The following is an article that appeared in the Deccan Herald, Bangalore on Nov 28th 2014.

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/444229/mistaking-crooks-saints.html>

The author is Valson Thampu. Now a cursory google search for this person throws up a Wiki link, the first line of which says he is an educator and more importantly, a **Christian theologian**. Here’s the link:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valson_Thampu>

**Moreover, the author belongs to the Church of North India whose basic creeds are the**[**Apostle's Creed**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostles_Creed)**and the**[**Nicene Creed**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene_Creed)**of 381**[**AD**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AD)**which therefore means that CNI makes a distinction between its adherents and non-Christians. This essentially means that they declare that they and only they follow the true religion and that all non-Christians pray to false gods.**

If that indeed is a major vocation of his, he should have been truthful by stating in the byline for the article that he is a Christian theologian. But his byline reads only thus. “The writer is Principal, St Stephen’s College, Delhi”. This is intellectual dishonesty since the reader is not aware of the fact that his vocation as a theologian could also colour his views on a particular subject.

Further, this person was nominated to the National Integration Council as this report in The Hindu states.

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-newdelhi/valson-thampu-nominated-to-nic/article92688.ece>

Also see this post in Christianity Today. The author is in the company of people like John Dayal who has been named in “Breaking India”, written by Rajiv ji.

<http://www.christiantoday.co.in/article/outspoken.christian.journalist.noted.academician.appointed.members.of.national.integration.council/876.htm>

This author has also petitioned the then PM on atrocities against Christians in Kandhamal, Orissa as is evidenced by these reports.

<http://www.identitynetwork.net/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=50508&columnid>=

<http://www.milligazette.com/dailyupdate/2005/20050902-minorities-rights.htm>

In writings elsewhere this author barely conceals his hatred for what he calls right wing extremism. He has been close to Swami Agnivesh too as you can see from the below link

<http://www.swamiagnivesh.com/valson.htm>

Here is another link that is not quite so flattering to the Rev. Dr. Valson Thampu

<http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/st-stephens-acting-principal-thampus-phd-fails-ugc-test/284719/>

This report shows that the author had to quit as principal of St. Stephens in 2008. However he seems to have been reinstated later that year. Both the stories in below links.

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/valson-thampu-quits-st-stephens/article1221048.ece>

<http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080913/jsp/nation/story_9827149.jsp>

At the outset, it is important to understand that I hold no brief for Sant/Baba Rampal who he has ostensibly attacked in his piece. I have no particular view on the subject and I refuse anymore to believe all the canards put out in the mainstream media for they’ve cried wolf so often now, that one refuses to take them seriously and I cannot accept trial by media. Also, it’s a curiously skewed situation when crimes committed by assorted padres and mullahs find hardly a mention in the ever shrill media. I believe the law of the land will therefore treat his case on its merits and he will be acquitted or convicted as the case may be. However, I do have a problem with the broad brush Mr. Thampu takes to generally trash all so called “godmen” which is a term that seems to be exclusively used for gurus from the Dharmic faiths. It is a fact that all padres and mullahs and rabbis in churches, mosques and synagogues are also godmen. But this pejorative is very selectively applied only to those coming from the Dharmic faiths.

With the above introduction, I present below some of the observations that I made on his article using the ideas that I picked up from reading “Being Different” by Rajiv ji and also watching, listening and understanding how he uses purvapaksha and the Dharmic lens to refute positions taken by his opponents.

Para 3, line 3: “How come people in this sophisticated age armed with a critical, sceptical spirit, fail to distinguish between an ‘ashram’ and a fortification that looks anything but an ashram?”

The writer has put “ashram” in quotes. Why? Is it because there is a mental picture of the ashram? As a reader I would like to know what that mental picture is and what the author thinks an ashram should look like.

Para 4: “The canards on which the conmen of religion build their empires pertain to their ludicrous ideas about god and their pretensions to having special powers.”

I assume since in the previous paragraph he has underlined our “secular culture and scientific temperament” the above quote can be applied to all religions equally. I move ahead assuming this is so, for I believe the author will have no difficulties accepting that conmen exist in all religions.

