

THE EMERGENCE OF AN INDIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

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Since religious experience takes place within a specific context, a context structured by cultural symbols, religious expression also emerges from a particular context of cultural symbols. The history of Christian thought in India reflects the tension between expressing religious phenomena in the context of the cultural worldview and vocabulary of Europe on the one hand and the cultural symbols and legacy of India, and particularly of Hinduism, on the other. A theology which does not draw upon the legacy of the people to whom it speaks usually exhibits little creativity and development, quickly loses relevancy, and gradually alienates the believer from the social and cultural context in which he lives. The broadening of an indigenous spiritual and theological tradition from within the Indian Christian community lies beneath any attempt for an Indianization of Christianity, a call frequently heard today.

Indian Christianity has experienced differing relationships with Indian culture and society in its long history. The early Christian communities dating from the first centuries of the Christian era, although adopting the ritual of the Syrian Church, kept the social customs and many religious practices of their Hindu neighbors. Hindu and Christian shared a common religio-cultural experience¹. There is little evidence of a theological tradition arising among the Christians in this first millenia, but a communality of experience is reflected in the literature and religious movements of South India². The arrival of Portuguese missio-

¹ See JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM, *Patterns of Indian Thought* (New York: Orbis Books, 1971), p. 131: "As to religious practices like family prayers, church attendance, observance of festivals and personal devotions, there was little to distinguish between Hindus and Christians, except that one group frequented temples while the others had their churches. There was close co-operation between church and temple on the popular level in the observance of festivals." For the inter-change of Hindu and Christian life, see PLACID J. PODIPARA, "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, and Oriental in Worship", *Ost-kirchliche Studien* (Würzburg 1959), pp. 89—104. For documentation concerning Indianization among the Christians of Kerala, see A. CHERUKARAKKUNNEL, "Indianization among the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala", *Jeevadhara: A Journal of Christian Interpretation* (Kerala: Alleppey), Vol. 1, No. 4, 1971; pp. 361—373. For the place of Christianity in the social system of India, see DAVID G. MADELBAUM, *Society In India, Change and Continuity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), Vol. 11, pp. 564—571. For a survey of the rise and growth of Christianity in India, see *The Cultural Heritage of India*, edit. HARIDAS BHATTACHARYA (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission, 1956), Vol. IV, pp. 547—570. The major source work in this area is about to appear: *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India* (Trichur: 1972).

² One of the major contributions of Christianity to Indian life has been its effort in language and literature. The creation of a Christian literature in the

naries in the fifteenth century followed by the Dutch soon after altered this situation. A dark period in missionary history began in which the Westernization of the Indian Christians tried to change century old customs and traditions and thus stifle indigenous expression. By the nineteenth century, however, an impressive encounter between Christianity and Indian life was initiated by Hindus who readily accepted the social gospel, and it was this effort which influenced the renewal of Hinduism in modern times. Whatever has taken place within the Christian community in India in this century must be seen within the greater context of contemporary Hinduism. The revitalization and reconceptualization taking place in Hinduism today will in time affect all religious expression in India, Christianity included³.

BIRTH OF AN INDIAN THEOLOGY

Several extraordinary Hindu figures focused the theological issues subsequently developed by Christian thinkers in the first half of this century⁴. RAM MOHUN ROY (1772—1833), frequently considered the

Dravidian language family, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, is impressive. An example of Christian influence to religious literature is the *Tirukkural*, an old Tamil poem of the eighth or ninth century, looked upon as a scripture of South India and reflecting the thought and mood of the New Testament. Older scholars like GARBE, GRIERSON, R. G. BHANDARKAR, and N. MACNICOL contend that the influence of Christianity was considerable on the Indian *bhakti* movement and on Vaisnavite and Saivite theism in general. On this point, see *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: First Edition), Vol. 11, p. 550; also N. MACNICOL, *Indian Theism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), p. 277.

³ For studies concerning the reconceptualization within contemporary Hinduism, see: J. N. FARQUHAR, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (Delhi: Munshiram Mancharlal, 1967); D. S. SARMA, *Studies in the Renaissance of Hinduism in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Benares: Benares Hindu University, 1944); RAMA SHANKER SRIVASTAVA, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Munshiram Mancharlal, 1965); V. S. NARAVANE, *Modern Indian Thought* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964); E. R. PUROHIT, *Hindu Revivalism and Indian Nationalism* (Sagas, M. P.: Sathi Prakashan, 1965); AGEHANANDA BHARATI, "The Hindu Renaissance and Its Apologetic Patterns", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1970.

⁴ Several studies have been recently completed on this early period of Indian theology. A good resource work is KAJ BAAGO, *Library of Indian Christian Theology, a Bibliography* (Madras: 1969). A survey of the entire period is R. H. S. BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1969). Two brief articles have been done by A. CAMPS, "A Survey of non-Western Christian Theology with Special Reference to India", *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non-Christianis* (Città del Vaticano), No. 14, 1970, and "The Person and Function of Christ in Hinduism and in Hindu-Christian Theology with Special Reference to India", *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non-Christianis* (Città del Vaticano), No. 18, 1971. The outstanding works on Christology during this period are: M. M. THOMAS, *The Acknowledged*

Father of the Hindu Renaissance, was the first to draw ostensibly upon Christianity in order to contain Hinduism within monotheistic expression and to heighten the social consciousness of Indian man. He looked upon Jesus and his saving work as the exemplar of ethical life. He was soon followed by KESHAB CHANDRA SEN (1838—1884) who sharpened the focus of Indian thought vis-a-vis Christianity by emphasizing the personal kenosis of Jesus. Keshab was also impressed by the social implications of the gospel. Both of these men came from a background of Hindu theism; others to follow stood more in the framework of Hindu non-dualism (*Advaita Vedanta*). RAMAKRISHNA (1836—1886) and his disciple VIVEKANANDA (1863—1902), both Advaitins, directed their attention to the mystical experience of Jesus and saw in the gospel a spirituality of self-renunciation. These same themes were taken up by MAHATMA GANDHI (1865—1948) and SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN (*1888) in the present century. Gandhi held up the life of Jesus and the sermon on the mount as the highest experience and expression of non-violence (*ahimsa*); Radhakrishnan, an neo-Advaitin, considered the sacrifice of Jesus as the abandonment of the empirical ego and the identification with the Supreme Brahman, the goal of Vedantic experience. Gandhi worked out a theology of religions which limited one to the cultural traditions of one's birth while Radhakrishnan's estimation of non-dualism appeared at the height of all religions.

