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M.M. THOMAS (b. 1916)

In this chapter and the following we will be studying living theologians, so their theology is still in the making and changing. Looking at it one way, of all the contemporary theologians we have studied, M.M. Thomas is a crucial theologian in his own right. He is not only the most experienced among the contemporary Indian thinkers but also the one who has read most and written most. In the years to come he may also have the greatest influence for Indian Christian Theology. Along with Raymondo Panikkar and Stanley Samartha, M.M. Thomas makes up the modern trio of Indian theologians, comparable to the classical trio – Chakkarai, Chenchiah and Devanandan. As we studied the first trio together it will be beneficial to study the second one also together, as they influence and cross fertilize one another.

Early Days

Madathilaparampil Mammen Thomas was born in 1916 in Panavila, Kerala. His father was a member of the Orthodox Syrian Church. He was pious and quite well to do, a well-known evangelist, also an enthusiastic patriot who wore *khaddar*. After early schooling at his native place, Thomas went to Trivandrum to study Chemistry. It was during the first year at college that he came into contact with Christ in a meaningful way which he describes in his own unpublished autobiography:

It was through an evangelical experience as a first year college student in Trivandrum in 1931-32 that Jesus Christ became real to me as the bearer of divine forgiveness and gave my life, awakened to adolescent rages, a principle of integration and a sense of direction.¹

During his turbulent adolescence he was drawn in gratefulness to God and began reading the Bible and meditating on it. At the time his moldable mind was deeply impressed by

books like *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Transforming Friendship*, *The Practice of the Presence of God* and *The Life of Prayer*. He also began to witness for Christ among his friends and took active part in his own Mar Thoma Youth Union and also the Student Christian Movement. To begin with he was dependent upon the church. He writes, "I became devoted to the church and beside availing myself of its liturgical and sacramental resources I made regular visits to centres in the neighborhood of the city for evangelistic work."²

Finishing his college study, he went to Perumpavoor Ashram, teaching in a school belonging to the Ashram. He organized his friends into an "interceding fellowship" and regularly circulated among them some letters apparently of personal nature. At the same time he was actively involved in the creating of an international fellowship among students as well as an inter-religious fellowship of students. Here he rejected both evangelism and the exclusive claims of Christianity, arguing that "love is at the heart of universe" and in love we need not pressurize one another to change one's convictions. He also met Pennamma, his future wife, during these student activities and after ten long years of engagement married her. As he himself mentions in some of his books, it was his wife who was the primary cause for Thomas' Christ-centredness.

CHRISTIAN ACTION

1938 was a significant event in Thomas' life when he was co-founder of the Youth Christian Council of Action, whose primary objectives were to bring out the social implications of the gospel, to expose the evils within and without the church and to act to remedy them. He was the secretary of the Council, but soon there were splits in the organization on the question of violence and so disassociated from those who rejected violence and formed another new organization called National Christian Youth Council in 1942. But this latter organization was short lived. At this juncture, he says in his autobiography:

I was with this last group and desired to make my double orientation real by getting ordained to the ministry of the Mar

Thoma Church and by becoming a member of the Communist Party of India. Both of them refused, the Church's ordination committee on the grounds that I was not Christ-centred enough, because I did not adhere to the ethic of truth and non-violence; and the Party on the basis that my religious conviction would bring disruption of the party ranks and pave the way for reaction.³

This impossible attempt of Thomas to reconcile the spirit of Christ to the Marxist-Leninist ideology has remained the most dominant characteristic of his life and thought throughout. Later for a little while he worked in a hostel for street boys. This was the time when he came into close contact with Sadhu Mathai, who remained a life long friend of Thomas. This was also the time when his views on the church were crystallized. In his own words:

There was a time when I thought of joining the ordained ministry of the church and if I now think that way it is because I have come finally to that strong conviction that as things are now I can better serve the church by being outside the official ministry.⁴

This anti-clerical attitude of Thomas has remained throughout and also explaining why henceforth he worked only with para-church organizations. In 1941 he was instrumental in defining the social creed for the Mar Thoma Students' Organization, which also became the social manifesto of the church. He based the manifesto of the divine purpose of human brotherhood, the worth of human personality, and the equality of men in the sight of God – elements which have remained with him for good.

After leaving the work in the boy's hostel, along with one Thamby he went to Bangalore to study with the well-known Gandhian brother Ralph Keithahn. In Bangalore well known writers like Reinhold Niebuhr, Hendrick Kraemer, Christopher Dawson, C.H. Dodd, and Nicolas Berdyaev, seem to have made a lasting impression on his youthful mind. He also read Marxism.

STUDENT LEADER

During 1943-45 he joined the Student Christian Movement, partly through the urging of M. Adisheshaiah, who also

encouraged him to write in the official organ *The Student World*. This was the time when he read Luther, Augustine, Aquinas, Aristotle and also met personally John Bennett of Union Theological Seminary, New York, who became a close friend.

