COMPARATIVE RELIGION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER, 1904–1979

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That 'what Manchester thinks today the rest of the world thinks tomorrow' is a familiar enough saying to anyone who has spent time in the city. In the history of the Faculty of Theology over the past seventy-five years this extravagant claim might in some cases be difficult to support; not, however, in respect of Comparative Religion. In that field Manchester long occupied a position unique among British universities, not only in making a provision for the subject to be taught, but, more seriously, in making it an essential element in the training of aspiring Christian ministers. Before 1904, Comparative Religion had been incor-porated into the curricula of only one or two theological colleges (for instance Mansfield and Manchester Colleges in Oxford) and had never previously been accepted by any British university. The setting up of the Manchester Chair was therefore a radical departure. But before we can begin to appreciate how radical it was, we must take a moment to inquire into the character and status of Comparative Religion in 1904, and the relationship in which it stood at that time to some of the wider issues and goals of Christian theology, since it was introduced not as an Arts subject (as had happened a few years earlier in Berlin) but as an arm of Christian theology. This is particularly necessary in the present case in view of changes in the climate of Academic opinion which have taken place since 1904.¹

¹A paper contributed in connection with the 75th Anniversary of the University's Faculty of Theology. This survey has been prepared and written in Australia and many of the sources have been inaccessible to me. I thank those who have responded to queries on matters of fact and who have supplied me with information. Most of the material has, however, had perforce to come from my own library and my own memory. I apologize for any shortcomings, while I acknowledge with deep gratitude all that Manchester has taught me.

²For the general background to the subject, see Sharpe, Comparative Religion: A History (1975), and particularly chapter 6, 'The Quest for Academic Recognition'.
It is often said today that 'Comparative Religion' as a term has outlived its usefulness and ought to be replaced by other forms of words, such as 'Religious Studies' or 'the History of Religions'. And certainly, Manchester's is one of the few departments of Comparative Religion which have retained this form of words. There is all the more reason, then, to recall its original meaning.

'Comparative Religion' is of course a shortened form of 'the comparative study of religion', the aim of which was once described by L. H. Jordan as being '...to investigate and expound, through the competent comparison of data collected from the most diverse sources, the meaning and value of the several faiths of mankind'.1 The enterprise might equally be called 'the science of religion', as in Friedrich Max Müller's 1873 book *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (which might well be called the foundation document of the discipline), or its German equivalent *Religionswissenschaft*. It is important to remember that in these labels the word 'religion' stands in the singular, and not in the plural. It is equally important to note that the original intention of those who practised this new 'science' was not simply to study religion outside the borders of Christianity and its antecedents (a common assumption which, once made, has proved well nigh impossible to eradicate), but to study all the religions of the world, irrespective of time and place, as diverse and evolving manifestations of the religion of the world. The presuppositions of Comparative Religion were, as I have attempted to show in detail elsewhere, in large measure (though not exclusively) those of the Darwinian–Spencerian theory of evolution as applied to a particular area of human experience—an intellectual position which from the first aroused the suspicions of conservative Christians, Catholics and Protestants alike. What this meant in practice was that Comparative Religion was welcomed by Liberal Protestants (and by a small number of Catholic Modernists), that is, by those for whom divine revelation was not restricted in principle to the deliverances of one single tradition.

What was at issue in the emergence of Comparative Religion was not whether it was a fit and proper thing to study the

religions of the world other than Christianity. Many conservative Christians were prepared to do that, not least for missionary purposes. To take only one non-Mancunian example, in 1887 we find the noted Boden Professor of Sanskrit in the University of Oxford, Sir Monier Monier-Williams, telling an Exeter Hall audience to study ‘non-Christian bibles’, but to keep their heads in so doing. These bibles, he said, are

. . . all developments in the wrong direction. They all begin with some flashes of true light, and end in utter darkness. Pile them, if you will, on the left side of your study table, but place your own Holy Bible on the right side—all by itself—all alone—and with a wide gap between.¹

The liberal mind saw things differently. To the liberal Christian, the new science of Comparative Religion enabled the student to view religion, not in the bare categories of ‘true’ and ‘false’, but on an ascending scale of human response to God’s revelation of himself. All religion, therefore, is in a sense ‘true’—or at least relatively true, depending on the position it occupies on a scale of developing awareness and refinement. The highest point of this development might lie outside the commonly accepted sphere of religion altogether, in agnosticism or in science; but the liberal Christian was convinced on the one hand that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was the point toward which the development was moving, and on the other that the highest point could only be rightly appreciated by those who had taken the trouble to study the world of the religions in all their infinite variety. In the words of James Hope Moulton:

Our new science [Comparative Religion] enables us to write a new chapter of the Praeparatio Evangelica. We have learnt from physical science the general formula of evolution as describing what we know of the Creator’s method in the material world. Research is yearly modifying what science understands by the formula; but that does not concern us, as the central principle does not change. We have seen this principle of evolution applied successively to other departments of knowledge and to human institutions. . . . Is it not reasonable to expect that if evolution is a good enough method for God to employ everywhere else, it will be good enough for Him in the crown of all His work? Not by objective, external, authoritative voices, compelling an unintelligent assent, will He speak to those whom He created in His own image . . . All things

have reached their present condition by evolutionary process; but God has been as vitally present throughout that process as He was in the framing of the evolutionary Law.\(^1\)

The same apologetical principle was stated in 1909 by J. N. Farquhar (who came to Manchester in 1923) in these words: Each religion

\[\ldots\] contains a partial revelation of God’s will, but each is incomplete; and He comes to fulfil them all. In each case Christianity seeks not to destroy but to take all that is right and raise it to perfection. Christianity is the full, final truth, towards which every religion has been straining.\(^2\)

Statements such as these would be unlikely to win much support in our present climate of opinion. But they certainly provided the department of Comparative Religion with its initial ideology. It is important that we remember this, and also that we recognize that by this means, Christian theology and wide and (within certain limits) dispassionate study of non-Christian texts and monuments could be, and were, brought together under the same conceptual canopy.