None of these early figures, all Hindus to their death, gave themselves in faith to Jesus Christ, with the possible exception of Keshab Chandra Sen. Yet, there was both a response to Jesus and to Christianity among these renaissance figures, and they gave a direction to Christian thought in India. It is significant that none were able to deal with the historicity of Jesus, but they found most significant the exemplarity of the ethical Christ and the mystical Christ who emptied himself for the fullness of divinity. Christian thought was for them principally Christological thought. Secondly, they distinguished between an acceptance of the person of Jesus and the rejection of the Christian Church which reflected the capacity of Hinduism towards accommodation with other religions but with little change in institutional or cultural roots. This enabled them to formulate a rather eclectic approach to a theology of religions.

Christian thinkers in the nineteenth century began to directly confront Indian thought, especially the intellectual systems of Hinduism. In its inception they took an apologetical approach to religious intellectual development. This was true in the work of NEHEMIAH GOREH (1825 to

Christ of the Indian Renaissance (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1969); STANLEY J. SAMARTHA, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ, Towards a Christology in India*, in German under the title, *Hindus vor dem universalen Christus*, Beiträge zu einer Christologie in Indien (Stuttgart: 1970). For a more general consideration, see P. D. DEVANANDAN, *The Gospel and Renascent Hinduism* (London: 1959).

1895), a convert to Christianity and later an Anglican priest, who possessed a reputable background in Sanskrit studies and classical Hinduism. He made a critical examination of the six philosophical systems of Hinduism with the ultimate objective to refute them. The central message in his frequently published *A Rational Refutation of the Hindu Philosophical Systems* defined Hinduism as a *praeparatio evangelii*. His theology advanced in relation to his apologetical efforts. Although he reflected a Western orthodoxy, he lived deeply within Indian culture and frequently spoke out of an Indian conceptual and linguistic framework⁵. Taking also an apologetical approach in confronting Indian thought, though far more positive, was the work of the missionary J. N. FARQUHAR (1861—1921) who considered Christianity the fulfillment of Hinduism. Christianity in its evolutionary development, as a lower form to a higher form, was the crown of Hinduism and would ultimately replace it. Farquhar influenced both the missionary rationale and the future generation of Indian theologians⁶.

Another early approach by Christian thinkers in confronting Hinduism, not apologetical but basically philosophical, was initiated by BRAMABANDHAB UPADHYAY (1861—1907) and continued by missionaries. Bramabandhab, a Roman Catholic, was ultra-Hindu in thought and maintained that for Indian renaissance man the religious and socio-political spheres of life were virtually inseparable. Trying to reconcile Hindu philosophy, basically Vedantic non-dualism, with Christian theology was the prime task at hand. He was convinced that the Catholic Church would find it hard to confront Hinduism unless she made Hindu philosophy her own. He thought it irresponsible to sever cultural and religious ties with a nation and a people one is rooted to and committed to. He wrote eloquently on this point:

"However we are fully imbued with the spirit of Hinduism. We hold with the Vedantists that there is one eternal Essence from which proceed all things. We believe with the Vaishnavas in the necessity of incarnation and in the doctrine that man cannot be saved without grace. We agree in spirit with Hindu lawgivers in regard to their teaching that sacramental rites (Sankaras) are vehicles of sanctification. With wondering reverence do we look upon their idea of establishing a sacerdotal hierarchy vested with the highest authority in religious and social matters.

In short, we are Hindus so far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned, but in regard to our immortal souls we are Catholic. We are Hindu Catholics⁷."

Brahmabandhab's insight to draw upon Indian philosophical systems to reconcile Christian doctrine to the thought patterns of India continues to the present day, but was initially taken up by Roman Catholic mis-

⁵ BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, pp. 40—57

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 89ff

⁷ WM. THEODORE DE BARY, *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), Vol. 11, p. 189

naries, principally Belgium Jesuits who were trained Orientalists. PIERRE JOHANNIS and G. DANDOU, both Oxford scholars and Indian missionaries, attempted a synthesis of Indian thought in order to reconstruct a Catholic philosophy. In the first issue of their journal, *The Light of The East*, appearing in 1922, Johannis clearly enunciated his approach:

"If the Vedanta philosophers will only bring their several positive statements into harmony, they will turn disconnected doctrines into a system and that system will be Thomism or something akin to Thomism"⁸

The use of Hindu thought patterns and philosophical language was employed by all subsequent theologians.

