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## Decolonization of Spirituality

Subhash Anand

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**Keywords:** Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Liturgy, Order of Carmelites, Spirituality, Vows

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## Decolonization of Spirituality

Subhash Anand

Dept. of Indian Studies, JDV, Pune- 411 014

On December 8, 1855, Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and his ten companions pronounced their religious vows.<sup>1</sup> This event marked “the foundation stone of the first indigenous Religious Congregation in India.”<sup>2</sup> On being told that as they “did not have a recognized constitution... their vowed life was still imperfect,”<sup>3</sup> Chavara and his companions sent a copy of the time-table they followed to Bishop Bernadinos of Verapoly. Instead of returning it with his comments, he sent them a copy of the constitution of the First Order of Carmelites, requesting Chavara to make the needed changes and return it to him.<sup>4</sup> This is not the end of the story for

Without due consideration of the unique nature and historical background of the Servants of the Immaculate Conception, they were affiliated to the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites by the general body of the Discalced Carmelites meeting in Rome in 1860. This was done without their knowledge and consent.<sup>5</sup>

Thus we can say the congregation – *The Servants of the Immaculate Conception* – founded by Chavara was in a way forced to accept the rule of a congregation belonging to the Latin Church, and it came to be known as *Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced* (T.O.C.D).<sup>6</sup>

In 1894 another significant event took place in the history of the Church in India. A recent convert from Hinduism, that too from the Brahmin caste, Brahambandhab Upadhyay made public his decision to become a mendicant *sannyāsī*. He freed himself of his possessions, “and was granted permission (not without struggle) to wear, as a Catholic, the traditional robe of the Hindu renunciate (*sannyāsin*).”<sup>7</sup> Subsequently he wanted to found a Hindu-Catholic monastery whose members would train the wandering missionaries this land needed because, as he wrote in *Sophia*, October 1894,

People have a strong aversion against Christian preachers because they are considered to be destroyers of everything national. Therefore, the itinerant missionaries should be thoroughly Hindu in their mode of living. They should, if necessary, be strict vegetarians and teetotallers, and put on the yellow Sannyasi garb... The central mission should, in short, adopt the policy of the glorious old Fathers of the South [referring to Roberto de Nobili and Josef F. Beschi]. The missionaries should be well versed in Sanskrit, for one ignorant of Sanskrit will hardly be able to vanquish Hindu preachers.<sup>8</sup>

The Bishop of Nagpur made available to Upadhyay a large house in Jabalpur. But this scheme was soon

suppressed by the then papal representative, L.M. Zaleski.<sup>9</sup>

Why were Chavara and Upadhyay treated in so radically different ways by the Church authorities? While it is true that Chavara and his group were made to accept the rule and patronage of a Latin religious congregation, it would not be the full truth to say that the Latin tradition was entirely imposed on a non-Latin congregation. *Athmanuthapam* is one of the “three major poems” written by Chavara in which “he delves deeper into his own experiences.”<sup>10</sup> In writing this poem, Chavara was inspired by some foreign books among which “the most important” was *The Mystical City of God*, by the Spanish mystic, Mary of Agreda.<sup>11</sup> Thus the founder had personally internalized the spirituality of the Carmelites of the Western Church, and subsequent generations of his disciples have perpetuated this tradition. The latest version of the *Constitutions and Directory* of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate – as they are known today – states that the members wish to pursue “the mystical union with God so masterfully explained by great mystics like Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross...”<sup>12</sup> Chavara was beatified on February 8, 1986, and today the congregation has more than one thousand and five hundred professed members.<sup>13</sup>

Upadhyay, on the other hand, wanted a religious community that would draw its inspiration not only from the Catholic faith but also from the profound spiritual tradition of this land. He was thinking far ahead of his times, and so after his death, he was “relegated to almost total oblivion,”<sup>14</sup> and remained

for a long time “A Prophet Disowned”.<sup>15</sup> As far as my knowledge goes, we cannot even locate the house where he and his disciples lived in Jabalpur. We must not forget that “[a]s ecclesiastical proconsul, he [Zaleski] took his orders from Rome,” and that Pope Leo XIII “was never able to divest himself of a somewhat imperialistic conception of the Church’s role.”<sup>16</sup> Chavara allowed the colonial framework to guide him, while Upadhyay proved a threat to it.

In my article I shall first show why Vatican II gives us a mandate to decolonize our Church and the urgency of this task. The process of decolonization has many aspects. Here I shall concern myself only with spirituality. This is very urgent if the message of Jesus is to reach not only the poor and the uneducated of this land, but also the others.<sup>17</sup> There is another reason for the urgency of this task. Religious congregations are expected to provide their members with a more congenial atmosphere for their spiritual growth. Yet, even though we have many indigenous religious congregations, they continue to be “patterned on non-Indian models.”<sup>18</sup>

## A. The Emergence of Decolonized Churches

### *The Pre-Vatican II Scene*

In the era before Vatican II, there were no truly local churches in India.<sup>19</sup> Even though the good news of Jesus was brought to this land already in the first century, the Mar Thoma Christians became colonies of Syrian Christianity, because “the Syrian Christianity which

[actually] spread to Mesopotamia, and Persia, Central Asia, Malabar and China, did not attain full independence from Syrian culture.”<sup>20</sup> This means that Syrian Christianity arrived in India only after it had acquired a definite form in its native land. Further, if colonialism is a “policy by which a nation maintains or extends its control over foreign dependencies,”<sup>21</sup> then the – albeit ecclesiastical – colonial character of the Mar Thoma Church is further corroborated by the fact that for centuries in the past it did not have native prelates.<sup>22</sup>

In like manner the advent of missionaries from the Latin Church further aggravated the alienation of the Indian Christians. The Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, in its instruction to the first two candidates for the episcopate in Indochina, had this to say:

