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VENGAL CHAKKARAI (1880-1958)

Vengal Chakkarai is considered by some as the only systematic theologian from the Indian continent. He belongs to the well known trio of theologians – Appasamy, Chenchiah and Chakkarai.

He was born in Madras in a rich Chettiar family. His father was a Vedantin, while his mother was a devout Vaishnava *bhaktini*. He received his early education in Christian institutions: Scottish Mission school and Madras Christian College, where he came under the influence of William Miller. He studied the Bible himself and through the friendship of Miller he was helped gradually to a personal experience of Christ. What really mattered most to Chakkarai in his conversion was the cry of dereliction on the cross by Jesus, “My God, My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?” He deduced from this that any man who should cry like that must really be divine. As you have already noticed the person of Jesus Christ touches different people in different ways!

He made public profession of his faith and was baptized in 1903. Though qualified as a lawyer, he worked in the evangelistic department of the Danish Missionary Society in Madras, among educated Hindus. Yet as early as 1906 he became a patriot throwing himself passionately into the national struggle against the British. In 1907 he joined the Home Rule Movement and in 1920 he supported Gandhi’s non-cooperation campaign. Later he also took active part in the Labour movement. He became one of the best known Christians and was elected Mayor of Madras in 1941. In 1951 he served as the Chairman of the All India Trade Union Congress.

Along with Chenchiah, his brother-in-law, he was one of the founders of the Madras group known as the *Christo*

Samaj. Later he started a paper, *The Christian Patriot*, and became its editor. Most of his theological writings were published in this periodical. He was also one of the chief architects of the group called "The Rethinking Group". This was rather an informal group and is known by that name because they all produced a most significant book under the title, *Rethinking Christianity in India*. This you can find in the rare-book shelf of a few seminary libraries.

His writings include *Jesus the Avatara*, his magnum opus; *The Cross and the Indian Thought*, and numerous articles over the years in *The Christian Patriot*.

Chakkarai's Theology

GOD AS THE MANIFEST

For Chakkarai, theology cannot begin with some abstract *nirguna* (qualityless) or *avyakta* (unmanifested) Brahman. We must begin with the manifest, i.e., *Ishwara*. This means that we must begin with Christ himself and indeed as Jesus Christ. This approach is the Indian way of doing Christology from below. So he calls it the doctrine of the Christhood of God. In Jesus, the *Deus Absconditus* (hidden God) has become *Deus revelatus* (the revealed God). If there is any aspect of God which is not to be found in Jesus, then, Chakkarai asserts, it is simply non-existent for us. This is another way of saying what Paul says in Colossians, that in Christ the fullness of Godhead dwells bodily. And how do we know this Christ? Chakkarai's answer is: through a personal experience. Christ is now Emmanuel or God with us. He thinks not of the divine immanence but of the human immanence of Christ. As such Christ is alive today and it is possible for men to know him and love him. It is the very person of Christ, seated in the lotus of the human heart, who is *antaryami*. In a picturesque language Chakkarai describes it: "In the picture of Jesus the express image of the invisible has found his own soul. The painter and the picture are one."¹

In all this Chakkarai is attempting to answer the school of Albert Schweitzer which was very influential at the time.

It was very negative and skeptical about the historical value of the gospels and their picture of Jesus.

Though Chakkarai understands Christ as the *mula purusha* (root man, first man) or even as the true man, yet he does not understand Jesus Christ to be metaphysically one with the Father in any monist sense, but as one who lived in communion with the Father. Jesus is *satpurusha*, the true man, in the sense that there is no influence of *maya* on him, while all the rest of us are so influenced by it. That is why Satan could not be successful in tempting Jesus. As such, for Chakkarai, Christ's sinlessness is not because of his metaphysical divinity, but a dynamic sinlessness which is the free choice of his own free will. In the self-giving of himself on the cross, this sinlessness comes to its fullest manifestation. And Chakkarai takes pains to stress that even today the knowledge of God is through Jesus alone. Jesus was not only *avatara* 2000 years ago. Even now he is still the *avatara*. Incarnation did not end with crucifixion but is a permanent *avatara* and it is still advancing today.

The Jesus of history is to us the *avatara* of God, but incarnation whose real significance we are trying to grasp from the standpoint of Indian thought, was not a static product which admitted of no growth.²

Thus these are the two elements in Jesus' incarnation: it is both permanent and dynamic. Very interestingly, he says that not only did the incarnation mean a new phase in the life of man, but also in the life of God. To explain this we have to turn to Chakkarai's pneumatology.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

For Chakkarai the work of the Holy Spirit is the continuing part of the incarnation or *avatara* of Christ. Actually he identifies the Spirit with the risen living Christ, at work in the world today. His biblical basis for this is John 14:18: "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you". At the Pentecost this promise was fulfilled. He observes: "The historical is the primary element in the western interpretation." (that is, concentration on the Jesus of Nazareth), but

“the spiritual is or will be the primary element in Indian conception” (that is concentration on the Holy Spirit). So he says: “It is from the Holy Spirit, our *antaryamin*, the indweller, that we start our inquiry concerning the nature and work of the person of Jesus”. Elsewhere he very directly says: “The Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ himself taking his abode within us . . . The starting point in the consciousness of the Christian disciple is that the Holy Spirit is Jesus himself.”³

Obviously this dilutes the doctrine of the orthodox Trinitarianism.

While Vivekananda went about interpreting Christianity in terms of Vedanta, Chakkarai goes the other way round. He thinks Vedanta can be really understood only in the light of the Christian gospel:

The *Mahavakya: tat tvam asi* is a tremendous assertion of the possibility. In Christian *anubhava* it is not a mere metaphysical postulate to start with or to end in. It is not a mere achievement, a *sambhava*. This advaita has been wrought on the anvil of the life of Jesus.⁴

Thus except for the metaphysical union of *atman* and *paramatman* he has re-interpreted advaita in order to suit to the life of Jesus.

THE CROSS

What does Chakkarai understand about the cross of Christ? He would not accept the theory of vicarious suffering, though he holds that the way to communion with God is definitely through the Cross. Rather than penal substitution he tends to adopt the Christus-Victor theory, since he understood Christ as being the Victor on a battlefield, fighting against the evil forces, the powers and the principalities of the air. Sometimes he even speaks of the death of Christ as a sacrifice, but somewhat in a Hindu fashion.

How does man respond to the Cross? Here Chakkarai follows the Gita, where *karma marga* and *jnana marga* are found to be inadequate and *bhakti marga* is portrayed as the solution. He thinks that *bhakti*, or an intense and loving attachment to the risen Christ, is the proper human re-

sponse. The Jews followed the *karma marga*, the Greeks followed the *jnana marga* but Christians must follow the *bhakti marga* as far as Christ is concerned. Though this comes nearest to the Pauline understanding of faith as appropriation, yet there is no clear indication how the justification is wrought by faith.