What gave more significant development to the birth of Indian theology than its confrontation with Hinduism was the personal experience of Jesus Christ in the lives of individual men. Two outstanding men, SADHU SUNDAR SINGH (1889—1929) and SUBBA RAO (*1912), exemplified a type of religious teaching based solely on individual experience. Sundar is considered one of the most popular figures in Indian Christian history whose influence may be the most enduring. He was born a Sikh who at the age of fifteen had a vision of Jesus Christ which transformed his life. After studying in Anglican schools, he felt that his preaching ministry should extend beyond any one church. Sundar followed in the footsteps of the *sadhu*-ideal and became known throughout India and even the West as a charismatic preacher. His writing, compiled in eight short books, is pietistic, ecstatic, and prayerful; his thought is based upon his personal experience of Jesus as Risen Lord. Although his theology is thoroughly Christocentric, his rejection of the discipline and social context of an individual church sharply limits theological perspective⁹. A similar figure, popular and charismatic, is Subba Rao who in 1942 had an experience of Jesus Christ which gave him the power to heal in the name of Jesus. Subba Rao is no theologian but his lyrics, composed for prayer services, reveal a Christocentrism and a salvation experience similar to the Vedantic experiences of Hinduism. Oneness with Christ and becoming a Christ are common themes. He too is antagonistic towards any form of institutional religion, Christianity included¹⁰. These two men exemplify something typical to Indian religious history, that is, their teaching is contained within the limits of personal experience. This highlights the limitations of a non-institutional Christian theology and the further question of the possibility of a religious tradition opening itself to transculturation when it is based solely upon individual experience.

The most creative thinkers during this early period were known as the Rethinking Group of Christians, all Indian Protestants, who drew not only upon their personal experience of Jesus Christ as the basis for theolo-

⁸ BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 91

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 92—109

¹⁰ KAJ BAAGO, *Movement Around Subba Rao* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1968), pp. 8—10

gical reflection but also upon the great religious minds in Indian history¹¹. Two from this group, VENGAL CHAKKARAI (1880—1958) and PANDIPEDDI CHENCHIAH (1886—1959), are mentioned here for they especially articulated the task of Indian Christian theologians in terms of reconstruction of thought and a radical restatement of faith. Chenchiah trumpeted the call to rethink the challenges facing Indian Christianity for his conception of theology was ancillary to an Indian style of Christian life, a life rooted in Christ and in Indian experience¹². Since he looked upon theology as developmental and processual, he did not think it necessary to prescribe limits for Christian thought. The centrality of man's experience reflects his methodology: "Christian individual experience is the centre and circumference, foundation and superstructure, of Christianity. There is no experience which is not individual¹³." Protesting against the Barthianism prevalent in India, he found inspiration and a philosophical structure in SRI AUROBINDO's evolutionary and cosmic patterns of thought. Chenchiah, probably because of Aurobindo's influence, spoke of Jesus as the final revolution in the creative process, the prototype of a new era, the summit of creation:

"Placed alongside the earlier terms of creation, atom, cell and man-matter, life, soul-Jesus marks the addition of a new creative power, the potentiality of a new creative order. As life is to matter, and soul is to life, so is Jesus to man. He is the Son of Man — the child of Humanity — a diversion of the human stream to a higher level. Jesus is the vertical descent of spirit into the horizontal stream of creation... The process of creation finds its crown and culmination in Jesus... He is more than a Redeemer, Messiah, Teacher. He is the prototype of a new creation, the first of a new race of children of God. He is the latest term of the creative process and may be the last. He is the fulfilment of all earlier terms-matter, life and soul. Whatever else he may or may not be, He belongs to us, who are of the creative process¹⁴."

Chenchiah's writing spanned the range of theological reflection, but it was in the area of spiritual discipline where he became most conversant with India's legacy. Following the direction of a classical yoga master for some years, he tried to develop in his own life a Christian yoga, an indigenous discipline yet inclusive of Jesus Christ. His rethinking of Christianity reflected this spiritual dimension as

"... a desire for direct contact with Jesus (*Pratyaksha*) and an aspiration for rebirth, to be born a Son of God in the image of Jesus (*Punarjanma*). It is

¹¹ This section is limited for the sake of brevity to two figures. Others could be mentioned, especially A. J. APPASAMY and MARK SUNDER RAO. Appasamy holds particular importance because for him the *bhakti* tradition and its philosophical statement in the writing of RAMANUJA is the best means to expose and proclaim the Christian message. Useful for a study of the Rethinking Group is KAJ BAAGO, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1969).

¹² D. A. THANGASAMY, *The Theology of Chenchiah* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1966), p. 52

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 50

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116

not so much a desire to be a Christian, i. e., a follower of Christ, as to be identified with Christ-for *Sayujiya* with Jesus, a longing that made Paul to say, 'I no longer live, but Christ in me'¹⁵."

Chakkarai, also representative of the Rethinking Group, was unlike BRAHMABANDHAB, APPASAMY, and CHENCHIAH who sought a philosophical structure in SANKARA, RAMANUJA, and AUROBINDO respectively, in order to take seriously the Hindu heritage in understanding and expressing Christian experience¹⁶. He made greater use, however, of Sanskrit terminology than any other Christian thinker. Chakkarai's effort to start from experience and the scriptures to express Christian faith in Sanskrit terms brought about a transformation in the classical vocabulary, a development taking place even among Hindu thinkers in modern times. The Fact of Jesus, the source of which is personal experience and the scriptures, was the criterion in forging a theology¹⁷. His major effort was a restatement of Christology within the experiential context of Hinduism. The Christ of experience results from a *bhakti* experience, that is, the manifestation of Jesus Christ in present history is dynamic and man with loving surrender offers himself to the Lord. The kenosis of the Christian life is in imitation of the kenosis of Jesus, which in traditional Indian spirituality means the overcoming of the limitations of the empirical ego. Christ through his Spirit now present in history is the inspirator of man's kenosis¹⁸. Chakkarai's contribution is probably greater in terms of theological method than theological content. He saw his age as a time when "men lived in two worlds, divergent and opposed to each other in spirit, form, atmosphere — yet they managed to bring together, work them into a whole — into a globe of two hemispheres"¹⁹. Chakkarai outlined such a reconciliation.