Do not in any way attempt, and do not on any pretext persuade these people to change their rites, habits and customs, unless they are openly opposed to religion and good morals. For what could be more absurd than to bring France, Spain, Italy or any other European country over to China?<sup>23</sup>

Yet in India things were different. For instance, in Goa, Portuguese became the official language of the Church, and the people who were baptized had to change their names and surnames. The Latin missionaries even tried to Latinize the earlier Mar Thoma Christians and, to some extent, succeeded. The two Oriental Churches in India – in spite of all their enthusiasm to free themselves from Latin influence – still carry marks of Latinization, e.g., the law of obligatory celibacy for the

clergy, which, as Vatican II teaches, is part only of the Latin tradition.<sup>24</sup>

### *Vatican II and the Formation of the Local Church*

All this was possible because the ecclesiology prevalent before the Council saw the Church as a highly centralized institution, with bishops requiring the permission of Rome even in very small matters, e.g., allowing nuns to wash purificators.<sup>25</sup> They functioned more as representatives of the Pope than as successors of the Apostles. But one of the central themes of this Council was the emergence of the local church as the goal of evangelization:

Thus from the seed of the Word of God, particular Churches founded all over the world shall grow. With their own vigour and maturity, with their own hierarchy united to the faithful and the related means for leading a full Christian life sufficiently established, these Churches shall play their own useful part in the activity of the entire Church.<sup>26</sup>

A little later the document spells out in greater detail what the emergence of the local church implies:

Truly in the manner of the plan of the Incarnation, the young Churches, rooted in Christ and built upon the foundation of the Apostles, in wonderful exchange assimilate all the riches of the nations given to Christ as his inheritance. These riches are taken from the customs and traditions of the people, from their wisdom and their teachings, their arts and sciences; and everything in fact is absorbed, which can contribute to the proclaiming the glory of God, illustrate the grace of the Saviour and better the performance of Christian life.<sup>27</sup>

Thus the Council invites the local churches to decolonize themselves and be more rooted in the rich heritage of their own land.

### ***Colonialism in India***

The teaching of Vatican II notwithstanding, one must humbly admit that the three rites that constitute the Catholic Church in India today are all of foreign origin: Latin, Antiochean and Chaldean.<sup>28</sup> To say that a particular church is Catholic in faith, Oriental in liturgy and Indian in culture seems to betray ignorance of what is meant by liturgy and culture. There is no authentic culture without some cultic expressions and no meaningful cult without a cultural framework. When this intimate relation between cult and culture is ignored, then we have the anomalous situation that in one and the same city we have believers divided into different churches. Thus imported rites divide, while Jesus came to bring us together. This togetherness is precisely what is most symbolized by the Eucharist, and yet people of the three rites have problems coming together for the Eucharist.

A foreign power can control the country through political or military power. It can also do this by a very powerfully manipulative media or through an exploitative economic policy. Thus the process of colonization is not merely a part of our past history, but also very much of our present reality. I am even inclined to believe that cultural and technological neo-colonialism is doing much more harm than the colonial powers of the past did. The latter disregarded our rich cultural and spiritual heritage, the former is attacking our

very humanity. Let me explain. In our world today there are some economically powerful nations with imperialistic ambitions. They want to control not only our life-style, but also our way of looking at life, so that they can successfully sell their products though we really do not need them, and keep their factories going and maintain their economy. The process of globalization, if it lacks a human face, will be at the cost of the poorer nations. Hence, the struggle to decolonize our spirituality also involves the awareness of this dimension of contemporary reality and the capacity to counter it as far as we can.

### **B. Decolonization as Conversion**

The process of decolonization demands that we undergo a change of heart.<sup>29</sup> We need to look at our country with all its past and present with a fresh perspective. Second, we need to correct our understanding of spirituality. This new understanding must take into serious account not only the cultural but also the religious pluralism of our land. If this dimension is ignored then our spirituality will not have an appeal to peoples of other faith traditions.

### ***Mātrbhūmi: India as My God-given Mother***

Some Hindus have the impression that Christians (and Muslims) do not really consider India as their true home. Once again we cannot completely blame them for this prejudice. The colonial dependence of the Christian churches in India for centuries has not only brought about a social and cultural alienation among the Christians, but it

has also left deep wounds on our psyche. Christians seem to be more at home with things western. We find this inferiority complex even among people who are supposed to be theologically educated. They consider foreign universities and degrees superior to our own. Allow me to illustrate this by re-cording a personal experience. When I first joined the teaching faculty of a seminary twenty years ago, some of my students asked me where I had done my studies. When they came to know that I was totally a home-made product they looked a little disappointed.

Thus decolonization begins with *metanoia*, a change of mind, a new way of thinking. In our context this means that we feel at home in this land, a land of which we should be proud – this not just because it happens to be our cradle, but also because it has been the cradle of great spiritual, religious and cultural traditions which are vibrantly alive even centuries after their origin, that too without any centralized organization and in spite of long spells of oppressive foreign rule. My mother not only took care of my bodily needs, but she also taught me the first songs I learnt, the first prayers I uttered. In like manner India, our motherland, provides us nourishment not only for our body, but also for our minds, hearts and spirits. We need to cultivate a taste for native literature and art. Above all, we need to believe that in the global salvation history this ancient land, which God has blessed in so many ways, definitely has a very special purpose, and that it is our privilege to explicitate this hidden plan of God, and to enrich our understanding of the Christ-event.

