectually separate from Christian Europe' (p. 78). Kraemer criticizes Dubois to be sure, but he is also critical of Panikkar who in his opinion seems 'to leave too much out of consideration the fact that the end of Western political dominion is not the end of Western cultural and spiritual influence, nor the beginning of an era in which the digestion and manipulation of the Western influence is furthermore an exclusive affair of the Asians' (p. 78). 'Moreover', Kraemer affirms, 'we are standing only at the *beginning* of a cultural confrontation and meeting of unprecedented and incalculable dimensions, in which the conscious running and willing of man, be he Western or Eastern, is not necessarily the decisive factor' (p. 78).

## II

The author quite correctly points out the immense significance of Christian Missions in the modern encounter of cultures and religions. He notes the psychological inhibition of humanism with regard to missions. 'It excels in the field of culture proper and of the arts, whether Eastern or Western. Even in the field of foreign religions. But as soon as Christianity comes on the scene (which is clearly the case with Missions) it seems as if a certain inhibition, a conscious or semi-conscious revulsion, becomes operative and distorts the picture. Not only does there appear a

strange inability to understand Christianity or Missions adequately from within, as one rightly tries to do in regard to foreign religions, on its own merit as it were, but also in regard to Missions particularly, a propensity to evaluate it first and foremost according to its faults (which are indeed many), and to misunderstand it as to its intention and rôle' (p. 84). He also notes that Eastern writers, who are often apathetic to Christianity (Panikkar is a case in point) are more objective in duly recognizing the rôle of Christian Missions in stimulating Asia. Kraemer himself tells us 'It can be said without exaggeration that Christian Missions have been great agents in the East-West culture contact which took place in this dimension' (p. 90). Furthermore, 'Christian Missions were an important instrument (together with Other agencies) for inculcating a humanization which transcended the traditional limits and opened people's eyes to entirely new channels of service . . . An important activity such as the Ramakrishna Movement is in its orientation and devoted activity unthinkable without the stimulus derived from Christian Missions' (p. 90). On our part we find Kraemer's positive estimate of Missions quite acceptable and correct. Kraemer is also fair to resurgent non-Christian religions in that he does not assume, as so many Christian writers do, that the specific 'Christian' qualities of service and concern for society are mere borrowings and as such could never be assimilated into them as an integral part of themselves. Nevertheless, we also get the feeling that he does not allow attacks from outside to be occasions for penitence and redeeming self-criticism for Missions, but tries to whittle down their importance. For he says, 'the only blame one can and must lay on Missions, looking back on the whole story, is that only rarely were they adequately aware of the obscuring of their own character, and often met a world steeped in an Eastern atmosphere and invaded by the West with Western arguments. Arguments which might ease one's own conscience, but were not a real answer to the situation as it was' (p. 91). The trouble, in our thinking, is not merely lack of imagination and inability to enter into the psychological workings of those to whom the Missions are sent, but a deep spiritual one. There is a tendency in Kraemer, one notices, to go into too much psychological explanation. There are non-psychological and genuinely spiritual factors operative in the relation of Christian Missions to non-Christian religions. As long as this is not appreciated any efforts at psychological adjustment would appear to the deeply religiously committed non-Christian as trick and deception. Frankly speaking, the aversion of non-Christians to Christianity is not due solely to the historical association of Missions with colonial and imperial powers.

One extremely refreshing feature of Kraemer's approach is that he is not a moralist beating his breast penitently or mock-penitently about the sins of imperialism and colonialism. He is objective enough to face up to the providential and 'unforeseen'

good that these ugly episodes of history brought in their wake, even though far from being a member of the exploited and oppressed community, whose besetting sin is self-righteousness, he is historically and geographically a part of the erstwhile colonizing and imperialistic world. Rather than going into any kind of needless self-reproach, he points out that all historical events are providentially over-ruled. He states 'I simply wanted to point to the mystery which is always hidden in all great historic events, and to the transcendence of the consequences of historical acts and human decisions and aims over the conscious intentions of man in these decisions and aims. Even our indispensable moral judgments are not adequate to what really happens . . . Theologically expressed: the historical process, far from being self-explanatory, requires and itself calls for a transcendent eschatological judgment' (p. 99).

