Preface

I

Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough was born in Brooklyn, New York on October 24, 1893. He died in Cambridge, Massachusetts March 20, 1965. He spent nearly 40 of the years in between on the faculty of Yale University, teaching history at first; later he would be a member of a half-dozen Yale departments at once.

There are several accounts of his life and career. The most important is his autobiographical *Toward a Mature Faith* (1955). The memorial volume *Religions in Antiquity* (1968), edited by Jacob Neusner, includes a brief account by Morton Smith, reprinted below, and a more extensive "appreciation" by Samuel Sandmel.

The biography by Robert S. Eccles published in 1985 provides the most detail. Like Sandmel, Eccles was a doctoral student under Goodenough; his work is more a tribute than an analysis (Meyers 1987), but it is still helpful in at least three ways. It offers a detailed review of Goodenough's career, provides extensive summaries and paraphrases of Goodenough's major and minor writings, and publishes excerpts from important private letters and other materials from the Goodenough papers in the Yale University Library.

Goodenough's personal values and his scholarship were closely related; understanding either greatly helps to clarify the other. With no area of his work is that more true than with what is presented in this volume.

II

Twenty years after Goodenough's death, in prefaces to the reprint of *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, and to the book of essays edited by
himself and Ernest Frerichs (1986), Jacob Neusner summarized the importance of Goodenough's contributions to three areas of study: the material evidence for the Judaism of the Greco-Roman period, Philo, and the history of religions. Neusner makes it clear that Goodenough's work in any one of these would be the equivalent of a credible career for many writers – but Goodenough worked brilliantly in the three simultaneously.

What is often forgotten, however, is that Goodenough's first area of interest was none of those for which he is best known. Rather it was the beginnings of Christianity. His first scholarly publication was his still-cited and reprintd 1923 monograph on Justin Martyr. And that concern never left him: his final project, the one which occupied his last day of writing, was about earliest Christianity and its Hellenization. He had originally intended his work on that topic to be the culmination of his career and also, I suspect, of his own personal quest.

It is not hard to reconstruct the basic outline of what he would have written about early Christianity. There are many hints in the essays reprinted here, and in his other writings. He and I talked about little else when I worked for him. And Eccles (1985:170-71) reprints a letter of October 11, 1958 to Mircea Eliade which gives a rather detailed plan. It would have moved through four major concerns:

I. The various forms of Judaism at the beginning of the Common Era, including early rabbinic Judaism, the Dead Sea scrolls and the apocryphal literature.

II. The Hellenization of Judaism, and the great importance of that phenomenon for the story of Christianity. The letter to Eliade provides one listing of the sources he would use: Philo, "the hellenistic group of synagogues" and the other archaeological evidence presented in Symbols, and finally the "early Christians mentioned in Acis," many of whom Goodenough believed were originally hellenized Jews (Eccles 1985:170).

III. "The tremendous impact of Jesus as an historical person" (Eccles 1985:170).

IV. "The obviously different way various early Christians interpreted" that impact (Eccles 1985:170).

As is clear almost from his earliest writings on, Goodenough attributed the great variety in the forms of New Testament Christianity not so much to internal evolution within the early Christian movement as to two other factors: the differences in pre-Christian background and piety brought to the new faith by the earliest generations of
Christians, and the diversity in the audiences the first Christian missionaries faced. To point to a "religious evolution" which might have taken place within the Christian movement in the decade or two between Jesus and Paul is not sufficient to explain the great differences of emphasis between their messages. And even three or four decades of development cannot begin to account for the many divergences between the content of Paul's letters and what *Acts* will say about him.

Goodenough's approach has a great deal to recommend it, and helps to explain his continuing value for the study of the religions of the Greco-Roman world. But it also causes significant discomfort to more traditional interpreters because of the way it elevates the importance of external factors in the development of earliest Christianity. Goodenough's understanding of how Christianity grew attributes more to the formative power of religious and social contexts, less to the new religion's own internal dynamic.