### *Darśana: Spirituality as a Life-shaping Vision*

Let me begin by saying that I am not quite comfortable with the term 'spirituality' and the expression 'spiritual life'. This vocabulary – part of our colonial heritage – belongs to a dualistic world-view that makes a sharp distinction between spirit and matter. It betrays traces of Platonistic and even Manichaeistic dualism.<sup>30</sup> In India the expressions commonly used for denoting a holy person, a whole person are: *sat-puruṣa* (a true person) or *sādhū* (a good person), or *mahā-ātmā* (a great self).<sup>31</sup> The person trying to attain perfection is a *sādhaka* (exercitant) following a *sādhana* (exercise or discipline) or a *mārga* (way) that will lead to freedom (*mokṣa* or *mukti*).<sup>32</sup> Having said this I am still obliged to continue using the earlier vocabulary as we do not yet have a more suitable alternative.

For many Christians spirituality denotes a list of pious exercises and also some prohibitions. This is a functional approach to spirituality. While we do need some pious exercises and some disciplinary prohibitions, these do not constitute the core of spirituality. It is understandable that when the new converts belonged to very backward, uneducated and poorer communities, the missionaries thought it best to teach them some prayers and enforce some rules. But spirituality is much more than that. It consists in having the mind of Jesus Christ (I Cor 2.16; Phil 2.5),<sup>33</sup> and having it as fully as possible. It is looking at life the way Jesus did. This is exactly what is suggested by the Hindu concept of *darśana*.<sup>34</sup>

The pious Hindu goes to a temple for a *darśana*.<sup>35</sup> Like other Sanskrit words, '*darśana*' too has many meanings. It implies a certain activity on our part, a reaching out to. It implies a desire to see Truth (*sat*) as it is, and a willingness to dispose ourselves for this experience. The visit to the temple is for a *darśana* of God, not merely of the icon, but also of the mystery symbolized by that icon, the fullness of Truth. The devotee going to the temple for a *darśana* of God also hopes that God will graciously look at him, that God will give him a *darśana*. To see God as He is we need a new vision, a divine sight (BhG 11.8), a new *darśana*. This is the experience of grace, for God can be seen only by those whom He chooses and to whom He reveals His body (*tanu*, KU 2.23; MU 3.2.3).<sup>36</sup>

As a result of his contemplation (*darśana*) and God's grace-filled glance at him (*darśana*), the devotee acquires a new vision (BhG 11.8). That is the third meaning of *darśana*, a way of looking at life in its totality, seeing it as God sees it. Like Arjuna, the devotee undergoes a catharsis and begins to see God in all creation and all creation in God (BhG 4.9-14). As a consequence spirituality becomes first and foremost a vision, a way of looking at life with all its aspects, and the acts of piety and self-discipline become meaningful only if they are an expression of this vision. The contemplative experience of God becomes both the source and the guiding principle of our life and all our activity. The devotee who shares in God's vision becomes *sama-darśin*: he sees all creation in himself (*ātman*) and himself in all things (BhG 6.29).

### *Satya: Spirituality as Authentic Existence*

The Hindu tradition gives great importance to *anubhava* the contemplative experience of God. Thus *anubhava* is another word for *darśana* in its first meaning as explained in the previous section. But this word contains a challenge: it invites us to make our existence (*bhava*) in accordance with (*anu*) the mystery we contemplate. Thus spirituality must not only be a vision but must become an effective vision. This is what is suggested by the expression *satya*, which is derived from the word *sat* (being).<sup>37</sup> A thing or a person is *satya* when that thing or person "is truly and completely that which the substantive (to which it belongs) expressed."<sup>38</sup> It is what it is expected to be. Thus the Hindu tradition gives primacy to being.<sup>39</sup>

The New Testament gives us a similar perspective. God is presented primarily not as one who acts on behalf of His people. He is not merely Israel.<sup>40</sup> He is Emmanuel, "God with us (Mt 1.23)." He does not send Moses to Egypt, but He himself goes there, where His people are (Mt 2.14), pitching his tent not outside the camp (Ex 33.7), but right in their midst (Jn 1.14). What is emphasized is not just His saving activity but above all His loving presence with His people. Jesus is the embodiment of this presence. He not only speaks the Word of God and brings the message of salvation, but He is that Word, that message. Thus the New Testament too gives primacy to *satya*, truth-embodiment presence.<sup>41</sup>

The vision the consumer West tries to force upon us is the result of a

production-dominated ethos, where productive activity is what really counts. When action becomes more important than presence then we tend to give primacy to information and knowledge, to performance and production, to equipment and well organized institutions, to flashy buildings and glamorous media. Then what becomes important is not my inner reality but the outer appearance, not what I am but what I can do and possess, not the practice of Christ-like love and compassion but the frequenting of sacraments, novenas, pilgrimages, not what I say but how I say it. The medium itself becomes the message. Competence, effective action and quick results become more important than commitment, authentic presence and honest effort. *Darsana* will help us to realize the primacy of *satya* (truth-embodiment existence). Then the messenger becomes the message, a sign of contradiction, a silent but powerful prophetic critique of the modern cult of false gods: competitive careerism and individual success. There is ample evidence that this cult is quite prevalent in the Church.

The primacy of *satya*, the realization that what I am is more important than what I have, will make the Christian deeply detached from worldly possessions and values. The call to evangelical poverty – and this is addressed not only to those who follow the vowed life but to all who wish to follow Jesus fully – will then mean not merely a detachment from wealth and material goods but also detachment from worldly concerns like success, prestige, status, popularity, etc.<sup>42</sup> In our tradition the spiritual person is characterized by

*vairāgya*. He has experienced *ātman* (BU 3.5.1), and hence sees all these in relation to this mystery (BU 2.4.5). Second, our mission as disciples of Jesus is to be exercised in the contemporary context. Today we are surrounded by a powerful culture of dehumanizing consumerism, and this poses a greater threat to human survival than all nuclear weapons put together.

