

---

**SECTION 3**

**WHAT IS INDIAN CHRISTIAN  
THEOLOGY**

---

# 11

You will notice in this final chapter we are coming back to the questions we raised in the earlier chapters of this course – the question of doing theology in context. It is a truism to say that Indian Christian theology has of course relevance for the Indian people, but the question here is: Does it have any significance for churches outside India? We want to draw out from what we have learned in the thinking of many Indians.

Again we may look at Boyd's summary of the development of Christianity in the world. It had to struggle to survive and every time it overcame a particular culture or philosophy or religion its growing power increased correspondingly.

## THE THREE CONFRONTATIONS

Boyd says that the first great confrontation Christianity had was with the Jewish culture. With a strong sense of being the elect the Jews thought they were the centre of all nations – they called all the other nations heathen. It must have been well-nigh impossible for the early Jewish Christians and apostles to come out of the Jewish environment. It was very easy for them to understand that Christianity was just a continuation of the Jewish religion and that Jesus was the promised messiah to consummate the Jewish kingdom. In fact, some understood that way. But it is the miracle of history that Paul and Peter and James tore away radically from Judaism and that at its very birth. Perhaps here some of the Jerusalem Christians can be the cause. But whatever the cause, the Christianity of the early church was definitely no mere sect of Judaism.

That is one reason why it could immediately take root in heathen and Greek cultures and that is why Antioch and not Jerusalem became the centre of mission, and later the centre of orthodox Christianity (here I am referring to the

tension between Antioch and Alexandria in the 2nd and 3rd centuries). It is for this reason that even the very high cultured and highly intellectual Hellenism (Greek philosophies) could not contain the gospel. The Christian gospel broke through the walls of Hellenism also and went beyond the then world of Greece. This, Boyd calls the second great confrontation.

Then when Christianity spread beyond the known world of the time into Africa, India and other lands, it confronted also barbarism, animism, and above all Islam. Boyd prefers to call all these confrontations insignificant, but they seem formidable enough to be termed the third and the fourth great confrontations. But all these confrontations were mild. Some of these tribal or barbaric cultures had no system of theology or doctrines or culture or ethics. Islam, of course, was itself a child of Judeo-Christian teachings, claiming itself to belong to the children of Ishmael. The confrontation with the Chinese culture, "where along with the dominant Confucianism and Taoism there was also the Indian derived Buddhist tradition", has now been virtually broken off. Boyd seems to suggest that even this confrontation was not a big match for the two thousand year old Christianity. Though there is another kind of confrontation, that with communism, Boyd seems to think that along with the Chinese traditions communism also has been vanquished. Hence he says: "The task of presenting the gospel in India is then of quite exceptional importance."

Therefore, according to Boyd, the third great and final confrontation of Christianity is with Hinduism. Christianity stands or falls as it fares with Hinduism. For one thing, as no other religious or philosophical tradition Hinduism has both a very developed intellectual and closed system of thinking added to that, it also had its own sociological system and world-view. In another context we have already seen that Sanskrit contains more philosophical and theological words than all the terms in Greek, Latin and German put together. That means that any theology, anywhere in the world, which interprets the message of the gospel of

Christ, cannot be complete without the Indian contribution. Thus Indian Christian theology adds not only to the fullness of the Christian gospel but also a depth so far unknown to it. You and I as Indian disciples are called upon to do our bit in this great task. God forbid that we fail.

Since in this chapter we are more or less summarizing what has been said in the earlier chapters, we need not go into the details as to what an Indian Christian theology should contain. We can briefly describe the issues in the current debate as follows.

Starting at Radhakrishnan's comment that Christianity is a dogmatic religion which requires the assent of its adherents to propositional statements, and not a religion of experience, many Christians have tended to reject dogmatics. As we have seen most of the Indian Christian theologians have been rather apologetes and not systematicians. Thus dogmatics, the sum of the teachings of the church, and systematics, the presentation of dogmatics according to one coherent principle of relationships, have been deliberately avoided. So far I have not seen any systematic theology or dogmatic theology from Indian writers, though there are several books containing some chosen doctrines. So in Radhakrishnan's criticism there is an element of truth, namely, we Christians have preached but not practiced. We accept a set of beliefs but that has no life implications. Now the question is, what kind of theology must now be produced in order that the church can be renewed and be vital again? The following are a minimum:

(a) I think we have already seen that the exegetical work from Indian writers is almost negligible. So it is of utmost importance that we start producing biblical theology. Not that our biblical theology will be much different from others, but it shows that we Indians go to the Bible ourselves and find the truths in it originally and so apply it to our situation. That will have weight.

(b) We have said already that Indians are weak on history and I think to a great extent it is true. That is why we do not

have very many biographies of Christian saints or events in India. So the second great need is to produce an account of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done to particular persons in concrete situations in India, rather than to think vaguely on an Indian national scale.

(c) Perhaps the one area where we have all been strong, as the host of above Indian thinkers show, is in the area of apologetics. It is necessary in order to defend the gospel against the current questions and attacks from outside the church. And every generation must write its own apologetics, since it cannot borrow it from the past generations.

(d) Since in India we have more than 550 million Hindus, when we think of Indian Christian theology the tendency is to think rather of theology relevant to Hindu hearers. Such a tendency has been disastrous in evangelism among Muslims, since to the Muslims Indian Christian theology is more or less Hindu theology. Thus, I think we Indians must develop Christian theology or the message of Christ in forms relevant to religions other than Hinduism — Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Parseism and Sikhism. It is a sad fact that the Sikh community, though they have a population only a few lakhs, have had the influence to have a Sikh President, whereas with 20 million we have not yet had one Christian President in the last half century since Independence. Unless the Christian gospel makes an impact on religions other than Hinduism we cannot be the salt of the earth.

(e) There is one new problem which is now coming on the horizon of Indian Christians — that of liberation theology. I believe in the coming years liberation theology will occupy most of our energy, be it evangelical or otherwise. So our theology must develop some kind of expression relevant to the socio-political context. I mean a balanced emphasis on Christian ethics or even Christian social ethics is an urgent need right now. Dalit theologies are now in the air, albeit with shaky bases.

## INDIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL EXPRESSIONS

In this section we will simply analyze the various terms and strands of thought in Hinduism used in Indian Christian theology, eventually attempt to evaluate, and make some recommendations also. In the next section we try to integrate all that we have learned and we want to evolve something for the future. In fact we ask the basic question: Is there such a thing as Indian Christian theology, and if yes, what is it? We hope to describe it a bit. In the final section we supplement our analysis to even a broader level and discuss what contextualisation or indigenisation is, and we hope to arrive at a presentation as to what elements an Indian Christian theology should have.

