



The Indian Challenge: Indology and New Conceptions of Christianity as ‘Religion’ at the End of the Nineteenth Century

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The present notion of religion as a universal concept, the question of its historical origins and the circumstances of its global dissemination has been significantly influenced and inspired by Tomoko Masuzawa’s (2005) *The Invention of World Religions*. Following other historians of religion (Asad 1993; Dubuisson 2003; Fitzgerald 2000), Masuzawa identified a structural Eurocentrism within fundamental categories of the discourse on religion. Two of her claims are important. First, the notion of world religions, which European scholars coined at the end of the nineteenth century, was subsequently exported to the rest of the world (Masuzawa 2005: 20, 32–3); and, second, in a time when history as a scientific discipline became foundational to the humanities and a comparative history of religions evolved, coining the concept of world religions was a means of

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safeguarding Christianity's traditional claim to supremacy over other religions in the guise of religious pluralism (Masuzawa 2005: 29, 327). Masuzawa identifies this fundamental shift from Christianity's traditional claim to supremacy based on metaphysical assumptions to a new approach based on history in the work of the German Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) (Masuzawa 2005: 309–28).

Several outlines of a global history question the view that Europeans were the first to see religion as a universal concept (Bayly 2004: 325–65; Beyer 2006; Osterhammel 2009: 1239–304). These authors see the birth of the modern world, including the emergence of the notion of religion, as the product of an entangled history of colonialism, in which the last decades of the nineteenth century, in particular, saw fundamental changes in all religions, including Christianity. In this respect, global history and postcolonial studies converge to confirm that globally applied concepts like religion have a global history: Both colonizers and the colonized—despite the asymmetry of the power relations between them—were intimately connected and in the nineteenth century underwent parallel transformations based on mutual influences (Chidester 2014; van der Veer 2001). Furthermore, from a postcolonial viewpoint, several regional studies have shown how, in colonial contexts at the end of the nineteenth century, local reformers conceptualized various cultural formations as religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam (Hatcher 1999; Hopf 2021; Kateman 2019; King 2008; Snodgrass 2003). As I have mentioned elsewhere (Thurner 2021), we should try to understand Christian theologians like Ernst Troeltsch in the context of the new global discourse on religion occurring at the end of the nineteenth century and his conception of Christianity as paralleling the development of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam as religions. This, plus the agency of reformers on the periphery, casts doubt on Masuzawa's hypothesis of there being a unilinear export of a European concept to colonial contexts.

Masuzawa contests the Eurocentrism of religion as a universally applied concept. However, seeing the categories of religion and world religions as a Western or European construct would in no way alleviate the problem of structural Eurocentrism. In his seminal work *Provincializing Europe*, Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty warns of the consequences of assigning universal concepts to a particular geographical or cultural origin—usually Europe—prior to historical examination (Chakrabarty 2000: 27–46). In this case, the conceptual content is identified with the intellectual history of a certain region. If then, in a second step, a universal

concept is applied to another region, the region of the supposed origin of the concept works as the prototype by which all other contexts will be measured. In this scheme, any difference to the prototype can only be grasped as a ‘failure, lack, and inadequacy’ (Chakrabarty 2000: 34). In historiography, where universal concepts function as fundamental categories structuring historical investigations, this creates the epistemological and ethical problem of Eurocentrism. As Chakrabarty (2000, 29) put it, ‘only “Europe”, the argument would appear to be, is *theoretically* (that is at the level of the fundamental categories that shape historical thinking) knowable; all other histories are matters of empirical research that fleshes out a theoretical skeleton that is substantially “Europe”’. This unconscious prioritizing of Europe and its history is marked by classifying societies as *pre-modern* or *pre-capitalist* because they are measured by and located on the timeline of European intellectual history as the self-evident point of reference for all other histories. To quote Chakrabarty again: ““Europe” remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call “Indian”, “Chinese”, “Kenyan”, and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called “the history of Europe”” (Chakrabarty 2000: 27).

To assert that the concept of religion is of European origin would on the one hand legitimize claims of Europe’s exclusive ownership of the concept, and on the other would discriminate against the numerous other extant cultural identities in postcolonial contexts based on a self-understanding as religion. As religious studies can neither do away with universal categories nor seek refuge in cultural relativism, the only solution can be to engage in a conscious, yet historically informed, use of these categories. It is thus important to remember that the global application of these categories has a global history; that this history is closely connected to the colonial project of Europe and its power relations, but happened on a global stage and included voices from the colonial periphery that also shaped these categories; and that the supposed universality of these categories stems not directly from their alleged enlightened rationality but from a contingent global historical development against the backdrop of colonialism (Chakrabarty 2000: 43). Thus, historicizing religion as a universal concept reveals its contingency and accommodates both criticism and modification.

In this chapter, we will demonstrate how, within a global discourse on religion, German theologian Ernst Troeltsch and German Indologist

Hermann Oldenberg tried to counteract the onslaught of non-Christian religions on Christianity. Ernst Troeltsch drew on Hermann Oldenberg's work to substantiate his new conception of Christianity as a religion against the backdrop of a global religious history. We will see how Oldenberg was himself part of a global discourse on religion in which, through his Indological scholarship, he attempted to defend the supremacy of Christianity against the rising popularity of Buddhism and Indian philosophy.

THE CHALLENGE

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Heidelberg-based Protestant theologian-cum-philosopher Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) found himself and his academic guild challenged to justify Christianity's claim to truth and validity in a recently globalized world of religions. As 'Orientalist scholarship was considered to be among the highest scientific achievements of the time' (van der Veer 2001: 65), the act of establishing a general religious history reduced Christianity to just one religion among others. To maintain its claim to the truth, Troeltsch argued, theology needed to make an empirical turn towards history and, to avoid descending into relativism, this had to be supplemented by an idealistic philosophy of history. As Troeltsch noted, in his Essay *Die Selbständigkeit der Religion* (The Independence of Religion), published in 1895/6, this empirical adjustment had already been made insofar as 'the general religious history had increasingly been forming the basis of all theological research and its methods had permeated the whole body of theological scholarship' (Troeltsch 2009: 367). In his eyes, however, this turn was only half-hearted—an impossible attempt to integrate a few ideas and methods merely to maintain the conventional theological metaphysics in the age of science. Troeltsch (2009: 366), by contrast, argued that the serious 'contemporary crisis' of religion called for a fundamental shift from theological scholarship to the general religious history. For him, the 'essence of religion' and the possibility of its 'coexistence with science' (Troeltsch 2009: 365) were at stake. In sum, Troeltsch saw science as fundamental challenge for Christianity and religion in general. In other words, religion needed to accommodate science in a way that legitimated its independence.