Leaving further background matters aside, in 1904 Manchester ‘alone among the modern Universities of England had attained to a maturity and a completeness of equipment worthy of a great industrial centre’.\(^3\) The John Rylands Library had been inaugurated in October 1899, with an inaugural address delivered by A. M. Fairbairn\(^4\) of Mansfield College, Oxford (a man, incidentally, who as well as being a friend of Max Müller and A. S. Peake, was an early advocate of Comparative Religion in England). Its collections already contained a vast range of printed and manuscript material relative to the religions of the world.\(^5\) Its celebrated Bulletin (which commenced publication in April 1903) was

\(^1\) Moulton, *Religions and Religion* (1913), pp. 50 ff.
\(^3\) James Hope Moulton, by his Brother (1919), p. 59.
\(^4\) On Fairbairn, see Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil* (1965), pp. 126 ff.
destined to serve as a forum for a great deal of Comparative Religion material, and many notable Manchester publications in the field were first given to the public as library lectures. The Council of the Library included, as ‘Co-optative Governors’, James Hope Moulton and Arthur Samuel Peake, and it is to their contribution, particularly to that of Moulton, that we must now turn.

Not having had access to the records, I have not been able to trace the negotiations which preceded the establishment of the Chair of Comparative Religion, but it is clear that the presence in Manchester of Moulton and Peake was of importance.¹ Neither was of course a comparative religionist in the professional sense: Moulton came to Manchester from Cambridge in 1902 as a tutor at Didsbury College (Wesleyan Methodist) and was appointed six years later Greenwood Professor of Hellenistic Greek and Indo-European Philology in the University; Peake had come from Mansfield College, Oxford ten years earlier, in 1892, to a similar position at Hartley College (Primitive Methodist) and became in 1904 the University’s first Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis. Both were New Testament scholars primarily, though Moulton was more the philologist and Peake more the exegete. There were good reasons why both men should have been well aware of the importance of comparative work outside the boundaries of their discipline.

These were the years of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule—that body of scholars, mainly in Germany, who sought to elucidate the meaning of the Bible, and particularly the New Testament, by assiduous study of the religious conditions of the Hellenistic world. Advances in scholarship were making this enterprise more and more feasible for every year that passed. First one area, then another, came to the forefront of critical study. At the turn of the century the foci of attention were Mesopotamia in Old Testament studies, and Egypt (thanks to the emergence of papyrology) in New Testament studies. Yet another stimulus to background studies had come through the discipline of comparative Indo-European philology. It was not too difficult for scholars trained

in the Greek and Latin classics to broaden their philological competence in the direction of Sanskrit, Avestan and other Indo-European languages; there were important reasons why at least some biblical scholars should wish to do so. For two centuries, down to the time of Alexander the Great in the 330s BC, Judaea had been part of the Persian Empire, and it was beginning to be suggested that in some areas at least, notably that of the apocalyptic literature, the Old Testament (and hence indirectly the New) might have been influenced from Iranian sources. No one, though, could be quite sure without subjecting the Old Iranian material to a thorough analysis. This Moulton had set himself to do long before coming to Manchester.

Iranian studies were, however, already represented in Manchester in the distinguished person of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Salford, Louis Charles Casartelli (1852–1925), a Manxman by birth who had become an Orientalist while studying under de Harlez (translator of the Avesta) at Louvain. In 1884 Casartelli had presented for his Louvain doctorate a dissertation in French entitled La Philosophie Religieuse du Mazdéisme sous les Sassanides. This was later translated into English by the son of the Parsi High Priest in Bombay, Firoz Jamaspji Dastur Jamasp Asa, and published in Bombay in 1889 as The Philosophy of the Mazdayasni Religion under the Sassanids. In the meantime he had also published Dinkard: Traité de Médecine Mazdéene traduit du Pehlevi (1886), and he subsequently contributed a number of articles to James Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. In 1961 R. C. Zaehner called Casartelli’s dissertation ‘unique in its time’, and compared it favourably with Söderblom’s later work in the same area.2

Moulton had begun his Avestan studies in his Cambridge days under ‘that prince of Christian Orientalists’,3 Professor E. B. Cowell, while an Assistant at the Leys School. Already in the late 1880s and early 1890s he was giving lectures to various Cambridge

1 Obituary in The Tablet, 24 January 1925. For information about Casartelli, I am indebted to Mr John Allen, Secretary to the Diocese of Salford, Wardley Hall, Worsley.
3 Moulton, Religions and Religion (1913), p. viii.
audiences on aspects of Zoroastrianism; and during his Manchester period he developed into Britain's most outstanding scholar in this fairly novel area, while gaining international recognition for his work on the language of the New Testament. While still in Cambridge, Moulton had struck up a firm friendship with the celebrated anthropologist James George Frazer, and in 1904 we find him writing to A. S. Peake: 'I was, of course, a comparative philologist at Cambridge, a classic mostly for teaching purposes, a NT student from the grammar side... and a Zendist as a philologue originally, finally a disciple of Frazer from the growing taste for comparative religion. ...'

The link with Frazer is worth a special mention, not least since it was through the successive editions of *The Golden Bough* that the Western world was familiarized with the methods of Comparative Religion on its anthropological side. When the Manchester chair of Comparative Religion was established, Frazer was in fact approached with a view to becoming its first incumbent. Frazer clearly felt the attractions of Manchester, but in the end declined the invitation. On 10 April 1904 he wrote to Moulton:

As to Manchester, ... I was asked whether I should be willing to accept the chair of Comparative Religion if it were offered to me, and I said I might do so on certain conditions. But I am in two minds about it. I have begun to doubt whether, with my views on religion in general and Christianity in particular, it would be right for me to accept a teaching post in a Theological Faculty instituted by Christians for Christians, in particular for men training for the Christian ministry. ... I have grave doubts whether I can do so. The case would be quite different if the chair were established independently of any Theological Faculty. ...

Today we can but speculate as to the course which Comparative Religion in Manchester might have taken if Frazer's scruples had been overcome.