In summary, Christian theology during this period began as a response, albeit apologetical, to the encounter between Hinduism and Christianity. The philosophical response which drew upon the great Indian minds of the past proved more fruitful. However, only when Christian thinkers began to reflect upon their own experience did they move towards an Indian sensitivity and approach to the development of religious thought. These early figures had neither the capacity nor the need to develop a metaphysical Christology for such could not result from the reflective methodology on experience which was so typical of the Indian thinker. Indian thought has consistently developed a spirituality, a path, because

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 4

¹⁶ BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, pp. 165—166

¹⁷ P. T. THOMAS, *The Theology of Chakkarai* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1968), p. 4. The fact of Jesus in CHAKKARAI's vocabulary includes both the historical Jesus as witnessed to in the scriptures and the experience of the trans-historical Jesus in the lives of men.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 90. Also see A. CAMPS, "A Survey of non-Western Christian Theology with Special Reference to India", l. c., pp. 74—75

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 3

of its experiential basis and emphasis. The categories of reflection are more ethical and mystical. Consequently, none of these figures grappled with the Western question concerning the ontological union of Jesus with the Father. They questioned instead the experience of Jesus in his self-emptying and ultimate consummation as the Christ. The methodology contained somewhat the theological enterprise, but it brought a note of relevancy to it. From these initial endeavours it can be concluded that Christology was not only the core of Indian theology, but it also placed Christianity in an intelligible relationship to the other religions of man. Finally, although theology was in evidence during this period, there was neither a strong theological tradition established nor any great theological system proposed.

EXPERIENCE WITHIN A DIALOGICAL CONTEXT

It is only in the last decade that Christian theology in India has located the Hindu-Christian dialogue as the fundamental context of its own development. The number of Christian thinkers who have seen their specific task as maintaining dialogue with contemporary Indian man, Hindu and secular, has steadily increased. This role was defined by P. D. DEVANANDAN (1901—1962), a Christian scholar of Hinduism and a professor of comparative religions, who more than anyone else explored the meaning of dialogue for Christian religious thought. He wrote over ten years ago:

"One of the functions of the Christian evangelist in India is not so much to counter forces of secularism and irreligion, but to help Hindus, in city or in village, at all levels of culture, to redefine the very nature of what is called religion²⁰."

"The resurgence of Asian religions is in every case a new evangelistic opportunity for a face-to-face meeting of the creedal claims of the Christian Gospel and their (i. e. non-Christians') foundational doctrines²¹."

The task of dialogue for Devanandan was not limited to a theoretical discussion but was an opportunity to share experiences at the deepest level of meaning. After years of approaching dialogue polemically, or from a syncretistic, or neutralist position, the present is looked upon as a new moment of dialogue with theological significance²².

Since Vatican II the Catholic community has advanced considerably the dialogue initiated by missionaries and renaissance Hindus a half century ago. This community has become more conscious of the range of issues and contexts from which dialogue is now unfolding within the Church and outside of it. A conference on Asian monasticism held in Bangkok in late 1968 brought to attention not only the ascetical life within Hinduism but also congregated a number of Christian ascetics

²⁰ BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 188

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 201

²² *Ibid.*, p. 226

who testified to their serious undertaking of Hindu paths of spirituality²³. An impressive effort to focus issues was the Consultation on the Theology of Hindu-Christian Dialogue called in Bombay in January 1969. The participants, Catholics and Protestants, selected as their topic the theology of dialogue as preparation for dialogue and as a means to advance it. The growing awareness of a community in dialogue was clearly manifested in 1969 at the All India Seminar called by the Catholic Bishops to respond to the implementation of conciliar directives²⁴. Participants left these conferences assured that their identity and role in the Church universal could only be fulfilled in terms of an Indian Christianity resulting from a more profound dialogue with Hindus. A new creative effort has taken place to integrate traditional Christian and Indian thought into a theology which attempts to be dialogical both in purpose and in its systematics²⁵.

Since India is more conscious of the spiritual legacy which the renaissance discovered, the Christian Indian and his community are placed in a standing dialogue with Hinduism. As more historical research is completed what may emerge is the fact that the religio-cultural symbols,

²³ Such figures as Sister SHRADDHANANDA BAHIM, Sadhu ITTYAVIRAH, Dom M. F. ACHARYA, O. S. C. O., and Dom BEDE GRIFFITHS, O. S. B. have developed models of Hindu-Christian dialogue at the level of ascetical life. They have entered into Indian cultural and religious patterns and contexts. See JOHN MOFFITT, edit., *A New Charter for Monasticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970). At this point it should be mentioned that the number of seminary and university professors (Protestant and Roman Catholic) is increasing who have done theological work in European and American universities and have completed an equal amount of study in Indian religious philosophy at the best Indian universities. This should have a profound effect on the development of an Indian Christian theology.

²⁴ This conference received great press coverage in India at the time, highlighting among other things the Indianization of Catholic liturgy. In general it created the machinery for continuing among clergy and laity alike the fuller implementation of Vatican II. A follow up was held in Nagpur in October 1971, called the International Theological Conference; another session of this conference was held in Madras in late December, 1971. Proceedings will be published shortly.

