

# Staff Institute in Christian Theology

## INTERPRETING CHRIST TO INDIA TODAY

An Institute on *Interpreting Christ to India Today*, sponsored by the Senate of Serampore College and the Theological Education Fund, was held at Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur, from December 27th, 1972 to January 12, 1973. This issue contains the papers read and lectures given at the Institute, some of them in an abridged form.

The programme visualised the following approaches to Indian Christology:

1. From the background of classical formulations and historical developments up to the present time (Dr John Macquarrie).
2. From the background of South East Asian Culture (Dr Kosuke Koyama).
3. From the background of Hinduism and Indian philosophical systems and Indian Culture (Mr Paul Sudhakar).
4. From the background of various approaches to Indian Christology already developed by Roman Catholic and Protestant Theologians (J. B. Chethimattam, D. Jeyaraj, Joseph Mattam, Samuel Rayan, R. H. S. Boyd).
5. Through Indian art as developed by Catholic and Protestant Christian artists. (M. R. Lederle).

Lectures by Dr Koyama and Mr Paul Sudhakar could not be included here, as they were not received in written form. Regarding Christology as already developed by Protestant theologians, the Institute used Robin Boyd's book *Indian Christian Theology*, and as such no special paper on that is included, but the results of the discussions are included among the findings as under:

### *Towards an Indian Christology—Findings.*

Christology is the expression in a concrete situation of a committed Christian's understanding of, and attitude to, Christ.

#### 1. *Some prerequisites in forming an Indian Christology*

- (i) Knowledge of the India of today, India with all its hopes, aspirations, frustrations, conflicts.
- (ii) Knowledge of Hinduism in its various forms, sects, schools; and other religions like Sufism, Sikhism, etc.
- (iii) Assimilation of the Hindu Scriptures through meditation, etc.
- (iv) A genuine Christian life lived in a truly Indian form, our life becoming the source of theological reflection.

## 2. *Some guidelines in presenting Christ to India*

- (i) Plurality of Christological models will have to be an essential feature of the Christological task in India.
- (ii) There is no possibility of a uniform vocabulary: for the bhakta type, bhakti literature terminology, for the jnana type an advaitic-Sankara system of terminology needs to be used.
- (iii) Christ must be presented as the liberator of men in the concrete situation today in India: as the friend of the poor, as the builder of a new community of men, as the builder of a future for man, with man.
- (iv) Greater emphasis is to be placed on the indwelling Spirit, the risen Lord, and from the risen Lord to the Lord of suffering, death, etc.
- (v) In relation to Hinduism, Christ is to be presented as the answer to the aspirations of Hinduism, the fulfilment of the promise of God through the avatars.
- (vi) Following the Image, the idol worship tradition, Christ can be presented as the true image of God, given by God himself.
- (vii) The uniqueness of Christ is perhaps not the starting point, but rather the point of arrival.
- (viii) The starting point of our Christological task in India should be the humanity of Christ.
- (ix) Some of the ways of presenting Christ in the past may yet be tried, e.g., following the sahasranama typology.
- (x) A mere comparison and translation of terminology based on any existing Christian systems of Christology is of limited value, yet as a starting point some such words as *sabda*, *Akriti*, *Saguna—Nirguna* (both used for Christ), *Chit*, *purusa*, etc., could be used.

3. *The quest of the historical.* To our non-Christian brethren we seem to be over-emphasising the historical character of the Christ-event. To us it seems that the non-Christians completely ignore the historical. Could there be a meeting ground? The mystery of Christ cannot be exhausted by the historical event. God works in history, but history cannot exhaust the depth of the mystery contained in it. Christian theologians have so far stressed the once-for-allness of the historical character, and lost the time-transcending character of the mystery of Christ.

4. *Global dimension.* In developing a Christology relevant to the Indian situation, we should not be interested merely in a Christology for India alone. India has a contribution to make to the whole world. Indian Theology should not be isolated from the main stream of Christian thought and witness. Hence Indian Christology should be seen in the context of a global purpose.

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