THE ANTAGONISM OF RELIGION AND SCIENCE AND THE BIRTH OF A NEW CONCEPT OF RELIGION

While, at first sight, religion's antagonistic relationship with science seems to have been ongoing throughout the ages, Troeltsch's alarming tone suggests that there had to be something new to it. In fact, the antithetical juxtaposition of the two terms has its roots in the historical conditions of the mid-nineteenth century (Bergunder 2016; Burrow 2000: 31–67; Chadwick 1972: 1–39, 1975: 161–88; Harrison 2006). Following the impressive discoveries and immense progress in the natural sciences in the first half of the nineteenth century, some scientists claimed that only science could provide a full explanation of the natural world. In Germany, its impetus was not least due to political developments: After the failure of the first pan-German democratic movement in 1848/9, some disappointed leaders of that movement returned to their original professions to overcome what they had come to regard as an oppressive and obsolete system. One of them was the physiologist Carl Vogt (1817–95). In his *Physiologische Briefe* (Physiological letters), Vogt expressed a profound physiological materialism, in which he not only refuted that reason and nature were independent of one another but also characterized the spiritual world as a direct outcome of nature and wholly accessible through science. As he put it (Vogt 1847: 206):

Each and every scientist whose thinking is logically consistent will, I think, adopt this notion: that all those capabilities, which we think of as spiritual, are merely functions of the cerebral matter; or, to express myself bluntly: that thoughts have the same relationship to the brain as bile has to the liver or urine to the kidneys.

The line of attack of this statement was directed against the idealistic philosophy of mid-nineteenth-century Germany, which, because it had state approval during the post-revolutionary years was influential. Vogt toured Europe, held lectures, and became the most popular figure in what later came to be known as the 'materialism controversy' (*Materialismusstreit*) (Bayertz et al. 2007). Owen Chadwick (1975: 166) described him as 'a wonderful orator, with a perfect mixture of humour and satire. ... He had far more power of popular exposition than Darwin, more power than Huxley'. Jacob Moleschott (1822–93), who in 1847 became associate professor of physiology at Heidelberg University, expressed similar views

in his work *Der Kreislauf des Lebens* (Circuit of life), published in 1852, in which he (Moleschott 1852: 419) claimed that:

Man is the sum of parents and nurse, of place and time, of air and weather, of sound and light, of food and clothing. His will is the necessary consequence of all those causes, bound to a law of nature which we recognize from its appearance as the planet from its orbit, like the plant from the soil.

Moleschott, like Vogt, also became a public figure especially through devising his famous phrase of ‘no thoughts without phosphorus’. A third spearhead of physiological materialism was Ludwig Büchner (1824–99), a physician and active politician during the German democratic revolution, as well as the brother of the famous writer Georg Büchner (1813–37).

In 1854, the controversy over materialism came to a head at the 31st Convention of the Society of German Scientists and Doctors in Göttingen, when Rudolf Wagner (1805–64), a physiologist at Göttingen, advocated basing science on Christian convictions. He wholly discredited physiological materialism and explicitly attacked Vogt, who countered with his monograph (Vogt 1855) *Köhlerglaube und Wissenschaft* (Birdbrained faith and science). Also stepping into the controversy, in the same year Ludwig Büchner (1855) produced *Kraft und Stoff* (Force and matter). The essence of this book lay in his claim that there is ‘no matter without force and no force without matter’, which left no space for a spiritual force, let alone traditional biblical images of God. Acknowledging its influence, Chadwick (1975, 170–1) observed that ‘if a single book represents the popular, as distinct from the real ... oppositions between Science and Religion in Europe of the middle nineteenth century, that book is Büchner’s *Force and Matter*’. By 1904, there were already 21 German editions of the book and it had been translated into 15 languages.

Although the controversy over materialism began in Germany, it quickly spread to other countries. Besides prominent figures like Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95) and John Tyndall (1820–93), John William Draper (1811–82) made an important contribution towards fuelling the debate in the Anglo-Saxon world. In *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, he (Draper 1874) constructed a history of the millennia-old enmity between the two spheres and their respective agents. However, Chadwick concluded that ‘the conflict was hypostatized, Science and Religion were blown up into balloon duellists, Science containing all knowledge, Religion containing no knowledge. ... Once it had been

hypostatized, it became possible to read back the antipathy throughout history, and see the ding-dong of duel through the centuries' (Chadwick 1975: 162–3). Draper regarded the Roman Catholic Church as the primary enemy of science, but emphasized that all religions had to meet the challenge of science. As he (Draper 1874: 324) explained:

When by our wonderful facilities of locomotion strange nations and conflicting religions are brought into common presence – the Mohammedan, the Buddhist, the Brahman – modifications of them all must ensue. In that conflict science alone will stand secure; for it has given us grander views of the universe, more awful views of God.

Draper's universal claim for the legitimacy of science was amply rewarded by the global attention his book attracted. It was quickly translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Russian, Portuguese, and Serbian, and also, among other languages, into Japanese (1883), Turkish (1885), and Urdu (1910) (Bergunder 2020: 81; Chadwick 1975: 161). By the end of the nineteenth century, the supposed conflict between science and religion was widely acknowledged as a matter of fact around the globe.

Peter Harrison equated the materialism controversy and the popularization of the conflict between science and religion with the birth of the concept of science as we now know it, namely strictly based on empirical research, with anything like natural philosophy being outsourced (Harrison 2006). There are strong indications that the same is true of religion. Materialism's attack on religion resulted in theologians and other intellectuals beginning to define the latter as an inner experience. As John Burrow (2000: 60) remarked, 'even theologians began to strut a little, on ground cleared by idealist philosophy or in an enclave of inner personal experience of the divine which might reasonably ... seem immune from scientific tampering'. In the same way, Thomas Green (2016: 51) argued that 'defining religion in terms of experience had the appealing result that religion would be made seemingly invulnerable to scientific or historical criticisms which could pick holes in scripture, but which could hardly touch the inner sense of the Infinite'. In other words, the new understanding of religion as a matter of inner personal experience, was a direct consequence of the new understanding of science. In the eyes of its advocates, this conceptual shift safeguarded the existence of religion in the age of science.