This association with SCM brought him to Geneva as a political secretary of the World Students' Christian Federation. In that capacity he toured and organized conferences, specially the famous Asian Leaders' Conference at Kandy in 1948, and the World Youth Conference in Kottayam (1947). He attended the Oslo Youth Conference in 1947. He also attended the EACC meeting at Bangalore and was made the secretary for the Church and Society wing. Being in Geneva during 47-48, he also got involved in the preparations for the first Assembly of the World Council of Church at Amsterdam and came into contact with leaders like Oldham, Brunner, Ellul, Niebuhr and others. He seems to have contributed substantially to the Church and Society department. Perhaps because of his involvement with WCC, which was seeking an alternative both to communist and capitalistic societies, he eschewed communism, at least in his thinking. He writes:

1948 saw a definite change in my orientation to communist policies . . . I thought in Christian obligation to follow Marxian technique of class struggle for social revolution, within a liberal democratic framework, where it is viable.⁵

Turning point

Later on he toured quite a bit and this was the time when he wrote *The Christian in the World's Struggle* along with Paul Abrecht of WCC. But actually a new stage began only in 1953, as he himself confesses in his autobiography. He came at this time to Union Theological Seminary, New York, to study theology for a year (the only theological study he ever had). Meeting people like Bates, and Paul Tillich, was very exciting for him. After the study and a subsequent touring of the United States, he returned to India to work with the newly formed Christian Institute for the Study of Society (later changed to Christian Institute for the Study of

Religion and Society), as Associate Director with P.D. Devanandan, the Director. When Devanandan died in 1962 he became the Director, until his retirement.

Thomas is perhaps one of the very few Christian leaders who have attended all the Assemblies of the World Council of Churches and also has made significant contributions to each. In India he worked also with the Committee for Literature for Social Concerns and several allied efforts. His conviction was "That the insights of the theologians and social scientists should coalesce in these studies . . . it has been an explicitly 'Christian' interpretation but in the human and not in the communal sense."⁶

As already mentioned, his ecumenical activities took him all over the globe. He was made the chairman of the World Conference on Church and Society, Geneva, in 1966. His understanding of society, revolution and ideology was stabilized mainly in connection with his preparation for and contribution in this conference. His book *Christian Participation in Nation Building* is another key book in this area. In 1966-67 he went for a second time to UTS, New York, but this time to teach as a visiting professor. The notes of his teaching were later published as a book, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, a thoroughly selective anthology. In 1968 he was elected the moderator of the Central Committee of the WCC, perhaps the highest honour given to any Indian Christian. Many of his ecumenical utterances have been published by him in the form of a book *Some Theological Dialogues*.

In 1969 a further decisive event took place in Thomas' life. His wife Pennamma died after a long period of suffering with cancer. This loss was irreparable. Since her pastoral care was missing, he himself acknowledges that his theology went wild afterwards. On his 60th birthday some of his friends at CISRS produced a Festschrift in honour of him entitled *Society and Religion*. At present he is engaged primarily in writing a mammoth commentary on the whole Bible and also in touring and lecturing a couple of times every year in Europe, the United States and other places. He

lives in his home in Panavila and is also actively engaged in indoctrinating the Kerala youth in his thinking.

Perhaps one more event in his life must be mentioned. During the Emergency under Indira Gandhi's prime ministership, when there was an effective silence over all legal measures, it is significant that Thomas boldly wrote against the lapses of the government and circulated his notes privately among friends. Later, when Indira was defeated and another party came to power, his writings were collected and published as a book entitled *Response to Tyranny*. This paved the way for him to become the governor of Nagaland for two years.

Theological Writings

His theological output, as already mentioned, is unbelievably great. Besides, nearly 1000 articles, he has written several books, and contributed or edited many more. His primary books include, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, *Salvation and Humanization*, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution*, *Christian Participation in Nation Building*, *Secularism in India and the Secular Meaning of Christ*, *Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism*, *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake*. One hopes that his autobiography, "Faith Seeking Understanding and Responsibility", will be published in the near future. It is an excellent reading, portraying the sincere searches, successes and failures of an honest soul.

Theological Method

Before coming to a description of his theology it is necessary to have a look at his theological method.

With an astounding consistency Thomas starts with the world. He looks at the world, analyses what is happening there and tries to understand what the Christian solution can be. Thus the first step in his theology is what can be called a contextual or situational approach. This is well expressed as an appendix in his book *The Acknowledged*

Christ of the Indian Renaissance. This concentration on the human situation has some implications.

1. Since it speaks only to those issues which are relevant, that becomes a selective theology, and since the human situation is the starting point his theology asks for pluralistic answers. Apparently this sounds as if his theology lacks the power of conviction. One also gets that feeling that his theology is not only empirical, but also quite fragmentary, which he himself admits.

2. His theology is action-oriented. Like the liberation theologians of Latin America he places praxis before orthodoxy. Responsibility is the key word here. This is what the WCC calls the action-reflection method. He finds the basis for this in the New Testament: as "faith working through love". It is for this reason that Boyd labels Thomas' theology as "The Way of Action".

Since Thomas is not an 'academic' theologian, it is difficult to summarize his thought into some accessible titles. For the sake of convenience we can study it under four heads: Man's quest, Christ's Offer, the Mission of the Church and the Goal of History.

Theological Emphases

MAN'S QUEST

Thomas starts with what is happening in the world, that is history, and as he looks at history he discovers that above all phenomena revolutions are predominant. Following the approach of Vatican II and of the World Conference on Church and Society, Geneva (1966), he also finds basically three revolutions in the world: the scientific and technological; the revolt of the oppressed groups, nations, classes and races, demanding social and international justice; and finally the break up of the traditional integration between religion, society and the state or the secularization of human life.

Of these, undoubtedly secularization is the basic revolt, for while earlier man was afraid of nature, which swarmed

with spirits and Gods, now he is no more so afraid; instead man has moulded nature to suit his own desires and comforts and has created a hominised world. This is also the cause for the scientific revolution. Earlier the Christian Church either rejected all revolutions as satanic or followed the revolutions blindly. He says that both these attitudes are false. The proper approach to revolutions consists in two steps.