MAN'S PERSONALITY: SELF-EMPTYING

There is one section where he talks of anthropology, specially in relation to man as personality. He thinks that the whole concept of 'person' is not actually biblical, but comes from the Latin *persona* and is very different from the Greek *hypostasis*. He thinks the western scientific attitude has limited personality to that of individuality, and has raised it to “the supreme excellence of man” This “sickly growth of the ego” must be stopped. When we see Jesus as the one who has completely eliminated the *aham*, ego, and has become one with God, then we can enter into communion with him. This is the type of *kenosis* (emptying) we have already seen earlier, that on the cross Christ gave his self:

Christ ignored and denied his self altogether . . . he destroyed self, and as self ebbed away heaven came pouring into the soul, for nature abhors a vacuum . . . hence as soon as the soul is emptied of self divinity fills the void.

Thus he understands Christ as “the most egoless person known in history and therefore the most universal of all.” Here he bases his argument on Hebrew 5:8 and Philippians 2:7 which speaks of the learning by obedience through suffering, and the emptying of himself. To him the historical Jesus was in the ego. But the risen Jesus ceased to be a human being. He became the universal Spirit; hence we can worship him as God since he is no more a human being.

Here he comes to the innermost of the cry of Christ on the Cross. When Jesus was on the Cross, he was stripped of everything. But still he was holding on to God as Father and himself as the beloved Son. But when he cried even that last straw of security was gone and he was where no god is. “He plunged into the *nirvana* or *suniyam* where god is not”.

This was indeed the depth of *kenosis* and nobody can go deeper than the absence of God, as Jesus.

HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY

What does he think of Hindu religion and its relation to Christianity? Like many of his contemporaries, he also thinks that Hinduism is a preparation for Christ. Since the God who reveals himself to man is the same everywhere he believes that He whom the *rishis* of old saw is also the God of the Bible, and will not wipe away all of Hinduism. That is why Indian Christianity must take the contribution of Hinduism seriously. This is the reason why his writings are full of Sanskrit terminology. However, one feels that just the mere use of Sanskrit terms does not really give a Christian content into them.

Evaluation

I think it is easier to evaluate Chakkarai than others for the simple reason that he concentrates exclusively on Jesus Christ. In one way this is a true approach. But as he does not go into other essentials of the Christian gospel, such as the Church, for example, his theology is rather a beginning than a whole system of doctrines. This is to be regretted all the more, since from such a fertile mind more could be expected. His view of Scripture is no doubt very orthodox, and he takes it as verbally true.

But his view of equating the Holy Spirit with Jesus is indeed disturbing. Of course in the history of the Church the Trinity arose by way of accepting Jesus' deity and only later Nicene Creed was the deity of the Holy Spirit recognised. In any case the real question about the Trinity is not so much Holy Spirit or Jesus, but actually it is a question of terms: What do we mean by person, substance and essence?

As we evaluate any theologian, let us keep the criterion always in mind: How far does one's theology lead one to a saving faith in Christ?

P. CHENCHIAH (1886-1959)

Chenchiah is considered the most creative and original among the Indian Christian theologians. For this reason, perhaps, the summary given in Boyd is a little difficult to grasp at the first reading. We will therefore study him with the help of extracts from *The Theology of Chenchiah* (CLS, 1966) by D.A. Thangasamy. We will not repeat here the background of Chenchiah's life and especially the influence on him of Sri Aurobindo and the guru 'master CVV'. You can read this in Boyd. These influences are important. The following summary evaluation of Chenchiah is taken from *Revolution as Revelation*, p.51:

Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1959), is the most creative Indian Christian thinker of our time. Following the biblical and evolutionary language of the time, Chenchiah takes Jesus Christ to be the starter of a new era of a new stage in the process of evolution. For him, Jesus Christ is thus the *adipurusha* (original man) of a new creation. For, "in Jesus, creation mounts a step higher". He is more interested in the *fact* of Jesus rather than the *act* of Jesus; hence he repeats that we are saved not by the acts but by the fact of Jesus. Having been committed to a philosophy of evolution, it is difficult for Chenchiah to accept the doctrine of the Fall: he could not accept that human history should start so negatively. As such, salvation is not redemption nor reconciliation, but simply "reproducing Jesus", by means of our essential (*sayyujya*) union with him. In this existential and individualistic approach, clearly there is no place for either the tradition (including Old Testament) or for the corporate Church. He could hence say that Christianity took the wrong turn when it accepted the institution of the Church. He sincerely strove to prove the continuity between Christianity and Hinduism, as that of old with the new.

Chenchiah's basic theological convictions are helpfully summarized by Thangasamy under 6 headings:

1. The Raw Fact of Christ the only Absolute
2. The Person and work of Jesus Christ
3. New Creation
4. Christ in Relation to Christianity, Church and Scripture
5. Christianity and Hinduism
6. The secular Mission of the Church.

The Raw fact of Christ: The only Absolute

Chenchiah distinguished clearly between 'two views of the task of theology in India – one broad and the other narrow'. He says

The broad view holds that the only fixed immovable absolute centre in Christianity is the fact of Christ and place Christian experience and faith in the relative sphere and sets theology the task of renewing direct experience of Jesus. Believing that God's training to different nations in different ways enables them to see new features and appropriate new powers in Jesus, not hitherto appropriated by others, this view assigns to theology the function of building with new experiences and powers, new structures of faith. The other view working with three absolutes of unchangeable core, unalterable faith and essential deposit, allots to theology the limited function of translating the fixed faith into a variety of languages, seeking proper ideas and words to express the three absolutes. The province of theology shrinks and expands according as you believe there are three absolutes or one in Christianity.⁵

Chenchiah accepted only one absolute in Christianity, namely, 'the raw fact of Christ'. He fought a relentless battle against the absolutisation of 'doctrine and dogmas, worship and ritual, mysteries and ceremonies'; for they 'gather round till at last the bright nucleus gets enveloped by a huge globe of tradition and testimony'. He said, 'Jesus is beyond creeds, churches and they cease to point to Him and at best only point to Him.' But they cease to point to Him, when 'the Church judges the words of Jesus by the words of the creed'. Chenchiah sounded the trumpet of freedom to accept, reject, reinterpret or modify every doctrine of the Christian churches, no matter how long and how universally it may have been held.

Let it be clearly understood that we accept nothing as obligatory save Christ. Church, doctrine and dogma, whether from the West or from the past, whether from Apostles or from modern critics, are to be tested before they are accepted.⁶

We must underline that in the above quotation, Chenchiah considers even the apostolic interpretations of Jesus Christ on the same level as church doctrines and dogmas. Or again:

We can call the New Testament a revelation only in the secondary sense inasmuch as it contains the results of the earliest study of the Revelation of the fact of Jesus. Revelation is not, as Christians and Hindus believe, the speech or word of God. It is the creation. God reveals in the stream of Creation. No explanation exhausts the fact, no exposition can be final. Jesus may be found but no interpretation of him could be final. There can be no unalterable dogma or doctrine of Christianity.⁷

Chenchiah was not unaware of the historical and intellectual difficulties involved in trying to extricate the simple and authentic facts of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ from the theological convictions that had become bound up with them even through the manner in which incidents and utterance had been selected and clothed in language. He knew quite well the argument that it was the early Church that processed the Gospels for half a century before they were released to the world. Chenchiah maintained that for the discerning eye and the devoted heart the core of the Gospel, devoid of doctrinal accretions, was not difficult to find.