### III

With regard to the cultural response to the Western invasion, the author identifies four distinct entities: the Islamic, the Hindu, the Buddhist, and Chinese-Japanese. There are also sub-classifications. For instance the Chinese and Japanese responses are characteristically different though identical in a general sense. In any case the main entities are different from one another in their response to Western influence, despite some general similarities again. For instance, it is to be noted that 'the peculiar difficulty of Islam, in the storm of the Western invasion, is that in contradistinction to the great Asian cultures, its hard-core problem is theological and not philosophical. The theological problem is ultimately how to switch over in a legitimate way from a thoroughly fundamentalist, legalistic, apprehension of Revelation to a dynamic one' (p. 109). In the Hindu response, we see on the other hand a 'symbiosis of openness and self-assertion,' made possible by the very lack of clear-cut distinctions in the matter of religious belief. There are striking differences in the Buddhist and Hindu responses to the West. 'When surveying the Buddhist world's response and reaction to the Western invasion, one is struck by a certain difference from the Indian religious and cultural world in regard to the same point. The impression the Buddhist world makes is that it is more placid in comparison to the Hindu world' (p. 170). But why? 'one reason, to be sure, is the obvious difference between the sincere, gifted Hindu and the peoples who inhabit the Buddhist lands. There is, generally speaking, a superior human substance in India. This has made her the mother of a great culture and religion of a luxurious growth and variety. The peoples of the Far East, who are in spiritual endowments the equals of the Indians and therefore have similarly become creators of imposing systems of culture, differ in a peculiar way from the Indians

precisely in the measure of religious and metaphysical seriousness' (pp. 170-171). In particular, with regard to China, accordingly, the following fact is noteworthy. 'China with its relativist, pragmatic conception . . . never conceived its meeting with the West in religious terms' (p. 194). This is exactly contrary to what happened in the case of India, where the whole of life is conceived in religious terms. This is not to say that the West's meeting with China was any less convulsive, although no less productive of dynamic changes. In the case of Japan, essential seclusion and the power of Shinto are the two unmistakable traits, for if we go 'straight back to Japan's uncontaminated nature' we will find that it 'is embodied in Shintoism'. 'Seen from the outside it was an awkward performance, but the significance is that Japan, though changed in form and function by the marriage with Western civilization, did not and does not propose to change her essence' (p. 225).

Now, it has already been mentioned that the invasion is not merely one way. There is also an Eastern invasion of the West. 'It is not only in the East that there has been, and still is, an "invasion" with its ensuing reactions and responses, full of disturbances and renewed vigour. There is also an Eastern invasion in the West, more hidden and less spectacular than the Western invasion, but truly significant' (p. 228). Dr. Kraemer investigates this matter also fully. Chiefly to be noted is 'The East's negative effect on the West'. 'It is rather that a *subjective* mood of capitulation to the East is noticeable in the West. Not in the sense of capitulation to an Eastern invasion, but in that of negativism to itself' (p. 229). There are various contributory factors here. The first is what the author calls the 'self-questioning' or 'self-criticism' 'which has been going on for a long time in the West'. He considers this self-questioning to be a purely autochthonous matter; it is self-born from within, from the West's own spiritual type and its inherent dynamism; also from its own special historical course of life, full of incisive new starts in exploring the mystery of Man and the Universe, and new experiments in political forms of collective life. Just as unbroken continuity in depth, despite sometimes great changes on the surface, is characteristic of the great Eastern civilizations, so for Western civilization, despite much persistent underground continuity, the characteristic quality is revolution' (pp. 229-230). In the opinion of this reviewer never was a truer statement made on this complex issue by any one. Still he feels that the historical rôle of Christianity in the revolutionary spiritual tradition of the West, covering all aspects of life, should have been pointed to and elaborated. Especially is this necessary in view of the fact that Kraemer assumes, and rightly, that the encounter of cultures is also an encounter of religions, and vice versa. It is a refreshing thought that Kraemer is not one of those persons who assume that a discrete isolation of the Christian religion from Western culture and civilization is a ready possibility; this in spite of the

fact that a culture through which the faith has found historical expression is in no sense absolute but is in every sense under judgment by that faith. Most people come into contact with the Christian faith or any faith at the borderland where faith and culture are not clearly distinguishable. This is true, as Kraemer works it out, of the encounter of religions themselves.