### THE TERMS

We have used various terms — literally hundreds of them — from Hindu, Sanskrit and other linguistic backgrounds of India. Apparently they are not all equally important. Are there certain crucial terms which in any case we must either use or baptize?

#### *Terms for God*

Of course the question, what kind of word we use for God is essentially related also to the words we use for the world as well as Christ. Following are the terms which we have seen as attempts: *deva* (which is cognate with *theos* of Greek and *deus* of Latin), *ishwara*, *parameshwara*, *Brahman* and *saccidananda*. Sometimes even the word *bhagwan* is used exclusively for *Krishnavatara*). One redeeming feature of this is that several names like Hari or Rama or *Purusha* are conspicuous by their absence. Sometimes we have used the word *paramatman* but as we have seen the word *atman*, meaning spirit, in almost all its allied forms is used for the Holy Spirit.

Of these perhaps the most important are the following three: *Iswara*, *Brahman* and *Saccidananda*. As far as the word *saccidananda* was concerned, we saw that it was

confused neither with the terms for Christ nor for the world, so perhaps that is the one with least difficulties. But we had difficulties about both *Brahman* and *Ishwara*. The problem with *Iswara* is that it belongs to the world, the *maya*, so can it bring out the transcendence of God as the Bible portrays? As far as the word Brahman is concerned we had two sets of difficulties (i) which Brahman do we mean, *nirguna* Brahman or *saguna* Brahman? *Nirguna* Brahman, being more impersonal and having no relations or attributes, is actually not suitable as consummator of all things. But since *nirguna* Brahman is the highest understanding of God in Hinduism, we dare not leave it alone. For the same reason to use *saguna* Brahman for God, which is rather a lower category of God for the Hindus, is not really suitable to use for the one almighty God. The other difficulty was: If we use the word brahman for God what other word can we use for Christ? Several people who have taken the advaitic strands as the only means of interpretation, like Brahmabandhav or Surjit Singh and Samartha would give nothing less than the term Brahman for Christ. So using the word Brahman for Lord Jesus Christ deprives him of his significance, that was the feeling we had. One solution was to call *nirguna* Brahman the Reformer's *Deus absconditus* or the God hidden; and *saguna* Brahman the *Deus revelatus* or the revealed God. In another theologian's words a God of grace and a God of wrath though the opposition is not exactly similar. I do not think our studies have proved that Brahman is higher than *ishwara* because there is at least one case (in *bhakti* interpretation) where *ishwara* is manifested as Brahman.

#### *Terms for God and the World*

We saw that various authors use various words for the world: *maya*, *sthit*, *prakriti*, *asat* and *shrishti*, *prapancha*, *sansara*, *loka*. The three problems which confront us in this were: (i) whether the world is real or unreal? (ii) whether it is created by God out of something or is it fully under his control? (iii) what is the means of the creation of the world? From these points of view the last term *shrishti* has no problem since *shrishti* means creation as well as the sum of

all created beings. It is of course difficult to choose a term which answers all the questions adequately – unless of course we invent one, which may also not be any more useful. Perhaps more than anywhere else it is here that, if any of these terms is chosen for the world or creation, as the Bible means, it must be baptized carefully with the biblical content.

#### *Terms for Christ*

We encountered the following: *maya*, *shakti*, *chit* of *saccidananda*, *avatara*, *purusha*, *sat purusha*, *mula purusha*, *purna avatara*, *antaryamin*, *saguna brahman*, *nirguna brahman* and *ishwara*. The problems here were (i) that any term we use for Christ we must say that he is fully God and hence not part of this world, *maya*, and at the same time he is fully man and so must be part of this world; (ii) he must be co-equal, co-eternal in all respects with God the Father; (iii) and he also must be presented as the prototype man, the full man, the true man, the real man. Particularly these christological terms show us as to what dangers we run into if we use one term without explaining the missing elements. We also encountered in this respect the two *mahavakyas*, so called, of the Johannine Gospel: "I and my Father are one" and "Abide in me" as being crucial in interpreting Christ to the Indian minds and hearts.

#### *Terms for the Holy Spirit*

Several thinkers have used the following: *atman*, *paramatman*, *antaratman*, *antaryamin*, *shakti*, *para shakti*, *maha shakti*, *ananda* and *jeevatman*. And what were the difficulties here? (i) In any case the term should not give the connotation of just a mere influence or power or principle but rather the Holy Spirit as a person must be preserved. (ii) It also must not be made lower than the second person of the Trinity. (iii) It must somehow be more accessible to man as the *paracletos* and wisdom, as the indweller. (iv) The term for Spirit must not make it pneumomonism – an exclusive but non-biblical emphasis on the third person of the Trinity. That means that it should not exclude the first and or the second person of the Trinity.

It is most interesting to see that of all the languages in the world it is Sanskrit which has the greatest abundance of words for the Spirit. So it is quite possible, the Indian philosophical and religious genius can provide a more adequate elucidation for the slippery category of the spirit. Professor Hengel of Germany once voiced that the greatest weakness of the German language is that it has no word for the 'spirit'. So the Germans somehow manipulate the word they use for the spirit also for reason, rational intellect, and yet understand it to mean spiritual things.

### *Terms for Man*

We saw the following: *atman, purusha, bhakta, manava, aham, ahamkara*. One problem we faced in the terms used for man is to preserve the finiteness of humanhood, in comparison with the Hindu advaitic infiniteness. The second problem was that the question of 'I' the person, should be preserved in its positive connection, while generally in Hinduism freedom is rather considered as a fall! And thirdly, the Gnostic idea that only spirit is good and matter is evil has tended to understand man only in his spiritual elements, so that the body does not play a real part. Another problem was the differentiation between self and soul — since as the popular understanding goes among Hindus, it is the self which is contaminated by sin while the soul remains pure. Recently I learned that the very concept of person, like of history, is a Christian contribution to the world. In fact, it is in dealing with the problems of christology (one person and two natures) and of trinity (one substance and three persons) that we find how crucial is our definition of the term 'person' for our theology.

### *Terms for Sin*

We saw one term which came to be used overwhelmingly is *karma*. Actually the only other term is of advaitic origin, *avidya*, ignorance. We also used words like *ahamkara* (selfishness), *agnana* (ignorance) for sin. But actually these represent certain particular sins rather than the principle of sin. The word *mala* meaning dirt was also used. But it is

surprising that the one word which most of the Indian languages use for sin was conspicuous by its omission — the term *papa*. The difficulties here were, of course, to see man as not only a sinner but sinful in nature. In addition, sin as belonging only to the realm of matter was discussed. We also saw that Hinduism does not have a sense of guilt for sin but rather for the shame of wrong. What was most conspicuous is the discovery that in Hinduism sin is not necessarily godward, as in the Bible.