First, to recognize that within the revolutions Christ is at work awakening desires for more human (that also means Christians) values. Secondly, to identify these values. He enumerates them: freedom, selfhood, humanness of the community and a sense of personal destiny, being involved in mankind's historical destiny.

Such an approach tends to mean that a revolution is a partial fulfillment of the kingdom of God. No doubt he sees the evil in revolutions, that revolution devours its own children, but he says this is where revolutions need the prophetic voice of the church. Hence,

Herein lies the mission of the church. It is to participate in the movements of human liberation of our time in such a way as to witness to Jesus Christ as the source, the judge and the redeemer of human spirituality.

GOD'S IMAGE IN MAN

Behind these revolutions Thomas sees a revolution in the human spirit. He says that the traditional understanding of man as being created in the image of God needs to be re-cast, so he defines the image of God in man as "the obligation to respond to the call in freedom is the core of his personality, the basis of his eternal status as a person."⁷ This means that freedom and responsibility are the key elements of God's image in man. Thus the social aspect as well as the spiritual aspect are found here. Here Thomas is consciously following the process theology since he says that not only man, but God also, is in process of evolution. So he finds the evolution of man an inevitable necessity, following to some extent Chenchiah here.

NEW SPIRITUALITY

Continuing on the revolutions, Thomas says there must be a fundamental change in our understanding of human spirituality. He is not so much concerned about human nature or person or spirit but spirituality which he defines as "the way in which man, in the freedom of his self-transcendence, seeks a structure of ultimate meaning and sacredness"⁸, the goal being self-realization through involvement in history. His contention is that for our age of revolutions an adequacy must be sought in open secularism. The goal of such ideology, as of revolutions, is a responsible world society – in other words, either the kingdom of God or the Marxian classless society. Since religion is a most potent source for strife in the world it does not help towards a classless society. Hence there must be a need for inter-religious dialogue. And so he comes up with his famous "Christ-centred syncretism", which means conversion not of individuals but of the whole religious systems to Christ. And so ultimately all religions and ideologies will be found in Christ.

GOD AND SIN

He scarcely deals with the doctrines of God or sin. While dealing with sin he emphasizes corporate sin, corporate remedies rather than personal sins: "Oppressive structures of corporate life are the result of the accumulated sins of generations and they develop an anonymity and momentum almost independent of persons now living."⁹

Rejecting the doctrine of creation, Thomas rejects also the doctrine of human depravity. Man 'falls' in his destructive and selfish ambitions and is created in his nobler works. This figurative interpretation of the biblical passages also shows that he does not take the inspiration of the Bible seriously. As far as the doctrine of God is concerned, there is hardly anything worthwhile he has written except a couple of gleanings among all his writings. When he does speak about God he speaks of God's action in political history rather than the attributes of God. That the theology

of hope has tremendous influence on Thomas' thinking is clear from the following quotation:

Creation is the world in motion towards its fulfillment in the coming *eschaton*. The *eschaton* is the creative power, the inner dynamic of the world in process, of the history of mankind towards integration in the lordship of Christ.

Following Chenchiah he sees "the absolute as a construct of the human mind involved in the process", and thus he does not think of God as unchangeable and absolute but as being a part of the evolving process.

CHRIST'S OFFER

All the foregoing is discussed as part of what man is seeking after and hence he comes to the understanding of what Christ has to offer. Since man is seeking freedom and historical involvement etc., Christ, Thomas discovers, offers exactly these things. So his christology is a tailored one. In talking of Christ's incarnation Thomas is concerned not so much about God becoming man but rather about two aspects: since Jesus is a man born in particular time in history, for him the incarnation means the validation of man as the method of God and history as the arena of God's action.

As far as the Cross is concerned, it is "the eternal and ultimate symbol of . . . condemnation and forgiveness". He resolutely rejects the penal substitution on the Cross. To quote him once again, "the crucifixion of Jesus Christ reveals that self-love has its source not in any accident of circumstance but in the spirit of man." Like some earlier theologians he understands that on the Cross *kenosis* took place, i.e. the emptying not of Christ's deity or any other aspect, but of his self. And so the Cross becomes a symbol and an example for men to imitate. What does he think of the resurrection as a physical event? Thomas, like Bultmanians, believes that Jesus was raised from the dead but in the minds of the disciples and so it was a spiritual resurrection. In any case, Thomas thinks of Jesus Christ as the new man, as the proto-type of self-sacrificial love.

How does man respond to Christ's offer of being an example, of being the new man? There are several responses. First, those who accept the pattern of self-giving love and forgiveness have already responded to Christ to some extent. At a deeper level are those who accept the divine mediation or the atonement of the suffering Messiah. At another level there are those who accept the very person of Jesus as the ultimate model of the Messiah to come. He sees all these as valid responses to the Christ. This quantifying of the Pauline faith is rather radically new. But finally he also sees man's response to Christ involving his allegiance to him as the Lord and saviour and joining his church in baptism.