Moulton was in every way an outstanding scholar. Jordan once wrote of him: 'His equipment is so ample, his temper so imperturbable, and his judgment so evenly poised, that many

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2 *James Hope Moulton*, pp. 164 f.
today accept his leadership absolutely without question.' Of his work for Comparative Religion, special mention must be made of his researches into the religion of ancient Iran and particularly his books *Early Religious Poetry of Persia* (1911), his Hibbert Lectures *Early Zoroastrianism* (1913), and *The Treasure of the Magi* (published posthumously, 1917). He also wrote the articles 'Fravashi', 'Iranians' and 'Magi' for the Hastings' *Encyclopaedia*. The present writer is in no way qualified to pronounce on the scholarly quality of these books but they exercised a profound influence in their day. It is, incidentally, interesting to note that it was also as a result of reading an early Moulton article that Nathan Söderblom of Uppsala, another outstanding comparative religionist and theologian, was first turned in the direction of Iranian studies. But Moulton was also a Christian theologian and apologist, who characteristically looked upon the Iranian religious experience as a *praeparatio evangelica*, though always to be considered with sympathy and with the most scrupulous accuracy of scholarship. In 1913 he published, as the 43rd Fernley Lecture, *Religions and Religion*, subtitled 'a study of the science of religion, pure and applied', in which his methodological position is stated with great clarity. This book has a great deal to say about Comparative Religion, but always under the aspect of Christian apologetics, and virtually summarizes all the liberal theological concerns of the pre-war period—which may fairly be supposed to have dominated the early years of the Manchester Faculty. Written in the first place for Wesleyan missionaries by one who '... is convinced that in his own faith he holds the key to the world's spiritual history, and in that conviction can afford to look with sympathy and understanding upon all the struggles of man towards God ...'; it is less specialized than his Iranian work; but the theological emphasis is the same, that of the 'fulfilment school' of Liberal Protestantism.

1 Jordan, op. cit. p. 386.
3 Moulton, *Religions and Religion*, p. x.
4 On the 'fulfilment school', see Sharpe, *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil*, passim.
Thanks to his Zoroastrian studies, Moulton had become known to the Parsi community in India, and in 1916 he accepted an invitation from J. N. Farquhar, then Literature Secretary of the YMCA in India and subsequently Professor of Comparative Religion in Manchester, to undertake a lecture and study tour in India, partly among the Parsees. On his return journey, in April 1917, Moulton’s ship was torpedoed in the Mediterranean. He was rescued, but died of exposure in a lifeboat. The Librarian of the John Rylands Library, Dr Henry Guppy, recorded that Moulton ‘fell a victim to the pitiless barbarity of the Germans’.

More moderately, but in a similar tone, A. S. Peake wrote that ‘... none of us can miss the tragic irony in his death that he who loved peace and laboured for it, who had desired friendship with Germany and whose work was appreciated by none more highly than by German scholars, should have been sent to his premature death by a German submarine.’

Returning now to 1904, attempts to secure the services of Frazer having finally failed, the new chair in Comparative Religion was offered to, and accepted by, a far different man, the Orientalist Thomas William Rhys Davids (1843–1922). The son of a Congregational minister, Rhys Davids had studied Sanskrit at Breslau before joining the Ceylon Civil Service in 1866. There he learned Pali, the sacred language of Theravada Buddhism, and in 1877, after leaving Ceylon, he began his publishing career with *Ancient Coins and Measures of Ceylon*. In 1878 there came his popular handbook *Buddhism*, which by 1937 had seen twenty-three editions; subsequent years saw a stream of books, articles and (particularly) translations from the Pali flow from his pen. In 1881 he was instrumental in founding the Pali Text Society. In 1903 there appeared his *Buddhist India*, and in 1908 *Early Buddhism*. In 1915, when he was over seventy years old, he resigned from the Manchester chair to be able to devote the whole of his remaining years to a *Pali Dictionary*, of which the first two volumes were published in 1921 and 1922, the third appearing after his death, in 1925.

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In 1894 Rhys Davids married Caroline Augusta Foley, who, as Mrs Rhys Davids, became as celebrated a scholar in the area of Buddhism as was her husband. She too lectured at Manchester. As well as numerous articles, many of them collected in the three volumes of *Wayfarer's Words* (1941), and translations, she produced for the Home University Library a short handbook, *Buddhism* (n.d.) which has still not outlived its usefulness.

The Rhys Davids family partnership did not make of Comparative Religion at Manchester what a Frazer (or for that matter a Moulton) might have made of it; but together they rendered an enormously valuable service to Buddhist studies in the West. G. R. Welbon, in his book *The Buddhist Nirvāṇa and its Western Interpreters* (1968), had devoted a chapter to 'The Rhys Davidses'; and although he is concerned with only one subject, their interpretation of Nirvāṇa, he does give us a more general evaluation in which one cannot altogether avoid the impression that Mrs Rhys Davids comes out rather better than her husband. His general conclusion seems to be that while Rhys Davids provided Pali scholarship with many of its tools, Mrs Rhys Davids used them more skilfully. He writes:

*The present generation of Buddhist scholars—those in India and Japan as well as Europe and the United States—has learned much from Mrs Rhys Davids. We no longer 'read our Buddhist scriptures like Fundamentalists'. Neat attempts to package the teachings of earliest Buddhism within the confines of a few terse pages are no longer considered possible. To the extent, then, that she focused attention on the history and change in the Pali Canon, to the extent that she has made sophisticated textual criticism—higher and lower—an indispensable aspect of Buddhist studies, she has indeed won her battle with the 'little books on Buddhism'.*

This is not to say, however, that we should belittle Rhys Davids' own efforts. Beginning in the 1880s, Buddhism had been patronized by the Theosophists, particularly in Ceylon. Amid their eccentricities, the Theosophists had no notion that critical questions even needed to be asked, much less how they were to be answered. It is to Rhys Davids' lasting credit that through the medium of the Pali Text Society, he provided subsequent generations of scholars with the linguistic and textual tools with

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1 Welbon, op. cit. p. 246.
which to work, and helped rescue Buddhist studies from the extravagances of the Olcotts, the Sinnetts and the Leadbeaters.