This new understanding of religion was not restricted to Europe and North America. Religious movements like the neo-Buddhism of Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), or the neo-Hinduism of Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), each defined their belief system as a religion, with inner experience as its core, and thus claimed to be compatible with science (Bergunder 2020: 86–103; Green 2016; Snodgrass 2003: 198–221; van der Veer 2001: 73–4). In a speech held in Lahore in 1897, Vivekananda, a prolific writer and orator who toured Europe and America propagating *advaita vedānta* as the essence of Hinduism, warned his followers about the evils of materialism (quoted by Green 2016: 89):

In the first place we have to stop the incoming of such a wave [of materialism] in India. Therefore preach the Advaita to every one, so that religion may withstand the shock of modern science. Not only so, you will have to help others; your thought will help out Europe and America.

The alarming tone of this quote and the urgency of the warning about science threatening religion, evokes Troeltsch's plea to reconcile religion with science. Like Troeltsch, Vivekananda looked upon his native beliefs as a religion exposed to a serious threat from science, and his response to that threat was to embrace a new understanding of religion as an inner experience (quoted in Green 2016: 49):

Experience is the only source of knowledge. In the world, religion is the only science where there is no surety, because it is not taught as a science of experience. This should not be. There is always, however, a small group of men who teach religion from experience. They are called mystics, and these mystics in every religion speak the same tongue and teach the same truth. This is the real science of religion.

Hence, the new understanding of religion at the end of the nineteenth century as an inner experience was a global one from the start. It developed in relation to a new understanding of science fundamentally based on empiricism and established as the ultimate authority for truth. Against this backdrop, the significance of the new concept of religion was to unfold over the following decades. In Chap. 10, Tilman Hannemann shows, in relation to the philosopher Paul Krannhals (1883–1934), that it was still influential in the 1930s.

THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the global use of religion for different ‘isms’—such as Buddhism or Hinduism—created a new stage on which different religions could compete in the current global public challenge to claim the ultimate truth. In this situation, history became the decisive benchmark against which to compare, measure, and value these religions. Ernst Troeltsch was fully aware of this new development, which was why he insisted on the shift from theology to the religious history convinced that Christianity’s ultimate claim to the truth could only be proven by making interreligious comparisons. Troeltsch (2009: 375) argued that ‘the [phenomenon of the] isolated individual ... will never be able to attest its absolute truth in a scientific way ... it is always necessary to go back to something general’. For Troeltsch, it was evident that religion must be this overall category, a *tertium comparationis* for different cultural formations. He focused on a historic perspective combining historical sources with an idealistic philosophy of religion. In this manner, he was able to consider religions as principles that compete and that are modelled like species within the framework of Darwin’s natural selection. For individual religions, however, he (Troeltsch 2009: 487) used ‘tendencies’ in the general religious history as points of comparison. These tendencies were intended to represent the general direction of religious history (Troeltsch 2009: 487). This represented a teleological understanding of history ultimately led by divine reason. But, as Troeltsch (2009: 488) admitted, Buddhism was a historical formation that did not lend itself to such a historiographic summary. As he argued (Troeltsch 2009: 488):

Its importance consists not in his excellence – that is out of the question with respect to a strong people – but in his pessimistic, sceptical and atheistic character, which is opposed to the essence of Occidental and other religions. If a religion with the spread of Buddhism, which far exceeds Christianity, moves in a completely new direction, then it seems that the Occidental development of religion should not be given one-sided consideration. Rather, the pessimistic atheism of Buddhism should be taken into account when determining the direction of the history of religions and should be included in the calculation. That is also the demand of the pessimists stimulated by *Schopenhauer* and *Hartmann*, for whom the importance of Buddhism in the history of religion is a welcome argument.

For scholars like Troeltsch, who tried to legitimize Christianity's claim to universal truth through the general religious history, Buddhism posed a major problem. On the one hand, its history differed from that of Occidental religions, but on the other intellectuals regarded it as the 'religion of the future'. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Indological research had become a major battlefield for 'the religion of the future'.

INDIA AND THE 'RELIGION OF THE FUTURE'

From the beginning, the term 'religion of the future' was designed to accord with science, and thus was meant as criticism of the present state of religion (Bergunder 2020: 108–11). Intellectuals, scholars, churchmen, and religious reformers claimed their own ideological viewpoints through which to bring religion into accord with science. This claim was primarily articulated through the term monism and intended as a critique of Christianity. Jena professor of zoology Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) vividly propagated a monism based on the 'unity of nature' that would be able to overcome the gap between science and religion. He developed a universal world view based on materialism but also claiming to encompass spiritual matters. In *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen* (General Morphology of Organisms), Haeckel (1866: 452) argued that 'recognizing no other than the divine powers in nature, monism, which recognizes all natural laws as divine, rises to the highest and loftiest conception of which man, the most perfect of all animals, is capable, the conception of the unity of God and nature'. Since the publication of his *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* (Natural History of Creation), Haeckel (1868) also became Germany's main propagator of Darwin's theory of biological evolution and its implications for a new religion or *Weltanschauung* (Nipperdey 1994: 507–10, 614). His most successful work, *Die Welträtsel* (Riddle of the world), published in 1899, went through 21 editions until 1914 (Bergunder 2020: 109). Another prominent contributor in Germany to the discourse on the 'religion of the future' was former Protestant theologian David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74). In 1872, his famous book *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (The Old Belief and the New) was published, and by 1885 it had run to a total of 14 editions. He propagated a monistic religion based on science, thus resolving the opposition between idealism and materialism, religion and science. The German scholar Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906) was Haeckel's idealistic counterpart (Heinßen 2003:

129–52) and, in his popular work *Philosophie des Unbewussten* (Philosophy of the unconscious), Hartmann (1869) proposed a monism in the philosophical tradition of German idealism that claimed to be based on the findings of empirical science. The crucial point in this discourse is that Hartmann, influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer, identified his monism with Buddhism and the Brahmanical *advaita vedānta* philosophy. In his polemical pamphlet *Die Selbstersetzung des Christenthums* (1874), which was soon translated into English under the title *Religion of the Future*, Hartmann (1886: 108–9) said:

Schopenhauer, on the contrary, plunges into the cosmic conception of the Vedas and of Buddhism; he revived their dreamy subjective Idealism, their Pessimism (which is far more profound than that of Christianity), and also he resuscitated the Ethics and the Nirvana of Buddhism. Thus Philosophy, anticipating the history of Religious Evolution, revives the more or less useful elements of Hinduism, brings them near to the consciousness of Modern Culture, and prepares a future synthesis of them with the transformed doctrines of (or the elements fit to be retained of) the Jewish–Christian religious development.