In fact, for Chenchiah, rethinking Christianity in India was not primarily an intellectual or even a 'theological' task. Nor was it even to be thought of as a task, but rather as the thrust of the two great urges of the Indian Christians –

A desire for direct contact with Jesus (*prathyaksha*) an aspiration for rebirth, to be born a Son of God in the image of Jesus (*Punarjanma*). It is not so much a desire to be a Christian i.e. a follower of Christ, as to be identified with Christ – for *sayyujya* [with the highest certainty] with Jesus, a longing that made Paul to say, "I no longer live, but Christ in me."⁸

It is as a corollary to these twin urges that Chenchiah calls upon Indian Christians that their theological enterprises should be one of rethinking Christ himself and not only 'the substance or content of faith'. Chenchiah was deeply conscious of the revolutionary implications of such direct experience of Christ and reflection on it. He wrote, "A man who comes in contact with the raw fact of Christ, if we may say so, upsets law and order."⁹

So Chenchiah strove to explore behind 'creeds, churches and scriptures', seeking to discover new dimensions of meaning in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. He did so against the background of India. He was conscious of two realities in this background – the long and unbroken Hindu religious tradition of the people and their contemporary struggles to build a new state and society. He spoke of the need to reconstruct Christianity in the light of Hinduism, to approach the Hindu mind and to recover some aspects of Jesus not seen in the Western traditional history of Christianity.

He was conscious also of the need of exploring the meaning of Christ in the light of the political and social struggles of contemporary India.

We have explored the implications of the two ideas relating to Jesus, namely the value of Christhood as propitiation and reconciliation as well as the meaning of Christ to the individual. But we have to discover the purpose and achievement of our Lord in the redemption of the social order or in his relation to the cosmic revolution. The enquiry bears intimately on the new powers imperatively needed by us in our conflicts in society and state.

The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

For Chenchiah Christianity begins with Jesus Christ and not with Genesis or even with God. Writing about a conference on Christology held at Jabalpur during the visit of Dr. Brunner to India in 1949, he said that one of the points of agreement reached at that Conference had been 'that Christology should govern theology and not *vice versa* as hitherto'.

THE PERSON OF JESUS

According to the outlined suggestion, the new lines of thought that Indian Christian should pursue were listed in an Editorial in the *Pilgrim* in June 1950 as follows:

1. The discovery and recovery of Pauline theology of incarnation as new Adam.

2. The working out of theology of the Son of Man in contrast with the traditional theology of Son God, and

3. Linking Incarnation firmly with Resurrection rather than with the Cross.

The Church has not understood the real significance of incarnation. In Jesus God has come down to us to abide with us for ever as a new cosmic energy. But the church has made of Jesus an object of worship, made him 'absolute', and placed him on the right hand of God in heaven. But Jesus as portrayed in the records is less than God. He says so explicitly (John 14:28). We wish to make him the very God – Transcendent and Absolute. The Jesus of the Gospels transcends the measure of man: we try to make Him the very man. He presents us a harmonized picture of God-Man – not merely hyphenated God-man.¹⁰

God's assumption of humanity, including the body, was a permanent one, and from now on, Jesus is the power of God and the first fruit of a new creation, a divine humanity, transcending mankind. In this connection Chenchiah makes a clear distinction between the Hindu and Christian views of the Incarnation; and in fact his criticism of Barthian theology is precisely that it is more akin to the Hindu than the Christian view. He says,

Incarnation is perfected human body receiving the full divinity of God into permanent integration. (It is essential for our doctrine of incarnation to hold that Jesus assumed body permanently as the consummation of creative human process). In Indian Christian theology Jesus belongs to man and even though he may sojourn in heaven. He will return to earth for here lies his home. A type of Christian theology approximates his function to that of Hindu *avatar*. The Son became Jesus to offer his life on the Cross as propitiation and went to his home in Heaven after His mission was fulfilled. In that case incarnation will be an adventure, an interlude in the Eternal Son's life, leaving no permanent deposit on earth or in heaven. He assumed the body for a purpose and when it was over, he assumed his former status. Our conception of the Son of Man radically differs from this. Jesus, on the view controverted, does not remain unchanged. He reverts to his place as Second person in Trinity . . . Indian Christian theology probes deeply into the meaning of the fact that Jesus ascended into heaven as Jesus and never resumed his place as the second person in Trinity. After ascension the Trinity was no longer the Father, Son and

Holy Ghost, but Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit . . . Humanity did not borrow Jesus to stay a while on earth. We have lent him to heaven to stay there for a while.¹¹

In this long quotation, Chenchiah affirms that Jesus represents not merely the meeting but the fusion into unity of God and man so that man may partake of it.

Jesus is not God and is not Man, but is the Son of God and the Son of Man. The word 'Son' indicates the measure of unity – something less than complete identity with God but something more than difference in category – between God, Jesus and the Christian. God is God. Man is Man. The twain have met in Jesus; not merely met, but fused and mingled into one . . . This is the message of Christianity – that the Word has become flesh and God has become man.

It is thus that Jesus becomes 'God permanently residing in Creation bringing to birth "a new order in creation"'.¹² Here incarnation and resurrection are linked. The fact of Christ is the birth of a new order in creation. It is the emergence of life – not bound by *karma* of man, not stained by sin, not humbled by death, of man triumphant, glorious, partaking the immortal nature of God, of the birth of a new race in the creation of the Sons of God. If Jesus is not the incarnation of this, what else could he be? A mere visitor from heaven who moved by his love, made a supreme sacrifice and then went away to his place on the right hand of God? Is not Emmanuel, God permanently residing in the creation – the answer to the prayer of man to transcend his destiny? These are penetrating and crucial queries indeed.

THE WORK OF CHRIST

Chenchiah asks:

What can we say to the Gospel which limits the totality of Christ's achievement to a restoration of man to the original condition? This reconciliation and restoration can only be a new start for life and not its positive content. Is there any new advance for man in Jesus beyond regaining the ground lost?¹³

There are two approaches to the Work of Christ. One sees Christ as saving man from original sin through his

sacrifice on the Cross and restoring him to his original righteousness and the other as bringing mankind and cosmos to a new creative destiny. Chenchiah's approach was the latter. Therefore he wanted Indian Christian theology to start not with myths of Adam and his fall, but with the fact of the new Adam, Jesus; not with the Cross, but with the Incarnation and the Resurrection.

So long as the orthodoxy adopts an interventionist theory of Incarnation – of God intervening to save mankind and going back to heaven after achieving the purpose – all efforts to distinguish Krishna and Jesus on grounds of historicity fail.