Following Rhys Davids' retirement in 1915, and bearing in mind the pressures of the war years, it was not found possible to fill the chair immediately. When the war was over a Reader was appointed to carry on the work. The Reader in question was W. J. Perry, who held his post until 1923; but before we can speak of Perry's contribution, a slight digression will be necessary.

From 1909 until 1919, the Chair of Anatomy at Manchester was held by a most unusual man, an expatriate Australian, Grafton Elliot Smith (1871–1937). Of his brilliance in his own specialist area there can be no doubt. His impact on the teaching of anatomy at Manchester has been described as 'swift and revolutionary', and even Glyn Daniel (who otherwise is scathing in his criticism of Elliot Smith) has recorded that 'at Manchester... he proved himself as a great anatomist, teacher and administrator'. Before coming to Manchester he had been Professor of Anatomy at the Government Medical School in Egypt. While there he had become fascinated by the phenomenon of mummi-fication and by other aspects of ancient Egyptian civilization. Gradually he had developed a comprehensive theory that all human culture worthy of the name had originated in Egypt, whence it had spread, by a process of diffusion, throughout the world, even as far afield as India, China, Japan and the Americas. This theory (commonly characterized as 'hyper-diffusionist')—which explicitly contradicted the Darwinian-Spencerian hypothesis of unilinear evolution—he was keen to expound at every opportunity. He lectured frequently at the John Rylands Library. Many of his researches were first presented in the pages of the Rylands Bulletin, before becoming his well-known books (in

1 On Elliot Smith, see Dawson, Sir Grafton Elliot Smith (1938), Elkin and Mackintosh (eds.), Grafton Elliot Smith: the Man and his Work (1974).
4 Bulletin, iii (1916–17), 60: '... there is amply sufficient information to justify the conclusion that many of the fundamental concepts of Indian, Chinese, Japanese and American civilisation were planted in their respective countries by the great cultural wave which set out from the African coast not long before the sixth century BC.'
their day) *The Ancient Egyptians and the Origins of Civilization* (1911), *Migrations of Early Culture* (1915), *The Evolution of the Dragon* (1919) and many more. On a somewhat different level, Elliot Smith was one of the anthropologists involved in the Piltdown controversy and at least one recent investigator was disposed to believe Smith to have been the ultimate practical joker: 'Somehow the whole affair reeks of Smith', wrote Ronald Millar before the final revelations came to light.¹

Between Elliot Smith and W. J. Perry there existed such a degree of fellow-feeling that it is genuinely difficult to tell where the work of one ends and that of the other begins. As early as 1915 Perry had contributed to the Manchester meeting of the British Association a paper on 'The Geographical Distribution of Megalithic Monuments and Ancient Mines', and in a footnote to one of Elliot Smith's Rylands Lectures, the anatomist records: 'Although I am wholly responsible for the form of this address, a great deal of the information made use of was collected by Mr Perry, and most of the rest emerged in the course of repeated conversations with him.'²

Perhaps Elliot Smith was the master, Perry the disciple—at least in the eyes of the world. But certainly Perry did much, if not most, of the primary research and inevitably Comparative Religion at Manchester during Perry's incumbency was strongly coloured by 'diffusionism'. Perry produced three books, *The Children of the Sun* (1923), *The Origins of Magic and Religion* (1923) and *The Growth of Civilization* (1924). Their thesis was similarly pan-Egyptian:

All the known evidence goes to show that the other early communities of the Ancient East derived their culture, directly or indirectly, from Egypt of the pre-dynastic or early dynastic age. It is impossible to produce any solid body of evidence to show that any other community had influenced the culture of Egypt in those times to any appreciable degree.³

So it was the Egyptians who had elaborated ideas on life after death; the Egyptians were responsible for the megaliths of Western Europe and the 'pyramids' of pre-Columbian America;

¹ Millar, op. cit. p. 231.
² *Bulletin*, iii (1916–17), 75.
all over the world the Egyptians, driven by their insatiable quest for gold, had left deposits of their culture. To this rule religion was no exception. Today diffusionism of this kind is treated with scorn by anthropologists and archaeologists alike. One of its harshest critics, Glyn Daniel, has characterized it as ‘this pan-Egyptian diffusionist delusion’. Its chief merit appears to have been (like the proto-astronaut theories of von Däniken half a century later) its massive simplicity. But it was part of the Manchester scene in the desperate years following the First World War: and it left a deeper mark than many would now be happy to acknowledge. In 1924 Perry followed Elliot Smith to London. His seminars (by now under the label of ‘cultural anthropology’), as well as teaching many ‘orthodox’ anthropologists, provided at least some of the initial ideology out of which the British branch of the ‘myth and ritual school’ was subsequently to emerge, even though the focus of attention had in the meantime shifted from Egypt to Mesopotamia. Bearing this in mind, it was not unfitting that what now appears to have been the final flourish of the school in Britain should have been a series of lectures on Myth, Ritual and Kingship, delivered in Manchester in 1955 and 1956 under the joint auspices of the Departments of Near Eastern Studies and Comparative Religion. I shall return to these lectures later.

On Perry’s departure for London, the question arose of once more filling the chair in Comparative Religion which had to all intents and purposes been vacant since Rhys Davids’ retirement. Thanks to the good offices of A. S. Peake, it was filled in 1923 by a Scottish ex-missionary, John Nicol Farquhar (1861–1929), who had been working in India since 1891, first under the auspices of the London Missionary Society and subsequently as a YMCA Secretary, though for some years he had been dividing his time between India and Oxford. Farquhar was undoubtedly the outstanding British missionary Orientalist of his generation. His books included Gita and Gospel (1903), A Primer of Hinduism

1 Daniel, op. cit. p. 96.

2 On Farquhar, see Sharpe, J. N. Farquhar: a Memoir (1962), and Not to Destroy but to Fulfil (1965). On 25 October 1923 he wrote to J. R. Mott, ‘Manchester has many interests: [William] Temple is there; Dr Peake is a friend of my old Oxford days; Dr Rendel Harris is at the Rylands Library; and there are many others’. Perhaps, too, there were memories of Moulton.
(1911), *The Crown of Hinduism* (1913), *Modern Religious Movements in India* (1914) and *An Introduction to the Religious Literature of India* (1920), while as an editor he had been responsible for steering through the press a vast range of standard works on all aspects of Indian religion and culture.\(^1\) He was also a close personal friend of both Peake (whom he had known as a student at Oxford) and Moulton (who he had invited to India, along with T. R. Glover, as a lecturer during the war).