### *Terms for Church and Sacraments*

*Sabha, samudayam, quam, ashram, math*, were some of the expressions. Some Indian languages have found great difficulty in finding an Indian equivalent and so they have retained the very Greek word *ecclesia* in their translation of the Bible. The problem here was whether the Church as an institution has any serious theological value. Thanks to the Hindu vedantic approach to God, man and the world, the corporate worship or life of the community of the church is definitely lacking. Surprisingly, there was not much difficulty in accepting the Christian ministry. There seems to be an unconscious transfer of the *sanyas* to the ministry of priests or clergy in Christian church. As far as the terms for the sacraments are concerned there are as many terms as there are Indian languages. Some of the languages have retained either baptism or eucharist, but more often than not they have used some rather very common expression indicating the Lord's Supper or initiation in baptism.

### *Terms for History*

I am sure we did not come across any particular Indian term, other than *charitra* or *itihasa* being used for history. Though we use the word *itihasa* or *charitra* or story in some other way, I do not think any of these terms have yet acquired a theological significance. That in itself is the problem, is it not?

### HOW DO WE USE THEM?

Actually the problem is that the terms one uses are entirely dependent on what line of thought one accepts. By

that we mean, since most of these terms are more or less part of a particularly Hindu philosophical or religious system, we cannot use them without these contexts. This requires us to study briefly also what different strands of Hindu thinking the Indian Christian thinkers have attempted to use as their vehicle.

### *Strands of Hindu Thought*

(i) Of course, the most obvious is the advaita strand. The reason behind Brahmabandhav or Surjit Singh accepting this line of thinking is that the advaitic categories are more comprehensive. But the problems encountered here were numerous. The impersonality of God, the unreality of the world, the status of Christ's deity the finiteness of man, the nature of salvation, and even the very concept of sin, just to mention a few.

(ii) The second strand was that of Ramanuja, the vishishtadvaita. As we have seen, it has certain marked advantages over advaita. But it has the tendency to make God or Christ too mundane and historical and empirical rather than eternal. Perhaps that is the reason why the vishishtadvaitins are accused by the advaitins as idolaters. In addition, what Rudolf Otto calls the gap – the *mysterium tremendum et numinosum* – between God and man is lacking in this type of strand. But many like Appasamy, have seen the *bhakti* tradition, coming in this strand, as the best suited to the Christian message. The reasons were, of course, that it speaks of grace, of a personal relationship, of obedience and faith and love and commitment, as well as it necessitates incarnation. As we saw, Klaus Klostermaier suggests that even the *bhakti* practices of *nama japa* and *kirtan* are good worship modes for the Christians.

You will notice that another vedantic interpretation, that of dvaita (dualism) is not used for communicating the Christian message. Perhaps you know that the whole question of duality between good and evil, light and darkness, really goes back to the Zarathushtrian duality between Ahriman and Ahura Mazda. Scholars are divided as to

whether Israel took their quality of good and evil and the eschatological implications of the final victory of God over the forces of evil from the Persians.

(iii) Of course there are many like Klostermaier, who did not advocate any one strand because they believed none of them are really adequate. We should rather use the richness of all the strands to express the message. Some have interpreted that this is what the Bible means when it says that all the riches of the nations will be brought to Zion. But we also saw the weakness of that. As Boyd pointed out, it will be difficult to avoid misunderstanding of the terms other than as used in their own strands.

### *Some Guidelines*

Many strands and the terms have been used by our Indian thinkers during the last 200 years. I suggest the following guidelines for using such indigenous categories and expressions:

(a) It is necessary that the Christian Church in India strives to use Indian modes of thought to express the Christian message. One must definitely analyze to what extent the western or the in-between missionary has brought into Indian Christian theology their cultural elements, and then to eliminate them. This is a long process.

(b) Having said that, we must also say we cannot do the same with the Jewish culture, because if we accept at all Old Testament as part of the word of God, then we must also accept it as normative for us. So what we need to do is to study the biblical culture and find counterparts in our own culture.

(c) Just because a term is found in all the languages (such as *karma* or *deva* or *bhagwan* etc.), it does not mean that it has the same connection or sense. Those who use the word *bhagwan* for God may be surprised to see others use the word *andavar* or still others to use the word *deva* or *ishwar* or *allah* or even *devi* or mother, as Narayan Vaman Tilak used. That is, it is not really so necessary to develop an

Indian Christian terminology as it is to develop Christian theology in particular languages or cultures – since here we are thinking mostly of terms and thoughts.

(d) I have noticed that in most of our Indian prayers we never use the word Brahman or such high sounding words. We use mostly words like *swami*, *prabhu*, *pita*, and so on. That is to say there are many words in our Christian usage, borrowed from the Indian cultures, which have been naturalized for such a long time that the new content of this is obvious even to the Hindus. All this goes to show that just as the early Christians let the Holy Spirit decide as to what the canon should be and only later endorsed it, I think we will be safer if we also let the Spirit guide us as to what terms and strands we must use for communicating the gospel to our Indian brothers and not to make such deliberate and conscientious efforts to create or apply the existing terms. Do we not believe that the Holy Spirit is able enough to guide even a weak church or a congregation, to guide into all the truth?

(e) Most of these contextualisations must take place in an evangelistic context. It is in speaking to real persons that issues arise and the Spirit will guide us as to what we should use. We will see later the example of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

### **SOME GUIDELINES FOR CONTEXTUALISING IN HINDU CULTURES**

As long as particular cultures, religions and ideologies exist contextualisation is a necessity. As long as there are more than five hundred millions from the Hindu background, this is the peculiar situation to which the gospel must address itself in India.

Notice that we are dealing in the plural – “in Hindu cultures”. As far as India is concerned, it is thoroughly pluralistic context. Hence one can speak only in the plural. Hinduism is an ocean, of many religions and cultures, morals and philosophies. One can of course distinguish

certain features common to all shades. At a popular level, the caste-system, the belief in *karma* and *punarjanma*, the worship of various gods and goddesses and festivals and pilgrimages in honour of them, observance of religious days and duties – these can be taken as the essence of Hinduism. Perhaps the greater influence of popular religious literature, such as *puranas* and epics and folklore can be added.