### III

Perhaps "he had dallied too long on the preliminaries." Samuel Sandmel was speaking as much for himself as for Goodenough when he attributed that judgment to Goodenough after their last meeting two weeks before Goodenough's death (Sandmel 1968:15). In one sense the conclusion is a correct one. How much more could Goodenough have said about the beginnings of Christianity if he had had longer to live, or if he had given more time to it and less to those other areas of research!

But the fact of the matter is that there was already more than enough publication about the New Testament by other scholars. As Goodenough himself said more than once, more of the same would not have been much of a contribution. Goodenough had a different angle on the New Testament, and that was just because of his other research and writing. The data he took seriously, particularly those of Greek-speaking Judaism, few others were considering important yet. And what later was to establish his reputation world-wide – the interpretation of Jewish material evidence from the Greco-Roman world – was still an unknown field. Not only had it been up to him to formulate its methodology. He also had to assemble many of the artifacts. Much of what constitutes "Jewish symbols" would not be so accessible to us now, were it not for the trips he took, the letters he wrote and the colleagues he queried.

On the New Testament and early Christianity he wrote the essays here reprinted – and very little else. His main contribution to this field would be his editorship of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (JBL) from
1935 to 1942, not the things he published about Christianity there and elsewhere.

But in the comments on early Christianity scattered throughout the *Symbols* and his other writings, he was signaling the way he thought the study of early Christianity should be taking. Occasionally he wrote more global pieces—such as Nos. 2, 3, 6, 7 here—which made more obvious the direction he intended to follow once he finished all the prolegomena.

The *magnum opus* was never completed. What he had once thought of as a study equal in extent to the *Symbols* themselves (Eccles 1985:85) became, in plan, a single volume after he became ill. Even that was unattainable; the last essay in this book is all that remains of that effort.

As he prepared for this project, Goodenough knew that he would almost have to begin over if he were to write credibly. His systematic knowledge of critical New Testament studies derived from his graduate school days (Sandmel 1968:6-7, Eccles 1985:173-74). When I began to work with him, my chief task was to try to bring him up to date as rapidly as possible. He worked at it heroically in the last weeks, and some of what we talked about is there in the footnotes at least. It never really made it to the body of the essay.

IV

Besides, there were other things on his mind as his time grew very short. When I first met him, he had inscribed a copy of *Toward a Mature Faith* and given it to me. The last chapter, "Personal Again," a kind of *credo*, is chiefly about prayer, or rather about Erwin Goodenough praying. Ten days before his death I asked him about that. "I still pray," he said, "but I no longer live on prayer as I used to." His situation was different now: "I am part of the cosmos...Religion is searching. That's what scientists live on. We have no right to expect peace; there is none."

It was an idea I had already read in the page-proofs of volume 12 of the *Symbols*: "The deeper religious spirits know that true religion lies in the search for the end, not in its attainment" (*Symbols* 12:74). On those same pages of the *Symbols* he was working with the Apostle Paul, and there again is repeated the parallel he often drew between personal religion and the life of the scholar. It was an ideal of great power as he embodied it.

The developing essay on the New Testament he turned over to Krister Stendahl to see through to publication. The rest of his writings he placed under the care of his literary executor, Jacob Neusner.
Goodenough had prepared a list of his "more important articles," and he added to it the last year before his death. He thought they might be reissued some day. They are noted in the 1968 bibliography, and many of them have been reprinted either in the Frerichs-Neusner volume (1988) or in this one.

Goodenough hoped for immortality, at the very least the kind of immortality proper to any great scholar. In the Woodbridge East Side Burying Ground in Woodbridge, Connecticut, his memorial carries the inscription he requested: "The scholar is dead but scholarship lives on." It identifies him as "Professor of History of Religion" at Yale. It bears no symbol at all.

Decorah, Iowa
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