

It has often been imagined, moreover, that Comparative Religion is secretly the foe of every individual religion; that it teaches the composite origin of literally every faith; and that it entertains the hope of gathering ultimately all religions into a single comprehensive synthesis. Its hostility towards Christianity, in particular, has been widely proclaimed. 'The attack from the side of Comparative Religion', exclaims a usually discriminative writer, 'is one of the most formidable with which the Christian apologetic has to deal at the present time; and, if that attack were driven home successfully, it is difficult to see how the missionary motive could survive in any adequate form.'¹ But, as already pointed out,² no more erroneous misconception could possibly prevail. All that Comparative Religion asks of Christian believers is that they allow their faith to be honestly and fairly examined. In point of fact, Comparative Religion restricts itself exclusively to the demands of a twofold purpose. 'It is that science which, by means of comparisons, strives to determine with exactness (1) the relation of the various religions of mankind to one another, and (2) the interrelation of conceptions current within a single religion at different periods in its history.'³

It is plain, therefore, that this science has a function to fulfil vastly different from—and infinitely higher than—that which some of its critics assign to it. Happily a saner judgement is now finding expression on every hand. It is beginning to be recognized that Comparative Religion and Apologetics are studies which stand entirely apart from each other.⁴ The former branch of research never seeks to exalt unduly either Jesus Christ or any other religious teacher of men; neither does it seek to shadow the glory rightly belonging either to one leader or to another. Accordingly, the modern spirit of inquiry finds immediate and congenial fellowship amongst investigators who, while striving to solve the fundamental problems of religion, are seeking to solve them quite independently of their local and traditional hearings, and (not less) of their subtle yet potent interactions. As a consequence, a new conception of religion—of its universality, of its essential unity, of its wondrous variety,

¹ Cf. Joseph H. Oldham in *The International Review of Missions*, vol. ii, p. 305.

² *Vide supra*, pp. 7 f. It is no evidence of antithesis or ill-will if Comparative Religion, again and again, has disclosed the indebtedness of Christianity to numerous non-Christian faiths.

³ Cf. Jordan, *Comparative Religion: Its Genesis and Growth*, p. 65. Edinburgh, 1906.

⁴ *Vide supra*, pp. 7 f.