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## Book Review

**Saju Chackalackal, ed.,** *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, Bangalore: Vidyavanam Publications & Coimbatore: Preshitha Communications, 2009, pages xii + 932, ISBN: 978-81-905799-6-4, price: Rs. 900.00, US\$ 50.00.

Every thesis has its antithesis; every action inevitably invites a reaction. If, on the one hand, the alluring power of materialism, consumerism, and the scientific technological revolution keeps modern humans all over the world away from their creator, on the other, the number of people who are disillusioned with the vanity and emptiness of all this glitter and glory and who yearn for a taste of the Divine, are on the increase. The Indian situation is no different. More and more people today flock to gurus and ashrams of all religions in search of God and God experience. This means that in spite of all that the world has to offer, people still search for the deeper meaning of life; they long for the realization of the true purpose of life. Disillusioned with the vanity of the temporal, people are thirsting for the eternal, which alone can give them lasting peace and happiness. It is in this context that the ashrams and the ashram way of life once again become relevant and important. Ashrams teach people how to live a life of renunciation and detachment, thereby attaining freedom from all bondage, and they provide enlightenment and God-experience to the seekers. Viewed thus, the present volume, which is a comprehensive study on ashrams and Indian *sannyâsa*, is a timely and significant contribution.

Vidyavanam Ashram, which Acharya Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI founded about thirteen years ago at Bhoothanahalli village on the outskirts of Bangalore city, is one such centre of Indian Christian living which has ever since offered spiritual realization to thousands of seekers of spiritual wisdom. Under the able leadership of Father Vineeth – himself a person of superior intellectual calibre, high educational qualification, and lofty God-experience stemming from true interiority – the ashram has grown into a nationally and internationally well known centre of Indian Christian living. Although many have contributed, in different ways, to the fulfilment of his dream, undoubtedly the brain behind the original vision, planning, and the working out of this great vision into concrete reality, is Father Vineeth himself. Taking into account all these, and *mutatis mutandis*, it is the reviewer's firm belief that posterity will consider Father Vineeth as one of the great pioneers of Indian Christian living, along with the other great pioneers like Monchanen, Swami Abhishiktananda (Father Le Saux), Francis Acharya, Bede Griffiths, and Amalorpavadas.

The volume under review, *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living*, is a Festschrift published in honour of this great Acharya on the occasion of the golden jubilee of his sacerdotal ordination and his seventy-fifth birthday. This volume is a comprehensive study on the various aspects of Indian *sannyâsa*, especially Indian Christian ashram life. In every respect this is an impressive work, and it may be rightly called the *magnum opus* of its editor, Dr. Saju Chackalackal CMI.

The present volume consists of the contributions of fifty scholars, almost all of whom are Father Vineeth's colleagues, friends, or students, on the why, what, and how of Indian *sannyâsa*, especially Indian Christian *sannyâsa*. As the editor himself puts it, "taken together, the whole collection [...] would function as a reference volume to many aspects related to Indian Christian living, an area of lively research and realizational interest" (p. 2). The fifty articles are classified under six headings, viz., (1) Father Francis Vineeth: Person and Mission, (2) Indian Approaches to the Bible, (3) Indian Christian Theology, (4) Inculturation and the Indian Church, (5) Indian Spirituality, and (6) Indian Christian Paradigms of Philosophical Synthesis. Each part is more or less complete in itself, providing a rather comprehensive analysis of the subject under consideration.

Part I, "Father Francis Vineeth: Person and Mission," begins with Father Vineeth's own description of the long spiritual journey that he, as one who is captivated by the revealing-concealing dynamics of the Ineffable, undertook in search of the Ineffable. This part presents the arduous and incessant search of a genuine spiritual seeker who has received the special call from God to pursue ashram spirituality and contemplative prayer. For, Father Vineeth believes that "true spirituality fosters search into one's own depth. Along with the outward global movement, we all need also an inward movement into the depth of our own being. [...] The Supreme Self abides within us as our inner controller and the ultimate Self. It is this Self that is to be experienced and realized" (p. 7). What better means can one think of for this realization than the founding of an ashram where contemplative prayer and realization of the Self are pursued as ultimate goals? In other words, the *raison d'être* of an ashram is to "seek God through inner fervour," as the *Taittiriya Upani'ad* puts it. The reasons that prompted Father Vineeth to believe that an ashram style of life will be of immense help in reaching the abiding Self, the *Atman*, must be two: First, "Search for the Self needs constant effort, undying spirit of ascetic fervour, peaceful mind, and deep concentration" (p. 8); secondly, as the *Ka ha Upani'ad* (1.2.12) puts it, "Realizing through self-contemplation that primal God, difficult to be seen, deeply hidden, set in the cave of the heart, dwelling in the deep, the wise leave behind both pain and pleasure." When Father Vineeth founded the ashram, he was "envisaging another form or another expression of living the CMI Charism" (p. 14). At this juncture, one must say that the decision which Father Vineeth took then, viz., "to experience the Ineffable in the serenity of the ashram" (p. 20), was a Spirit-inspired and wise one as thousands are now reaping the fruits of his labour.

The first part of this volume also contains an erudite contribution from the editor in which he discusses the life and philosophy of Father Vineeth, his mission, his contributions in the field of philosophy, theology, Indian spirituality, theology of religious life, ashram life, etc. Father Vineeth's amazing ability to make East-West synthesis and develop penetrating insights is highlighted. His commitment to developing an Indian-Christian theology and an Indian-Christian worldview (*darśan*) and his involvement in developing new forms of integration and inculturation are well appreciated and highly esteemed all over India and even abroad. Portraying him as a "true son of St. Thomas," as his motto always is, "*pita, tava cit bhĒvana; sadĒ mama h̄t sĒdhana*" – Father, thy will is always the way of my heart (p. 84), the editor concludes: "Father Vineeth, a person of simplicity and openness, continues his pilgrimage of life with an incessant quest for the Divine" (p. 83). The editor has also given, before this article, an entry in which the milestones in the history of Vidyavanam Ashram are given, followed by another article in which the milestones in the life of Father Vineeth and also the important writings of Father Vineeth are given. With two doctorates (one in philosophy and the other in theology), teaching experience of many years, membership in nine professional associations, 34 contributions in academic and spiritual fields of various types, and publication of 14 books and 86 articles to his credit, the picture one gets about the life and mission of Father Vineeth is pretty impressive.

The other articles deal with various dimensions of new ways of Indian Christian living. Louis Malieckal explores the mystic in Father Vineeth; Sister Karuna Vadakethala shares her reminiscences of her beloved brother; Jose Nandhikkara describes the dynamics of the magnificent chapel at Vidyavanam Ashram; and Sebastian Elavathingal relates the ashram spirituality with the spirituality of creative space. Thomas Aykara throws light on the relevance and importance of being consecrated priests in the context of India; Joseph Ethakuzhy discusses the ashram ideal and the spirituality of the *ḠtĒ*; and Sebastian Athappilly reflects on the theme, "Inculturation in the Model of Incarnation." Some of the other areas discussed are mysticism, Indian paradigms of spiritual life, discipleship in the Indian and Christian traditions, and various aspects of Inculturation in the Indian Church.

This volume, with 50 articles and 932 pages, is, in short, a solid contribution to the academic world. Hats off to the editor for planning well in advance and bringing out on time, this massive work! The layout and printing of the book are commendable. And so is the editorial work done. It is the reviewer's earnest hope that this work will go a long way in inspiring and guiding those who genuinely seek the Ineffable in the heart of their hearts.

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