The primacy of *satya* will bring about another deeper dimension of the *metanoia* that decolonization demands of us. The missionaries from the West were basically Church-centred, and they tried to make the Church in India a little replica of the Church in their own lands. Today we need to shift from a Church-centred to a Kingdom-centred spirituality. At the moment we are very much an institutionalized community, and a lot of our time, energy, money and personnel are engaged in keeping our institutions going. Efficiency, standards and results are of primary importance for many of us. On the other hand, a Kingdom-centred spirituality will make us more concerned about the quality of life and human values. Hence we will be more open to people of other faiths, and be willing to learn from them, and cooperate with them in order to promote God's Kingdom.

### *Yoga: Spirituality as an Integrating Process*

When I was a young seminarian, our spiritual masters placed a great importance on control of our senses and bodily penance, and chastity was considered the queen of all virtues. There was no input on the role of our subconscious in shaping our motivation and



behaviour, but the emphasis was on developing will power, often by doing great violence to ourselves. This mentality reflected a defective spirituality inherited from the West. But according to Rabindranath Tagore, "The special mental attitude which India has in her religion is made clear by the word *yoga*, whose meaning is to effect union."<sup>43</sup> Union is an experience of wholeness, and it can only be the result of a holistic approach. The word *yoga* is used in many contexts, but it is specially the way of life succinctly presented by Patañjali in his *Yoga-sūtra*.

The *Yoga-sūtra* begins by defining *yoga* as the spiritual discipline that enables us to control the movements of the mind (1.2), and thereby experience inner quiet. Thus it is possible for us to become aware of and actualize our real self (*svarūpa-avasthāna*, 1.3). God has made each one of us unique, but we tend to respond merely to the demands made on us from outside. We are conditioned by our culture, religion, education, family setup, etc. We easily take on a personality that is more in accordance with the expectations of people around us. It is this loss of our authentic self that *yoga* is trying to correct. It invites us to recognize our real self and gradually actualize it. True *yoga* involves a discernment of our uniquely personal vocation. For this Patañjali spelt out the *aṣṭa-aṅga-yoga* – an eight-limbed discipline (YS 2.29).

These eight limbs indicate the five ethical norms (*yama*: *śatya* –

truthfulness, *ahiṃsā* – non-violence, *asteya* – non-coveting, *brahmacārya* – continence and *aparigraha* – detachment), the five religious attitudes (*niyama*: *saucha* – inner and outer purity, *santoṣa* – self-acceptance, *tapas* – spirit of discipline, *svādhyāya* – the study of Scripture and *īśvara-praṇidhāna* – devotion to God) that are essential for authentic discernment; the psycho-somatic preparation we have to go through: comfortable posture (*āsana*), rhythmic breathing that helps us to relax (*prāṇāyāma*) and the control of the senses (*indriya-pratyāhāra*) that make concentration and self-awareness possible; and the three stages of prayer we need to cultivate: the focussing of the mind on a definite object constitutes *dhāraṇa* (YS 3.1), remaining on that point without any distraction is *dhyāna* (3.2), and getting totally immersed in the object to the extent of forgetting self is *samādhi* (3.3). This is deep prayer. Thus *yoga* is a process integrating the body, mind and spirit in our struggle towards wholeness.

The five *yamas* provide an excellent charter for the Christian: *satya* is best proclaimed by embodying it in our life. It has its own power and hence we do not need to manipulate people to accept it. Such tactics are a violation of *ahiṃsā* and a denial of the Good News. The Christian is called to a life of simplicity (*asteya*) and inner freedom (*aparigraha*). This way of life will not only proclaim his radical commitment to God and to His Kingdom (*brahmacārya*), but will also be a prophetic critique of contemporary manipulative media and consumeristic glamour.

The practice of *āsana* is not just a matter of few moments everyday, not merely the question of how we sit during

our prayer. It calls for a different lifestyle. There is a certain body-chemistry that needs to be maintained if we are to be healthy. If we eat too much or take such items as are harmful to us, if we do more work and not take proper rest, if we do not exercise ourselves enough, if we accelerate our movements – through computers, motorized vehicles, etc – so that we become tense, then we are doing violence to our self. Unless we pay attention to this side of our life, merely doing *āsanas* will not be of much help.

There is an intimate relation between our mind and our body. Deep emotions find expression in our body. The *Yoga-sūtra* presumes this basic human experience as an important guiding norm. It suggests a reversal: if deep emotions bring about bodily disturbances, then by quietening the body we can still our emotions. Our breathing too is affected by the emotional changes we go through. Here again a reversal is suggested: calm down and regularize your breathing and your mind too will become calm.

There is a deep relation also between our mind and the way our body behaves, so too there is an intimate relation between what we call the conscious and the subconscious levels of our life. What our mind registers during our conscious moments is not just a passing image on a cinema screen but is like the data fed into the hard memory of a computer. It remains within us and then shapes our responses – so often even functioning as a devastating virus. Hence it is very important that we do not load our minds with images and data

that is not really needed. It is this that the control of the senses is trying to ensure. *Yoga* brings together human endeavour and divine grace, for the desired integration is the gift of devotion to God (YS 2.45).

The more we dwell on sense-objects the more we get attached to them and experience the desire to possess them. This leads to fear and anger lest our desire be frustrated and eventually we lose our judgement (BhG 2.62-63). Thus, while the powerful media with their seductive appeal to our senses enslave and manipulate us, *yoga* is a call to discover greater freedom. Just as the ocean remains undisturbed even though so many rivers merge into it, so too with the practice of *yoga* we will attain inner freedom and remain unaffected by the many seductive appeals addressed to us (YS 2.70).

### C. Decolonization as Discernment

A colonial spirituality will give great importance to humility, loyalty to tradition and obedience to superiors. From my experience of being a priest for over thirty years, I know how often appeal is made to these attitudes to keep people under control and prevent them from asking questions, even when authority has been abused. In the past obedience and loyalty was emphasized. Vatican II calls us to active and responsible obedience.<sup>44</sup> This calls for discernment. This is also our obligation as a pilgrim community.