#### IV

Another contributing factor in the mood of negativism (and of the Eastern invasion of the West) is the Eastern propaganda, conducted both by Western enthusiasts for Eastern religions and by genuine representatives of the East themselves. As for the former class there is a host of men from Schopenhauer down to Aldous Huxley, among whom Keyserling is an important name. They are all occupied with what they consider 'the weak point of Christianity', which is that it is based on a single historical fact unlike Hindu-Buddhism which is universal in its principles. Observes Kraemer, 'An ever-expanding stream of writing, scholarly, popularizing or distorting, has brought this vast world of Indian spirituality and cultural achievement within the horizon of the West and made it, apart from the growing possibilities of direct contact in our planetary world of today, an important element in the welter of opinion and orientation in the modern West, which lives and lives through the critical period of searching for a basis of spiritual unification, which it has lost.' Then he adds quite pertinently, 'for the last 60 years or so India herself has gradually acquired a sense of "mission" to the West and attempts in different ways to present the "hidden true India" to the Western world, finding a willing audience among those who are driven either by curiosity or by sincere interest' (p. 251). Of course, Vivekananda's American experience was the turning point. The trend was continued by stalwarts like Tagore, Gandhi and Aurobindo.

This Eastern invasion of the West is a significant element in the modern meeting of the religions and cultures of the world.

Dr. Kraemer is alive to the fact that political revolutions and religious resurgences are not unrelated factors, particularly in Asia. From the vantage point of this perception he discusses at length 'the significance of the political revolution in Asia since World War II and the resurgence of the non-Christian religions'. This brings us nearer to our times . . . 'The cataclysmic close of the "colonial era", the defeat of Japan in its gigantic effort to become in the name of Asia the dominant world power, the accession of the colossus China to the communist realm, the feverish endeavours of new independent peoples to become coherent nations and reasonably durable States and recognized members of the political world "community", are events of the greatest import for the cultural and religious development of Asia and for the relations and dialogue between East and West'



(p. 272), he observes. Then by way of admonition to all concerned he states, 'If ever there was an opportunity to learn the crucial importance of political and economic factors and ideas for the cultural and religious areas of life, it is now' (p. 276). Those who have had set ideas of Dr. Kraemer's view by acquaintance with his early book, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, will be forced to revise them now.

There are other surprises in store for those who have had set ideas of Dr. Kraemer. In the encounter between religions and cultures and the common stand of religions against secularism, he sees immense spiritual potentiality. 'In the present world of religious pluralism and of growing secularism in East and West, we see the unprecedented spectacle of the *real meeting and encounter of the great religions and cultures* of the East and West not only in books or conferences and retreat centres, but as an inescapable coming to grips with each other as a result of the no less inescapable interpenetration we begin to discern' (pp. 277-278). In fact this statement brings us to one of the high points in the book. Dr. Kraemer has laboured so hard not for any negative purpose but to show that a real encounter of religions and cultures is taking place before our eyes. Of course he would hasten to add the other thesis of the book, viz. that although an encounter is taking place a dialogue is yet in the future. This reviewer disagrees with the latter thesis while he whole-heartedly agrees with the former. The moot point is, how to demarcate between encounter and dialogue? It needs to be said that this reviewer has assumed a position quite contrary to Dr. Kraemer's, for, according to him, the moment from which the encounter began, an implicit dialogue also began, which has been taking place all along. The problem simply is how to make this implicit dialogue explicit and spell it out in the language of constructive philosophic conversation.