Hartmann envisaged a religion of the future that merged elements of the Indian and Jewish–Christian religious histories. His personal contribution to the discourse was to link the highly suggestive term monism with a concrete object of religious history: ‘we must, in justice, recognize the truth that Buddhism is a stricter form of Monism than Brahmanism ever was’ (Hartmann 1886: 104). Hence, the religion of the future had to be monism: ‘if, then, we consider the actual condition of Science, what appears to be most probable is that the Religion of the Future ... will be a Pantheism, or, to speak more precisely, a Pantheistic Monism’ (Hartmann 1886: 118). In linking Buddhism and the Brahmanical *advaita vedānta* philosophy to this discourse on the religion of the future, Hartmann on the one hand accorded high esteem to Indian religious traditions, but on the other took the opportunity to legitimize his idealistic form of monism with historical methods. This was even more necessary as the claim to science required empirical foundations.

In the nineteenth century, Buddhism and *advaita vedānta* philosophy were already providing the historical references needed to mount sharp criticisms of Christianity (Almond 1988; King 2008: 118–60). Supporters of the rising popularity of Buddhism and *advaita vedāntic* philosophy

included figures such as Edwin Arnold (1832–1904), who wrote an influential biography of Buddha, *The Light of Asia* (Arnold 1879; see also Marchand 2009: 270–1) and the Theosophical Society. Founded in 1875 in New York by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–91) and Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), the Theosophical Society moved its headquarters to Madras (India) in 1882, thereby signifying a new focus on the Orient (Harlass 2021). With Vivekananda’s propagation of *advaita vedāntic* neo-Hinduism influencing theosophy’s anticlerical and anticolonial rhetoric (van der Veer 2001: 73), members of the Theosophical Society ‘declared that Hinduism and Buddhism were far superior to Christianity in terms of scientific rationality and moral values’ (van der Veer 2001: 74–5). Some of its leading members advised Ceylonese and Japanese Buddhists to challenge the religious arguments of the Christian missionaries in public debates and encouraged them to represent Buddhism as scientific religion to the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago in 1893 (Snodgrass 2003: 155–71). Within the academic field of Indology, Thomas William Rhys Davids (Snodgrass 2003: 104–7) and Paul Deussen (Bergunder 2012: 95–107; Feldhoff 2008), among others, were looking to the so-called Eastern religions for ways of transforming the religious profile of present-day Europe. The focus on Buddhism and an *advaita vedāntic* form of Hinduism strengthened when these religions acquired the dignity and scientific appeal of monism. One representative of this trend was Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), founding father of the science of religion and editor of the *Sacred Books of the East* (Molendijk 2016). In the three lectures he gave on *vedānta* philosophy, he praised the monism of *advaita vedānta* for reconciling science and religion (Müller 1894: 11–15). Moreover, his intellectual exchanges with religious reformers such as Swami Vivekananda elucidate the global entanglements of the discourses on religion in general and on monism in particular (Green 2016).

OLDENBERG’S ROLE IN TROELTSCH’S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIONS

Troeltsch’s unease towards some Indology scholars must be understood against the backdrop of the global discourse on the religion of the future. In this regard, he especially mentioned two scholars: ‘[Paul] Deussen represents the same notion more elegantly. Likewise, the positivistic opponents of belief in God and souls have taken hold of Buddhism as a

counterweight to Western spiritualism, as [T. W.] Rhys Davids's well-known Hibbert lectures on Buddhism show' (Troeltsch 2009: 488). Troeltsch wanted to maintain Christianity's claims to supremacy in terms of a general religious history. Hence, he saw himself challenged to classify Buddhism as a religion in a way that allowed this. That Troeltsch quoted only one Indologist academic for his interpretation of Buddhism demonstrates the difficulty of this task. Herman Oldenberg (1854–1920), a German professor of Indology in Kiel, found Troeltsch's full appreciation. He called the German Indologist's two works—*Buddha: His Life, his Doctrine, his Order*, first published in German in 1881, and *The Religion of the Veda* first published in German in 1894—masterpieces (Troeltsch 2009: 476, 489) and drew heavily on this still well-known scholar. In the following, it will be shown how Troeltsch's concept of Christianity as a religion relied on Oldenberg's work. Three aspects are of particular importance—Troeltsch relied on Oldenberg to underpin his understanding of religious history as an evolutionary process that led to internalization and individualization and culminated in Christianity. Furthermore, he tried to explain Buddhism's supposed atheism through India's specific religious history. Finally, he based his work on Oldenberg's outline of the history of religion in general to support his claim that the latter must be understood in terms of divine human interaction.

TROELTSCH'S RECEPTION OF OLDENBERG'S *BUDDHA* (1881)

To begin with, Troeltsch needed to understand the religious history as an ongoing process from outward practices to an individual inner experience. He calls it a 'constitutional law of all religions, that they tend by their own necessity to a belief in salvation' (Troeltsch 2009: 513), while the starting point is always a form of 'natural religion' (Troeltsch 2009: 512). In this respect, he found scholarly support from Oldenberg (1882: 3), who, in his *Buddha*, identified a

phenomenon, specially observable in the domain of spiritual life, which we may venture to describe as a shifting of the centre of gravity of all supreme human interests from without to within: an old faith, which promised to men somehow or other by an offensive and defensive alliance with the Godhead, power, prosperity, victory and subjection of their enemies, will ...

be supplanted by a new phase of thought, whose watchwords are no longer welfare, victory, dominion, but rest, peace, happiness, deliverance.

For Oldenberg, this new ‘condition of the inner life’ (Oldenberg 1882: 4) is followed by new social forms of religious life: it is no longer naturally based on the traditional creed of a community but on ‘the will of the individual’ (Oldenberg 1882: 4). From this perspective, general religious history shows a clear tendency towards individualization, spiritualization and, thereby, internalization. At certain points in religious history, religion becomes an individual matter of the inner life and gives rise to new forms of social life organized originally around a teacher and his disciples. This pattern devalues natural and popular religions as preliminary stages to an internal religion of salvation. Oldenberg (1882: 4–5) does not conceal the prototypical example behind this supposed universal development.