### *Brahmacarya: Spirituality as a Pilgrim Attitude*

Since we exist in time we experience ourselves as fragmented beings.

Life can be experienced only in succession: my childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. Our life is a journey (*yātrā*). Further, we are not Being (*satya*) but have being (*satya-vat*). Death reminds us that we have received being as a gift, and that we are not full masters of our own existence. Hence we are pilgrims unto Being, the fullness of Reality: God. We are called to be *brahma-cārins*. The word *brahmacārī* indicates a person who is walking (*carati*) towards the great reality (*brahman*).<sup>45</sup> God alone is deathless (BU 1.3.9).

Every journey implies some sort of crossing (*tīrtha*). Only when we leave the place where we are and go over to another, a journey becomes possible, and we can attain the fullness of Truth. Truth alone conquers (MU 3.1.6), and only Truth can make us free (Jn 8.32). We can see the Truth only if, like true pilgrims, we are detached from our present position, if we have *vairāgya*. This is why Gandhiji insisted that detachment was an essential condition for *satya-āgraha*, for the faithful pursuit of the Truth.<sup>46</sup> It is this openness to Truth that makes our life a sacred journey (*tīrthayātrā*).<sup>47</sup>

### *Tīrthayātrā: Spirituality as Ongoing Discernment*

As Christians we have received some kind of spiritual tradition. Our pilgrim character means that life-contexts are constantly changing and that we are called to respond to these actual contexts. Following a tradition – that too received from the colonial West – without constantly subjecting it to a critical scrutiny leads to fundamental-

ism and superstition. Then spirituality becomes disruptive of human life and values, and instead of humanizing us it makes us slaves of a meaningless past.

The call to be pilgrims demands that we cross boundaries within which we have grown and learn to make a personal synthesis of the many insights we have today not only from behavioural sciences, but also from the study of other religious traditions. Thus we continue to be pilgrims, in search of the fullness of that Truth which will always remain more than what we have comprehended.

Decolonization means freeing ourselves from what does not belong to the core of the Gospel message, but is an historical accretion belonging to Western Christianity. To put it positively, we need to make the Gospel meaningful to our land at this historical moment, with its specific religio-cultural complexity. Without deep and critical theological reflection there is a danger that our spirituality would be founded on sand and not on solid rock. Let me cite an example. When we look at Jesus as the King of all – and this very well suits the colonial powers – we consider it our duty to conquer others – and their land – for him, but if we see him as the brother of all, then we see ourselves as called to render fraternal service to all.

It is important to note that no culture is static, but it constantly grows due to inner dynamics but also through contact with other cultures. Further, in our eagerness to decolonize our spirituality, we need not completely throw overboard everything that is of foreign origin. Real saints belong to all humanity,

and so we can learn much from the great spiritual masters of the West.

While replacing imported spirituality with some indigenous tradition, we must make a clear distinction as to what within it is primary and what is secondary. For instance, Patañjali defines *āsana* as that posture which is comfortable and therefore can be steadily maintained (YS 2.46). If we sit in a really comfortable posture then we will not need to change. Today most of us use chairs, stools or benches. Hence we find it difficult to squat on the floor. But the *Yoga-sūtra* as such does not require this of us. What is essential is that we be comfortable and hence steady. Sometimes, in our zeal for inculturation, we squat on the floor for our personal prayer, but then we soon find our joints hurting and so need to shift. This disturbs our concentration, and hence I suggest that we discontinue this practice.

#### D. Decolonization as Commitment

I have expressed my reservation about the word ‘spirituality’ because it is based on a dualistic approach to human life as a composition of spirit and matter. It is also highly individualistic: *I* must become holy. Real spirituality demands the affirmation and development of the whole of God’s creation: wholesome persons, wholesome society and wholesome environment.

#### *Loka-saṅgraha: Spirituality as Cosmic Wholeness*

In trying to spell out the elements that go to make for human perfection, ancient Hindu writers elaborated the

doctrine of the goals of human life (*puruṣā-ārtha*). “From very ancient times they are said to be four, *dhārma* (right conduct), *ārtha* (economic interests), *kāma* (satisfaction of sexual, emotional and artistic life), *mokṣa* (liberation of the spirit).”<sup>48</sup> The individual who has realized these four goals becomes an integrated person.

A mature person is expected to take care of his basic needs. The money he spends on himself, his friends and his guests must be justified by the hard work he puts in. If our spirituality has been so colonial, then one important factor is that our seminaries and houses of religious formation – especially of men – have plenty of money coming in from the consumer West. Often these places are houses of abundance – colonies of the affluent West – surrounded by people living in sub-human conditions, not having even the basic amenities of life. In these houses many – if not the majority – of our seminarians are positively alienated from their cultural and economic context. In fact most of our seminaries – even those built after our nation became politically independent – are patterned on a colonial mentality and as such they are outdated.

A dualistic spirituality tends to suppress our sexuality. But to be adequately human, we need not only to integrate our sexuality, but also to become aware of, accept and deepen our emotional and aesthetic potential. Our body is the sacrament of our person,<sup>49</sup> and hence an integrated person knows when and how to express love and concern through bodily contact.

A person who has grown in his moral sense will be inclined to do what

is right not so much because he knows it to be right and so sees it as an obligation, but because deep down he feels an urge to do it. Such a person will also be sensitive to others who may not have reached his level of moral maturity and hence will avoid doing what in itself may be right, but could be scandalous for others (BhG 3.21).

The three concerns just spelt out become truly human values only when inner freedom (*mokṣa*) accompanies them. Without it *kāma* will become animal passion and subtle manipulation, *artha* will degenerate into dehumanizing consumerism and cosmetic glamour, and *dharma* will be reduced to enslaving legalism and neurotic compulsion. This inner freedom is the fruit of a steady process of self-understanding (*ātma-jñāna*) and self-acceptance, and it is possible if human life is a lifelong journey unto transcendental or eschatological freedom.