The uniqueness of Christianity lies beyond the promise of salvation, here or hereafter. Other aspects of the life of Christ than that of the role of a sacrificial lamb were far more fascinating to Chenchiah. To him Jesus is no less a Redeemer to non-Christians. But for him the redemption in Christ is the opening up of the infinite possibilities of new creation. He holds that the

construction of Christianity making law, disobedience, sin, cross, propitiation, judgment . . . [the essence] misses the beauty and the newness of the Gospels, while a poetry that stresses love, resurrection, service, communion, sonship, gets us nearer to the Master.¹⁴

And the salvation of Jesus is "by virtue of his existence and being and not by an act of His".¹⁵ Christ does not save us by suffering on the cross. Just as an animal is saved in man by the animal nature being sublimated by the entry of mind and reason, men are saved by attaining Christhood.

CHRIST IN TRINITY

Chenchiah believes in Trinity – of God the Absolute who 'lies beyond our thought, comprehension and capacity'; of Jesus who is 'God standing in relation to man' and has assumed humanity permanently to bring to creation a new order of existence ("The finite God is still God, yea, even so our Lord Jesus Christ")¹⁶ and the Holy Spirit who is universalized Jesus. He differentiates Jesus from God from

the time of the Incarnation, but only to identify Him more or less with the third Person of the Trinity after the Ascension. He says, "The Holy Spirit is the Universal Jesus"¹⁷ and again, "The Holy Spirit presides over the new creation and lives in the sons of God as their *atman*". But elsewhere the Holy Spirit is spoken of as cosmic energy which can hardly be regarded as a Person. For example, "The Holy Spirit is the energy beyond Creation which . . . flowed into the world."¹⁸ This identification of the Holy Spirit with the person of Jesus virtually amounts to non-recognition of any activity, or even existence, of the Holy Spirit, in the world before the incarnation. The Holy Spirit is the power that descended vertically in the human stream in Jesus. Chenchiah sums up his doctrine of Trinity thus:

God the Father represents what has not passed into creation. God the Son represents what of Him has passed into creation. He is *adi Purusha* of a new creation while the Holy Spirit is *Viswakarma* of a new world. Jesus is he that descends and having descended abides with us. He is *avathari* (he that descends) and *Tathagatha*, he that is to come to save the world process.¹⁹

New Creation

Since Chenchiah regards New Creation as being not only the basis for his christology but as the only rationale for the continued existence of Christianity, we should give priority over all his other theological views which were all like corollaries from that primary vision of his. He claims that "the real uniqueness of Christianity consists in the doctrine, or rather, the fact, of new creation and new birth."

Chenchiah announced the changes of his favourite doctrine in numerous papers that he wrote. The following is a typical statement of its essence:

Viewed as an outburst or inrush into history, Jesus is the manifestation of a new creative effort of God, in which the cosmic energy or *Shakti* is the Holy Spirit, the new creation is Christ, and the new life order, the Kingdom of God.²⁰

For Chenchiah, the Gospel of Jesus is essentially the good news of New Creation. It is not just news of what has already been done, but extends to the hope of 'things to

come' because of what has been done. It opens up vistas of growth and fulfillment for both man and society. 'The Children of God are the next step in evolution and the Kingdom of God the next stage in cosmos'.

Critics of Chenchiah have pointed out that, at best, Chenchiah's concept of a new creation in Jesus is only a reiteration of a sadly neglected doctrine of the Apostolic age, that the Church has never completely lost sight of the truth that if any man is in Christ Jesus he is a new creature. However, what is distinctive in Chenchiah's view of new creation, and what usually meets with incredulity on the part of his critics, is the 'change of gradient' that he envisages in the progress of humanity as a gift of God through the power of the Holy Spirit that has come to reside with men in Jesus' incarnation. New Creation is not just a matter of individual men and women being 'born again' in the evangelical sense of the term, but it is a further stage in the planetary life of mankind brought about by the release of fresh energy through a new tremendous creative act of God.

The horizontal flow of creation receives new force and elements that descend on it vertically from above and break into it. Life, reason or soul (to use Pauline language) mark such descents of new creative energies into creation from beyond itself. Without the recognition of such ingestions into creative current, we cannot satisfactorily account for the vital turns in creation. The temptation of science has always been to interpret the higher in terms of the lower. The correct way of stating the fact that would be the creative process has received accessions from itself from time to time and these accessions mark the place where creation changes as it were the gradient and raises itself to new heights.

The change in the nature of being man is to be reflected in his environment or order of existence also. It has already been said that in Chenchiah's view 'today we have to realize Jesus as the head of new world order'. Hence Chenchiah's hopes for a changed world as well as for changed men.

Chenchiah's exposition of the doctrine of the new creation loses clarity even plausibility when he insists that it is to be achieved through a biological process. This biological view of the new creation, as something that supervenes at birth and in our physical constitution, made Chenchiah emphasize the doctrine of the virgin birth, as for example when he argued, "The birth of Jesus is of greater importance (that his death) from a biological point of view, for every vital change in the creative order is accompanied by a new process of birth". Applying the law to the people of today he says, "it is suggested that mutations occur not in the fully developed body, but in the larvae stage. So also the new life may come to man while being formed in the womb of woman." But, as the Gurukul Group points out, the iteration that Christianity is a problem in genetics does tend to obscure the spiritual character of the new creation.

Parallel Indian and Western Thought

There have been several Western theologians in our time, who have sought to interpret Jesus as both heralding and ushering in a new turn upward in the creative process of history and cosmos, bringing to birth a new order of existence. These Western thinkers had not come to Chenchiah's notice, at that time in the forties and early fifties when he was thinking hard on the possibilities of new creation. On the contrary, he found support for his view in the philosophical excursions of two of his contemporaries in India. One of these was Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, perhaps the greatest philosopher and spiritual adviser of his time in India. He preached that 'supernatural life is at hand, seeking embodiment in us and working towards creation of new race of super men, the Christian sons of God'. The other Indian sage who, Chenchiah admitted, had seen the vision of a new creation after men had lost it for nineteen centuries, was 'Master C.V.V' – Venkatasami Rao of Kumbakonam. The 'Master' had a very small following and made but a feeble impact on Hindu thought or spirituality. Nevertheless, Chenchiah admired him as one who "devoted himself to the technical problems involved in engineering the new power and inducing it in our new personality".²¹

Though Chenchiah argues for New Creation on the basis of biblical text and Christian faith it is possible to trace the particular biological slant of his exposition of the doctrine to the influence of Master C.V.V. However, he saw the New Creation as a supernatural act of God and not as the result of the pressure of the biological urge characteristic of man. This is the chief difference in approach between him and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin whose concept of neogenesis runs otherwise closely parallel to Chenchiah's account of the new creation. Starting from scientific data de Chardin argues that the 'upward thrust' of consciousness, passing through the stages of matter, life and thought, must culminate at an Omega point. Hence, in his view man is not the centre of the universe as we thought in our simplicity but something much more wonderful – the arrow pointing the way to the final unification of the world in terms of life.

For Chenchiah, the only ground of certainty that the new creation must take place is that it has already happened in Christ. To de Chardin, too, confirmation of his biological postulate of Omega-point is to be found in what has already been accomplished in the 'Great Presence' of the Christ.