Were it allowable to borrow from one particular instance of those cases which illustrate this, a designation for this revolution of universal occurrence, which transforms the religious life of nations internally as well as externally, we might describe it as the transition from the Old Testament dispensation to the New Testament dispensation. The honour of having given the most unique and most marked expression to this transition in forms unequalled in history, belongs to the Semitic race.

He admits, that ‘five hundred years earlier than in Palestine, analogous occurrences took place among the Indo–Germanic nations in two places’, which he locates ‘in Greece and in India’ (Oldenberg 1882: 5). As it turns out, the three localities—Palestine, Greece, and India—are placeholders for specific contemporary identity markers in terms of religion: Oldenberg (1882: 5) makes clear that he was talking about ‘Socratic, Buddhist, and Christian vitality’ as distinct historical forces performing the same transition, yet in different ways. As he explained (Oldenberg 1882: 5–6):

the Greeks were bound to meet this demand with a new philosophy, the Jews with a new faith. The Indian mind was wanting in that simplicity, which can believe without knowing, as well as in that bold clearness, which seeks to know without believing, and therefore the Indian had to frame a doctrine, a religion and a philosophy combined, and therefore, perhaps, if it must be said, neither the one nor the other; Buddhism.

From this viewpoint, Buddhism served as a useful empirical reference to the claim that there had been a universal transition in general religious history. However, given Christianity's prototypical function within this scheme, Buddhism can only be an imperfect expression of this general law in the religious history. The same can be said of Greece's role in philosophy. For Oldenberg, philosophy and religion were universal concepts of undoubted validity and historically tied to Christianity and classical Greek philosophy, which led him to devalue everything that is Indian in history. As a subsidiary aspect, this enabled Troeltsch to rely on Oldenberg in his classification of Buddhism as an imperfect composition of philosophy and religion (Troeltsch 2009: 491).

Oldenberg was not the only Indology scholar to see revealing parallels in general religious history. His fellow scholar Thomas William Rhys Davids (1843–1922) also discovered parallels between Buddhism and Greek philosophy, though, he came to very different conclusions. In describing Buddha's first sermon, Rhys Davids (1879: 909–10) wrote:

But its chief value, after all, is historical. It shows us that in India, as elsewhere, after the belief in many gods had given rise to the belief in one, there arose a school to whom theological questions had lost their interest, and who sought for a new solution of the questions to which theology had given inconsistent answers in a new system in which man was to work out his own salvation. In this respect the resemblance, which Mr. Frederick Pollock has pointed out, between Nirvāna and the teaching of the Stoics, has a peculiar interest; and their place in the progress of thought may help us understand how it is that there is so much in common between the agnostic philosopher of India, and some of the newest schools in France, in Germany, and among ourselves.

This quotation shows how, in this case, parallels could be drawn in completely different ways. For Rhys Davids, the rise of Buddhism and Stoicism in India and Greece points to an intellectual discontentment with present forms of metaphysics and a penchant for an anthropocentric ethical theory. Moreover, it hints at what was at stake in this Indological matter. Oldenberg, Rhys Davids and others negotiated the relevance of religion and Christianity for their own time as well as for the future based on Indological research. The real subject was the contemporary discourse on religion.

Furthermore, the absence of a concept of God in Buddhism was a serious problem for the German Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch. It challenged the very category of religion as European scholars understood it and, in this regard, disputed the status of Christianity within general religious history. Therefore, he (Troeltsch 2009: 489) tried to explain this perceived aberration of Buddhism from ordinary religion:

This explanation lies – as has been shown many times – in the development of Indian religious reasoning. There, as everywhere else, the polytheism of the original natural religion was first purified and unified by scientific reflection, then decomposed and converted into a pantheistic monism, only in a peculiarly Indian form, where liturgical interpretations and fantastic brooding mixed bleakly with scientific thinking. ... Here is the source of the sceptic and atheistic ideas of the Buddha about the world and its course.

As in the first point, Troeltsch drew here on the Orientalism of his day. In contemporary Indology, he found reasons for the atheism of Buddhism and in Oldenberg a reliable reference that seemed to prove that this did not need to mislead Christian convictions. Below, Oldenberg (1882: 18) described the historical lines that finally led to the rise of Buddhism in the period after the formation of the oldest strata of the *Vedas*:

The development of thought, which was progressing in this period, while resting apparently on the basis of the old faith in gods, had really undermined that faith, and, forcing its way through endless voids of fantastic chimeras, had at last created a new ground of religious thought, the belief in the undisturbed, unchangeable universal-Unity, which reposes behind the world of sorrow and impermanence, and to which the delivered, leaving the world, returns. On this very foundation, moreover, centuries after the Brahmanical thinkers had laid it, were the doctrine and the church built, which were named after the name of Buddha.

In this view, there can be no doubt that the Indian religious history found its apex in the monism of the Brahmanic tradition. This corresponds to the widely shared nineteenth-century Orientalist stereotype that perceived the radical monism of *advaita vedānta*, usually ascribed to the Indian philosopher *Śaṅkara* (AD c.788–820), as the core of Indian religion (Inden 2000: 101–8; King 2008: 128–34). By emphasizing this cultural background, Oldenberg (1882: 53) tried to present monism as an exception and as a special Indian path in religious history:

If in Buddhism the proud attempt be made to conceive a deliverance in which man himself delivers himself, to create a faith without a god, it is Brahmanical speculation which has prepared the way for this thought. It has thrust back the idea of a god step by step; the forms of the old gods have faded away, and besides the Brahma, which is enthroned in its everlasting quietude, highly exalted above the destinies of the human world, there is left remaining, as the sole really active person in the great work of deliverance, man himself, who possesses inherent in himself the power to turn aside from this world, this hopeless state of sorrow.

This development had a clearly negative connotation for Oldenberg. He identified the Brahmans as the driving force behind this development towards an atheistic creed and therefore, not only called them ‘a vain and greedy priestcraft’ but also saw in them ‘the evil genius, ... of the Indian people’ (Oldenberg 1882: 13).

Still, the rejection of the Brahmanical tradition’s monism and its classification as an Indian special case was by no means undisputed. Oldenberg’s academic colleague Thomas William Rhys Davids (1881: 30) saw things very differently:

Everywhere where the attitude of mind called Animism ... has been permanently modified, it has been so by its development into *Polytheism*. ... Everywhere where philosophy ... has arisen in the midst of polytheists, it has perceived a unity behind the many, and has tended towards a more or less pantheistic *Monotheism*. Then, lastly ... there has come a time ... when men have tried, with more or less success, to seek for the *summum bonum* in account. Comtism, Agnosticism and Buddhism are, it is true, the only systems which have broken away, in the most uncompromising manner, from the venerable soul-theories which have grown out of the ancient Animism.