Para 5: “For centuries we have been brainwashed to believe that gods are partial to their own religious communities, cults, locations and individuals. The Christian god cares only for Christians. Hindu gods are partial to Hindus. Lord Buddha, Prophet Mohammad, Lord Mahavira and Guru Nanak, likewise, are irrelevant to those outside their fold. Such people are excluded from help or relief.”

Can the author clarify where Hindu gods or Buddha or Mahavira or Guru Nanak say that only their followers or “chosen people” will be preferred? If he cannot cite sources, we must then think that he is making his sweeping generalization based on the Abrahamic gods who indeed say so very explicitly that they are partial only to their followers.

Para 6: “God is, besides, contracted to certain ‘special agents’ whom he favours with special powers. Like a politician to his coterie, god reveals his cards only to these minions. The rest of us are condemned to receiving his favours second-hand.”

This is the perfect understanding of the people of the book. But wholly flawed when talking of Dharmic traditions where first person empiricism is the norm. Nobody from the Dharmic traditions is condemned to “receiving his favours second-hand” and everyone has the potential to achieve oneness with the Brahman. So, one has to conclude that the author is applying Abrahamic principles to understand a Dharmic phenomenon when the worldviews itself don’t match.

Para 7: “There is no knowing, however, how god chooses these middlemen. On current evidence, god appears to have a preference for crooks and criminals.”

Even allowing for the first sentence to be true, it follows then that the Christian god (granted that he is the purported son of god, but that still does not absolve him from being a middleman) on whom rests the Christian faith is a crook and criminal. The same also holds for Mohammad who is the prophet of Allah in Islam and therefore the middleman for that faith. As for the Jews, their crook middleman is still in the making.

Now to deconstruct the first sentence, while it is true that one doesn’t know why God should chooses his middlemen in the Abrahamic faiths, (He apparently plays tic tac toe and wherever his finger points that person is chosen) the sentence is not even applicable to Dharmic faiths. In Dharmic faiths, the human being chooses to realize his God potential and a person from these faiths achieves the so called “middleman” status based on the extent to which s/he evolves in consciousness through individual yoga. Moreovers/he is not sole arbitrator between god and his followers. He is only the guide and helps his followers choose their path. Eventually, each one of his/her followers evolves according to his own experience. These faiths also subscribe to the view that all of creation is imbued with God potential.

Para 8: “It is as though he has an air of condescension towards the rest of us, the common folk, to whom mercies will be sent only by proxy.”

Repetition that an Abrahamic worldview is being applied to a supposedly Dharmic person (Baba Rampal’s arrest drama which I understand is what the author wants to target). Dharmic peoples simply do not receive god’s mercies “by proxy”. A Baba/Guru/Sant is only a means to follow on a certain path and its up to the follower/shishya to evolve individually through tapas and sadhana.

Para 9, line 2: “We are sure to be forgiven if we disobey or disrespect God, which we do all the time. **But we are sure to be exterminated if we try the same with these middlemen**.”

Following from the sentence in bold, one can safely assume then that “extermination” is what happened in Europe during the crusades and in the US with the genocide of the native Americans and also what happened in Australia with the indigenous peoples of the land. When applied to Islam of course, this is the narrative that has played itself out numerous times since the advent of Islam. Genocide and extermination are exclusive achievements of these two Abrahamic faiths. It would be good to know if the author can produce an account of similar proportions with respect to Dharmic faiths.

Now, for the first sentence. There is no concept of forgiveness within Dharmic faiths because sin is not associated with these faiths. Dharmic peoples are fully responsible for their actions and will therefore reap its consequences (good or bad) as explained by the concept of karma. So where is the concept of forgiveness then? Now, applying this sentence to the Christians, their disobedience is forgiven by God or God’s middleman in the church called the Father? Thus if the Father is the middleman of God then he is of course a crook since the author has previously stated that. And then we have to conclude that it is these very same crooks who are forgiving Christians in the name of God. I don’t know enough about Judaism and Islam to apply it to them. However since these faiths also rely on middlemen for access to God, the transaction must perforce go through these crooks (as per author’s representation).