But the power and resilience of Hinduism through the millennia is to be found at another level – we could call it the spiritual level. Some key elements of this level are:

(a) A synthetic way of thinking. Reconciliation of opposites has always dominated the Indian mind. It is because of this that a Hindu is perfectly at home with atheism, pantheism, polytheism and monotheism, henotheism and demonism. Hindu thought can simultaneously accept the concept of *nirguna* and *saguna* Brahman (the brahman who is without qualities and cannot be known by man, and the one with qualities and hence can be known). Or, that atman can be one in substance with the brahman and yet is subject to *maya* (illusion) is no inconsistency to Hindus. They believe that this kind of truth can be grasped only by “intuition”, while contradictions belong to the rational level. That reality is one essentially, but only apparently many, is the philosophy (advaita) which is at the root of it all. Thus the well-known Hindu religious tolerance is a theological necessity for Hindus! In addition, such a logic has given Hinduism numerous philosophical systems, which are very rigorous and precisely worked out in all details, and co-exist to this day. The advantages of the Hindu way of thinking, however, include: paradoxical concepts like incarnation (fully God and fully man), inspiration (God’s and man’s word simultaneously and fully), the Union with Christ (not essential, neither moral, ethical . . .), can be easily comprehended by the Indians. The disadvantages are: mixing up good and evil, right and wrong, etc., one is left without a point of reference. This robs man of any sense of direction and action. The recent theological method developed by Asians,

called the Yin-Yang approach, is very closely related to this type of thinking, though it has many advantages over the Aristotelian (the law of contradiction) way of thinking.<sup>1</sup> Yet one must accept, as Boyd rightly observes,<sup>2</sup> the synthetic way of thinking is not the only way in India; in fact, the analogical and the analytical logics also are used for the Indian philosophical systems.

(b) An exclusive emphasis on spirituality. The renunciation of this world of society and material and physical things in preference for spiritual realization is a coveted high ideal in Hinduism. In fact, it is a religious requirement for every Hindu, that once he has satisfactorily completed the first three stages of his life namely *balashrama* (childhood), *brahmacharyashrama* (youth), *grihastashrama* (adulthood and marriage), he must go on to the final stage, that of *sanyasashrama* (renunciation). Such an ideal has caused the sprouting of many *ashrams*, *gurus*, *sadhus*, and *sanyasis*. It has led to the devaluation of this world and history and has encouraged a life of detachment. It has also led to the preference of individualism and spontaneity rather than organization and planning.

c) The all-compassing Hindu world-view, can be best summarized in the doctrines of *maya* and *karma-sansara*. *Maya* is the mysterious creative power which brahman possesses through which all changes, pluralities and qualities come into being; since brahman is without quality or potentiality *maya* is the illusion, *karma sansara* is the cycle of rebirths from which the individual soul (atman) wants to be liberated (*moksha*). Neo-Hindus, like Radhakrishnan and Gandhi have attempted to interpret *maya* so as to give reality and responsibility to earthly life. In particular, in the face of the struggle for freedom from the colonial British power and the task of nation-building following independence, it was necessary for these Hindu leaders to give meaning and reality to world, society and history by reinterpreting the classical meaning of *maya*; but thousands of years of indoctrination cannot be so easily counteracted.

(d) The ways of God. Another very widespread belief among the Hindus is that there are essentially three *margas* to God (ways): *karmamarga* (the way of action or duties), *bhaktimarga* (the way of personal devotion, submission) and *gnanamarga* (the way of wisdom, enlightenment). It depends on the type of personality as to which way one should choose *gnanamarga* is the highest while *karmamarga* is the lowest, conceptually speaking, but all ways lead to God.

These factors mentioned above reveal the magnitude of our task in contextualising the biblical message for India. That contextualisation is particularly necessary in India is best illustrated by Sunder Singh, the greatest Indian Christian of the century.<sup>3</sup> We in India do not just need to use Indian words for some foreign concepts. We need to make the biblical message so relevant to the Hindu's pre-understanding that he hears what the Spirit has to say to him through the Word. What are some of the special emphasis needed in India?

i) Religious authority. Both among the Indian Christians as well as Hindus the discussion concerning authority is very much alive. We discussed this in the first chapter. As we have seen, the three main pramanas *sruti*, *yukti*, and *anubhava* have been extensively used by Indians.

Sadhu Sunder Singh was careful to check that his experiences were no contradiction to the Bible. Brahmabandhav and Panikkar, as well as Appasamy to some extent, give the first place to the Church. The doctrines and authority of the Church have precedence. Chakkarai, Goreh and several others have given the Scriptures the first place as the supreme authority. Hinduism itself places *sruti* first, *anubhava* second and *yukti* third. In the face of excesses of Indian legalism (brahmanism) and occultism (*shakti* and *bhakti*), the one-sided emphasis either on the Scriptures or on the Holy Spirit in the Indian Christian theology will not meet. We need to stress the 'objective word' and the 'subjective Spirit' as equally, supreme authorities and necessarily together. Actually,

both comprise one single authority, as the two sides of the coin. It must be stressed in the Indian scene that inference, analogy and experience must all be judged by this two-edged divine authority. This is perhaps the only way to keep Indian Christian from 'bibliolatry', on the one hand, and *schwaermerei* (that is, an irrational movement, as of bees swarming) on the other.

(b) There is no other system which has influenced the Hindu mind more than the advaita system, that truth is ultimately one, monistic. (We are speaking here of course, of the cream of philosophical Hinduism). In this system, good and evil, right and wrong, life and death, etc. are necessary pairs (as in the Yin-Yang method), and so Hinduism leads one to a kind of universalism unimaginable in Christianity. In real sense it is a justification of evil, wrong and falsehood along with good and right and truth, like in the Hegelian system. Such a thinking leads not only to antinomianism but also to apathy, meaninglessness. In the face of this, it is imperative that the Christian Church in India lifts up the biblical picture of God as a holy God, who is of holier eyes than to behold evil. Most of the Hindu writers and thinkers accept without reservation the biblical idea of God as love, but what all of them miss is His holiness. The Bible portrays God as a jealous God, who does not give His glory to others! Without such an uncompromising emphasis on the holiness of God, the biblical message loses its cutting edge. The atoning death of Christ, the missionary enterprise, the ethical responsibilities and even the existence of the Church become unpalatable to Hindus. Thus the Church stands in constant danger of being absorbed by the vortex of Hinduism. That God is not love alone but holy love is the one strong foundation of which the Indian Church can be built up and be a strong witness to her Lord.

(c) The world and reality. Renunciation of this world has a great appeal in India because of the belief in *maya*, that this world of matter is an illusion or, at best a second-rate reality. Unless *maya* is drastically reinterpreted, Hindus do not have any basis for historical or ethical action. As we have

seen, this is what both types of neo-Hinduism of Radhakrishnan and Gandhi attempted to do.