Wholesome persons will constitute a wholesome society. We can understand *dharma* as an attitude guiding an individual. But *dharma* also means “the privileges, duties and obligations of a man, his standards of conduct as a member of the Aryan community, as a member of one of the castes, as a person in a particular stage of life.”<sup>50</sup> What is suggested here is that *dharma* is intimately bound with the traditional structure of the Hindu society based on *varṇa* (social group) and *āśrama* (stage of life). Originally the Aryan community was constituted by four *varṇas*. The *brāhmaṇa* is the custodian of sacred learning, the *kṣatriya* is responsible for the security of his community,

the *vaiśya* was expected to engage in agriculture and business, while the *śūdra* was to be available for the service of others. To me these four groups were really symbolic of the four basic needs of any society: learning, security, production, and the spirit of service – this last being the attitude that must necessarily qualify those engaged in ensuring the first three.

According to the traditional understanding there are four *āśramas*, stages of life that follow one another. At a given age, the sons from the first three *varṇas* would be led to a teacher who would then take them under his care and impart to them sacred learning: *brahmacarya*. After finishing his studies, the young man married and founded a family: *gārhasthya*. After he saw the face of his grandson, the householder left his family and retired to a forest to spend his time in more spiritual matters: *vanavāsa*. Finally, when through his spiritual discipline he felt inner freedom, he became a wanderer: *pārivrājya*. This wandering is a sign of total renunciation (*sannyāsa*).

I suggest that these four stages should not be seen as diachronic – coming one after the other, but as synchronic – to be realized simultaneously. To begin with, there is the fundamental presupposition that man here is merely a wanderer (*pārivrājya*) and this world is not his final home, and that all here is passing away. This awareness will be nurtured by deep meditation, specially in touch with nature, which by its beauty reminds us of God – the forest being nature unspoilt by human touch (*vanavāsa*). This awareness will give birth

to inner freedom, a spirit of genuine renunciation (*sannyāsa*), enabling us to make life on earth a sacred journey, a pilgrimage (*tīrtha-yātrā*). This pilgrimage is meant to be a life-long search for the ever-abiding Truth (*brahmacarya*), and it is this search that gives meaning (*artha*) and direction to that journey, to life here on earth. This search for the Ultimate calls for an effective commitment to society and environment, for all that exists is a manifestation of the Ultimate and so we can and ought to be at home with it (*gārhasthya*).

The Hindu sages saw a wonderful harmony and rhythm in nature (*ṛta*), and they experienced this harmony as a source of human welfare. Gradually those sages had a deeper experience of nature. They felt a certain kinship with it: it was not just something, but a revelation of the great Person (*puruṣa*, RV 10.90). Hence nature becomes a revelation of the divine mystery, a sacrament of the God's presence. This explains why, when they wanted to have a deeper spiritual experience, they would retire to the forest, where we can experience nature in its pristine purity.

Nature is the primary school of spirituality. Hence when little *Satyakāma* wanted to be initiated into the life of the Spirit, his teacher sent him back to nature. The boy was very attentive and so he returns as one who knows God (*brahma-vid*, ChU 4.9.2). Nature provides us with most of our deepest religious symbols. We need them not merely to articulate our spiritual experience, but also to deepen it. Only when nature is seen as a partner in our jour-

ney towards God, will we approach it with respect and care.

### *Swadesi: Lifestyle as an Expression of our Commitment*

Works speak louder than words, and our life-style indicates the seriousness of our desire for change. Hence if our efforts at decolonization are to bear real fruit, then we must begin with what comes first. Discipleship of Jesus expressed in a way of life comes before liturgy, theology and spirituality. Our efforts have been concentrated on the latter items, sometimes totally ignoring life. Let me give you an example. Imagine a community, swearing by decolonization, celebrating the birthday of a theologian who is fully committed to Third World Spirituality: a yogic meditation followed by an elaborate Indian Mass with saffron shawls and Sanskrit chants in the morning and a grand European style dinner in the evening, made possible by generous donations from erstwhile colonial First World! When decolonization is a very convenient matter it becomes a sedative, but when it calls us to share in the cross of Jesus it becomes liberative. This will happen when we begin with life. Hence, unless we are serious about a change in life-style all talk of decolonization – whatever be the area – is an exercise in futility.

Decolonization is not at all advocating a parochial ghetto, but an enlightened response to our present situation. Even though we have spent almost fifty years as an independent nation, we have massive poverty in our land, and the Church too is very much the Church of the poorer sections. Choosing a

simple life-style – and simplicity has been the mark of God-experience in our tradition – not only brings us in solidarity with the poor but also makes us a prophetic sign in a world of vulgar consumer affluence. Decolonization demands contextualization, and this demands that we take the massive poverty of our land as one of the vital element in process of decolonizing our spirituality. To live a life of simplicity when all the media are doing their best to sell a consumer culture requires a lot of courage.

If we are serious about a decolonized spirituality as shaping the Church at large, then we need to begin by completely overhauling the present formation pattern, starting with the recruitment process. Not only are we taking young people who are not yet fully rooted in their culture and who have dubious or unclear motives, but also the whole system only serves to alienate them from their roots. I have been closely associated with seminaries that have tried to bring their formation pattern closer to the life of the people, for example, by demanding regular manual work from the students. In some cases such efforts have encountered stiff resistance. The message is clear: “We did not join the seminary to do manual work!” Spiritual directors from different seminaries have shared with me their painful experience: “The majority of our students are not eager to receive spiritual direction.” But our tradition insists that a person seriously wanting to grow in the life of the Spirit must have a competent guide.<sup>51</sup> Given the frightening level of unemployment and the cut-throat competition for jobs

available, the priesthood is an attractive and easily available alternative. On the other hand, I am inclined to believe that, as long as the majority of the seminary staff are trained abroad and as long as the seminaries are generously subsidised by foreign funds, all our talk of decolonization will be a wild goose chase.