Para 11, line 1: “Also, he used to wake up once a week per community (on Fridays for Muslims, Saturdays for Jews, Sundays for Christians) and limit his presence to designated places of worship (mosques, synagogues, churches, temples etc.) “

Asserting his secular credentials, he has targeted all faiths in terms of when God “wakes up” to affix his signature “to designated place of worship”. So far so good. He talks about Fridays for Muslims, Saturdays for Jews and Sundays for Christians. Where is the day for Hindus? No day for the Hindus (or for Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs for that matter). He leaves that out for he doesn’t find any references. That is fair enough. But when he continues he says “his presence to designated places of worship (mosques, synagogues, churches, temples etc.” Why have temples been added when he did not find a specific day for the Hindus, why did their place of worship find a mention? This can only be construed as ill-informed or most probably deliberate false extrapolation?

Para 13: “The Creator is present in, and available to, all parts of creation. Anyone who claims to be a privileged agent of God is a cheat and a de facto atheist. He flies in the face of the quintessential spiritual vision of vasudaiva kutumbakam.”

Now for the first sentence: he means God is immanent in all of creation. If so, I’d like to ask him if is he divine? Is a dog divine? Is a tree divine? Is a stone divine? If he answers yes to it, I would then like to ask if he will then be willing to worship himself, a dog or the stone? If he still says yes, I would ask if he would allow me to bring my Ganesh murthi into his church and pray to it. It is a stone and I think of it as divine and I have carved it in the form of Ganesha. Will he let me do it in his house, in his church? Abrahamic faiths do not essentially believe in an immanent god, else why would they object to worshipping a stone?

Let’s deconstruct the second sentence. Let’s assume that as a Hindu I have no qualms in saying that this Hindu “godman” who “claims to be a privileged agent of God is a cheat and a de facto atheist”. By the same token, then Jesus of the Christians, Mohammad of the Muslims and the yet to come Messiah of the Jews, are all cheats too since they claim to be privileged agents of God.

Now for the “vasudaiva kutmbakam” of the Hindus whose most abused usage has gained ground. First, until this point, the author has exhibited an ability to elaborate his point only from an Abrahamic worldview. Therefore, from where does this sudden recourse to a Hinduism tenet come in? it does come in so let’s now look at it. Does vasudaiva kutmbakam comprise everyone and everything indiscriminately? Then even an Osama Bin Laden or a Hitler as Rajiv ji says forms part of that kutumbakam. Or an approaching swarm of locusts should be allowed to create havoc just because they are also part of vasudaiva kutumbakam. The author assumes that a spiritual quest is devoid of fighting forces that are harmful to the concept of vasudaiva kutumbakam. And that is certainly not how Hinduism envisages this concept. Yes, vasudaiva kutumbakam is extended to all those who live by the principles of pluralism which also involves Rajiv ji’s “mutual respect” while conducting inter-faith encounters. The very fact that this author has so far written his viewpoint pontificating from his Christian exclusivist worldview, indeed he does not qualify to be part of my vasudaiva kutumbakam. He cannot be until he offers me the respect which I will offer him for his worldview.

Para 14: “The implied insinuation that God practices untouchability vis-à-vis almost the whole of humankind and dispatches his mercy and charity to them, therefore, only via some conmen deputies should provoke derisive laughter.”

This para is laughable for it tries to forcefully bring in the concept of untouchability and to my mind this is a blatant attempt to malign the Hindu faith with the prevalent divisive discourse of caste.