Christ in relation to Christianity, Church and Scriptures

Chenchiah's approach to the Christian religion, to Church and the Scripture is based on his conviction that Jesus and the New Creation in Him form the only essence of Christianity, and that all the rest, Christianity as religion, the Church as Institution and the Scripture, are relative and have to be evaluated in terms of their power to point to, express and convey that essence. On the whole Chenchiah's view was that they have largely become ends in themselves, hindering rather than conveying the truth in Christ, and he was highly critical of them, and frequently advocated doing away with them. He saw religion smothering life, Church displacing the Kingdom of God, and letter killing the spirit.

There is one type of Christianity which is biological, pivoted on new birth, acquisition of a new body and faculties

for the creative operations of the Holy Spirit – a Christianity that reproduces Christ in the Christian, and another type of Christianity where life forces are translated into a lower notation of Church, ideology, organization, state power.

The dangerous fact is that doctrines, institution, sacraments, priests and pastors, all join together under the name of the Church and take the place of Jesus whom they in doctrine exalt as God. The Christian does not go to Jesus direct, but clings to Church as the author of his salvation. Chenchiah accuses the Church also of having betrayed the Kingdom of God. The result is that there has been an exchange of the Kingdom of God for the Church. The Church is an institution which came into existence under extraordinary circumstances. It may be seriously doubted whether it was in the mind of our Lord. It was born out of the exigencies of early Christianity when it was confronted with the highly organized imperial society that was in Rome. As Christianity developed, we find the Church slowly raising its structure on tradition or on the Bible, and its social and religious organization on the principles of Roman society. Why did we allow the conception of the Kingdom of God to atrophy and the idea of the Church to take shape and strength?

Yet Chenchiah did not wish to escape the Church altogether, but he wished it could be reformed and make a new beginning here in India. Hence his stress on the need for repentance and renewal. If the so-called Church has any discernment yet left, it may leave its offerings at the altar and go in search of God in heaven and implore Him in the name of His creation to come and live with us, chastening, inspiring, ruling and overruling our petty plans and schemes.

Unfortunately, however, losing all hope of the Church's rethinking of its own mission, he began to write of the possibility of a Churchless Christianity. For his ideas Chenchiah claimed the support of a successful experiment in Japan.

Verbal Inspiration versus the Spiritual

Chenchiah did not regard the Bible as a verbally or divinely inspired book, but rather as collection of records of and treatises on God's revelations of Himself to man and man's expression of Him. This was not because he made a rational approach and could not accept the miraculous elements in the narrative. On the contrary he did not question the miracles; but on account of the romantic vein in him, he had a pre-disposition to look for them even among the incidents of everyday life. It was clear to him that not everything in the Scriptures was helpful to the understanding of God's nature and his dealings with man. He saw that the quality of spiritual discernment varied considerably from book to book. Hence Chenchiah could not place equal value on every part of the Bible or give to the whole of it the attention, trust and reverence he spontaneously offered to some particular parts.

Chenchiah made a distinction between the Old Testament and the New testament as books and ways of life. As books, he said they stood closely related and the understanding of some of the doctrines or the Pauline theology of the New Testament it would be necessary to know the Old Testament just as 'to understand *Ahimsa* as a doctrine it is necessary to know the teachings of the Upanishads, Buddhism and Jainism'. But neither for the understanding of the ethical or spiritual teaching of the New Testament nor for 'accepting Jesus' was the Old Testament necessary. He argued that Judaism could give no help at all in understanding some of the New Testament doctrine such as the Incarnation, which would be readily 'intelligible in the Greek and Hindu religious traditions'. Another example he resorts to is the idea of the Holy Spirit is not intelligible without Hindu experience.

As an intelligent and thoughtful reader of the Bible Chenchiah realized that it is a book that often perplexes the reader as much by many of its utterances as by the uncertainties of its text. He said,

I have not the fortune to be one of that group of Christians which mostly represents by pastors, zealous evangelists and strong sections to whom the word of God speaks with a clear and crystal voice supporting whatever views they happen to hold for the nonce . . . My lot is cast with those to whom the scriptures are more confounding than clarifying and who see through the glass of the world darkly rather than clearly, here nothing more than a thunder, [which] others interpret the voice of God . . . If I am never left in doubt after reading the scriptures, I am never in complete assurance either. To me scriptures are part of a Chinese puzzle, not of much use unless we get all the pieces together.²²

Quite courageous, though unorthodox stuff! He asks, Did Jesus ever say that scriptures are our unfailing guides and illuminators? Was there a New Testament at all for Jesus to speak of its guidance?

Christianity and Hinduism

Chenchiah's definition of the relation between Christianity and Hinduism arose out of five of his deep convictions. First, that the New Creation in Jesus is the essence of the Gospel; second, that it is so entirely new, that it is other than all the religions which represent only the old creation, and is little apprehended even by the Christian religion and the Church; third, that God has been at work in all religions so that it is possible to build bridges from Christ to them; fourth, that the spiritual treasures of other religions will bring to light new facts of the Person of Christ and of Christian life and experience; and fifth, that the New Creation in Jesus can be realized by all religions if they are prepared for radical transformation in their spirit and life through the Holy Spirit.

Christ Destroyer or Fulfiller?

Chenchiah's understanding of Christ's relation to other religions was dialectical. The newness of the New Creation in Christ led him to emphasize the truth that Christ 'abrogates' all religions. There is no continuity in the reverse. He says:

Neither Judaism nor Hinduism leads to Christ. Christ abrogates Judaism and Hinduism more than he fulfills them.

Christian theology builds bridges from Jesus to Judaism and Hinduism, and not bridges from Judaism and Hinduism to Jesus.²³

The radical newness of Christ places both Judaism and Hinduism on the same level as belonging to the old. Therefore he fought against making a radical theological distinction between Judaism and Hinduism, though he recognized fundamental sociological and historical differences. This attitude determined also his theological attitude to the scriptures of the Old Testament. For Chenchiah, the Jew does not walk forward from the Old Testament to the New. The Christian walked backwards from New Testament to the Old. The Jewish Messianic proof texts did not point to Jesus. Matthew unearthed texts in Old Testament to suit Jesus. Jesus did not point to Old Testament fulfill prophecy. Prophecies are picked up after Jesus to form a sort of background for Jesus. This sort of trick-effect can be produced if you turn Jesus towards Hinduism. Those who advance fulfillment theory of the relation between Jesus and Hinduism, seek to build the same sort of bridge as the disciples built. It was a bridge not built by Jews from the Old Testament side but by the Christians from the side of Jesus. He could pick up material for an Old Testament in Hinduism making selections in the light, of what Jesus said and did. That was exactly what early Christians did and later converts sought to do.

Chenchiah was convinced, however, that bridges can and ought to be built from Jesus to other religions. They can be built because God has been at work in the old creation, work which can be discerned in the light of Jesus. He himself was very sensitive to the working of God in Hinduism.