Men, world, society, history will have meaning provided they are real. Hundred of thousands of *sadhus* and *sanyasins* have completely renounced this world of relationships precisely because of the reality of this world is negated. In such a scheme of things the Bible's message comes with a challenging relevance, when it discloses that this world is a creation of God and is the realm of His loving action on behalf of man. You remember Surjit Singh's theology, that it is precisely because of the resurrection of Christ that the body, the world and history have infinite significance in God's scheme of salvation. Man also is not only a creature, but one who is in the image of God. The doctrine of creation and providence have tremendous relevance to India.

(d) That man reaps what he sows, either in this birth or in the following ones, is the most universal belief of Hinduism. The religious zeal of Hindus can be explained only by this root motivation. The world for a Hindu is a prison, of his deeds and their consequences, and to get out of this prison is thus his only salvation, or goal — *mukti*. Justification by grace through faith is more relevant to Hinduism than perhaps to any other religions or ideological system! The one word the Hindus use most often is the word *shanti*, peace, which they strive to achieve by their own works. Peace with God which grace brings to the believers will be a most welcome message for them provided it is clearly shown to them with a challenging relevance. Perhaps the understanding of conversion, regeneration, sanctification, union with Christ do not make much sense with Hindus as compared with justification. Bruce Nicholls comments,

In the context of the Hindu notion *karma* and the total lack of assurance of salvation, I believe the recovery of justification by faith is one of the greatest needs in the formulation of an Indian Christian theology.<sup>4</sup>

(e) Fellowship. C.F. Andrews wrote, after interviewing many leading Indian Christians of his day, that in many cases the reason for their conversion was not a desire for

personal salvation, but rather the appeal of Christian brotherhood. He adds;

I do not imply that the sense of individual need for salvation is absent or that this experience is necessarily typical. But in such cases as these, the purely personal aspects develop later. The community is the primary concern.

It is the deep-rooted caste-system, where one's social and religious and even human status is determined by birth, which is the cause for driving thousands of Hindus out of the Hindu fold. During the last few years several hundred thousand harijans or the untouchable, casteless Hindus embraced Buddhism openly, declaring that it gives dignity and meaning. Many of the people movements in India were primarily among the harijans. It is obvious that the one thing they were looking for was this element of fellowship.

Hindu people are now fed up with the ritualistic and legalistic pictures of the Church. Nothing will attract them more than the *koinonia*, which is expressed in *leiturgia* and *diakonia*. We Indian Christians have failed most in showing this *koinonia* not with outsiders but with one another.

Have we Indian Christians fully realized the great truth in the Lord's saying, "If you have love for one another . . . the world will know that you are my disciple"? *Koinonia* is perhaps one of the most effective forms of witness for Christ. Would to God that he sends such a revival of the spirit from above and so unites the grain together, even throwing away the husk, that there be a sense of *koinonia* as never before, and so the whole continent of India comes to know that we belong to Christ.

(f) Power Encounter. We in India are deeply grateful that the gospel can be understood in terms of power.<sup>5</sup> Nothing seals the fruits of evangelism more than a power encounter with the force of darkness and the victory of the Holy Spirit over them. When one constantly sees among the neighbours the fear and bondage to evil spirits, and how the fear governs their total religious and social life, one is convinced that the message of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of power

brings liberation. We do not need so many organizers and organizations, not so much theologians and scholars as simple people filled and led by the Spirit. Among the Hindus nothing gives surer acceptance than the evidence of a Spirit far stronger than their own.

## GUIDELINES FOR INDIAN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

### A BIBLICAL MODEL

One of the most thrilling stories in the Bible about the leading of the Holy Spirit is the story of Philip – the first missionary to the Gentiles and the Ethiopian eunuch, the first Gentile convert. Philip, as you know, did not belong to the top twelve but rather to the serving seven. Yet he was so zealous in preaching Christ that he was called "the evangelist". The eunuch was neither a Jew nor a Samaritan but a Gentile worshipper of God. He belonged to a 'third world nation' of the time. He was so honest that he was made the minister in charge of the queen's treasury (it is of course true that the greatest need in the Indian Church is for well trained evangelical Christian leaders. Money is the other God, as Jesus said, and unless we have learned to overcome this idol worship we are still worshiping mammon.)

Actually, eunuchs were forbidden to worship in the temple, according to Deuteronomy 23:1. We do not know whether he was forbidden or was allowed to worship on account of status or even the long journey – probably he was allowed to worship. In any case he was having a portion of the scriptures in his mind and was reading it on his way back home.

Philip was directed to meet the eunuch on the way. The eunuch was reading, providentially, that part of the scripture which was well suited to speak about Christ. And the Spirit prompted Philip to join the chariot. He joined and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" "How can I", answered the Ethiopian, "unless someone guides me?" (Ac.8:31)

Now the Bible does not tell us exactly what Philip told the Ethiopian except that “beginning with this scripture he told him the good news about Jesus”. Neither do I want to re-create the whole of Philip’s message; but what I am driving at here is that what Philip did then is exactly the contextualization of the message of the gospel to the Ethiopian’s needs. In any case I am convinced that in our attempts to contextualise the gospel and concentrate on interpreting the scriptures, in telling others the good news of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will guide us, as we depend upon him. That is exactly what Philip did.

#### WHAT IS CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY?

Christian theology can be described as the articulation by a disciple of Christ of his understanding of the contents of the biblical revelation. Such an articulation is historically conditioned by several factors such as language, culture, socio-politico-economic conditions, the past inheritance and so on. So Christian theology must be contextual in the sense that it is shown to be relevant to these contexts.

Perhaps a better word to express the connections of indigenisation and contextualisation is relevance. Unfortunately it has no verb. The word comes from the Latin *relevare*, to raise up, relieve – from the notion of helping. Thus it is free of either geographical or situational connections. Perhaps one of the best usage of the term is by A.G. Hogg, his famous phrase “challenging relevance”. Herbert Jausingh uses the term somewhat naively to mean “speaking to a situation”.<sup>6</sup> Explicitly or implicitly such a relevance is a must in any theologizing. Otherwise no theology would have any cutting edge!

All systematic theologies, all confessions and dogmatics and all *summae* theologies are contextual too. This is why we have not one but many systematics, dogmatics and confessions: by Origen, Aquinas, Melancthon, Calvin, Berkhof, Tillich, Chakkarai, and a host of others, as well as confessions of different churches. The origin, the method of treatment, the issues dealt with and their emphasis or

de-emphasis, the principle of the system, are all so drawn as to be relevant to the context of the theologian – hence the plurality of these results.