For Rhys Davids, general religious history was a human emancipation from metaphysical theories, a linear development with Buddhism at the end of that line. He paralleled it with philosophical positions of his time—Comtism and agnosticism. Therefore, to him, the absence of a concept of God in Buddhism was not a lack but a sign of progress. Oldenberg, on the other hand, explained Buddhism’s supposed atheism as a consequence of the alleged peculiarities of the Indian religious history. Their differing interpretations of Buddhist metaphysics is all the more striking as Oldenberg and Rhys Davids were both proven experts in the *Pāli* language and closely connected to each other. In 1881, they co-edited several

volumes in the famous series *The Sacred Books of the East* on the *vinaya-piṭaka*—the monastic rules of the Buddhist *saṅgha*. What the distinguished Indological scholars had in common shows that their differences were based on ideological grounds (Snodgrass 2003: 88). Oldenberg embodied a liberal Protestant view (Marchand 2009: 271–2) and Rhys Davids an agnostic, rational humanist standpoint, for which Buddhism provided historical evidence, and which served as a source of inspiration for the religious questions of his time (Snodgrass 2003: 107).

The same difference between these two excellent scholars of *Pāli* texts can be found in their interpretation of the fact that the historical Buddha did not receive divine status from his followers. Oldenberg identified the Brahmanical tradition in the Indian religious history as the reason for the ‘remarkable attitude of the idea of Buddha’ (Oldenberg 1882: 323), namely his lack of deification. Unlike Christianity, which evolved ‘on the basis of a strong faith in a God’, Oldenberg found it ‘natural that in the consciousness of the community, a reflection ... of the grandeur and fullness of the almighty and all-good God should fall on the person of him who, as master, teacher, example, is in every way of immeasurable significance to the life of his followers’ (Oldenberg 1882: 323). On Buddhism, however, he asserted that these kinds of ‘preconditions did not exist’ because of the supposed eradication of the Indian gods ‘by the pantheism of the *Ātman* theory’ (Oldenberg 1882: 323). Once more, for Oldenberg, the pantheism of the Brahmanical tradition became a source of evil in terms of Buddhism’s metaphysics in which ‘remained no more a god, but only the natural law of the necessary concatenation of causes and effects’ (Oldenberg 1882: 324) thereby presenting Buddhism as a kind of materialism.

The non-divine nature of the Buddha in Buddhism is, in Oldenberg’s view, a remarkable exception to what he would call the ordinary course of history, an exception that for him calls for an explanation. For Oldenberg, the human status of the historical Buddha derives from the development of the specific Indian *atman* theory and its perceived absence of divine power. Remarkably, however, his fellow scholar Rhys Davids almost reverses the argument: He did not consider Christianity the norm and Buddhism the exception, but vice versa. He found Buddhism ‘full of instruction, full of much-needed help, to a right solution of another question now increasingly pressed upon our attention: the question, namely, of the true history, the true meaning of Christianity’ (Rhys Davids 1923: 51). He asked his audience to step aside for a moment from the inherited

affections for Christianity and ‘to look at it in the cold light of reason’ (Rhys Davids 1923: 51). Based on the biblical literary criticism in the wake of David Friedrich Strauss, he proposed a comparison of the historical Jesus and the historical Buddha as in ‘the history of Buddhism we have revealed to us on the other side of the world as a religion whose development runs entirely parallel with that of Christianity’ (Rhys Davids 1923: 51). He went on to qualify the similarity of the two religions: ‘every episode, every line of whose history seems almost as if it might be created for the very purpose of throwing the clearest light on the most difficult and disputed questions of the origin of the European faith’ (Rhys Davids 1923: 51–2). In other words, the problem for Rhys Davids is not the lack of divinity with respect to the Buddha but the understanding of the conventional faith in the divine nature of Jesus Christ in the age of science. For Rhys Davids, the outcome of the comparison is quite clear. The reason for the supposed divine nature of Christ is the same as for the veneration of the Buddha as a superhuman being. ‘Need we be surprised that they were only half understood, that succeeding generations failed to learn the lessons of simplicity they had taught?’ (Rhys Davids 1923: 52). For him, the great teachers were misinterpreted by their followers. Likewise, scholars differed in their notions of *nirvāna*’s ontological status in Buddhism (cf. Oldenberg 1882: 264–6 with Rhys Davids 1881: 128) and the two morality of Buddhism (cf. Oldenberg 1882: 341–2 with Rhys Davids 1923: 44–5).

TROELTSCH’S RECEPTION OF OLDENBERG’S *THE RELIGION OF THE VEDA* (1894)

Brahmanism or Hinduism posed no specific problem for Troeltsch’s conception of Christianity as a religion in 1895, though Buddhism did. Nonetheless, Troeltsch found scholarly support for his general interpretation of religious history in Oldenberg’s work on Vedic religion, particularly the latter’s outline of the ancient Indian religious history in which he combined two conflicting—evolutionary and degenerative—approaches. The latter was based on the discovery of linguistic similarities between Indian and European languages. A theory of the Indo–European or Aryan family of languages, which evolved after the end of the eighteenth century, shaped the nineteenth-century debates on identity in India and Europe (Trautmann 1997; van der Veer 2001: 134–57). Oldenberg assumed that

the former Aryan tribes had degenerated culturally after their supposed displacement from western Asia to India in prehistoric times. He described a process in which originally healthy, strong, intelligent Aryan invaders deteriorated over the subsequent centuries into intellectually limited, passive, dreamy, and servile people (Oldenberg 1988: 1–2). Oldenberg’s degeneration model rooted in the colonial domination of India by European states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This colonial domination helped to produce conventional stereotypes of the country and its people. Indological scholarship formed part of the colonial knowledge production called Orientalism, which constructed the Orient as the other in the attempt to define its own identity as ‘Europe’ (Inden 2000; King 2008). In employing this degenerative model, Oldenberg was trying to reconcile the linguistic (and alleged ethnic) kinship of South Asian and European people with colonial rule of British India, which entailed a division between the European colonizers and the colonized Indians. As shown above, in Oldenberg’s view, the driving force behind the degeneration of the Aryans during their transformation into Indians was the Brahmanic tradition embodied in their priesthood. The evolutionary approach, however, studied religions in terms of their historical development, just like biology analyses the biological evolution of animate beings. According to this view, religious history ascended from so-called lower forms of religion to so-called higher religious expressions.