The religious are expected to play a prophetic role in the Church, but unfortunately, many of them seem to have been domesticated. The call to be a prophetic critique of a this-worldly consumer culture is one vital aspect of the charismatic presence of religious in the life of the Church. In one of his letters, the superior general of a religious congregation has this to say:

Poverty has become a matter of very deep concern to me. I firmly believe that on every level – personal, communitarian, institutional – the Society is in serious difficulty with regard to the practice of poverty. I would even go farther and say that many abuses in poverty prevalent among us could indicate that many of us are lacking in supernatural spirit and that our resolutions to be poor are not quite wholehearted.<sup>52</sup>

I do not wish to be judgemental, and yet I must say that this humble confession of a saintly general appears to be a fairly good description of many religious congregations today. We need a relevant decolonized spirituality, but we need much more models who can sustain us in our weakness. This is the primary service the People of God expects from religious communities.

Decolonization of spirituality will be a difficult, slow, long drawn-out process. In fact, it will be possible only

if we are ready to encourage and support creative individuals and groups to experience new forms of life, concerned more with the world to which we are sent as witnesses than with our own identity and structures, looking towards the future that we have to participate in creating than towards the past.<sup>53</sup>

It is for this that we need religious who have rediscovered their prophetic role in the Church. If they really Indianize themselves, they will be true contemplatives without having to cloister themselves in some convent.<sup>54</sup> It is this life of deep prayer that will make them like the Indian *sannyāsīs* who “are free persons, with a deep experience to witness to, with no structures to hold them back, with the liberty to go where the Spirit leads them.”<sup>55</sup> They will respectfully resist all efforts to domesticate them by a Church which “seems anxious to surround every one with a structured way of life and community.”<sup>56</sup>

If the process of decolonization of spirituality is to affect the Church in India at large, then in this process our pastors must support the theologians, believing that they are as much concerned about the welfare of the People of God as they themselves claim to be. On the other hand the theologians must make themselves more credible. It has been noted that the Indian theologians,

exceptions apart, are alienated from the Indian people, from other Indian intellectuals, and even from their own ecclesial community.<sup>57</sup> They were uprooted too early from their home context, placed in a house of formation that was structured on imported patterns, given a philosophical and theological orientation and spiritual formation with Western thought as the basic content. Almost all of them did their doctoral studies abroad and many came back with life-styles far removed from their roots. Few have a sustained involvement in pastoral life, except perhaps some ministry among nuns. If Christian faith is deeply an ecclesial experience, then without being an active and committed participant of a believing community, it is almost impossible to theologize in a relevant and convincing manner,<sup>58</sup> and without this the dream of decolonization would continue to be merely a dream.

Conversion, discernment and commitment are the fruits of the Spirit. We need a new Pentecost but for this, like the first disciples, we need to come together for deep prayer. Once we receive the Spirit then we will be transformed and will live a life that will speak powerfully to the people of our land. That is what decolonization of spirituality aims at. Thus the call to decolonize our spirituality is also a call to deep prayer.

## Notes

1. See Z.M. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, tr. S. Kannath, Kottayam: Deepika Book House, 1993, p. 49.
2. Ibid., p. 51.
3. Ibid., p. 47.



4. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-52.
6. *The Catholic Directory of India 1994*, New Delhi: C.B.C.I Centre, p. 1052.
7. J.J. Lipner, in his introduction: "Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907): A Resume of his Life and Thought" in J.J. Lipner & G. Gispert-Sauch (eds.), *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, Bangalore: United Theological College, 1991, p. xxxv.
8. *Qt. Ibid.*, pp. xl-xli.
9. *Ibid.*, p. xli.
10. Moozhoor, *Blessed Chavara: The Star of the East*, p. 87.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
12. *Constitutions and Directory: The Carmelites of Mary Immaculate*, Ernakulam: Prior General's House, 1997, p. 3.
13. *The Catholic Directory of India 1994*, p. 1052.
14. Lipner, "Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907): A Resume of his Life and Thought", p. xiv.
15. C. Fonseca, "A Prophet Disowned", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* (henceforth VJTR), 54 (1990), pp. 177-194.
16. R. Aubert et al., *The Church in a Secularized Society*, The Christian Centuries, vol. V, p. 14, quoted by FONSECA, *Ibid.*, p. 191.
17. See S. Anand, "Evangelization among the Hindus", *Evangelization and Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Rome: Salesian Centre for Missions, 1994, pp. 121-45, here pp. 128-132. "A New Spirituality for the Mission of the Church in India Today", *Jeevadhara: A Journal of Christian Interpretation* (henceforth JJCI) 24 (1994), pp. 314-24, here pp. 315-316.
18. M. Amaladoss, "Inculturation of Religious Life in India", VJTR, 55 (1991) 507.
19. See S. Anand, "Inculturation in India: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", *Indian Missiological Review* 19 (1997), pp. 19-34, here pp. 20-23.
20. J. Saldanha, *Patterns of Evangelization in Mission History*, Bombay: St. Paul Pub., 1988, p. 30.
21. *Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary*, London: Reader's Digest Ass., 1988, p. 317a.
22. P.J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, Bombay: St. Paul Pubs., 1970, pp. 63-72.
23. J. Neuner & J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, J. Dupuis (ed.), Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1996, pp. 430-431.
24. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 16.
25. See S. Anand, *The Local Church and Inculturation*, Pune: Ishvani Kendra, 1985, pp. 3-4.
26. *Ad Gentes*, no. 6. The English translation is from *The Documents of Vatican II*, Mumbai: St. Paul, 1966, p. 489.
27. *Ibid.*, no. 22, Eng tr. p. 512. See also *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13.
28. See S. Anand, "The Inculturation of the Eucharistic Liturgy", VJTR, 57 (1993), pp. 269-293, here pp. 270-274.
29. See S. Anand, "A Prolegomenon to Theologizing in India Today", VJTR, 43 (1979), pp. 50-58, here pp. 52-54.
30. In saying this I am not suggesting that radical dualism is totally foreign to India. In

fact not only Samkhya Philosophy, but most of the major Hindu traditions understand final liberation (*mokṣa*) as the liberation of the soul (*jīva*) from the clutches of the body (*sarīra*). Some interpreters of Śaṅkara's Advaita even seem to deny the reality of this world.