You may be surprised to find that even biblical theology (or exegetical theology as some call it) is not all absolute; for in speaking to describe and classify the facts of the biblical revelation within the limits of biblical categories and times, it must use contemporary human language. Moreover, the criteria of classification are extra-biblical and are determined by the theologian himself. There may be greater agreement in biblical theology than, let us say, in dogmatics, but both have varied. Thus all theologies, as human expressions, are inevitably conditioned by, and therefore relevant to the theologian’s particular context.

There are three aspects involved in any valid contextual theology.

#### *Contextual theology is the contextualisation of the biblical revelation.*

This is based on the conviction that the Bible is “the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice” (Lausanne Covenant). So a contextual theology must primarily attempt to determine and interpret what the biblical authors wanted to say.<sup>7</sup>

A proper contextualisation does not philosophize the ‘gospel message’, into some abstract ideas like ‘self-giving love’, ‘man for others’, ‘liberation’, ‘shalom’, etc. Rather it concretizes such ideas in images and pictures portrayed in the Bible, and builds its tenets upon them. For example, instead of discerning an abstract Christ who is hidden in all religions, cultures, liberation movements and ideologies, a valid theology attempts to discover the Christ who is revealed in a concrete person, Jesus of Nazareth.

To take another example, instead of deducing the nature of the Church from its functions, which may be particularly useful to a human situation, a valid theology must start

with the biblical understanding of what the Church is and then deduce the function, and the form of the Church which express her nature – and so discover what the Church can do at a particular time.

The primary issue here, therefore, is not an understanding of an idea of Christ or the gospel in particular context. Theology is primarily an interpreting of the Bible or scripture in context. The Bible is thus the primary source, ultimate authority and foundation for it.

Such an affirmation has at least two implications.

(a) This high view of the Bible is a confession of faith. The Bible is given primarily as an object of faith and obedience. If God has spoken, how else can man accept his word if not by faith? No miracle can really replace the hand of faith – that is why Abraham told the rich man who was suffering in hell-fire, “if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31). Further the Bible exhorts, “be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). He who believes God’s word honours God. So faith is the only proper attitude towards the Bible. The result of all biblical research – exegetical, historical, critical, hermeneutical – entirely depends upon this attitude for its validity.

(b) Our faith attitude towards the Bible is also a confession of our human predicament, for it admits that both the human reason and experience, individual or collective, are impotent to grasp any true knowledge of God. All our logic, wisdom, memory, history, must be judged by the Bible. In matters pertaining to God all our faculties are bankrupt. As Paul says in Romans, “None is righteous, no not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one” (Ro. 3:10-12).

(c) Thus, in starting with the Bible, a valid contextualised theology recognizes human fallenness and looks away from

all human strivings and recognizes God as trustworthy and looks up to him.

### *Contextual theology depends on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit*

How can man understand if by nature he is fallen and incapable? Hence the *sola scriptura* principle is powerless without the presence and power of the Spirit (1 Co. 2:11). The Holy Spirit who has separated the sixty six books of the Bible by inspiration and fixed the canon, is also the one who interprets the recorded word relevantly in every situation. He is also the Spirit of truth and so leads them into all the truth. He is the power and criterion of all valid theology.

This second affirmation also has its implications.

(a) “For as yet as Spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet given glorified” (John 7:39). The scriptures abundantly clarify that the Spirit shall come in Jesus’ name (John 14:26). He shall bear witness to and glorify Jesus (John 15:26; 16:24) and remind the disciples of Jesus’ teaching (14:26). Even the conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment which the Holy Spirit brings to the world is concerning Jesus (16:7-11). Thus the content of theology is Jesus Christ and nothing else. “You search the scriptures because you think in them you find eternal life and it is they that bear witness to me”, said Jesus (John 5:39). The Bible is given in order that we may know him, and believing in him we may have life (Phil. 3:10; John 20:30, 31). Thus we proclaim Jesus, not any truth or wisdom. He is our truth, our life, our way, wisdom, redemption and goal. “In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him . . . for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:16ff). And so we look forward for the day when “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10-11).

(b) It is precisely because of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit that a valid Christian theology is also the theology by the whole Church. For to each of us is given a variety of gifts "by the Spirit for the common good". So none of us knows the truth, i.e. Christ, fully – but only partly, for at best we can see only through a glass, as it were. The variety of the gifts is for the purpose of "building up the body of Christ" and therefore, "we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together, . . . makes bodily growth and upholds itself in love" (Eph. 4:12, 15, 16). Across all the barriers of time and space, race and nation, language and culture, we as the body of Christ encourage and correct one another. We need one another. All church traditions and persuasions which are built upon the above two affirmations though seemingly sectarian, are at a deeper level "eager to maintain the unity of spirit" (Eph. 4:3). Both at universal and local levels therefore all Christian theology is the articulation by the church of her knowledge of and devotion to the Lord Jesus.

Evangelical contextual theology needs to build upon firm foundation of the Bible and the divine power behind it. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7 etc.).

*The ultimate goal of evangelical theology is worship and the glorification of God*

In whatever way our doctrines are formulated, be it the Bible or the Holy Spirit, faith or sin, Christ or the Church – all must lead to the glory of God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. Of course, our theologies have objectives such as leading people to Christ, planting churches and edification of the believers to grow into the maturity of the fullness of the stature of Christ. But all this must be done with the ultimate goal of glorifying God the Father. Any other goal is atheological and hence anti-theological. Our first wish in prayer is always, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done . . ." (Matt. 6:9,10). And our final item is even the same: "Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanks-

giving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever!" (Rev.7:12).

The implications of this are :

(a) The above seven-fold doxology is based on the three-fold revelation of God as the creator, sustainer and consummator of all things. Hence, he is the source, support and end of man too. Though everything that is, is by him and for him since he is holy he cannot be made the author of evil, for he is of holier of eyes than to behold evil! But not only is he holy but also holy love. Thus he sustains all things, including man, through all situations, including the situation of the evil one. In this way we should speak of providence as redemptive providence, instead of as creative providence (as some have affirmed). He is also almighty and so can consummate what he has begun hence our assurance is God and God alone! "Holy, holy holy is the Lord God Almighty who was, and is and is to come!" (Rev. 4:8).

(b) It is surprising that in spite of all the difference in their understanding of man, anthropologists agree on one thing – that man is what he is only when he is before God. Thus, instead of making our theology anthropocentric, as many have already attempted, evangelical theology tries to understand man from God's point of view. Hence anthropology must necessarily follow theology. It is not our self-understanding which is crucial, but rather God's understanding of us. Only when we know that God is holy love can we speak of the redeemed man, new creation. For "what is man that thou art mindful of him and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" (Ps. 8:4)

To summarize, evangelical theology has at least three essential characteristics. Based upon the Word, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, it serves and glorifies God, All three elements are equally essential and fundamental.