However, assuming for a moment that this is an unbiased observation, we shall look at the facts. Yes, there have been and there still are problems within the Hindu faith. But has it been a case of Hindus not doing the churning from within to correct these problems? The facts would not say so. We shall start with the Arya Samaj. In the page “About us” on their [website](http://aryasamaj.com/global/?page_id=114), the Arya Samaj says this. “**Arya Samaj** was established by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in the year 1875 to get rid of social evils of Hindu society. Arya Samaj is a bona fide Hindu-Vedic organization. It is non-denominational authentic Hindu-Vedic religious organization dedicated to remove superstition, orthodoxy and social evils such as un-touchability etc., from society.” So it is a fact that Hindus have a tradition of reforming from within and the Arya Samaj is just one example which is pan-Indian. Then there is Dr. B.R Ambedkar and there have been local reformers, for example in Kerala, Mahatma Ayyankali and Sree Narayana Guru who stayed within the faith and worked towards reform. Their contributions especially those of Mahatma Ayyankali have largely not been acknowledged and it is now that the Modi Government is educating Indians on icons such as him. There was also the temple entry [proclamation by the Travancore king](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_Entry_Proclamation) which was a landmark and forward looking decision to change the bad practices that had crept into the Hindu faith. The proclamation signed by Sree Chithira Thirunal reads thus. “***Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and on all-comprehending toleration****, knowing that in its practice it has throughout the centuries, adapted itself to the needs of changing times, solicitous that none of our Hindu subjects should, by reason of birth or caste or community, be denied the consolation and the solace of the Hindu faith, we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that, subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering or worshipping at temples controlled by us and our Government.”*

The emphasis in the above quote is mine to underline the fact that this ground breaking reform was achieved from within the faith.

Apart from these examples, since independence, the Government of India, no matter whichever ideology, is committed to affirmative action to overcome the injustices of the past and towards that has so many programs intended for the upliftment of the oppressed. As a result, we have so many successful leaders today who are drawn from the Dalit fold. And no one better exemplies this than the ascent to the premiership by Modi ji who himself is drawn from among the backward castes. We have also had a person from the oppressed castes as President in K R Narayanan. Apart from all of this, I am very sure that many of us in our daily lives, knowing the situations of the past do our utmost in our individual capacity to correct such imbalances. All these examples are showcased in order to reinforce that while Hindus understand that there are many problems within the faith, they can never be accused with a single broad brush of not having done anything about it as Mr. Thampu seems keen to underline.

Now, since the author is wholly unbiased, the above sentence I believe he would have no problem in extending to the Jews, Christians and Muslims of the world. They are also untouchables, for God’s word is propagated if anything more centrally and principally in these faiths through his “conmen” prophets. So, yes the laughter is indeed derisive for it has exposed the author as someone who threw a stone from a glass house only to have his own windows broken.

Para 15, line 1: “Enlightened souls feel embarrassed when special powers are attributed to them. Extravagant claims of special powers are made only by the wheeler dealers of religion.”

That’s why Jesus, Muhammad and the yet to be born messiah are also “wheeler dealers of religion” along with all the Dharmic ones he insinuates.

Para 16, line 1: “It is a nightmare that temples of light are today overshadowed by ashrams of darkness.”

Author seems to be using binaries associated with exclusivist ideologies which hardly holds true for Dharmic faiths in which “yes”, “no” and “maybe” also operate.

Para 16, line 3: “Why obscene wealth should punctuate the conmen of religion is an enigma that we dare not face.”

While this can and does need to be questioned for Dharmics, the same also applies to churches and mosques where conmen operate in the guise of padres and mullahs. Don’t they also possess obscene wealth?

Para 17: “In point of fact, it is the glare and glitter, the scale and size of their megabucks that blind us to the subhuman realities that shroud these corrupters of our species.”

Repeat the same point as before that author fails to realize that the same words could equally apply to the church and mosque who many feel are “corrupters of our species”.

For the scale of Christianity’s intervention in India it will just suffice to go through this blog which does a fantastic job of exposing the designs of such interventionists by accessing the available data n the Government FCRA website.

<http://sighbaboo.blogspot.in/2014/04/state-specific-top-20-organizations.html>

To conclude, one has to say that there are repercussions when one talks from a lofty pedestal on issues where one’s worldview is shaped by a certain exclusivist ideology. Every faith and every culture has its problems and the author while being a citizen of pluralistic India, if he wants to contribute positively to the change needed within the society must work shoulder to shoulder with its vast majority who do understand the need for change for the country. However, it seems as if this author is interested only in playing up the faultlines in the society and one seriously questions his motives for doing so.