Thomas has more to say on the universal lordship of Christ: "the certainty that Christ reigns as the sovereign Lord of the cosmos and will sum up all things in Christ is an essential part of the biblical faith". He sees the whole world as being under the hidden kingship of the risen Christ and moving towards the day of his open reign, at his second coming – all these categories are understood figuratively. In this Lordship of all he sees all religions, all nations, all revolutions being imbibed with Christian values and the spirit of Christ. And also on this basis Thomas differentiates between secular and salvation history, as many have done. Thus for Thomas Christ is not only the agent of creation, the divine power, but primarily he is the fulfillment of history. Here very openly Thomas accepts the logical conclusion – universalism.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Then what is the mission of the Church? As we have seen earlier, according to Thomas it is to participate in the revolutions of our time. The Church's mission is primarily one of humanization and not of salvation. Salvation or redemption is only one aspect of humanization, catering to the inward or to the spiritual aspects of mankind. The recipients of Christian mission are not individuals anymore but structures such as cultures, religions and ideologies. The method is no more proclamation, but now it is partici-

pation or as he calls it the confession of participation. The bearers are no more the called and sent missionaries, but rather organizations or the churches who do the work. He has enough to say why the verbal communication of the gospel is utterly inadequate for our time. So he comes to the conclusion that evangelism in our time equals service. Unless the church exercises its prophetic ministry of constructive criticism, the priestly ministry of the suffering servant, it has lost its salt. Following from here he goes on to give details of the task the church has in several areas of national and international life – the political, the economic, the cultural, the social, the religious etc.

True to his anti-clericalism, Thomas emphasizes more on the ministry of the laity in the world when he talks about the church. For him the church must have *koinonia*, or open fellowship, without any barrier. For this reason he discusses baptism whether it should be an entrance ticket into the church or privilege of the member of the church (like the Eucharist). These insights lead him also to the formation of the church in Hindu and other religious systems:

Once we acknowledge that the Christ-centred fellowship of faith and ethics transcends the Christian religious community, are we not virtually saying that the church can take from as Christ-centred fellowship of faith and ethics in the Hindu religious community?

And so he comes up with what he calls “the Christ-centred Hindu church”. All this is in line with his understanding of the pluralistic response of man to Christ dealt with earlier.

THE GOAL OF HISTORY

If that is the mission of the church, what is finally the goal of history? Here Thomas admittedly takes the Marxian analysis of history as class struggle, and so the goal is, in his own words, the unity of all things (his equivalent of classless society) (see my book, *Revolution as revelation* - there I have tried to show that he takes this goal essentially from Hinduism as well as from Marxism and from process theology).

Evaluation

Evidently, the theology we have outlined thus far is very much unlike theology, in the sense it looks more like a political or sociological history of man. This is to the credit of Thomas, for he does not see the spiritual aspect of man isolated but in its integral relations with all other aspects. My own evaluations are as follows:

1. Thomas has tried to reconcile the biblical revelation with three systems: Marxist ideology, Hindu spirituality and process philosophy, but he has failed in bringing this reconciliation. He has so failed because the character of the biblical revelation is entirely different from the other three systems. Since he has attempted this impossible amalgamation, his theology ultimately ends up in one or all of the following results: Either God’s holiness as given in the Bible will be rejected, or the personal lordship of Christ will be rejected, or faith as the connection between God and man will be rejected.

2. Following from such an understanding of God, Christ, man and the world Thomas’ theology inevitably leads to political action.

3. There is a basic lack in his approach to the scriptural revelation – he has tried to find revelation in the revolutions. Thomas has done very little exegesis in all his theological writings. His writings are more philosophical, sociological, ideological or political, but almost never have biblical support. Raising history and scientific expertise to the level of the scriptures in authority he has diluted the scriptures radically. It is not just a question of how to interpret the Bible, but of the very place of the Bible in our Faith.

RAYMONDO PANIKKAR (b. 1918)

In ecumenical meetings where Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox are involved, invariably it is the Catholics who dominate the scene by their philosophical input. This is to be expected, because in Protestant seminaries the

whole theological education is finished within three or at the most four years. But in Roman Catholic seminaries they start by learning philosophy for about five years and only then they go on to the study of theology for another six or seven years.

Here I am definitely thinking of theological reasons. For me it is obviously based on Thomas Aquinas' structure of nature and supernature. To nature belongs the natural or universal ability of man given in creation. To the supernature or grace belongs the additional capabilities given through Christ. As far as theology is concerned, reason belongs to nature and faith belongs to supernature. In other words, there is a natural theology as well as a revealed theology. Natural theology is that which man can know about God by human reason without the aid of revelation. Revealed theology necessarily bases itself on the Scriptures. Aquinas accepted natural theology as valid and therefore philosophy has been part of the Roman Catholic theology since his time. Reformation theology has generally rejected the competence of the fallen human reason to engage in natural theology. Only by the enlightenment of the Spirit in regenerate man can a true knowledge of God be found.

But behind this framework of thought there is the basic exegetical approach to the image of God in man. In Genesis 1:26 we read "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'." Here the use of the two terms 'image' and 'likeness' have different meanings in Protestant and Roman Catholic Circles. The Protestant theologians rightly equate one with the other, since elsewhere in the Bible they are interchangeably used. But the Roman Catholics make a strict distinction. According to Aquinas and the Catholics the 'likeness' or *similitudo* consists in the original righteousness given to man, whereas the image or *imago* consists in, among other things, reason. They contend that while *similitudo* (likeness) was lost in the fall of Adam and hence for the rest of mankind, the *imago* is not lost, that is, the human reason is still intact to know true elements about

God. For this reason the Roman Catholics have majored in natural theology and hence in philosophy.

There is one more final reason and that has to do with sanctification and the sacraments. The Protestants generally accept that sanctification is something imputed to man. That is, Christ's righteousness, imputed to use by faith. It is based on our relationship and standing before God. But Catholics believe that it is a complete, almost substantial transformation of the inner being, effected by the sacraments. For them, God's righteousness is *imparted* to us. Thus sacraments have an effect *ex opere operato*. That means, the sacraments are effective in the operation itself apart from the faith of the believer. This means that the Church, by the use of the sacraments, has direct access into, the realm of supernature or grace or revelation. Hence, it has a greater command over its 'subjects' than the Protestant churches. Ultimately it is linked to the magisterium (teaching authority) of the Church and Papal infallibility.