31. Some would translate this as 'a great soul'. This word *ātman* is derived from the root *an* (to breathe), and comes to mean not only breath, but also the body or some of its parts. But already in the Ṛg-veda we have "the incipient use of *ātman* (soul) in a reflexive sense." See Suryakanta, *A Practical Vedic Dictionary*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 133; V.S. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, eds. P.K. Gode & C.G. Karve, Poona: Prasad Prakashan, rev. ed., 1957, p. 323; and A.A. MacDonell, *A Vedic Grammar for Students*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, rep. 1966, p. 112.
32. See S. Anand, "The Hindu Temple: Its Significance Today", JJCI, 23 (1993), 97-119, here pp. 114-119; and "Jīvanmukti or Liberation in This Life", C.M. Vadakkekara (ed.), *Prayer and Contemplation*, Inter-Religious Dialogue Series - 1, Bangalore: Asirvanam, 1980, pp.179-208, here pp. 181-183.
33. Besides the usual abbreviations for the books of the Bible, the following are also used in this study:  
*BU Brhadāranyaka-upaniṣad* (For the Upanishads, I am following the text as in V.P. Limaye & R.D. Vadekar (eds.) 1958, Eighteen Principal Upanishads, Poona: Vaidika Samsodhana Mandala.)  
*BhG Bhagavad-gītā* (cr. ed. as in Mahābhārata, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933-71).  
*ChU Chāndogya-upaniṣad*.  
*KU Katha-upaniṣad*.  
*MU Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad*.  
*RV Ṛg-veda-saṁhitā*, with the commentary of Sāyaṇācārya, Poona: Vaidika Samshodhana Mandal, 1933-51.  
*YS Yoga-sūtra* as in M.R. Desai, *The Yoga-sūtra of Patanjali*, Kholapur: Desai Pubs., 1972.
34. See S. Anand, "Yeśu-darśana: Towards a Hindu-Christian Spirituality", VJTR, 58 (1994), pp. 717-37, here pp. 722-724.
35. See Anand, "The Hindu Temple: Its Significance Today", pp. 111-114.
36. It seems to me that the use of the word *tanu* (body) is evocative of the graceful gesture of the young bride who unveils herself for her bridegroom.
37. sate hitam yat. Apte 1957, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 1614.
38. J. Gonda 1968, "The Historical Background of the Name Satya Assigned to the Highest Being", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 48-49 (1968), pp. 83-93, here p. 86.
39. S. Anand 1979, "Satyam eva jayate", in J. Neuner et. alii, *Mission in India*, Pune: Ishvani Kendra, pp. 5-13, here pp. 8-10.
40. J.L. McKenzie, after admitting that the etymology of the word is not known for sure, maintains that morphologically 'Israel' would signify "let El contend." *Dictionary of the Bible*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975, p. 403. Thus, simplifying a bit, we can say that in the Old Testament God reveals Himself as one who acts on behalf of his people.

41. See S. Anand, "Some Missiological Implications of the Concept of Incarnation", VJTR, 42 (1978), pp. 35-41, here pp. 35-37; "Universally Unique and Uniquely Universal", VJTR, 55 (1991), pp. 393-424, here pp. 419-424; and "The Compassionate God: A Hindu Perspective", JJCI, 26 (1996), pp. 184-200, pp. 198-200.
42. See A. Anand, "Evangelical Poverty and Our Mission in India Today", VJTR, 40 (1976), pp. 461-66.
43. R. Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 67.
44. *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 14.
45. The word *brahman* is derived from the root *bh* (to grow, to expand). See Suryakanta, *A Practical Vedic Dictionary*, p. 493.
46. V.B. Kher (ed.), *In Search of the Supreme*, 3 vols. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Pb. House, 1962, vol. I, pp. 12, 123; vol. II, p. 11.
47. See S. Anand, "*Tīrthayātrā*: Life as a Sacred Journey", VJTR, 61 (1997), pp. 669-692, here pp. 679-683.
48. P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, 5 vols., Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, rev. ed., 1968-75, vol. II, p. 8.
49. S. Anand, "Human Sexuality: Some Theological Reflections", VJTR, 47 (1983), pp. 77-85, here pp. 78-80.
50. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, vol. I, p. 3.
51. See S. Anand, *The Way of Love: The Bhāgavata Doctrine of Bhakti*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1996, pp. 133-137.
52. P. Arrupe, *Challenge to Religious Life Today*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1979, pp. 95-96.
53. Amaladoss, "Inculturation of Religious Life in India", p. 507.
54. See S. Anand, "Contemplation and Secular Involvement", VJTR, 47 (1983), pp. 240-49, here pp. 242-246.
55. Amaladoss, "Inculturation of Religious Life in India", p. 512.
56. Ibid.
57. G.M. Soares -Prabhu, "From Alienation to Inculturation", in T.K. John (ed.), *Bread and Breath: Essays in Honour of Samuel Rayan*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991, pp. 71-78.
58. See S. Anand, "Gandhian Satyagraha: A Theological Model for India", VJTR, 59 (1995), 561-80, here pp. 574-80.