²⁵ These were the sentiments of K. KLOSTERMAIER in his talk "The Theology of Hindu-Christian Dialogue", in "Report: Consultation of the Theology of Hindu-Christian Dialogue, Bombay, January 4th to 8th, 1969", *Religion and Society* (Bangalore), Vol. XVI, No. 2, 1969. For some time outstanding institutes and journals for the study of religion and Indian culture have set the context for this broader type of dialogue. The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (Bangalore) under the direction of M. M. THOMAS has done particularly fine work; under Roman Catholic auspices and more recent is The Institute of Indian Culture (Bombay-Bandra). Several outstanding journals also advance dialogical theology: *Religion and Society* (Bangalore), *Indian Journal of Theology* (Serampore), *The Clergy Monthly* (Poona), *Jeevadhara* (Alleppey).

customs and practices of Hinduism within Indian Christianity were not severed by missionary efforts as many think. This has already been demonstrated in Kerala, a center of early Christianity in South India, in terms of religious practices²⁶. Since the rebirth of Hinduism even the Christian may find the *Bhagavad Gita* a primary source of religious wisdom. India has formed a national consciousness since the days of colonialism, a consciousness formed in part by its religious heritage. The Indian Christian shares in this consciousness which places him in direct encounter with Hinduism. The intellectual encounter outlined above in recent years is a sign of a dialogue on a deeper and broader level: namely, the dialogue among religious communities. The encounter continues on this broader level because of the reconceptualization of contemporary Hinduism, a reconceptualization characterised in its positive attitude towards man, his world, and the building of society²⁷. As the Indian Christian enters more actively into the creation of a new social and political order, the Hindu-Christian dialogue becomes a fundamental context in which he lives²⁸. There is no reason to fear a loss of Christian identity for any revitalization within Hinduism will be reflected in a creative development within the Christian community itself.

Experience within a dialogical situation presupposes that two religious communities are open to one another in such a manner that they are not merely compared one to another, consciously or unconsciously, but they stand in purposeful relationship. Experience in dialogue is experience in relationship, experience which receives meaning only in relationship. Christian experience within the cultural context of India and the religious context of Hinduism has a unique character because of these specific relationships. The relational fact gives to the experience a uniqueness and specificity. What this means in general terms cannot be surmised, but in the examination of a particular community it could be identified and defined. Christian experience within the dialogical context of Hinduism draws upon the religio-cultural symbols of Hinduism. More is implied, however, for the spiritual sensitivities, capacities, and aspirations of Hindu man are the sources of these symbols. Experience

²⁶ See A. CERUKARAKKUNNEL, "Indianization among the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala", l. c. pp. 361—373

²⁷ The caricature of Indian thought which has so dominated Western texts on Hinduism as world-denying and negative does not reflect the life and thought of GANDHI, TAGORE, RADHAKRISHNAN, AUROBINDO and the *samaj* movement in contemporary Indian society. These plus secular influences have begun a reconceptualization and revitalization in Hinduism today.

²⁸ A parallel phenomenon is the experience in American social and religious life. As the Catholic and Jewish community entered seriously into the political and social life of the United States, the encounter with Protestant America was sustained. This is true especially on the level of communities more than among church institutions. See ROBERT BELLAH & WILLIAM G. McLoughlin, edit., *Religion in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

within a dialogical situation consists in sharing experiences of a cultural and religious nature. This experience itself determines the form which future experience takes²⁹.

An indigenous spirituality takes root because it is not foreign to the context out of which it emerges. When a spirituality has become consistent in the experience of a particular community, a representative theological tradition is possible. In terms of Indian theology there will not be one theological tradition for there has never been one spiritual path in Indian experience. Singularity in a spiritual or theological tradition would betray the rich experience of which Indian man is capable. The direction of Christian experience in India today is toward a dialogical experience with Hinduism, and this is a new emergent for reflection in Christian theology.

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS TODAY

Recent theological scholarship by Indian Christians has taken several directions setting in motion the theological activity for the last quarter of this century³⁰. Three trends are well defined: the establishment of a theological method, a search for integralism in theological understanding, and finally, the activity of theology in developing a spiritual tradition.

The search for a theological method is fundamental to any advance in dialogue, a theology of religions, a Christology or any theological reflection. Over a decade ago PAUL TILlich suggested that the starting point of theological dialogue is the aim of existence, the *telos* of all things³¹. He wanted to avoid in religious dialogue the mere comparative and conceptual discussion of man and his world, history and the sacred. The difficulty with Tillich's point of departure is that the meaning of existence is better suited at an advanced level of dialogue than a beginning. The more realistic point of departure in theological dialogue is man himself as was suggested by the Bombay conference of 1969 on the

²⁹ ROBLEY EDWARD WHITSON, *The Coming Convergence of World Religions* (New York: Newman Press, 1971), p. 29. The first chapter of this book, "The Unity of Civilizations", speaks of shared experiences in cultural and religious dialogue, and my ideas have been stimulated by WHITSON's discussion. Another pointed study on this subject is PETER SCHREINER "Roman Catholic Theology and Non-Christian Religion", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1969.

³⁰ This section has been inspired by Roman Catholic studies which show extraordinary creativity and has generally been limited to Roman Catholic theologians. This should not ignore the fine and recent scholarship of SURJIT SINGH (*Preface to Personality: Christology in Relation to Radhakrishnan's Philosophy*), Bishop S. KULANDRAN (*Grace: A Comparative Study of the Doctrine of Christianity and Hinduism*), DHANJIBHAI FAKIRBHAI (*The Philosophy of Love*), MARK SUNDER RAO (*Ananyatva: Realization of Christian Non-Duality*), and PAUL SUDHAKAR (*The Fourfold Ideal*).

³¹ PAUL TILlich, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 63f

Theology of Hindu-Christian Dialogue. According to this statement a common point of discussion could be found in anthropology, in the contemporary situation and social behavior of man, in communal attitudes and existential problems of religious man himself³². The hope is to develop theological anthropology out of a real situation. Such a methodology would make possible the sharing in religious experiences and the consequent growth of religious man. An anthropological approach to the theological dialogue hinges upon the meaning and significance of sharing experiences. It suggests a type of methodology which opens men to each other on the cultural and humanistic levels of experience prior to an exchange of personal commitments, values, and spiritual experiences³³. Theological dialogue, consequently, can then establish itself with the capacity to build an authentic theological anthropology.

