

FRANCIS VINEETH VADAKETHALA CMI

Footprints of a Philosopher-Theologian Mystic



Thomas Aykara CMI, Former Prior General **An Accompanying Companion and a True Confrere**

Expected though, it was due to his fast-deteriorating health condition, the demise of beloved Vineethachan made us all deeply sad. Most of us experience a sudden disappearance of a pleasing and supporting presence of a genuine and generous friend who walked with us always as an accompanying companion and a true confrere. Father Vineeth was an exemplary Religious Priest who lived his religious consecration faithfully and joyfully. He was simple in lifestyle, humble in heart, gentle in nature, and always warm and positive in his attitudes.

We worked together for about four decades, did our post-doctoral studies at Oxford for four years, staying in the same college, collaborated actively in initiating several creative projects at DVK, Bengaluru, and elsewhere. He contributed substantially towards

the growth of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram as its professor for many years, as its President, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, etc. During the years of our research studies, we had plenty of occasions to share our research experiences in our respective areas, mostly in the field of comparative religion and integration in an interdisciplinary context, always having Dharmaram and Indian Church as our main focus. He was an excellent scholar who did think out his thoughts, kept on integrating Indian and Western traditions. Integration was the central thread of his creative thinking. He was an original philosopher, who sincerely tried to discover the Divine at the heart of being. He was a progressive theologian, who not only found, but so to say, experienced the Divine in his lived-world (Lebenswelt) and a true mystic in his basic vision. He was courageous to take up prophetic and innovative steps in ashram life on Dharmaram Campus in 1979. Deeply spiritual and naturally philosophical



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in his thinking-patterns, as he was, Father Vineeth was incessantly in search of a real ashram style of life. His Vidyavanam Ashram in Bannerghatta, Bengaluru, is the realization of his fond dream, a living monument to his spiritual search and mystical vision. Vidyavanam, I would say, is the very embodiment of Father Vineeth, his dream with a true vision.

Father Vineeth was an excellent teacher, appreciated, respected, and, above all, loved by his students. He was a genuine Guru, who tried his best to dispel the darkness in his disciples, the true role of every Guru. He tried to dispel the darkness in the minds of his disciples, the deviations in their world vision and value systems. He was a Guru not only by his effective teaching but more by his witnessing and appreciative presence. Deep knowledge in Heidegger's existential philosophy, wide reading in Indian theology and spirituality helped his students become more open and pluralistic in their theological and spiritual pursuits. He was a

much sought-after spiritual guide, to many, especially to the consecrated men and women. He encouraged enthusiastically every spiritual initiative of individuals and communities. I recall vividly an experience of mine as we started chalking out plans for our quarterly recollection programmes while we were in the UK during our research studies. We were four CMIs then (1970-1974) studying in the UK. Father Moses Kallarackal at Leicester University, Father



Thomas Mampra at Cambridge University, and Father Francis Vineeth and myself at Oxford University. As we started thinking about this new venture, Father Vineeth was so taken up by the new initiative and we had it in three different places where we studied. I do cherish the great interest he took in getting our new programme effectively executed.

His first doctoral dissertation on Martin Heidegger's Existentialism under the direction of Professor J. B. Lotz SJ at Gregorian University, Rome,

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his second doctoral dissertation on Paul Tillich and Ramanuja, a comparative study, under the guidance of world-renowned theologian John Macquarrie at Oxford University helped him immensely to become a true scholar of depth in philosophy and theology. His long research in Indian scriptures, his expertise in Sanskrit and Indian traditions made him so attached to Indian culture and Indian genius. His love for Indian traditions and wide reading in Indian scriptures did help him to make serious contributions towards helping the formation of an Indian liturgy and Indian way of theologizing. Hence, he could make original contributions in the field of Indian spirituality, especially in the context of liturgy, religious life, and priestly formation. At the very heart of Father Vineeth there was a stimulating spark of the Spirit that enabled him to be a shining light and a guiding lamp to many of his disciples, confreres, and friends on their pilgrimage. This spirituality of Father Vineeth was original, authentic, attractive, and edifying: deep and simple at the same time.

He was a well appreciated author who wrote mainly in the field of spirituality, Indian theology, and religious life. The real source of strength and depth

in the thought and daily life was his simple but deep spiritual life. His incessant insistence on meditation and yoga, his focus on the Word of God, the importance of silence, his concentration on Eucharistic adoration, etc., contributed substantially towards the building up of his simple but solid spirituality. His love for Mary our Mother was really filial and ever abiding. He enjoyed sharing with us the short poems that he used to write on Mother Mary.

Father Vineeth was a precious gift to all of us. His life of simplicity and humility is profound, his attractive spirituality of simplicity, gentle and generous approach of interacting with others, his warm and welcoming attitudes, etc., made him a unique CMI whom all respected and loved lavishly. This sad demise of our beloved Father Vineeth is only a temporary disappearance in the inevitable context of time and space, the unavoidable fate of finitude. He will certainly continue to stay in our hearts and in our prayers, transcending the finite, enjoying the ever-abiding peace and the never-ending joy of the Risen Lord. He will remain always as a helping friend and a guiding mediator in our journey ahead until we meet again in our everlasting abode of praise and everlasting joy.