Against this backdrop, Troeltsch insisted on distinguishing between fundamental religious conceptions and human rationality. He relied on both Oldenberg’s works, but focused mainly on his later one, *The Religion of the Veda*. Troeltsch (2009: 478) was convinced that ‘religion grows in the connection and assembling of such fundamental conceptions, which are only fixing and assembling religious emotions’. He insisted that these fundamental religious conceptions ‘are entirely involuntary, neither made nor invented’ (Troeltsch 2009: 478) and are strictly opposed to ‘indifferent or artificial spinning out, the conscious elaboration of cultic and priestly cleverness, the harmless or braiding game of imagination, which sinks down to the profane, and egoistic superstition or magic’ (Troeltsch 2009: 478). The latter must be understood as genuine human products, the former as a divine human interaction. The dichotomy of the two terms was meant to underpin Troeltsch’s assumption of the divine–human character of religious history. For him, religion was more than a mere cultural phenomenon. It was a vestige of divine will in history, manifesting itself

mainly in the inwardness of piety. This could be seen in general religious history from its earliest stages. Troeltsch (2009: 478) argued that:

By means of a mythological mindset, which is not a form of religion but a common, primitive form of reasoning, religious objects become easily connected with the other objects of this kind of an all-personalizing reasoning and to the great fundamental conceptions new ones are added, which merge with the hitherto existing ones into distinct anthropomorphic pictures and create the sharper figures of the pantheon. At the same time, the artistry of a priestly class seeking special insights takes possession of those objects, or the purely profane imagination of narrators and poets.

Troeltsch saw the categorial differentiation between religion and reasoning as crucial. Consequently, he used both Oldenberg's evolutionary classification of the religious history and his contempt for *brahmin* priests as evidence of that differentiation.

Leaning on the newly established ethnology, Oldenberg (1988: 18, 27) understood religious history as subsequent epochs ascending from a stratum 'that is primitive, robust, crude: with goblins and monsters, with the cult of magic, with the devil-possessed' to a further step of the 'idolized nature-being'—such as stars, weather, plants, and animals. Finally, he proceeded to the stage of venerating anthropomorphic gods, which he called the mythological era. In his description of the two Vedic gods Mitra and Varuṇa, Oldenberg (1988: 27) distinguished between mythology and religion:

Finally and above all, a sphere of moral concepts was peculiar to Mitra and Varuṇa alone. These concepts were enlarged by the process of progressive ethical absorption and these, in turn, contributed considerably in restraining the natural significance of those gods. It can be said that the religious factor drained especially energetically the mythological complex of ideas of its force.

Here, the mythological stage is represented as a lower stratum in religious history that should be overcome by religion proper—a faculty of the inner life connected to ethical advancements that are somehow opposed to the natural meaning of the gods. Therefore, Oldenberg's evolutionary model seemed to demonstrate that religion was opposed to mythology and anything natural.

In fact, the converse theory of degeneration showed the same outcome in the Indian religious history with respect to Oldenberg's contrasting juxtaposition of popular belief and priestly concepts. In the *Rgveda*, the oldest stratum of Vedic literature, he discerns 'a language from which the breath of fresh simple nature has not yet vanished. But besides these, there are a vast number of hymns imbued with another spirit' (Oldenberg 1988: 2–3). The latter belong, according to Oldenberg (1988: 3), to 'a closed circle of priest-technicians of the sacrifice'. In the same way, he (Oldenberg 1988: 9) thinks about the origin of the texts in the *Atharvaveda*:

In addition, there are, in part, extensive texts, which have little to do with so-called popular magic, but more with the new inventions of shrewd priests, say, in developing or reconstructing the great sacrifices as magic acts of different types; then there are, with dubious repetitions, texts extolling the virtue of pious alms giving to the priests.

'Yet, the reader of the *Atharvaveda* will have the impression that what was originally popular has gone through the priests' hands' (Oldenberg 1988: 9). As shown above with respect to his earlier monograph *Buddha*, Oldenberg's attitude towards Brahmanical priests was quite negative. In his view, they were responsible for the development of monism eventually leading to the atheism of Buddhism. At that point, he (Oldenberg 1988: 2) discerned a harmful influence on the minds of the then Indian Aryans in the works of the priests among the Aryan invaders in particular:

The first signs of this passivity are manifest in the oldest document of Indian literature and religion, the hymns of the *Rgveda*, in the sacrificial songs and litanies with which the priests of the Vedic Aryans invoked their gods to the templeless sacrificial places of sacrificial fire surrounded by grass. Barbaric priests invoked barbaric gods who came through the celestial realms astride steeds and in chariots to feast upon the sacrificial cake, butter and meat, and to invigorate themselves with courage and divine strength with the intoxicating *Soma*-juice.

This verdict on *brahmin* priests located the assumed degeneration as long ago as the earliest sources of Vedic literature. Therefore, Oldenberg's differentiation between popular belief and priestly concepts must be understood in terms of his contempt for the latter as exponents of anything Indian, while popular belief contains some remnants of original Aryan culture.

In this assessment of Indian intellectual history, Oldenberg had a prominent opponent. While in his first work, Thomas William Rhys Davids was his implicit interlocutor, Paul Deussen (1845–1919) can be seen as a scholarly opponent of his monograph, *The Religion of the Veda*. Paul Deussen, a professor of philosophy in Kiel since 1889, was a pioneering translator and editor of a considerable corpus of *vedānta* philosophy and a fervent advocate of Schopenhauer's philosophy (Feldhoff 2008). Understandably, his general assessment of Indian intellectual history was more sympathetic than Oldenberg's. In the first volume of his general history of philosophy, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie*, he expressed his appreciation of Indian culture by saying that 'India is the only case of an original culture in the high sense of the word having developed in the tropics, and the poetry of the Indians reflects the peculiar magic of the tropics in all genres – epics, lyrics, and drama' (Deussen 1894: 37). Like Oldenberg, Deussen identified the magical or animistic features of Vedic literature. However, unlike Oldenberg, Deussen (1894: 78–9) regarded the influence of magic on Vedic traditions as very minor and traced it back not to *brahmin* priests but to ordinary people:

animism, a belief in demons associated with magic, which we assume exists in India, as elsewhere, as a preliminary stage of polytheism, must be left aside here, for the religious consciousness from which Indian philosophy has arisen has long surpassed it, however much it may still linger among a certain level of the lower classes and even although it found expression in many of their Atharvaveda songs.