Without the Word, the natural desire we have to worship leads to mysticism, and the sensitivity to the Spirit we have brings conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment. This was the case with Cornelius. It may lead to seekers, but it

leads also to judgment, hopelessness and fatalism. Unless the word, that is the word of grace, is spoken, there is no redemption.

But without the Holy Spirit, our natural desire to worship can become dry and dogmatic, like the Pharisees who had a form of godliness but lacked the power thereof. And we may even have the Word without the Spirit, but then we get mixed with words and philosophies (like Hegel, Schleiermacher) and this may lead to dogmatism and schism.

Only the Bible, without the Spirit and the supreme goal to worship God may lead to worship of the creature rather than the creator. In fact to self-worship and even to ideologies (Utopia or Christo-marxism). Only the presence of the Holy Spirit, without the Word and the supreme desire to glorify God may lead to false worship which is not worship in truth – to occultism, animism, and spiritism. And only the goal of worshipping God without both the Spirit and the Word, will of course lead to error – lacking both the power and the Word of God – to heresies, ritualism and religions.

Thus it is of crucial importance that evangelical theology must always keep all three basic elements intact and in balance.

Whatever the terms, the genuine concern behind the contextualisation debate is a step forward in the sense that it has made us realize the inadequacy of the both the terms in their traditional connection. Indigenisation as a process of relating the gospel to a culture, and contextualisation as relating the gospel to a secular situation – both are outdated. Because, as Bruce Nicholls shows, a person's pre-understanding is not based on either of these alone, or even both taken together. There are other factors which also decisively influence the interpreter's/receiver's pre-understanding. The expansion of one term to include the other has not really clarified the issues. Perhaps new terminologies and new approaches are needed. In any case, though it may seem arbitrary, I have chosen the term contextualisation to express our concern here, partly because it frees one from geographical and political overtones.

Thus contextualisation is meant here as the process of showing the Bible to be meaningful/relevant to the receiver in whatever culture/context he may be, in order that he may truly discover what the Bible has to say to him. The main concern here is to take the total pre-understanding of the hearer into consideration and not just one aspect such as culture, ideology etc.

## BEYOND CONTEXTUALISATION

Our above definition has several implications

(a) In order to present the good news of Jesus Christ to those of the Hindu fold, Indian Christians are compelled to go beyond both cultural and theological contextualisation in modern India. There are some who consider only the religious aspects as the relevant sphere, while others deal only with the ideological aspect. Thus far a wholistic contextualisation, taking into consideration the total pre-understanding of the receptor, has not been attempted in India – at least no concerted effort is seen.

(b) Perhaps of even greater weight is the fact of the "coming world culture". Whether we like it or not we are being caught up in "the current of the single world history" which is huddling us together as neighbours to one another in "one global village". This is a new fact, particular to our time. Perhaps as in other parts of the world, also in India it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify what a Hindu culture is. As the cross-fertilization of ancient cultures is steadily preparing for the one world culture it is also de-culturizing many aspects of them. Like many others, the modern Indian is in a cultural vacuum, or at least in a multi-cultural situation. Will it not be more meaningful and more fruitful if instead of only a cultural approach, we also add a person-to person approach in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ?

(c) Empirically, it is this exciting realisation of the imminent unity of mankind, the "one world" ideology which is sweeping everywhere, which makes us Christians depend

upon one another as never before in past church history. The number of inter-denominational activities and conferences in our time so outweighs the denominational ones that it is a truism to speak of the ecumenical character of our contextual theologies. The historical distinctions may continue, yet we have all amply realised that we need one another across denominations and persuasions, across political, economic, racial and ideological barriers. After all we are one body and have one spirit, one faith, one Lord and one hope. Not only does the west need the east and the north need the south, but we of the Two-Thirds World need the First World brethren. Any evangelical theology in any culture needs henceforth to re-state itself in the light of these above inter-contextual factors. Otherwise it will not be a relevant theology. Though the scriptures belong to a particular historical context and culture the biblical message is universal. Christian, secular and other religious ecumenisms of our time are clarifying this truth to us very effectively.

#### TOWARDS APOLOGETICS OR DOGMATICS?

(d) The consolidation of theology into confessions or dogmatic or systematics or *summae* is necessitated on account of heresies and controversies. Looking at the Indian scene at a time when the production of theologies is increasing rapidly, one reluctantly agrees that a time for such a consideration has come. One is overwhelmed by the scholarly (doctoral) monographs written, or being written, by Indian Christians – let alone by the literature churned out at the popular level. But it is another question how much of this bulk is evangelical or how long any system will last in our fluid situation.

This means at least one thing: One great need in the Indian Church, even for the sake of her mission, is what St. Paul calls *diakrisis* – the dividing of the spirits or the discerning of the spirits. Partly due to historical reasons (colonialism, denominational rivalry, the intoxication of the nationalistic spirit in the pre-independence era, the Church Union movements etc.) and partly due to our cultural

background (the synthetic way of thinking, the pluralistic situation, the need for a united front against communal opposition, Hindu/Muslim/Buddhist counter-missions etc.) Indian Christians have set aside theological differences in the name of unity and service, survival and growth. But now at long last we must realize the seriousness of these differences. They are as great as the gulf between the unknown Christ of Hinduism and Jesus Christ of the New Testament; between action groups to break down inhuman structures and the fellowship of believers for worship and witness; between vedic *Sruti* and biblical revelation. It is time that the evangelicals discern the spirits and take a stand.

We also recognize gratefully that such efforts are on the increase. What is needed in the Indian Church now is not so much loyalty to various organisations such as EFI, NCCI, etc. or to denominations and institutions like CISRS, UTC, UBS, etc., but cutting across all these, a loyalty to the Lord of the Bible. Such cases are to be found, we are thankful, more and more.

Though the need for developing theologies relevant to various Hindu contexts is no less now than before, the simultaneous need for an evangelical confession/consolidation is also increasing. Systematics or dogmatic are not so irrelevant as many seem to think.

In a nutshell, our theology must also edify the Indian Church beyond the legitimate task of equipping her for evangelistic efforts. Only when the Church is so built up can she be the base for missionary outreach. Evangelical theology is therefore more than evangelistic theology or a theology of mission, or even a theology of the church. It must aim at the contextualisation of the comprehensive biblical message – as we have already seen in other lessons, the whole counsel of God.