Thus far we have spoken about natural theology because in Raymondo Panikkar we see it at its highest. You will not be surprised by the use of Latin and Sanskrit terms which have to be expected and in which he is an expert.

Raymondo Panikkar was born in Spain to a Hindu father and a Spanish Roman Catholic mother. He was also brought up in both places, India and Spain. He learned both Vedanta and the Bible equally. And then he studied in Spain, Germany, and Italy and later also in Benares. Even now he lives in two worlds: he teaches part-time in the West and part-time in Benares. He has written many books both in Spanish and German. Most of them are unknown in India. But what are known are his English books: *Cult Mysterium in Hinduism and Christendom*, *Religion and Religions*, *Kerygma and India*, *Indian Letters*, *The Trinity and World Religions* and above all the publication of his doctoral thesis, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. This last mentioned book was published in 1964 in the midst of the proceedings of Vatican II, and was virtually taken up as the theology of the Vatican II concerning religions, as the final

pronouncements of that Council show. We can begin to study the major emphases of his theology from this book.

He starts with the question, what is the meeting place for a fruitful dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity? To answer in his own words:

Where can a real encounter take place, so that both having met there could no longer be room any more for ignoring each other, but only for a catholic embrace and exclusive substitution or a mutual interpenetration?

Here both segregation and substitution are definitely neither desirable nor possible, according to Panikkar. He analyses and finds that neither mere cultural synthesis nor doctrinal parallelism are adequate as meeting point. But he affirms that Christ is the meeting place for the two religions. Both meet in Christ: Christ is there in Hinduism but Hinduism is not yet his spouse. Hinduism is the desired bride whose betrothal was celebrated long ago in the Vedic times and whose marriage still remains the mystery of history. According to him Hinduism seems to say: "Because we all are really the same, what harm is there if we keep separate?" while Christianity seems to answer: "if we are all really the same what harm is there in coming together?"

Basing his logic on the classical passages in the Book of Acts about the *Logos spermatikos* idea Raymondo Panikkar asks,

If God has a universal providence over the whole of mankind, and Christianity is the fullness of his revelation 'in those last times', there, must also be a link between the cosmic religions and the religion of his Son.

In fact he finds that Hinduism is a kind of Christianity in potential, a kind of Christianity in seed. Apparently his own life situation is reflected here, the relationship of his Hindu father and Catholic mother.

Panikkar states as his basis the exposition of Brahma Sutra (1:1, 2). The text reads, *Janmadi asya yatah*. Literally it means "whence the origin of this?" According to the rules of the Hindu exposition the text could be expounded to mean "Brahman is the whence, the origination, sustenance,

and transformation of this world" or in simpler words "Brahman is the total ultimate cause of this world". The text has been of course a crucial one in Hindu theology as Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhava, Yaksha and several others have very variedly expounded it. The question is an old one. If Brahman is the unconditional Absolute how can he be the cause of the world? And this is precisely where Panikkar suggests: a Christian solution to this logical dilemma. In his own words, "that from in which this world comes forth and to which it returns and by which it is sustained — that 'that' is Christ". Thus already in the very core of the Brahmasutra Christ is there, for without Christ the dilemma cannot be solved. This is the *agnostos Christos*, the unknown Christ in Hinduism. Of course in accepting Christ as Brahman he adopts the personalist strands in Hinduism to the exclusion of the advaitic strands. Based on this presence of Christ in Hinduism Panikkar, like M.M. Thomas advocates the conversion or transformation of Hinduism to Christ. In this transformation he maintains that there is no real loss for Hinduism but it only gains its own soul. It will be a transformation into a higher sphere, yet keeping its full identity. The concept and the logic is a bit difficult to understand but that has been main trust of his thinking.

In a latter book called *The Trinity and the World Religions* he arrives at a similar conclusion from a different angle. His main concern is to work towards "the universalisation of Christianity, towards the actualization . . . of its catholicity" contributing "to the development of all religions' unity". He then proceeds to show how in the doctrine of the Trinity the three kinds of spiritualities, *karma marga*, *bhakti marga* and *jnana marga*, are not mutually exclusive but can be reconciled. Here he admits, of course, the key problem is the real meaning and content of the terms 'nature' and 'person' — this we have seen already earlier. His final solution is 'theandrim'.

Theandrim is the classical and traditional term for that intimate and complete unity which is realized . . . in Christ, between the divine and the human and which is the goal towards which everything here below tends in Christ and the Spirit.

And he finds theandrist best suited to characterize the synthesis of the three spiritual attitudes described earlier. Of course, the term 'theandric' is an alternative term for Trinity. In philosophical terms he puts it thus: "Theandrist stresses in a paradoxical fashion (for one can speak in no other way) the infinitude of man, for he is tending towards God the infinite; and the finitude of god for he is the end (*finis*) of man."

This theandric vision of reality of Panikkar is an alternative both to dvaitic and advaitic visions. Thus according to Panikkar theandrist is more than both thought and action, it is a spirituality; for Panikkar man is more than a mere human being: he is a theandric mystery.

Evaluation

Of course, as we have already hinted, the whole of Panikkar's theology is philosophical in approach and the logic of it eludes the reader. Yet we can attempt some evaluation.