Farquhar's retirement from active work in India had been brought about partly by failing health; and during his six years in Manchester, from 1923 to 1929, he was to publish relatively little. But to the *Bulletin* he contributed three articles, two on the ancient tradition linking the Apostle Thomas to India,\(^2\) and the third—a piece of pioneering research—entitled 'The Fighting Ascetics of India', in which he looked historically at the phenomenon of 'militant Hinduism' and at the existence of orders of initiated fighting sannyāsins.\(^3\) This work, which is not without certain political implications, deserves to be far better known than it is. Otherwise, Farquhar devoted his diminishing energies mainly to his teaching, which was by no means limited to the Indian material. He was a Christian of warm Liberal Protestant convictions and during his time the work of the department, while retaining its emphasis on sound historical and textual scholarship, returned to the position as part of the Faculty of Theology which had originally been envisaged for it.

A useful indication of the strength of Manchester scholarship in the wider field of the study of religion is provided by the twelve volumes of James Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1908–21, Index Volume 1926). To this outstanding enterprise, Manchester scholars made a notable contribution. Not all of these were, of course, comparative religionists, but the total effect was very impressive. The *Encyclopaedia* contains articles by Moulton, Peake, the Rhys Davidses (some sixty between them), Casartelli and Farquhar; while a total survey shows it to include

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1. For a complete list, see Sharpe, *Not to Destroy*, p. 380.
2. 'The Apostle Thomas in North India', in *Bulletin*, x (1926); 'The Apostle Thomas in South India', in ibid. xi (1927).
3. 'The Fighting Ascetics of India', in ibid. ix (1925), 431 ff.
over two hundred and thirty articles by twenty-six scholars having some link with the University of Manchester.

During the 1930s the field of Comparative Religion was beginning to enter upon a very difficult period. The generally optimistic evolutionism which had been such an important characteristic of its earliest years had suffered a body-blow at the time of the First World War. Advances on the scholarly front were such as to make the works of grand synthesis (such as Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*) less and less practicable for every year that passed. Instead, an increasing number of scholars were retreating into the sheltered world of limited monographs. Theologically, the old-style apologetics was crumbling under the onslaught of the Barthians and their ‘Neo-Orthodox’ relatives, and it was no longer clear that the study of the religions of the world would have a great deal to contribute to the final result, either for or against Christianity. In a sense, Comparative Religion remained a popular subject but its scholarly standards were in decline. New departures in parallel fields such as philosophy, phenomenology, psychology, anthropology and sociology were beginning to play havoc with some well-established conclusions and methods.¹

Academic subjects and syllabuses, however, sometimes have a curious self-perpetuating quality and are not easily altered. Between 1930 and 1950 none but the most sanguine would want to claim that the subject was moving with the times. It was not. The chair was occupied successively by the Revd John Murphy (1930–41), the Revd Laurence Edward Browne (1941–6) and the Revd Frederick Harold Smith (1946–51).

Concerning these three incumbents I must be brief, though I should not wish conciseness to be interpreted as implying any lack of acknowledgement of their work on behalf of either the University or the discipline of Comparative Religion. John Murphy was a theoretical anthropologist in the generally Frazerian tradition, who had spent most of his career as a working Congregational minister, and who published three books, *Primitive Man: his Essential Quest* (1927), *Lamps of Anthropology* (1943) and *The Origins and History of Religions* (1949). Browne, like Farquhar, had been a missionary in India, having served for a period on the

staff of the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies in Lahore. His publications dated back to 1913 and a Hulsean Prize Essay entitled *The Parables of the Gospels in the Light of Modern Criticism*. Subsequently he had published much solid and valuable work in the area of the encounter of Christianity and Islam, including *The Great Moslem Wall—the Problem of Missions to Moslems* (1931), *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia* (1933, reprinted as recently as in 1967), *The Prospects of Islam* (1944), and a series of Hulsean Lectures entitled *The Quickening Word: a Theological Answer to the Challenge of Islam* (1955). Browne's period was the only time during which Islamic studies played any real part in the department's work; but he was in Manchester for only five years, crossing the Pennines in 1946 to become Professor of Theology in Leeds. However, he returned to Manchester in connection with the Faculty of Theology's fiftieth anniversary in 1954 to deliver a lecture entitled 'The Value of the Comparative Study of Religion'.

This lecture is a theological, rather than a methodological, statement, emphasizing as it does that the 'scientific' study of religions must not be allowed to obscure the claims of the various religions to be the repositories of absolute truth in the realm of the spirit. He raises the question of academic objectivity, only to dismiss it in a phrase. 'In the comparative study of religions,' he writes, 'one must begin with the openness of mind which is prepared to find truth in any quarter. But there is no compulsion to find truth everywhere, or to shut one's eyes to falsehood and error'. And, after passing in review some conflicting religious doctrines, he concludes that in his travels, he has seen a great deal of the world of religions in action, and has reached certain conclusions:

I have seen the beauty of holiness, the love of truth, and self-sacrificing devotion. There is only one religion to which these beauties are indissolubly linked. The other religions, by their failures, by their seekings, and by their near misses, seem to point to that one. That religion shows the way that God indwells the human soul and imparts his character. Yes, I am still a Christian. It is the best religion that I have met so far.

1 *Bulletin*, xxxvii (1954–5), 42 ff. He also sent greetings to the Faculty for its 75th Anniversary although the infirmity of old age prevented him from attending the celebrations.
2 Ibid. p. 45.
3 Ibid. p. 53.
Moulton and Farquhar would surely have concurred. Concerning Smith I can record only that he published four books, *Outline of Hinduism* (1934), *The Elements of Comparative Theology* (1937), *The Comparative Study of Religions* (1948) and *The Buddhist Way of Life* (1951).