#### THE MESSAGE OR THE MESSENGER?

(e) In our effort to develop a relevant theology there are also factors which are more significant than the theology itself.

The biggest hindrance to the Church of Jesus Christ in India is not outside her but inside – the very lives of those of us who are called the disciples of Christ, what Stanley Jones calls “the Great Hindrance”. Gandhi once said, “if you call one of us a Christian man he is complimented, but if you call him a Christian, he is insulted.” Hindus have time and again told us very frankly that if we Christians lived a little more like Jesus Christ or practiced a little of what we preach, the process of conversion would have gone on far more rapidly. The following conversation between Stanley Jones and Gandhi, the greatest representative of and the most influential among the Hindus, is revealing:

In conversation with him one day I said, “Mahatma Gandhi I am very anxious to see Christianity naturalised in India, . . . what would you suggest that we do to make that possible?” He very gravely and thoughtfully replied: “I would suggest, first, that all of you Christians, missionaries and all, must begin to live more like Jesus Christ . . . Second, I would suggest that you practice your religion without adulterating or toning it down . . .”

This brings us directly to the next point: we should concentrate more on preparing the messengers than the message itself. If we look back to the story of Philip, we realise how contrasting were the missionary and the native, the preacher and the hearer. But the preacher was so thoroughly prepared by the Holy Spirit in Samaria, in serving the tables, that he finds it no problem to contextualise the message to the Eunuch – it was a complete success. Also the messenger is already on his way to the next assignment after the Eunuch’s baptism. It is a story of the messenger. Every time we stand up for the sake of the Lord, may He grant us his grace, and prepare us and the hearers, rather than the message.

Finally, we need Philip’s sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit – and more we need the presence of the Holy Spirit. Nothing less than a visitation by the Spirit of God is the solution or India, for the Indian Church.

## NOTES

1. Jung Young Lee, “The Yin-Yang way of Thinking: A Possible Method for Ecumenical Theology”, in *Mission Trends* No. 3, pp. 29-38.
2. *ICT*, pp. 231-233.
3. Once when he was traveling in Rajputan he saw a brahman hurrying to the railway station. Exhausted by great heat, he fell down on the platform. The Anglo-Indian station master, anxious to help him, offered him water. Although the brahmin was thirsty he refused it. “I cannot drink that water. I would prepare to die”, he said. “I am not asking you to eat the cup”, the station master chided him. “I will not break my caste”, replied the brahmin, “I am willing to die.” When, however, the water was brought to him in his own brass vessel, he drank it eagerly. It is the same with the Water of Life. Indians do need the water of Life but not the European cup. This is well expressed.
4. Contextualization, p. 54.
5. Once with a German friend I had long discussions about the authority of the Bible. He could not see how the Bible can be the supreme authority. In desperation, I told him, “If you want to see how the Bible is powerful, you just come to India and see how the gospel works as a power against the evil powers everywhere.” A tree is known by its fruits, Jesus said.
6. Herbert Jaisingh, “Toward a Relevant Gospel in India”, in *Indian Voices in Today's Theological Debate*, Lucknow Publishing House, Lucknow, 1972, pp. 125-142.
7. Bruce Nicholls says, “The purpose of this method is to discover what the biblical writer said, and it must be distinguished from the more speculative historical-critical method which aims to discover the author’s intention”. See *Contextualisation: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*, p. 49. I am indebted to this booklet for many of the insights here.

## APPENDIX

### The importance of writing Biographies

We are indeed very much indebted to Dr. Kaj Baago for producing under the research plan of the United Theological College, Bangalore, an anthology of Indian Christian writing. This is a good, though by no means exhaustive collection. As you read through the collection, one dominant feature is that the biographies of Indian Christian saints are lacking. This is not to say that there are none of them; there are of course. But I am convinced that there is a greater majority of saints whose biographies are not written.

There are varied reasons for this: (a) Following the oriental logic one is not supposed to say anything bad about those who are dead and gone (perhaps that has to do with ancestral worship?) except in eulogies. (b) Lacking a sense of history perhaps our Indian mind is less inclined to put down the facts or even to interpret them with a definite purpose. (c) Since Christianity came to India through the western colonialism and was already an established religion in western countries for several centuries, there seems to be an unconscious idea in the Indian mind that only Saint Francis or Saint Teresa are saints in India. (d) Finally, what Jesus said also is true. Since a prophet is without respect in his own country, those who know him best tend to remember rather the working side of the person. The right side is often forgotten, hence its usefulness to the wider world is gone.

If you read some of the Puranas or Hindu literature, and then turn to the Bible, one of the most striking features is that even about the great patriarchs like Abraham or David or Jacob the Bible is very realistic in picturing their character. It does not hide their mistakes. In fact, I remember as a young Christian this aspect greatly impressed me concerning the truthfulness of the Bible.

But what I am driving at is this. The Bible itself has several biographies written. If the gospels were not written you would not have known about Jesus now. The famous list of the faith giants in Hebrew 11 is a grand cloud of witnesses which can edify us even today. Just think how much poorer our under-

standing of God's relationship with man would be if we did not have the records of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, or Moses running away to Libya, Hannah's dedication of Samuel, Queen Esther's devotion to her people, Job's suffering and his fighting with God, Daniel in the den of Lions, Paul's conversion and missionary journeys, and dozens of other biographies.

It is wrong to think that biographies are written only for self-glory. On the contrary they are written with the express purpose of glorifying God; that what God's grace has wrought in others can also work in me and encourage and edify and strengthen me in my Lord's service. Thus one of the main reasons why throughout history several saints' lives and ministries have been recorded is that they edify the church universal. Is not God really glorified through the faith and commitment and life of his servants?

But this education is two fold. It not only helps us to follow where the saints have trod, but it also helps us to avoid the mistakes they have done. For example, David's adultery, Jacob's deception, Peter's denial are still strong warnings to us today. Actually speaking, church history is the story of God's people.

Right now I am involved in corresponding with senior Christians all over the land to collect some of the unknown Christians' biographies. Some of the things I have discovered are most illuminating. I hope some day to publish them. But it is most encouraging to see that in the recent decade several anthologies of Indian Christian saints have appeared. If you come across any of these biographies I will be grateful if you can kindly write to me or even send a copy of that to me or let me know the address where they are available. If you know of any unwritten stories, you could tell me also. Perhaps we can share it for the benefit of other Christian Indian brothers and sisters. Thank you.

**ADDRESS:**

Dr. Sunand Sumithra  
Theological Book Trust  
54, MIG. Colony  
Koramangala, Bangalore- 560095.