Since the relationships between religions are determined in dialogue, a theology of dialogue immediately effects an approach to a theology of religions. The methodology of one influences the methodology of the other. In the history of Christianity various relationships between Christianity and other high religions have been proposed and followed by missionaries and theologians. These relationships express multiple and diverse levels of encounter: imperfect-perfect, tolerance-presence, development-fulfillment, adaptation-indigenization³⁴. In the light of Vatican II the fulfillment view, popular among missionaries and theologians for some time, gave way to the dialogical approach. Recently an Indian Catholic theologian has developed a further step in religious inter-relationships by what he identifies as the sacramental approach to other religions³⁵. In this framework the relational fact is the sacramental disclosure of one religion to another which establishes a bilateral relationship between the religions, unlike the strict unilateral relationship in other approaches. A methodology along the lines of sacramentality retains the essential differences between religions and explains more adequately the manifestation of the divine in each and their responsibility to disclose this sacramentality to each other³⁶.

As is clear in Christian theology of the past century in India, the source of all Indian reflection, the source of a theological methodology,

³² See "Report: Consultation on the Theology of Hindu-Christian Dialogue, Bombay, January 4th to 8th, 1969", *Religion and Society*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, 1969, pp. 72—76

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 73

³⁴ See OWEN THOMAS, edit., *Attitudes Toward Other Religions* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1969). In this book a systematic discussion of the following attitudes is presented: Truth-Falsehood, Relativity, Essence, Development-Fulfillment, Salvation History, Revelation-Sin, Christian Presence, Christian Secularity.

³⁵ J. X. IRUDAYARAJ, "From the 'Fulfillment-View' to the Sacramental Approach", *Jeevadhara*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1971, pp. 200—211

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206

is experience³⁷. An Indian Christology, for example, is based on the experience (*anubhava*) of the Christ event in the person of Jesus, in its recapture during apostolic times, and finally in the present lives of the devotees of Jesus. Lived-experience of past and present is the source from which Christological reflection emerges. More specifically, if the experience is to emerge within an Indian context, it would have to reflect the non-historical Christ, the logos, the indwelling of the spirit of Christ in his followers, or the experience of the presence of the Risen Christ³⁸. Since historical consciousness is not the general framework of Indian religious man, a Christology cannot begin with the Jesus of history³⁹. As earlier Indian theologians noted, personal experience of Jesus Christ is the ground and source for the development of a Christology. Recent Christological explorations endorse this⁴⁰.

The establishment of an indigenous methodology for dialogue, for a theology of religions, for Christological reflection, is a key to the further development of a Christian theology. It can only be established from the thought patterns and sensitivities, emotional, rational, and intuitive, of Indian religious man. The multiplicity of experiences and expressions upon which this theology rests presents a complex situation. The plurality of Indian experience and expression so baffled the early CHAKKARAI that he proposed two theologies, and consequently two methodologies, one for the believing Christian community and one for dialogue with the non-Christian community⁴¹. This is certainly intolerable for an indigenous theology.

A second trend presently found in theological scholarship is the search for integralism. The classical Indian traditions, from the ancient *Bhagavad Gita* to the recent *The Life Divine* of SRI AUROBINDO, exhibit this facet of Indian thought. The irreducibility of religious experiences to a single denominator has given rise to many integral visions of reality in Indian religious history. Moreover, the capacity of Indian man to overcome intellectual relativism because of a plurality of expressions has been contained by the persistent search for integralism. This is evident today

³⁷ See two perceptive articles on this point: T. M. MANICKAM, "Anubhava as Pramana of an Indian Christology", and SOBHARANI BASU, "Anubhava Via Saksatkara to Mukti", *Jeevadhara*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1971, pp. 228—249

³⁸ See JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM, "The Spirit and Orientation of an Indian Theology", *Jeevadhara*, Vol. 1, No. 5, 1971, pp. 456—458, and SAMUEL RAYAN, "An Indian Christology: A Discussion of Method", *Jeevadhara*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1971, pp. 219—223

³⁹ See P. T. THOMAS, *Theology of Chakkarai with Selections from his Writings* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1968), pp. 81—100

⁴⁰ See JOHN MOFFITT, "Christianity Confronts Hinduism", *Theological Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1969.

⁴¹ P. T. THOMAS, *Theology of Chakkarai with Selections from his Writings*, p. 101

in a theology which attempts not a single expression but a unified expression with flexibility and diversity. It is especially evident in the new Christology. For example, the ontological union between Jesus and the Father, a point apparently impossible for early theologians to confront, has become a serious point of reflection for present Catholic theologians⁴². An attempt to balance the non-historical Christ with the Christ of history is also a move towards integralism⁴³. The work of RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR and JULES MONCHANIN on the theandric reality within Christianity and within other religions, likewise, indicates a desire for comprehensiveness⁴⁴. The most consistent trend, evident in the earlier theologians and in the present, is the evident synthesis of the spiritual paths of knowledge (*jnana marga*) and love (*bhakti marga*) with its consequent theological implications⁴⁵. The effort to work out a terminology, drawing upon both East and West, also reflects a desire for an integral theological vocabulary.