It is perhaps unsafe to generalize on a period for which I have found information sparse, but it does seem clear that during the 1930s and 1940s Comparative Religion continued to maintain its position at Manchester largely as a scholarly arm of Christian apologetics. Of the three professors since Farquhar, Browne was evidently the most accomplished scholar, while Murphy followed a line similar to that of E. O. James, and Smith was—or appears to have been—a straightforward expositor without being in any way original. But for my inevitable lack of perspective on this time of transition I can do little save to refer regretfully to ‘the tyranny of distance’.

For twenty years, from 1951 to his untimely death in 1971, the chair of Comparative Religion was occupied by Samuel George Frederick Brandon. During this time the whole subject passed through a period of extraordinary change. From being a secluded and insignificant backwater of academic life, it became a focus of popular concern, not least among students. I shall return to this question shortly.

A Mirfield-trained Anglican priest who had served throughout the Second World War as an army chaplain, Brandon was appointed to the Manchester chair not on the strength of his previous experience as a university teacher (he had none) but as a pupil of E. O. James and as the writer of two books which appeared more or less simultaneously in 1951, *Time and Mankind* and *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*.¹ In the first of these he had launched the theory that man’s sense of religion was bound up from the first with his consciousness of the time-process; in the second he had explored the significance of the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in AD 70 for the subsequent history of

Christianity in the Roman Empire. To the end of his career he had these two strings to his scholarly bow, and in both areas his work was stimulating but at the same time controversial. In writing about time he was hampered by his relative indifference to questions of philosophy and psychology from taking his investigations very far beyond the historical facts as he had learned them. In the area of Christian origins he was to become a highly controversial figure, accused by some of a wilful misreading of historical evidence and by others of advocating violent revolution in the name of the Jesus Christ whom most still revered as 'the heaven-born prince of peace'. The publication of his two later books *Jesus and the Zealots* (1967), and *The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth* (1969), coming as they did at a highly volatile time in Western religious history, in fact brought Brandon international recognition bordering on an unwelcome notoriety; but they did not fall strictly within the orbit of what he, or the Faculty, understood by Comparative Religion, and must on this occasion be regretfully left on one side.¹

Brandon's comparative religion began by being conventional in its approach, following a well-worn path through Palaeolithic religion, by way of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian material (he was well read in the Egyptian sources, though scarcely a professional Egyptologist), to Judaism and early Christianity, with some side glances at India and the Far East. Substantially the same approach is to be found in all his major writings in this area. *Time and Mankind*, as I have said, appeared in 1951. It was followed by his Oxford Wilde Lectures *Man and his Destiny in the Great Religions* (1962), *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East* (1963), *The Judgment of the Dead* (1967), *History, Time and Deity* (virtually a re-written version of *Time and Mankind*) (1965) and *Religion in Ancient History* (1969).

In all these books the overriding theme is 'change and decay', the inexorable passage of time, death, judgment and the future life. With the centrality of this theme in the history of religion no one would want to quarrel. The contrast between mortal man and the immortals who hold man's destiny in their hand is always

there, in however many forms. And yet, though always thought-provoking, there was something slightly disappointing about Brandon’s work in this area, perhaps because he always stopped too soon. Everything in religion that had happened since the European Middle Ages he tended to see as being decadent and artificial, and he was therefore unable to give very much serious attention to the religious world around him. Insisting that religions can only be understood with reference to their earliest beginnings, he failed to recognize the principles of change and continuity in religious traditions. Consequently, when the sudden upsurge of interest in Comparative Religion of which we have spoken took place in the early 1960s, Brandon (along with many others), whilst welcoming it, was somewhat at a loss to know either why it had happened or what was to be done to deal with it.

But this is to anticipate. In the 1950s the transition from Comparative Religion as a largely historical science to Comparative Religion as a matter of present-day behavioural observation had hardly even begun to take place on the university level, while internationally one notable focus of historical interest was in ‘the sacral kingship’. Here we must return briefly to the ‘diffusionism’ of Elliot Smith and Perry. From Perry, a line of inquiry had spread into the larger area of Ancient Near Eastern studies, centred on the relationship between myth and ritual, and on the role of the kingship in maintaining the ‘myth and ritual’ pattern. Best known in its Scandinavian form, in the work of such scholars as the Norwegian Sigmund Mowinckel and the Swedes Ivan Engnell and Geo Widengren, the British representatives of the ‘myth and ritual school’ had for twenty years been pursuing an independent line, partly for reasons connected with the diffusionist theory.¹

The most notable early British publications in this field had been A. M. Hocart’s two books Kingship (1927) and Kings and Councilors (1936) and E. O. James’ Christian Myth and Ritual (1933). Also in 1933 Professor M. A. Canney of Manchester (Semitic Languages and Literatures) had published a paper in which he had argued that in the Ancient Near East generally kings were thought of as

divine, and that even in Israel the king was ‘virtually an incarnation of the deity’.¹ H. H. Rowley has, in fact, said that ‘In 1933 Manchester was as deeply involved in the ideas of the so-called “school” as any of its members, either then or later, whether in this country or Scandinavia’.²

The two books (or rather symposia) by which the British wing of the ‘myth and ritual school’ was chiefly identified were both edited by S. H. Hooke. Myth and Ritual appeared in 1933, The Labyrinth in 1935. Twenty years later it was time for a return to Manchester. In 1955 and 1956 I was one of those who attended the Cissie R. Blundell Memorial Lectures on Myth, Ritual and Kingship (published in 1958, also edited by Hooke). Seven of the nine lectures were delivered by British scholars, though only two (H. H. Rowley on ‘Ritual and the Hebrew Prophets’ and S. G. F. Brandon on ‘The Myth and Ritual Position Critically Considered’) were by Manchester men. Though it would be tempting to examine Brandon’s criticism in some detail, I shall not do so, except to note that he scented Christian apologetics of a ‘priestly’ kind in some of the work of the school, which he evidently did not greatly appreciate.³ For my part, I should be disposed to ask in addition whether there might not also have been a certain element of politics involved in the work of the school as a whole—politics of the right rather than the left—though this is a question on which I do not propose to elaborate.