(a) Basing himself firmly on Thomism, that is on Aristotelian logic, and on the magisterium (teaching authority) of the Church, Panikkar does not budge from the orthodox doctrines of the Church. As is the case of most of the Roman Catholic theologians, he tends to centre all authority in the Pope. I say this because as long as Catholicism was closed to outside religion so were its theologians, and once it opened so also did the theologians.

(b) Secondly, he has followed the usual *Logos spermatikos* idea (by now you will be familiar with the term) which though has some truth and biblical support, yet in my opinion definitely dilutes the uniqueness and the finality of Jesus Christ as the culmination of God's revelation. If one can find Christ in Hinduism, or elsewhere in revolutions, as M.M. Thomas has asserted, why then do Christians preach, why does the Church exist? What at all is conversion and why at all incarnation?

(c) For Panikkar, the fact of his being born to a mixture of religions – a Hindu father and a Catholic mother – has had a strong effect on him. A parallel is the life of Paul Tillich, who was born and brought up in Germany in the border

situations of the World War. Then later on he worked and lived in America. So all his writings deal with the two worlds, and with border situations, as he himself admits. We find a similar influence of Panikkar's life context on his theologizing. After all, each of us is a child of our times, are we not.

STANLEY JOSEPH SAMARTHA

Background

Like M.M. Thomas, Russell Chandran and Panikkar, Stanley Samartha is one of our contemporary, senior theologians in India. He hails from the South Kanara district of Karnataka, as his name reveals. His influence outside India is more than inside. After having studied at United Theological College, Bangalore, he finished his doctoral dissertation in the United States, on the philosophy of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. On his return he taught for several years in UTC and then at Serampore where he became the Principal of the Serampore College.

In 1968, when the World Council of Churches was re-organizing its Study Unit on the Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men they called Samartha to the Unit as its director. Soon his excellent leadership converted the Unit into a full-fledged organization within WCC, named DFI – Dialogue with Men of Other Faiths and Ideologies. Till 1975 he worked as Director at Geneva and after his retirement he came to teach at Karnataka Theological College, Mangalore. Now he is a lecturer and theologian at large, particularly at UTC.

He has written and edited several books. One of the most readable and clear presentation of his thoughts is his book *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*. Beside that he has either written partly or edited several other books in the capacity of Director of DFI, all on the subject on dialogue.

Samartha's Christology

Samartha's main contribution is naturally in the realm of christology, and here he has gone beyond his predecessors. Raymondo Panikkar's *The Unknown Christ of Hindu-*

ism postulated that Christ is already present there in pure Hinduism but not yet known to Hindus. M.M. Thomas went a step further in *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* affirmed that though Christ is still unknown in the pure Hinduism, he is already acknowledged in the modern Indian renaissance. Samartha goes beyond both these steps. In *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* he postulates that Hindus have recognized Christ in their own traditions and even have responded to him at several levels. His book is a study of the several levels of Hindu responses. As a conclusion he gives a summary of what an authentic Indian Christology should be and here he definitely takes an advaitic interpretation of Christ.

In his books he gives excellent guidelines as to what kind of Christology the Indian Church must evolve:

Its (i.e. the Indian Christology's) central effort should be to acknowledge the mystery and explain the meaning of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Its starting point is the total commitment to Christ as crucified and risen Lord. Its context is one of sharing and involvement . . . it is my conviction that unless Indian Christian theological thinking takes advaita seriously in both its classical and modern forms it is not likely to make any effective contribution to the quest for resources to undergird our national life.

Thus he makes clear that his primary purpose in studying Christ is to make his claims and offers relevant to the national needs struggles of India, and not a spiritualized version of these needs and struggles.

His theology starts with a very valid question: "What does it mean to affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour today in India?"¹⁰ In answering this the basic situation of India ought to be in competition with the whole range of Hinduism but can rather be in "co-operation with it." The reason for this is that "if the message of the gospel has to become challengingly relevant to human needs today both the credibility of the Saviour and the meaning of the salvation he offers have to be stated afresh"¹¹, that is, only by involvement and meeting the present struggles and meeting the present needs. But sadly, he says, the Christian presence is symbolized by "the church

building on the same river bank, with a cross on the top but with its doors shuttered and its gates locked, to be opened only on the following Sunday"¹² while on the other side there are slums and huts and workers and strikes going on. Yet, in the midst of all this, Christ is standing incognito because "The Hindu response to Christ is sufficient evidence of his presence, even though the manner of the response and its characteristics may be unfamiliar to those inside the hedges of the traditional church."¹³

In this connection, Samartha emphasizes that only the universal accessibility of Christ, but also his universal initiatives, are to be taken account of. But then he is quite aware that such an acknowledgment of Hindu response to Christ outside the church has several implications:

a) Now that Christ is found to be present in most important areas of Hindu life and thought, the church must be grateful for such a revelation rather than offer suspicious criticism.

b) It paves the way in which direction indigenous Christianity must proceed.

c) The Church must start afresh the meaning of "the historic particularity of Christ even when he is 'unbound'".¹⁴

d) Christianity need not be in competition with Hinduism but learn to co-operate with it.