Now and then without preparation or warning, the religious forces of Hinduism throw into light men of Christian heart, features and love who had no contact with the historical Jesus or the visible Church. They are silent reminders of the fact that God is working in his own way in religions.²⁴

Chenchiah's respect for Hinduism was neither a matter of native prejudice, nor one of uncritical acquiescence. But it came out of full knowledge of the philosophy and religious

literature of the Hindus. He was critical of several doctrines of Hinduism and interpretations modern scholars tried to give them. For example he suggested that 'the postulate of ultimate unity of truth so readily believed by the Hindu develops a spiritual shortsightedness which incapacitates him from seeing differences in religion'. Of the *karma* theory he said that the view that the 'soul is sent into the world in several births or that it may acquire different experiences which will be summed up and brought into consciousness at the time of fruition' is a view that 'rests on pure speculation that finds no support in the facts of life'. He also argued that 'the absence of all consciousness of previous births militates against its ethical value'.

Prominent among the features of the spiritual heritage of Hinduism that Chenchiah wanted Christianity to assimilate were *ashramas* and *yoga*. He wrote several chapters in the book, *Ashramas Past and Present*, which was published by the Indian Christian Book Club. He wrote a series of articles on *Yoga* in *The Guardian*. But, while giving a historical and philosophical account of these institutions themselves to be adopted by Christianity he saw a great deal of experimentation need to be carried out in 'spiritual laboratories' for the purpose.

While Chenchiah believed that Hinduism could offer spiritual discernment and experience to the Indian Christian, and particularly to the convert, he was aware of wide difference between its understanding of truth and that of Christianity. "To the Semitic", he said, "Truth is ethical, dividing the right from the wrong, good from the bad. To the Hindu, truth is the support uniting the divisions on the surface".²⁵ He was also aware of differences in the goals or attitudes to ultimate Reality when he stated, "Hinduism celebrates the end of the life, Christianity its birth".²⁶

CONVERSION TO CHRIST NOT A NEW RELIGION OR COMMUNITY

Chenchiah had a great longing that all his countrymen should come to know Christ. But the process of Christianisation that he advocated was "the spread of the

gospel . . . as life, opinion and inner change rather than as social groups or spiritual groups outside Hinduism".²⁷ He was for changing the life impulses of Hinduism itself. According to him the process of Christianising Hinduism will take the shape of men who are influenced by the spirit of Christ partially at first and in increasing degree later. And he asked, "When we have Christians in name with little of the spirit of Christ, why should we not allow Hindus in name but possessing the spirit of Christ in reality?"²⁸

Further he explained that making a Christian should mean implanting the light of Christ in a human heart, creating loyalty to his ideas, promoting devotion to the leadership of Jesus – in short to fill the mind with enthusiasm for Christ's way of life. Evangelism is a change of heart and mind, not an annexation to the Church. The outflowing of the Christian spirit into the soul and mind of the nation, a movement into Hindu and Islamic society rather than a landslide from those masses to quality, change to character.

Chenchiah saw Christ's influence on Hinduism already at work. According to him, Christ's influence on Hinduism manifests itself in the re-construction of Hinduism, as in the case of the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, and the Ramakrishna Mission; in the transvaluation of religious and ethical and social ideals; in the creation of a purified spiritual vision which feels the presence of a new spiritual energy in life; in personal devotion, as in the case of eclectic movements such as theosophy and Visvabharathi.

The Secular Mission of the Church

As early as 1928 Chenchiah wrote, 'Any attempt to separate the Church from its mission is fraught with disaster'. He conceived of the mission of the Church in terms of the new creation, the Kingdom of God and the renewal of the social order. We have already spoken of the new creation. Chenchiah believed that it was the mission of the Church to 'harness the Holy Spirit to the creation of new life'. And that new life was to be the sign of the Kingdom of God come among men. The period between the Wars was a time of the

rediscovery of the message of the Kingdom and an altogether too optimistic gospel was fashioned out of it. But Chenchiah insisted on the need for a firm spiritual basis for the Kingdom. It is only by bringing a new divine power and the energy of the Holy Spirit that we can hope to become the Sons of God and establish the Kingdom of God.

Chenchiah was sure that the strong motivating power for the reordering of society, 'the spirit of *nishkamyā karma* and self-forgetting love so much needed for nation-building, could come only from the ministrations of faiths at the highest level'. The Christian, more than any other, had to enter all areas of life with this spirit and redeem them for the Kingdom. He deplored the compartmentalisation of life into religious and non-religious spheres.

Chenchiah outlined a programme of social service and social action by Christians in India. Among these were suggestions for the organization of mobile service groups to undertake relief work on occasions of famine, fire, pestilence and storms; co-operatives; experiments in common farming (advocated as a national policy by Nehru fifteen years later), housing schemes and co-operative banks.

He encouraged that Christians should first equip themselves with knowledge, both of their faith and of the possible ways in which social problems could be tackled, before they could play a significant redemptive role in the affairs of the nation. The absence of such thinking was a great lack in the armour of the Indian Christian. Therefore he called upon his educated fellow-Christians to 'discuss and formulate after study a Christian scheme or policy in politics and economics which they shall try to implement whatever party they may join'. And to stimulate their thinking, he along with close friends like A.N. Sudarsanam, V. Chakkarai and G.V. Job, started the Indian Christian Book Club.

Evaluation

Thangasamy agrees with Chenchiah's assessment in one of the numerous articles in *The Guardian*, that the courage to think through the challenges to Christianity

without doctrines and dogmas may be the new gift of the Spirit of the times to the Indian Christians.

Chenchiah's own greatest contribution to the cause of Christianity may be precisely this courage and the lead given by him. Chenchiah declared that the Indian Christian has come of age and therefore, is able to think on his own and add to the spiritual treasures of mankind.

Indian Christians have not been eager to face the challenges of the times but content to face those of a remote past in the manner in which they had been met in the past. Like certain spirits which did not wish to be troubled by Jesus, they would only wish to be left alone to carry on their exercises of piety in their own way. Facing the world of today would demand too great an exertion on their part and would seem to be so dangerous as to upset even the foundations of their faith and life. It was to such a group that Chenchiah addressed his call to courage that is demanded by the effort to meet the new challenges by abandoning the security and the moorings of traditional Christianity.

Chenchiah was often at issue with those who sought to prescribe limits within which Indian Christian theological inquiry should be contained. The stand of the typical missionary of the time and his Indian satellites was that what they regarded as basic doctrines could not be questioned, but only explained or interpreted in images and speech-forms that were indigenous. But if theology is not regarded primarily as a set of doctrines which may not be questioned, but as the growing understanding of God's dealings with man, especially through the life and work of Jesus Christ, it would then rank as a discipline in which any one interpretation of observed or historical fact cannot be accepted as being final. In every science there is periodical re-examination of presuppositions and the theories based on them – from the theory of a geocentric universe in astronomy to the constitution of the atom in physics. In this view, which was certainly Chenchiah's doctrines such as those of the 'Trinity and Atonement' would be regarded as doctrinal theories rather than as absolutes, as they have

been in theology so far. They would, in other words, be treated as the first; profound, perhaps, but by no means final or complete interpretations put upon the facts of the birth, life and resurrection of Jesus as these may be gleaned from the Gospels.