It is at all events noteworthy that in the late 1950s we should find Manchester’s Professor of Comparative Religion expressing his suspicion of Christian apologetics. Brandon, though he was still in Anglican orders, most emphatically did not see the chair as Farquhar or Browne would have seen it. His position was that of the impartial historical investigator. Others might question his impartiality but certainly he was never as much as tempted to turn any of the evidence he uncovered in a Christian direction. His bias—if bias he had—was in the opposite direction, though he maintained the most cordial professional relations with his

² Ibid. pp. 237 f.
³ Brandon, in Hooke (ed.), op. cit. p. 264.
theological colleagues, and on his death the memorial oration was delivered by Professor F. F. Bruce, whose evangelical credentials were and are impeccable.

To return now to the developments of the 1960s, before about 1960 (though I do not have any statistics) classes in Comparative Religion were still made up almost entirely of theological students, depressingly few of whom had any real interest in the subject. By 1966 the size of classes had increased dramatically. New student generations were pursuing their individual religious quests along unconventional lines, in which the study of the exotic wisdom that Comparative Religion seemed to offer often played a part. In this new climate of opinion, the old notion of Comparative Religion as an arm of Christian apologetics was forgotten. Ancient religions were to be studied for the sake of the timeless wisdom they enshrined; but, more importantly, ‘the wisdom of the East’ was now a living option to many young people who were growing progressively alienated from the roots of their own tradition.

Brandon did his best to cope with this new development but characteristically chose to do so by attempting to provide scholarly information in a more readily assimilable form. He planned, and wrote a great deal of, A Dictionary of Comparative Religion (1970), but this was not an outstanding success, being uneven in quality and too short for its purpose. He wrote regularly for History Today and Horizon, and on the most popular of popular levels he was deeply involved in the planning and writing of that extraordinary weekly encyclopaedia Man, Myth and Magic, which without his advice would certainly have been even more eccentric than it finally turned out to be. And in the last years of his active career, having reached the conviction that the study of iconography is of the utmost importance to the student of Comparative Religion, he had launched a new course in religious iconography as part of the department’s offerings—an elegant byproduct of which was his last book, Man and God in Art and Ritual (1974). This appeared in New York, was for some reason rapidly remaindered, and is now something of a collector’s item. The admirable motivation for this work he expressed in the words:
For if the first charge upon a scholar is to further knowledge in his own particular field, his second duty is to disseminate that knowledge... The task of presenting his subject in an interesting and non-technical manner to this wider public [of 'intelligent layfolk'] is... the duty of the scholar...1

In 1970 Brandon was elected Secretary-General of the International Association for the History of Religions, a mark of the esteem in which he was by this time held as an 'elder statesman' in Comparative Religion. He hoped that the Association's 1975 Congress would come to Manchester and had begun to work to that end. But it was not to be. In 1971 he died, wholly unexpectedly, as the result of an infection contracted in Egypt. The 1975 Congress had to be moved to the University of Lancaster, while a planned Festschrift, Man and his Salvation (ed. Sharpe and Hinnells, 1973) became a memorial volume.

On Brandon's death the chair in Comparative Religion passed (in 1973) to Trevor O. Ling, a specialist in Buddhism who at that time held a personal chair at the University of Leeds. He had previously published four books, The Significance of Satan (1961), Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil (1962), Buddha, Marx and God (1966) and A History of Religion East and West (1968), and in 1973 he added to these (as part of a series which had been planned by Brandon) The Buddha—dedicated, incidentally, to Indira Gandhi. In his Leeds inaugural lecture, Ling had shown the extent to which he had already broken away from the notion of studies of religion carried out by remote control, so to speak, on the basis of translated texts studied from a safe distance. Writing on 'Max Weber in India', he suggested that his achievements notwithstanding, Weber could hardly have written as he did, had he actually studied the social conditions of India at first hand.2 This criticism extended by implication to many comparative religionists, quite apart from their frequent, and in Ling's opinion unwarranted, preoccupation with matters of Christian apologetics. In the introduction to his 1968 text-book, he had firmly excluded Christian theology from the Comparative Religion picture and had put forward arguments for re-defining

the discipline as ‘the philosophy and sociology of religion’ (this at a time when the tendency internationally was to refer to it as ‘the history and phenomenology of religion’), while indicating his personal preference for sociological method. Subsequently Ling’s work was to move more and more in a sociological direction methodologically and in the direction of Bengal geographically. In a one-man department, this might have been a serious narrowing of the frontiers of research; as it was, this infusion of sociological expertise added a dimension to Comparative Religion which was badly needed as a corrective.

By this time, however, the Manchester department was no longer dependent on the abilities and interests of a single professor, and I must take a moment to refer to the work of some of its other staff members.

The first full-time lecturer to become a member of the department had been appointed in 1953 in the person of D. Howard Smith. He had been for many years a missionary in China and lectured with evident delight on the curiously-named subject of ‘Chinese Cults and Philosophies’ as well as on Hinduism and Buddhism. During this time at Manchester, Smith did not publish extensively but after his retirement in 1966 he wrote in rapid succession two notable books, Chinese Religions (1968) and Confucius (1973). Both of them were extremely well received by reviewers and immediately became standard works in their area. He was also responsible for all the Chinese material in Brandon’s Dictionary.

By 1966 the one lectureship had been extended to two. An unsuccessful attempt was made to appoint a Sinologist to carry on Smith’s work after his retirement. In the event, however, the posts were filled by the present writer, a former student of Brandon’s who had spent the period from 1958 to 1965 in the University of Uppsala, Sweden, working under Professors Geo Widengren, Carl-Martin Edsman and Bengt Sundkler, and had written a doctoral dissertation, Not to Destroy but to Fulfil (published in 1965) on the work in India of J. N. Farquhar; and the Revd D. N. de L. Young, who had become a specialist on Buddhism during his time as a missionary in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Neither was

to remain at Manchester for very long. In 1970 both left, the former moving to Lancaster, and subsequently Sydney, while Young returned to the Church; less than a decade later he is now Bishop of Ripon.