Our Hindu brethren should not be regarded as recruits to the kingdom of God but as fellow citizens in the commonwealth of Christ, seeking together the fullness of Christ in his continuing work of reconciliation and renewal.¹⁵

e) It also means that this common quest could help Hindus themselves "by way of deepening and enriching its own heritage as it seeks to relate itself to modern needs."¹⁶

Of course, Samartha is not speaking of one response but of several Hindu responses to Christ, because "Response is a complex attitude involving cultural, psychological and theological factors, and in trying to describe it one should be careful to avoid generalization and over-simplification of the issues."¹⁷

HINDU RESPONSES

With that principle he differentiates three types of Hindu responses to Christ.

a) "Response to Christ without commitment to him".¹⁸ As examples he cites the following Indian thinkers: Sree Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Akhilananda, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, S. Radhakrishnan. For these people there is absolutely no value in the Christian Church nor commitment to Christ.

b) "Response and commitment to Christ, and Christ alone, but reject the context of Hinduism itself, but with either indifference to or a total rejection of the Church."¹⁹ Here belong the people who accept Jesus Christ but reject the institution of the Church, like Subba Rao, Parekh and others.

c) "Response and commitment to Christ and an open entry into the Church through baptism, but with strong criticism of the church from within its fellowship."²⁰ People belonging to this kind of response are part of the church, on the membership roll of the church, but raise a prophetic voice against the church practices. The 'Re-thinking Christianity' group is an example he mentions, that is people like Chenchiah, Chakkarai and the like.

As a postscript he adds a fourth category of response which he describe as "The effort to discover the hidden Christ within Hinduism itself and to unveil him even though there is no conscious visible response to him."²¹

Raymondo Panikkar and Klaus Klostermaier are examples of this type of response. Naturally this is not a Hindu response, as Samartha is aware of. The attempt here is to make explicit what is already implicit in this very citadel of Hinduism.

Then Samartha goes on to analyze in detail the different responses. Some of the common elements of those who have given the first type of response to Christ are:

1) To all of them experience is the supreme authority in religion.

2) All of them make a selective use of the scripture, whether Hindu or Christian, in interpreting Christ. They also show little interest in the Old Testament. The Gospels are their primary interest and specially the fourth Gospel.

3) The church is an unnecessary appendix for them. The notion of election or the people of God is arrogance in their sight.

4) There is no special significance they attach to the historicity of Jesus Christ.

5) They rather give importance to the ethical teachings of Christ and especially to his sermon on the mount. Yet all of them regard the death of Christ with the greatest respect, since it is a symbol of self-sacrifice and renunciation. But the resurrection has no special significance for them.

6) All of them make conscious effort to separate Christ from Christianity. Thus their response is not to the Christ of the Church but to the unbound Christ.

7) To all of them service is a crucial category, and they regard service to man as equivalent to service of God. As such, worship of God and philanthropic activity are brought together.

8) Most of them use the advaitic framework to fit Christ and his work, so Samartha asserts: "Therefore it is clear that any attempt at Christology in the context of Hinduism, if it should command their intellectual respect, must in some way come to terms with Advaita, not just in its classical form but also in its modern interpretation."

9) There is a strong tendency in all of them to universalize Christ, to lift him out of his Jewish particularity and western cultural bondage and emphasize the Christ principle against the Jesus of Nazareth.

10) None of them really commit themselves to Christ. "At best Christ is an additional item in their spiritual menu."

They do not consider Christ as an alternative to present possibilities but only as additional source for their spiritual growth.

INTERPRETING CHRIST THROUGH ADVAITA

With these responses in mind, Samartha comes to define what he calls "the core of the Christian dogma", "the essence of the faith once delivered to the Saints". Since *anubhava* is the chief source of knowledge among the advaitins, that is, since Brahman can be known only through *anubhava*, Samartha believes that it should be our starting point. But Christian *anubhava* has a certain distinctiveness,

First in that, unlike advaita, here the Christian *anubhava* is controlled by the historical fact of Christ, and second, in that it has a social dimension in the church, in the fellowship in which it is sustained, strengthened and transmitted to others.²²

Here Samartha of course criticizes both the *bhakti* understanding of *avatara* as unsuitable for Christ, as well as Ramanuja's understanding of matter and consciousness raised to the level of Godhead. He thinks advaita is the more suited strand for the interpretation of the Christian gospel. And particularly the Advaita of Shankara. But since there is a tendency of dvaitic inquiry to reduce the significance both of person and history, Samartha suggests that the Christian view of advaita would "help in recovering the sense of the personal, the historical and the social in the structure of Hindu spirituality". This means that in Samartha's thinking the interpretation of Brahman is not impersonal but it is reconcilable with personal values. Thus he is free to relate Christ to Brahman. Samartha realizes that the real point of contention here is: What do we mean by the term person? He suggests that there should be at least the following as its content: subsistence, distinctiveness, completeness and intelligence.

How do we then in advaitic system understand the world? Is it an illusion or a reality? Samartha says, "It is not necessary to understand *maya* as advocating the unreality

of the world. *Maya* should be regarded not so much as the doctrine of the ontological status of the world as description of its relation to God." He approves Devanandan's approach that *maya* need not mean even a first-rate reality but a dependent reality which has worth in the sight of God. In any case, Samartha is clear that the *maya* of advaita is not identical with the world of the Bible. Therefore,

The historical nature of Jesus Christ, with all its implications for man and society, can be justifiably considered in this context. It can be noted that the ontological status and the historical fact of Jesus Christ are held together in his life and framework.

So what is more important is to affirm the fact that in Jesus Christ this world of nature and history is created, redeemed and sustained, and of course God's grace is being directed to its final consummation.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

Then how do we view the two natures of Christ and specially the deity of Christ? Along with Cullmann, Samartha says that there is no need to say that God's nature is completely exhausted in Jesus. That is to say, while accepting God's truth and love in Jesus Christ, the sense of the mystery and depth in God should not be eliminated in any christology in India.