It must be admitted that in rejecting, modifying and originating doctrines, Chenchiah tended to rely too much on his own judgment and experience and too little on that of the large body of believers who had faced no intellectual or spiritual difficulty in thinking and living within the neat but narrow framework of the traditional understandings of Christian doctrines. And when he asserts, "Christian individual experience is the centre and circumference, foundation and superstructure, of Christianity. There is no experience which is not individual."²⁹ He seems to steer too dangerously towards the existentialist obsession with experience as the basic reality. But, as against this, one has to bear in mind what Bonhoeffer says about a world that has 'come of age' — *Kairos*, as well as God, seem clearly to be calling upon Christians to travail for a new understanding of His nature and His relations with the world. However, the present "is a time for ploughing, not reaping . . . it is a time for making soundings, not charts or maps"³⁰ Hence, except for the development of the thesis of the New Creation, there is hardly any systematic formulation of doctrine or system of ideas in the writings of Chenchiah.

Chenchiah's Christianity was rooted in the experience of life of the saints down the centuries. He had no regard for conventional religion which "builds on a foundation of nature, colouring and sometime controlling, but really conquering our instincts and impulses"³¹ For him religion is the supernatural permeating, transforming and activating the natural, not getting dissipated in it or standing apart from it. The vital experience of such supernatural activity constituted real advance in religion and it alone could provide the means of theological illumination. The experience that Chenchiah was talking about is something far nobler than an individualistic 'experience of salvation' that

revivalists often talk about. The experience that Chenchiah was talking about was that of being admitted by grace into the state of striving for oneness with God. Dynamic experience is possible only where there is a willingness to experiment not only in the narrow fields of faith-healing and the like, but also in the larger arena of life. Chenchiah was for making bold experiment that would extend, as Mahatma Gandhi's did, to the fields of political and social life.

What is the experiment and experience that Chenchiah was advocating?

It is power of the Holy Spirit as a cosmic energy that is seeking to transform the race of man. Even the critics who were otherwise repelled by Chenchiah's theology have commended him for rediscovering or re-emphasizing the forgotten doctrine of the creation. There has been such a lack of faith in the power of the intention of God to 'make all things new' on the earth or to transform the kingdom of the world into His own Kingdom that for centuries the Church had settled to the job of saving a few brands from the fire that must inevitably consume the world and its structures. Only now, thanks to the struggles of the minds and the souls of men like Chenchiah, we are beginning to affirm that new life must permeate and change its environment. If it is really the supernatural power, if its energy is that of the Holy Spirit, it must transform the social order. Chenchiah was one of the few Christian thinkers in India who, even before the Second World War and the Independence of India, tried to show how Christians in India should participate in the task of nation-building. Participation implies living and working with others, taking them seriously as persons respecting their convictions and belief and entering into real partnership with them.

Chenchiah was one of the very few Christians who may be said to have not only got inside the world, but to have felt quite at home in it. This was not because he had been born a Hindu, but because quite deliberately he set out to gain a knowledge of Hindus and Hinduism after he was converted.

Dialogue with men of other faiths was a spontaneous, almost natural, Christian self-expression for Chenchiah, at bar association premises, verandah clubs and many other places of meeting. At a time when Christians in India are taking their 'participation' in nation-building seriously and are concerned with 'partnership' with men of other faiths and 'dialogue' with them at depth, it is right and proper that we go back to Chenchiah and draw upon the resources of his thought. Chenchiah is significant as one who cleared the ground for a mature 'Indian Christianity'.

P.D. DEVANANDAN (1901-1962)

Paul David Devanandan was born in Madras in a pastors' family. After his studies at Madras, Tiruchirapalli and Hyderabad he went to University in Madras. Coming under the influence of K.T. Paul, he went as his secretary to the United States of America in 1924. He stayed on for seven years and eventually finished his doctorate in the Pacific School of Religion and later at Yale, with the subject "The Concept of Maya". Later on he ended up as K.T. Paul's son-in-law!

On his return to India he taught Philosophy and History of religions at United Theological College, Bangalore, at a time when these subjects were scorned. He taught them for 17 years. When he was serving as the Literature Secretary of Y.M.C.A., the National Council of Churches called him to lead the newly formed CISS – Christian Institute for the Study of Society. This institute later merged with the Christian Institute for the Study of Hinduism and became the present CISRS – the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society. Till his untimely death by heart attack in 1962, he remained in the position of Director. During this time he went often as a teacher and lecturer all over the world. One of his great contributions was his message under the title "Called to Witness" in the third Assembly of the W.C.C. at New Delhi in 1961.

In his autobiographical writings, Devanandan confesses that one of his great spiritual experiences was in his reading

of Hendrick Kraemer postulated the discontinuity thesis that there is no point of contact between Christianity and other religions. Thus he rejected the validity of all natural revelations. This stance disturbed Devanandan very greatly. He could not bring himself to condemn Hinduism, under whose influence he had grown all his life, as demonic or containing no element of truth. But later, after a long and strenuous research, he hit upon the idea what can be now called the 'Devanandan discovery' on which many later theologians have built their theology of religions. We will look at it later.

His theological writings include, beside several articles the following books: *Our Task Today*, *The Gospel and Renascent Hinduism*, *Christian Concern in Hinduism*, *I will lift up mine Eyes*, (Sermon and Bible studies with a biographical Sketch) and the posthumously published *Preparation For Dialogue*.

Devanandan's Theology of Religions

As indicated above, the very decision of Devanandan to study Hinduism (the concept of *maya*) shows that his entry into theology was through the study of religions. Devanandan understands religion, or more accurately faith, as a series of concentric circles – creed, cultus and culture (a system of doctrinal beliefs, the religious rites and ceremonies, and the world view and life style respectively). The innermost circle is the creed. Invariably, when a religion interacts with its environment, the impact is first felt in the outer circle, area of culture, only later upon the cultus and still later if at all on the credal core itself. This means that the theology of religion changes with great inertia. That is why when a renewal takes place in a religion it effects all the spheres, and it is right to deal with a faith in all these spheres, and not with an isolated one.

Devanandan affirms that these resurgent or renewal movements, in a religion are of four types – reform movements, revival movements, renascent movements and revolt movements.

In reform movements there is change brought about from causes outside. The change brings an emphasis upon the new as against the old, and many old ideas and practices and values are given up for the new ones. By contrast, a revival movement takes place within a particular religion. Here the response of the religion to an environment is dynamic and hence the emphasis is not so much on the new as on the old elements. Therefore, all revival movements are both defensive and apologetic, seeking to justify the validity the old claims. Renascent movements are the changes brought about by the forces acting both from without and from within. There is a revolutionary shakeup of the fundamentals of the religion. Finally, in revolt movements the ancestral faith is shaken up so much that it leads to a repudiation of it. Here the older values are outmoded and the modern elements are lifted up.

Devanandan further affirms that in modern Hinduism there is a new renascent movement taking place. The new values of person, society, and history are definitely foreign to the age-old Hinduism with its caste system and *karma sansara*. Then the question arises: from where does Hinduism absorb these new elements?