It has been pointed out by JOHN CHETHIMATTAM that the uniqueness of an Indian theology will be its attempt to integrate the viewpoints of East and West⁴⁶. This is the grandest aspiration of theological reflection. It seems, however, that the value and significance of any East-West dichotomy is more anthropological than philosophical, religious, or even cultural. Twentieth century man has become androgynous containing within himself values, dimensions, and experiences of both East and West. Theological integralism has become possible in our time for, according to RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR: "We can only bridge the gulf between so many abysses, between East and West in this case, if we realize the synthesis and the harmony within that microcosm of ourselves"⁴⁷. Indian

⁴² This is implied throughout the well-known thesis of RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: 1964). See the entire issue titled "Approaches to Christ", *Jeevadhara*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1971. Also see KLAUS KLOSTERMAIER, *Kristvidya, a Sketch of an Indian Christology* (Bangalore: 1967).

⁴³ This is found in all the Roman Catholic writers beginning with P. JOHANNES early in this century and continuing with more contemporary theologians.

⁴⁴ See JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM, "The Spirit and Orientation of an Indian Theology", I. c., p. 455, in which place he writes: "Hence the Trinitarian mystery is the ground and starting-point of an Indian Theology." See J. MONCHANIN, *Swami Parama Arubi Anandam: A Memorial* (Tiruchirapalli: 1959); also, RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR, "Toward an Ecumenical Theandric Spirituality", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. V, 1968, pp. 507—534

⁴⁵ See MARIASUSAI DHAVAMONY, "Christian Experience and Hindu Spirituality", *Gregorianum*, No. 48, 1967, pp. 776—791. BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, pp. 251—254, considers this one of the major strands of theological thought, a strand perceived some time ago by both UPADHYAYA and APPASAMY.

⁴⁶ JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM, "The Spirit and Orientation of an Indian Theology", I. c., p. 460

⁴⁷ R. PANIKKAR, "The Ways of West and East", *New Dimensions in Religious Experience*, edit. GEORGE DEVINE (New York: Alba House, 1971), p. 93. In this

man, especially, has the flexibility to assimilate differing experiences and viewpoints in a comprehensive vision, and this is necessary for an indigenous Indian theology.

The final trend which lies beneath all theological reflection is the role of theology in building a lived spirituality. The history of Christianity in India has developed three possibilities for an approach to an indigenous Christian spirituality⁴⁸. The first integrates Christian values and discipline into traditional forms of Hindu spirituality. This was attempted by some figures of the Hindu renaissance. The second integrates Hindu disciplines and values into Christianity. This is a prevalent approach in Christian India today and is advocated by those who lead the Indianization of Christianity, namely, missionaries who have entered seriously into Indian culture and thought⁴⁹. Finally, because Christianity is a prophetic and incarnational religion, it provides the basis for moral and social regeneration at a particular time and place in history. This option developed by the Indian renaissance continues today within some Christian communities. The difficulty with the above alternatives is that they have not emerged from the type of dialogue now possible and taking place, at least partially, in India today. JACQUES-ALBERT CUTTAT, some years ago, spoke of East and West meeting as two spiritual persons, sharing, exchanging, transforming each other⁵⁰. Since Hindu-Christian dialogue is the meeting of spiritual persons, this encounter can bring about a spirituality not previously envisioned.

Dialogue is a theologizing activity in itself and develops a new type of religious man⁵¹. The spirituality of this new man comes from the experience of dialogical theology. An Indian Christian spirituality must ultimately form in a practical manner a life of Christian faith within the context of Hindu religiosity⁵². It is the lived experience of the Christian faith within the context of and developed from the anthropology of

place PANIKKAR proceeds to show that the differences between West and East have become minimal geographically, historically and culturally. Even philosophical patterns and religious divisions can no longer be credited to East and West. Yet, according to PANIKKAR, East and West have meaning only if they are understood as anthropological categories, which gives them place, justification and value.

⁴⁸ For a consideration of these possibilities, see "Editorial", *Religion and Society*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, 1969, pp. 1-5

⁴⁹ The specific contributions of Sister SHRADDHANANDA BAHIN, Saddhu ITTYA-VIRAH, M. F. ACHARYA can be found in JOHN MOFFITT, edit., *A New Charter for Monasticism*.

⁵⁰ JACQUES-ALBERT CUTTAT, *The Spiritual Dialogue of East and West* (Bombay: Max Mueller Bhavan Publications, 1961), p. 27

⁵¹ S. J. SAMARTHA, "More than an Encounter of Commitments", *International Review of Mission*, No. 59, 1970, p. 396

⁵² This is suggested by A. CAMPS, "The Person and Function of Christ in Hinduism and in Hindu-Christian Theology", l. c., p. 211.

Hindu religiosity. This alone assures its indigenous character. Theological activity reflecting this type of religiosity could thus establish a spiritual tradition.

The key trends outlined above bring us to the point of development in Christian theology in India today. There stands a form of activity and pluralism not to be found in theological development elsewhere. This is not entirely novel for Indian religious thought has always been a quest, an activity, an opening of man to a fuller experience of the divine, and not primarily a science or systematization of the relationship between the human and divine orders⁵³. Hence theology points the way toward a more comprehensive and integral experience of God. With such a thrust there will be much experimentation, much will be tested and rejected. It is a highly pluralistic form of theological activity. India in the past produced one of the few civilizations where pluralism in experience and expression was taken seriously. The thought systems of Indian history reflect a richness and breadth because of their candid confrontation with pluralism, and an indigenous Christian theology attempts to capture this same seriousness. Needless to say, this type of theology has meaning not only for the Indian Christian but also for the universal Church.