Then Samartha considers the work of Christ's salvation. In the advaitic monism some things are not given enough significance. These include: Freedom and responsibility of the individual personality; the social and historical dimensions of human life; the possibilities for the emergence of the new both in nature and in history; the fact of tragedy and evil within human spirituality sometimes masquerading as goodness; the persistence of sin, guilt and death in human existence, particularly at a time when new weapons of total destruction create the disposal of man, which may willfully be used or accidentally released.

So Christian christology must give them significance. Only through an interpretation of Cross and the Resurrec-

tion of Christ can this be possible. Yet we must avoid the 'emergency measure' or 'rescue operation' kind of interpretation of the Cross, because the scope of Christ's work is larger than the redemption of individuals:

As the agent of creation and as the Saviour of mankind, his work is continuing until all things are summed up in him. Here therefore the advaita emphasis on the unity of life, where history and nature are seen together in the totality of the life of God, is not irrelevant.

This does not mean, as Christians have often done, that we should explain away the mystery of the Cross. Yet the offense of the Cross need not be stated in an offensive way. He would like us to avoid the following mistakes: the tendency to describe the Resurrection as a kind of happy ending to an otherwise tragic story; theories of atonement based on the idea of sacrifice; the tendency to remain weeping at the foot of the Cross and join the emotional catharsis; and over-emphasis on original sin; the stress on feelings of sin and guilt as prerequisites before the saving power of the Cross; obsessions with the symptoms of sin rather than its root and the like.

Samartha says Christ's death and suffering were, first, voluntary, secondly, vicarious "in the sense that there is a deliberate recognition that it was for the sake of the others", thirdly, it is the resurrection which is the culmination of the cross. Hence the cross cannot be interpreted without the resurrection.

In the conclusion of the book Samartha comes back to the original question with which he started: What does it mean to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in India today? He answers:

To accept the lordship of Jesus Christ means that one must be prepared to obey God's demand in Christ to crucify the self, in its desire for isolation and in its feeling of self-sufficiency, in order that the promise of renewal in the resurrection might become operative in human life. Wherever the Christ event is recognized and whatever people are prepared consciously to die with him and to be raised again with him, there God's work of reconciliation takes place.

The Goal of Salvation

Samartha knows that this salvation in Christ is beyond human or social or cosmic history. It includes the consummation of all life, the disclosure of the ultimate meaning of creation. It is definitely not a return to the beginning but an enrichment and fulfillment, a move through the struggles and conflicts, overcoming evil in love and finding final fulfillment in the fullness of God himself. Thus there is no exclusiveness in Christology in India. On the contrary, "it is the declaration of the universality of the unbound Christ . . . Christ transcends all cultures."

So Samartha concludes his book *Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* by saying Christ is always involved in human situations, wherever the struggle for justice, freedom and truth is going on, and demands that his followers also participate in his crucifixion and resurrection. And he cannot be bound or identified with any particular cultural situation nor to a particular system of thought.

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Since Samartha is also the primary spokesman for the theology of dialogue of WCC we must say something on that topic also. We will speak of one aspect of dialogue from his writings. He thinks of two principal attitudes for any dialogue: openness and commitment. First commitment. Unless one is committed to a particular set of beliefs he cannot dialogue. Thus he exhorts that only committed Christians, those who are fully committed to Christ, can have the courage to have the dialogue. But commitment is not sufficient unless it is coupled with openness. One should be open not only to understand what the other has to say in dialogue, but be open enough to change one's own position in the light of the dialogue; only then it is true openness.

And dialogue does not take place between structures, i.e., religions or theologies, nor at the intellectual level, but it takes place at the human level. That is why WCC sub-unit is called dialogue with *men* (later, people) of other faiths and ideologies. This is certainly healthy.

Since dialogue takes place in community there are two aspects to it. First the Dialogue within the community: "the building up of relationships expressing mutual care and mutual understanding". Among the Christians this must lead to communication. Secondly dialogue between communities: "For the sake of a wider community of peace and justice". Common purpose in society are important here. This may lead to international consensus or inter-religious dialogue. Without the first the second becomes shallow sentimentalism, but without the second the first becomes narrow exclusivism.

What does dialogue do? a) it clarifies the meaning of terms used in dialogue; b) it makes possible "a more coordinated theological reflection on the relationships between religions"; c) it provides a theological framework within which questions can be asked from all sides. Thus, a theological dialogue is necessary, says Samartha.

Evaluation

Samartha's resort to the advaitic system as the proper vehicle for interpreting Christ is based primarily on empirical enquiry and not necessarily on theological grounds.

He seems to be carried away by the vision of unity of Advaita and thus he seems to dilute the uniqueness (one can say even exclusiveness) of Christ as portrayed in the Bible. Since his goal seems to be more of a society of peace and justice and harmony he is more concerned with avoiding religious conflicts than in preserving the truth of the Gospel. As a result, his reinterpretation of the Cross and Resurrection existentially and his dilution of the penal substitutional theory of atonement of the Cross and even the deity of Christ are to be regretted. Though his starting question, what does it mean to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in India today, is most significant, his answer seems to be tailored more to meeting the need of the hour in India.

NOTES

1. M.M. Thomas, "Faith Seeking Understanding and Responsibility", p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
7. J.R. Chandran and M.M. Thomas (eds.), *Political Outlook in India Today*, pp. 168-169.
8. M.M. Thomas, *Christian Action in Asian Struggle*, speech at EACC Assembly at Bangkok, 1975, p. 3.
8. *Ibid.*
9. M.M. Thomas, speech at 5th Assembly of WCC at Nairobi, in *Revolution as Revelation*, p. 118.
10. S.J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, CLS, Madras, 1974, p. 5.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 118.