Moreover, Deussen's key concern with respect to morality was to acknowledge the high moral standard of the Vedic tradition. Although Deussen noted the moral shortcomings of some Vedic gods, in the *Rgveda* he also discerned a morality without theology (Deussen 1894: 93). For him, philosophy and not theology brought about the most important shift in Indian intellectual history, namely the development of the concept of oneness in the form of the monism of *vedānta* philosophy (Deussen 1894: 103), which reflects Deussen's general standpoint on religion. For him, all philosophy rejects dualistic ideas of God and necessarily leads to monism as the only reasonable metaphysical position. He located the beginnings of this development in Indian and Greek philosophy leading directly to modern philosophy in the form of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). Furthermore, for Deussen, the inner

experience of morality was the only epistemic approach to the divine. He saw both monism and the inner experience of morality as key expressions of religion and means of legitimating religion in the age of science. He was thus keen to meet Swami Vivekananda in Kiel on his journey through Europe, for he could use him as a reference for his own image of Indian religion (Bergunder 2012). Following Schopenhauer, all mythological conceptions of the divine were, in Deussen's view, of Semitic descent. Therefore, his ideal was a 'scientifically renewed Christianity' (Deussen 1894: 22) that had dropped all its Semitic influences and incorporated the monism of the (supposed Aryan) *advaita vedānta* school. Thus, his advocacy of Indian philosophy was a means of promoting monism as a respectable metaphysical standpoint because of its historical originality and Aryan character (Deussen 1894: 11–12). Hence, the differences between Oldenberg and Deussen reflect their respective positions on the contemporary discourse on religion. As Isabella Schwaderer demonstrates in Chap. 5, Deussen had a popular appeal that continued into the twentieth century: He made a significant impression on artists from the Bayreuth Circle like Felix Gotthelf (1867–1931) who saw his opera *Mahadeva* (1910) as a form of redemption.

SUMMARY OF TROELTSCH'S RECEPTION OF OLDENBERG

The German Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch relied on the Indologist Hermann Oldenberg to support crucial points of his theory and history of religion. For Troeltsch, Oldenberg's importance lay in the challenge that Buddhism as a religion posed for Christianity. First, he used Oldenberg to validate his understanding of general religious history as the evolution of religion itself—the historical process from natural religion to an individual inner experience of the divine. For Troeltsch, Christianity was at the top of that development. He thus aimed to legitimize his devaluation of Buddhism, which in the last decades of the nineteenth century had gained global popularity as an alternative to Christianity and, in Oldenberg, he found Indological support for his view. Second, Troeltsch referred to Oldenberg to explain Buddhism's alleged atheism. He based his argument on Oldenberg's assessment of the Indian religious history in the wake of contemporary Orientalist stereotypes about India, but with special contempt for the *brahmin* tradition. Third, Troeltsch focused on the conceptual distinction between religion and reasoning. Echoing the conception of religion in the age of science, he argued for religion as a *sui generis*

category as an individual inner experience of the divine that could be perceived in history. This, in turn, was meant to support his understanding of general religious history as an ongoing divine human interaction. In all these ways, Oldenberg provided Troeltsch with important Indological references that allowed him to uphold Christianity's claim to supremacy in general religious history.

CONCLUSION

I started this chapter with a critique of a common notion in religious studies—the idea that religion as a universal concept was a European invention. Against its main advocate, Tomoko Masuzawa, I tried to demonstrate that the idea of religion as a *sui generis* phenomenon identified with an inner experience of the divine, had emerged from a globally entangled history in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The first fundamental precondition of this new concept of religion lay in the hegemony of a new understanding of 'science' as a mere empirical matter without metaphysical defilements, which had evolved in the second half of the nineteenth century. Against this background, the concept of religion was recast as a personal inner experience of the divine to meet the truth claims of science. The second precondition lay in the challenge presented by a general religious history that had also emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Based on the new importance of 'history' in the wake of the empirical paradigm of 'science' and the increase of colonial knowledge production the history of religion became the arena of competition for cultural identities classified as 'religions'. As several regional postcolonial studies have shown, all this was by no means a European or Western development: By the end of the nineteenth century, it was something with which reformers in all parts of the world were having to cope. All sorts of different people were defining their own traditions as religions, and claiming that they were completely in accordance with science. Furthermore, by examining religious history, European intellectuals were starting to think about 'the religion of the future'. Buddhism became popular because it seemed to meet all the criteria of a 'religion of the future'—an ancient ethical religion of salvation by an inner experience that could accommodate science. Against this backdrop, we saw how the German theologian Ernst Troeltsch turned to the works of the German Indologist Hermann Oldenberg to deal with the challenge that Buddhism was presenting to his new conception of Christianity as a religion in the age of science.

In this context, Ernst Troeltsch looked to Indology for scholarly support, and Oldenberg supplied him with an image of India and Buddhism within the framework of Orientalism. Indian religion was seen as part of the supposed degeneration of an originally great Aryan culture into the passive, servile, and backward people of nineteenth-century British India. Furthermore, in his view, an important defect in Indian religion was its alleged domination by the *brahmin* tradition of Vedic scriptures identifying it with the monism of *advaita vedānta*. In short, for Oldenberg, India simply embodied Europe's other. Surprisingly, his academic colleagues Thomas William Rhys Davids and Paul Deussen had the same language skills, used the same textual sources, and were part of the same Orientalist discourse on religion, yet they came to quite different conclusions. In that they looked to India and Buddhism for inspiration on the 'religion of the future', they were clearly critical of Christianity in its present state, which was how Indology came to be part of a global religious history in the late nineteenth century.

Indological research was not confined to academic circles, as events like the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893 in Chicago indicated. Religious reformers from British India, such as Swami Vivekananda or Anagarika Dharmapala, claimed Hinduism and Buddhism as religions that could coexist alongside science by referring to European Indology. Thus, the new discourse on religion was globally entangled from the beginning and cannot be described as a European invention exported to the world, as Masuzawa would have it. These colonial voices were part of a new global religious history that led even European Protestant theologians like Ernst Troeltsch to see Buddhism as a challenge for his own conception of Christianity as religion.

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