IMPLICATIONS

Understanding Indian Christianity in its theologizing activity offers special problems to the student of religion. The implications of pluralism, indigenization, and creativity contribute to a complexity of elements which have significance for each other. The work of the student of religion is to formulate an understanding of this significance. One interpretative tool used by religionists today to aid in the understanding of pluralism is complementarity. The complementarity of pluralistic experiences, theologies and traditions, does not proceed uncritically or syncretically but seeks a comprehensive understanding in situations where variety exists. According to ROBLEY WHITSON:

"The complementarity of simultaneous multiplicity, therefore, is a necessary and objective instrument of theology insofar as the complexity of the religious process is recognized and theologizing remains integral to it. Complementarity is the key to any attempt to extend the range of any one religious tradition to meet and integrate with another⁵⁴."

With this instrument the diversity is accepted and the development of further meaning is permitted. As seen through complementarity, the

⁵³ JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM, "The Spirit and Orientation of an Indian Theology", l. c., pp. 452—454

⁵⁴ ROBLEY EDWARD WHITSON, *The Coming Convergence of World Religions*, p. 126. Also see JOHN T. FORD, "Ecumenical Convergence and Theological Pluralism", *Thought*, Vol. XLIV, No. 175, 1969, pp. 531—545; also EDWARD J. JURJI & JAMES I. MCCORD, edit., *The Phenomenon of Convergence and the Course of Prejudice* (Austin: The University of Texas, 1966)

pluralistic experiences and expressions cease to be divisive and become the basis for a significant unity. To seek understanding through complementarity is to seek a significant unity while retaining variety and creativity. Complementarity is an instrument for intelligibility. Developing thought traditions and spiritual traditions have a unitive meaning as they advance together. In fact, they receive higher meaning in their relationships one to the other, while avoiding theological isolation or fragmentation in the individual components.

To theologize with the instrument of complementarity presumes that the theologian in faith and experience is representative of his own tradition. He is not on the brink of the tradition but within it, drawing upon a possibly wider experience of it than the ordinary believer. With the instrument of complementarity he has the capacity to order the experiences and expressions of the larger community. This is the systematic role which falls to every theologian. He is able to relate the multiple dimensions of the tradition, one to the other because his view is now expanded. His unique task is to understand the inter-relationships and to systematize them within an intelligible whole. The further task of the theologian working with the tool of complementarity would be to extend the experience itself⁵⁵. In the systematization of a tradition at any one point in its history, the theologian has the task of presenting a creative view, a normative model, one drawn from the multiplicity of experiences and expressions that further extends the experience of any individual aspect of the tradition. SANKARA, RAMANUJA, and MADHVA in classical times, and RADHAKRISHNAN and AUROBINDO in contemporary India have consistently systematized Indian experience and opened the experience to more creative possibilities.

The work of theology is located within complementarity and is active because of it. Every dimension of the tradition must communicate its vision and experience enabling each aspect of the tradition to locate its work more precisely⁵⁶. The lines of continuity and change are located. Over-all development in a tradition is more likely to continue when seen within the framework of complementarity, for each aspect of the tradition receives its meaning from the whole. Complementarity localizes theological work which otherwise would be fragmented because of differentiated views of reality. The outstanding religious thinkers of India always placed their specific contribution within the greater framework of Indian religious life. The task of the theologian is to grasp his own most creative contribution, his point of originality and genius, and integrate it within the tradition⁵⁷. This can be done with the instrument of complementarity.

⁵⁵ R. WHITSON, *The Coming Convergence of World Religions*, p. 116

⁵⁶ THOMAS BERRY, *Five Oriental Philosophies* (Albany: Magi Books 1968), p. 48. In this study BERRY is working with the concept of complementarity quite broadly, i. e. among the high religions of the world.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Complementarity is thus offered as a positive and viable tool for the indigenization of a theological effort. It would encompass not only the speculative but also the practical aspects of a tradition; it would embrace the devotional and mystical, the ritual and sacramental, and the social and cultural experiences and expressions of a people; it would place all verbalization of religious experience within the broader literary, artistic, and cultural context in which it is rooted. It suggests a humanistic approach to the total tradition under study.

An Indian Christian theology must come to grips with the reality of multiple models of theological expression. It faces the possibility of multiple theological languages⁵⁸. If such an enterprise is to be constructive, it must be thoroughly inter-related. This will contain disparate energies and enthusiasm. There is no need, however, to fear new experiences, new languages, new theologies. If they are neither contiguous with the tradition nor in fact reflect the spiritual experience of the tradition, nor integrally related to it as a part to a whole, time will eventually carry them to extinction.

Finally, complementarity defines one's place within the faith community. One need see his experience as either peculiar or disassociated from the rest of the believing community. For the task of the theologian of complementarity is to reveal and to make intelligible the place and role of a particular experience within the total tradition. In short, it gives to the believer a deeper meaning and understanding of his own experience.

Two things have been implied in this brief consideration of complementarity as an instrument for understanding. First, one's experience becomes more intelligible. Religious experience tends to become more pluralistic in contemporary society and especially in communities which seek greater indigenization. Complementarity achieves a significant unity while retaining diversity and validity in individual experiences. Secondly, to clearly focus an emergent theology requires a long historical process. Indian Christianity, however, does not have the luxury of time for there is a call and need for immediate articulation. With the present condition of Indian Christian theology, complementarity is suggested as the one instrument which can focus sharply and quickly the direction of a new theological age. This was an insight and achievement of great Hindu thinkers in the past, and it could be the key for the birth of a great theological tradition in the future.

⁵⁸ See ANTONIO T. DE NICOLAS, *The Four-Dimensional Man: The Philosophical Methodology of the Rgveda* (Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 1971). In this study the four basic languages (units of meaning, intentionalities) of the *Rgveda* are investigated: *Asat* (Non-Existence), *Sat* (Existence), *Yajna* (Sacrifice), and the embodied (*Rta*) Vision (*dhih*). The multiplicity of religious languages is a fact in the Indian tradition: it would be an equally interesting study to identify the religious languages of contemporary Hinduism.