

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Indian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_ijt\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ijt_01.php)

# Not to Destroy but to Fulfil\*

DUNCAN B. FORRESTER

Christian missions in recent years have become remarkably dependent on unexamined slogans rather than on carefully formulated theology. Identification, Involvement, Presence, Encounter, Confrontation, Dialogue—all have been held to point to the essential character of the Christian mission. But at least certain of the implications of such slogans are dangerous, leading to a dilution of the exclusive claims of the Gospel, or an extravagant over-emphasis on the life and actions of the evangelist over against the spoken message which he bears. Too many people today suggest that the task of the missionary is something impossible and unnecessary—a repetition of the Work of Christ.

Such slogans are modern, vague and misleading. The book under review is concerned with a once very influential—and painstakingly formulated—theology of mission centring on the concept of *fulfilment*, as classically expressed in J. N. Farquhar's book, *The Crown of Hinduism*. In tracing the background to Farquhar's thought the author gives us a fascinating and erudite analysis of a century of missionary thinking.

From the beginning Protestant missions in India operated on two fronts: on the one hand there was evangelistic work, mainly in the villages, leading eventually to the mass movements among lower caste groups in various parts of India. On the other hand there was educational work, aimed primarily, but not exclusively, at the upper castes. Alexander Duff saw education as the handmaid of evangelism, and the most effective missionary technique available to the Church. Communication at any depth between a Westerner and an intelligent Hindu was, he felt, almost impossible because of their radically different backgrounds and ways of thinking. The solution is to offer to the Hindu an education as similar as possible to the missionary's own in order that then he may be able to understand and appropriate the Gospel. This reliance on Western education as a missionary method meant that many able missionaries of the

---

\* *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil*—the contribution of J. N. Farquhar to Protestant Missionary Thought in India before 1914 by Eric J. Sharpe. Swedish Institute of Mission Research, Uppsala, 1965. Pp. 360+ bibliography and index.

first and second generations never really came into touch with Indian thought or the Hindu tradition at all. The college was a little Europe, and the students were expected to become little Europeans in education, culture and, above all, in religion. The rejection of Hinduism behind this theory was complete: a sympathetic attitude to Hinduism was regarded as tantamount to apostasy from Christianity. Yet, Duff's conviction that education which is not shot through with religion does not make sense probably still has much to teach us.

William Miller was the typical figure of the second generation of missionaries. He was willing to see good in Hinduism, although he still professed the superiority of Christianity, and was rather vague about the relation between the two faiths. Educational institutions were not, in his opinion, agencies of evangelism. A preparation for the Gospel they might provide: education sowed the seed from which the evangelist outside the college might later reap. A Christian college is not justified by the number of conversions it effects, for its work is service in the name of Christ.

Miller's position to a considerable extent reflected the changed circumstances when he wrote. Increasing university and government control over curriculum, examinations, and so on, meant that Christian colleges could no longer teach what they wanted, as they wanted. A college missionary's time was filled so full with secular teaching that he found it impossible to concentrate on the preaching, Bible teaching and personal contacts which had in early days been central. Miller provided a justification for the missionary colleges in this new situation. But many of the more evangelistically-inclined teachers became dissatisfied and restless. F. W. Kellett, for example, left Madras Christian College and devoted himself to evangelistic work among young people in Madras, and in Calcutta J. N. Farquhar gave up what he called the 'joyless, hopeless work of college' and became a Y.M.C.A. secretary responsible for literary and student work.

Farquhar was a Scottish layman without theological training but with his countrymen's proverbial delight in theological debate. He was remarkably sensitive to the Hindu renaissance and the national movement of his day, and determined that the Church's attitude to these developments should not be purely negative. A great deal of his energies were directed into stimulating sympathetic and scholarly study of Hinduism by Christians. He edited three still useful series of books—the *Religious Quest of India*, the *Religious Life of India*, and the *Heritage of India*. As an editor and instigator of new thinking among Christians in India, Farquhar's role was like that of the late Dr. P. D. Devanandan in our own day.

Farquhar's own thinking was summed up in his book, *The Crown of Hinduism*. He was much influenced by the evolutionary theories of his time, and their application to theology.

Ideas such as progressive revelation are not popular in theology today, and few would now agree with the suggestion made in 1913 by the Rev. R. G. Milburn, of Bishop's College, Calcutta, that in the Indian Church the Old Testament should be replaced by Vedantic writings. Farquhar would not go as far as that, but he did see the relation of Hinduism to Christianity as that of evolutionary promise and fulfilment. Christianity, in a sense which was never made explicit, fulfilled Hinduism and replaced it. Serious-minded Hindus eager for progress should therefore embrace Christianity, and devout Christians may regard Hinduism with sympathetic understanding rather than contempt or abhorrence.

The most effective criticism of Farquhar came from Professor A. G. Hogg. The term fulfilment suggested to him condescension rather than sympathetic understanding. And, besides, he asked, what exactly is it in Hinduism which is fulfilled in Christianity? If, for example, we say that mysticism is the essence of the higher Hinduism, one might well argue that Hinduism fulfils Christianity. In what sense are Hindu rites and doctrines fulfilled in Christian rites and doctrines? When pressed, Farquhar would say that human religious needs are better satisfied in Christianity than in Hinduism. But this is a partisan Christian statement with which the devout Hindu could not agree, and Hogg argued that the need which Christianity meets is just not felt by the average Hindu.

Hogg was a most penetrating and creative theologian—far more so than Farquhar—and was always conscious of the distinctiveness and individuality of each particular religion. Between Hinduism and Christianity he saw a sharp contrast which made it impossible for him to relate the one to the other as simply as had Farquhar. So far no one has studied Hogg's theology in detail, but we have reason to hope that Dr. Sharpe intends to follow up this book with a careful examination of Hogg's thinking and its influence. Such a book would fill a real need.

Hardly anyone would now accept Farquhar's fulfilment theory as theologically or practically adequate. The theological revival of this century has forced such basically untheological thinking out of fashion. The writings of Barth and Kraemer form the great divide between our generation and what went before. But a book, such as Dr. Sharpe's, by expounding the missionary thinking of a past century must make us question whether this generation, with all its modern theological sophistication, may not perhaps have lost much both of the urgency and of the sympathetic scholarly approach to Hinduism which motivated Farquhar. This is an important and valuable book.