## V

A parenthetic conclusion there is in this enormous treatise, which is wholly acceptable to this reviewer. He has maintained that the really crucial conflict in the realm of religion in our time is that between personalistic Christian Faith and impersonal monism, and not between a true God and a false God or between one God and many gods. Dr. Kraemer puts his finger on the same point, from a different angle. He states, 'The extraordinarily remarkable phenomenon which presents itself to us, however, is that one can perceive through various signs in the modern mind a mighty current of conscious and unconscious return to the universal "natural" religion which is strikingly expressed in the archaic systems of life and thinking and which has found its sublimest expression in the great Asian religious cultures. Especially in Hinduism, Chinese "universism", and Buddhism.

In other words the fundamental notions, shorn of the many appendages in rite and custom characteristic of these Eastern systems of life (and world) apprehension, seem to strike a responsive chord in many leading modern minds' (p. 325). Many modern writers like Toynbee, Hermann Hesse, W. T. Stace, Northrop, etc., are discussed as articulate representatives of this trend towards 'naturalistic monism' although they are different from the propagandist.

This reviewer fully agrees with Kraemer when he inveighs against men like Northrop, Toynbee, and Hocking who can only conceive of 'religion in the universal'. There can be no such thing as a common substratum of truth for all religions. To pursue that goal is in the end to join hands with kind of religion (Asian) and oppose a religion like Christianity that understands religious truths only in terms of the Christ-revelation. It is also true that tolerance can be truly only a psychological and spiritual attitude born of the total religious awareness, even if the religious truth underlying is claimed to be particular and unique and not logical deductions from metaphysical presuppositions regarding the ultimate identity of all religions. It is here that we have to look for the sources of the paradox that Kraemer points out of tolerance becoming a dogma and in the end very intolerant.

There is a related point, however, with which this reviewer partly agrees and partly disagrees. That is with regard to the problem of 'religion in the singular'. It is quite true that religions are different from one other in such a way as to make it impossible to speak of a genus religion as against the species 'religions'. It is also true that the pragmatic attitude of wanting to use religion in the singular for purposes of fostering world peace or other Gods is worthy of condemnation. The author observes, 'The disappointing experience then follows that no intellectually construed universal religion, comprising all the necessary attributes for the unification of all minds, appears able to remove the fact that concrete religions are more steeped in their peculiar habitues and consciousness than in these wishful fictions' (p. 352).

Although this is very true we should like to add that it is possible to speak of religion in the singular, because the definition in the singular is given from points of view outside the religions. It is only in this sense we can speak of Christianity and more particularly of 'the Church'. Hence it is plausible. It is possible to give definitions of religion and determine its characteristics from a point of view outside religion altogether. Such a perspective is always necessary. That is the redeeming feature of religious men or men who are for the sake of perspective momentarily freed themselves from religious pre-occupation looking at religion from outside its domain. If that is achieved certain obligations that secularists expect from religion, and accuse it of not fulfilling, can be taken somewhat more seriously. Religions are not only in a state of encounter with each other but

also, all together, a state of encounter with the secular or even anti-religious world. This Kraemer recognizes. Here dialogues can and do happen.

We are whole-heartedly in agreement with the author when he defines the 'terms of the dialogue' and suggests, amidst other things, it must proceed from the clear-cut understanding of the Christian Faith in all its uniqueness. Many eye-brows may be raised when Kraemer suggests 'Karl Barth's anthropology in his *Church Dogmatics* may contain fruitful material for a real dialogue on this point' (p. 368). But we find the suggestion wholly acceptable.

Dr. Kraemer's book is a very serious and very elaborate study of the subject of the book. We are all grateful to him for the book, which should make all interested in the cultural and religious areas of evangelism think deeply. He makes a strong plea for a more vigorous study of religions. 'The implication of this whole situation' is that the "dialogue" with the non-Christian religions should not be the concern of a few so-called experts, who are as Christians professional students of one or more of these religions. The period in which that could be the case has definitely passed. The time has now arrived when all theological thinkers have to include these new worlds of thought and apprehension in their sphere of interest' (p. 365). This reviewer whole-heartedly says 'Amen'.

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