If I may be allowed for a moment to indulge in some personal reminiscences, my chief memories of the 1966–70 period at Manchester are of hectic activity in a field which had suddenly become extraordinarily popular. The Department now seemed to belong in spirit rather more to the Faculty of Arts than to the Faculty of Theology, partly since numbers of Christian ordinands were declining and there had been a great influx of students from the Arts Faculty. Professor Brandon’s name was in process of becoming a household word due not least to coverage in the popular press (and particularly in Time and Newsweek) of his book *Jesus and the Zealots*. Visitors to the Department included the eccentric American Bishop James Pike, apparently bent on worshiping at the Brandon shrine. These were the days when the *Dictionary of Comparative Religion* and *Man, Myth and Magic* were being produced, and I for one was kept busy meeting one deadline after another. Apart from these *œuvres de vulgarisation*, I succeeded during those four years in producing only one moderately scholarly paper, ‘Nathan Söderblom and the Study of Religion’, in *Religious Studies* (1969). But it was as a result of having to teach the history of Comparative Religion to students that I began to write a book which later appeared as *Comparative Religion: a History* (1975), and of which this present paper is in a manner of speaking a by-product. Also in these years members of the departments of Comparative Religion (or their equivalents) at Manchester, Lancaster, Leeds and Newcastle began to meet together with a view to more extensive cooperation. It was as a more or less direct result of these meetings that a new journal, *Religion* (1971 ff.), saw the light of day. Another indirect consequence was the setting up in 1969 of the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education, which was destined to be highly influential in the area of religious education in schools.

At the first Shap Conference (held at the Shap Wells Hotel in Cumbria, hence the enigmatic title), organized by the Department of Adult Education at Newcastle, questions of method were
brought to the fore. A conference volume, *Comparative Religion in Education* (ed. J. R. Hinnells, 1970) included my survey article, 'The Comparative Study of Religion in Historical Perspective'. The following year's conference also resulted in a textbook, *Hinduism* (ed. Hinnells and Sharpe, 1972), but by that time I had moved to Lancaster. By that time, too, the 'Brandon period' had come to an abrupt and tragic end.

Of John R. Hinnells, who joined the Manchester department from Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1970, I write only with the greatest diffidence, since for more than ten years he has been a close personal friend. Beginning as a theological student at King's College, London, he became fascinated by one of the same problems which had exercised the mind of Moulton half a century earlier, namely, the extent of Iranian influence upon the New Testament. This led him in time not only into a study of Zoroastrianism but also into a consideration of Mithraism (particularly with a view to its archaeology) and into the field of Parsi studies. As well as being an energetic writer in all these areas, with an output which has been all the more remarkable when it is remembered that his health has not always been of the best, he has found time to engage himself in a wide range of organizational and editorial activities. For two years he was on secondment to the Open University and played a large part in the planning of the course 'Man's Religious Quest': his three-unit textbook *Spanning East and West* (1978), on Zoroastrians and Parsis, is especially noteworthy since as well as writing the text, his own camera provided most of the ample and excellent illustrations. Otherwise, apart from his popular Hamlyn book on *Persian Mythology* (1973) and his four Bombay lectures on *Parsis and the British* (1978), his publications have mainly been in article form. As an entrepreneur of Comparative Religion generally, and as an organizer of two congresses of Mithraic studies (an enterprise which sadly came to an abrupt end with the 'Islamic Revolution' in Iran), he has made—and is still making—a notable contribution to the field.

Other lectureships in the Department have been held by Lance S. Cousins (since 1970), Alan Unterman (1972–3) and Jeanne Openshaw (1976–7). I trust that I may be forgiven for mentioning
in this connection only that the first and second are a practising Buddhist and a Jewish Rabbi respectively—ample testimony to the wider multi-religious and multi-cultural implications of Comparative Religion in the 1970s.

During the past seventy-five years, the work done under the auspices of the Department of Comparative Religion at Manchester has mirrored, with remarkable accuracy, the progress of the study on a larger international map. Beginning from a position firmly within the orbit of what the liberal Christian world understood by 'apologetics' and from a whole-hearted endorsement of historical method, textual studies and ultimate value judgements, we have seen Comparative Religion move from its early status as an arm of theological study in the direction of behavioural science on the one hand, and acknowledged religious pluralism on the other. Manchester has always been strongest in its subject specialists (few of whom have not made a solid contribution to their chosen fields), weakest in the area of methodology. Oddly, Manchester has never produced (with the possible exception of the eccentric period of Elliot Smith and Perry) either deep methodological reflection or genuine innovation. Its methods, though assiduously applied, have for the most part come from elsewhere. Not that methodological innovation is necessarily to be applauded for its own sake; but just as the vitality of a religious tradition is often seen most clearly in the heresies it produces, so the vitality of a scholarly discipline may perhaps be measured by its creative eccentricities. Of these, Comparative Religion at Manchester may have had too few.

There are signs that the wave of popular enthusiasm for Comparative Religion which began in the 1960s may already be on the wane; its effects, however, are likely to remain with us for the foreseeable future. Never again will it be possible, even for a Faculty of Theology, to act as though alternative 'religious' maps of the universe did not exist, or to deal with these maps simply as 'non-Christian religions'. We all, whether we welcome the thought or not, live in a religiously pluralistic world, which it is the first duty of the scholar to attempt to understand—in the process using the methods and results achieved by colleagues in every accessible field. The achievement of Comparative Religion
at Manchester lies in the extent to which it has always attempted to do this, to the best of its ability. It has never been an easy task but on the whole it has been carried out with conscientiousness and wisdom. Perhaps when the centenary comes round in 2004 the well-worn title 'Comparative Religion' will finally have been relinquished in favour of some other form of words. The field, however, will continue to exist, as part of that intellectual enterprise in which the attempt is made to approach, with sympathy and understanding, *homo religiosus*. As for the past seventy-five years, without the Department's work that task would have been immeasurably harder and the life of the Faculty of Theology much poorer.