Here we come to what we call the 'Devanandan discovery'. His thesis as in *The Gospel and Renascent Hinduism*, is that the new Hinduism is the result of the Christian message. It is in interaction with the gospel of Jesus Christ that neo-Hinduism has imbibed these new human values. Thus as Christians we must rejoice in this creative activity of the Holy Spirit. As we enter into dialogue we will often find that the hidden Christ is there at work in Hinduism previous to us. This is the point of contact for Christians with Hindus. This is Devanandan's post-Kraemer position. His discovery he calls a second spiritual crisis, a second conversion, equivalent to his own experience of conversion to Jesus Christ.

In such a dialogue there are three steps according to Devanandan. First, there is a study needed of the varied types of Hinduism. Secondly, there must be clarification of terminology so that the concepts used are properly understood by Christians and Hindus. Thirdly, there must be an

Indian theological expression of Christian faith. So he says:

Effective communication of the gospel to the non-Christian man of faith depends on the effective use of the religious vocabulary with which he is familiar, and of the cultural pattern of life in which he finds self-expression and community being.³²

Christian influence of Hinduism

In his approach Devanandan has gone much beyond the earlier approaches either of rejecting Hinduism totally or taking Hinduism as the foundation for Christian faith or Christianity as the fulfillment of Hinduism. What are these new elements in Hinduism which it has borrowed from Christianity? Obviously Devanandan takes pains in developing these and we will do well to look at them one by one.

PERSONALITY

As far as the question of person is concerned Devanandan takes a daring step. He regards Brahman as neither personal nor impersonal; he says that he is both at the same time, i.e. he equates Iswara with Brahman. But God makes himself known to human beings in personal relationships and never as a series of oppositions.

As Boyd says, this concept of God as personal, speaking to and dealing historically with man as a responsible person, is fundamental to Devanandan's thinking. In this connection he develops the *imago dei* doctrine of man and primarily in opposition to *prakriti* or nature. It involves at least three attributes: a mutual encounter of I-thou; a capability of being in dialogue and of penetrating another I; and a purposive striving to realize a common end.

At the same time we must also point out that Devanandan holds to the orthodox view of human depravity and his view of sin is quite orthodox.

SIN AND SALVATION

But how does man come out of sinfulness? Not by evolution or by education or by self-realization, but by a deliberate commitment to the offer of Christ.

It is the power and personality of the resurrected Christ which transforms men and makes them into a new and living creation. Hence we can properly say "Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation".

Thus Devanandan stoutly defends the idea of conversion and carefully distinguishes it from proselytism.

HISTORY AND MAYA

Another elements which he dwells on is the concept of history. Thanks to the Hindu concept of *maya* neither the world nor history have any abiding value. Giving adequate examples, Devanandan shows how modern Hinduism is gradually awakening to a sense of purpose in history - another influence of the Christian message. Thus the age-old concept of cyclic understanding is replaced by a linear understanding. He sees that the transformation of all religions (as he has shown to be the case in Hinduism) is steadily moving, towards the eschaton, "the hope of glory", the final end. But the question is, if all the religions are moving to this glorious end, will they remain as they are, or will they be abolished, or will they merge into a world religion? Devanandan is not quite clear on that and he leaves the question open, very wisely. He thinks that the truth belongs to the eschaton and we need not speculate on it.

If he takes history so seriously, then how does Devanandan interpret *maya*? This was after all his doctoral dissertation. The earlier thinkers understood *maya* either as illusion or as a second rate reality. Devanandan attempts a new Christian interpretation: "Time is as it were shot through with eternity". Thus the Christian talks about man as a citizen of two worlds. This is really a way of stating that this is a world of *maya*, a world which is both real and unreal, conditioned by time and shot through with eternity, the scene of human endeavour and the plane of activity. But here the *sat-asat* nature of world life is not understood in terms of ultimate reality, but final purpose."

In other words Devanandan shifts the realm of *maya* from being to that of purpose. That is, where God's will is followed that is reality (perhaps he meant mainly the salva-

tion history); and where God's will is opposed that is *maya* (the secular history). Thus his understanding of *maya* is more or less similar to the understanding of vanity in the book of Ecclesiastes.

COMMUNITY

Another new element which he finds in Hinduism is community. Since Hinduism regards religion as a private enterprise, Devanandan stresses the need of community life. In Devanandan's words, "Man is truly man only in so far as he is found in the network of human relations which makes what the Bible calls 'people' and which in modern language is called 'society'.

He makes his point by basing it upon the very creation of man in the image of God, which involves the personality and community of man in relation to God and man in relation to others. Thus man is more than both *manava* and *purusha* for he must be a *bhakta* in *satsanga* or *koinonia* (fellowship) with God and his people. Following this line of argument obviously Devanandan rejects also the Hindu doctrine of *karma sansara*, that one is responsible for only his own deeds, because it is not only against social justice but also is not realistic.

For Devanandan the Church is this community. It is not only a transformed community. He is not so much interested in the narrow ecclesiastical issues but in the significant contribution of the church that it should be a living, witnessing, worshipping and serving fellowship, as a model to the world, of what a community ought to be.

True community is created by the conscious sense which each one in the group has of being vitally connected with a living centre and because of this living relationship to the centre they are all bound to one another. That is the real difference between a communion of saints and an association of people.

Thus he defines the church as "the fellowship of those who endeavour in community, as well as in their own personal lives, to do the will of the Father." This doing the will of the Father involves not only *kerygma* or proclamation

or evangelism but also *diakonia* i.e., service of the community around, and *koinonia* fellowship with another. The omission of *leiturgia* (worship) is significant, but since Devanandan was thinking of the Church as a community vis-a-vis Hinduism, it might not be relevant here. And Devanandan defends evangelism in no uncertain terms. He affirms that the primary mission of every Christian believer is to spread abroad good news that God has started a movement in the history of mankind by himself for the salvation of man.

Following from this Devanandan advocates praxis as well as orthodoxy as a must for the church's witness. And he earnestly calls upon Christians to participate actively in the nation building activities and gives a firm basis for this. This means taking part with other groups or non-Christian organizations for a combined effort towards social upliftment – even if need be secular or other ideological groups. Association with non-Christian ideologies and structures does not deter him from the Christian duty of nation building. Other elements in Devanandan's theology are quite conservative and thus we need not repeat them here.

Evaluation

We can only say this here, that most of his ideas are conservative and often give a new insight which is most relevant to the Indian situation. The only element which is disturbing is that he goes too far in developing the *logos spermatikos* idea in other religions. However we must be fair in admitting that he does this only subsequent to the Christian mission. One wonders, to what extent his idea of dialogue will be practical, because sooner or later it is a battle at the level of the spirit and one religion's interpretation and evaluation of the other will necessarily come up with some contradictions and hence confrontation. Dialogue may be short lived, as Devanandan envisages.

NOTES

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28. *Ibid.*, Appendix, p. 48.
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30. Quoted in J.A.T. Robinson, *The New Reformation*, p. 19.
31. D.A. Thangasamy, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
32. P.D. Devanandan, *Preparation for Dialogue*, CISRS, Bangalore, p. 191.