



FRANCIS VINEETH VADAKETHALA CMI

Footprints of a Philosopher-Theologian Mystic

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Courageous and Prophetic



At the outset, let me salute Fr. Francis Vineeth CMI, my guru, a great philosopher-theologian turned mystic, one of the pioneers and towering figures of the Indian Christian theology and contextual theology. My memories go back to 1975, when he taught us philosophy, especially Metaphysics. Students used to admire and appreciate the intuitive and inquisitive mind of Fr. Vineeth.

I wish to share a topic which is less known to many of us: the prophetic intervention of Fr. Vineeth through his erudite presentation on a very sensitive topic of those days, the inter-ecclesial relations in India. Indian Theological Association (ITA) had its annual meeting in 1982 in Mumbai during 22-24 October on the topic *Reconciliation in India*. Fr. Vineeth presented a paper titled *The Struggle for Justice in the Church and the Call for*

Reconciliation. The context of the presentation was that the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches were denied proper pastoral care in their ecclesial traditions and also were not allowed to undertake missionary enterprises. Indian territory was claimed to be the territory of the Latin Church except 0.47% of the total territory. Only on 9 October 2017, through the historic letter of Pope Francis to the Indian Catholic bishops, this restriction was removed.

Fr. Vineeth, in his presentation at the ITA, challenged the injustice faced by the Eastern Catholic Churches in India. Quoting the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and other Magisterial teachings, Fr. Vineeth explained the scandalous and unjust ecclesial situation in India. Not many ITA members expected such a challenging intervention from Fr. Vineeth, a soft-spoken philosopher-theologian. He had to face strong criticisms from the seminar floor and from different corners. Some even approached the editor not to include his paper in the publication of the proceedings of the ITA meeting. However, Fr. Kuncheria Pathil, ITA Sec-

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retary and editor of the book, included it in the book entitled *Reconciliation in India*, published by St. Paul's Publications, Bombay.

In response to the requests from different quarters, Dharmaram Publications in 1983 published this paper in a booklet form under the title *Justice and Reconciliation: The Sad but Living Story of a Church in Fetters*, along with an additional preface and a few church documents. It is worth quoting the courageous statement of Fr. Vineeth: "If the Latin Church wants to be really Indian, the first thing it has to do is to give up the desire for domination over the Orientals, because it is an offshoot and a still lingering remnant of Western colonialism." Many of his friends told him that this way

of writing would make him unpopular and unacceptable in many circles. This writing was much against his own natural liking and way of writing. Fr. Vineeth, being a just man, was compelled to write against an unjust system. The Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), in its meeting in Mumbai in 1983, made note of this prophetic intervention of Fr. Vineeth and in the future inter-ecclesial relations this paper played a very positive role, of course, besides many other factors. The autonomy and self-rule which the Syro-Malabar Church enjoys today is also due to the timely intervention of Fr. Vineeth. Therefore, the Syro-Malabar Church should be immensely grateful to Fr. Vineeth for his courageous and prophetic intervention.

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A Gentle and Kind Soul

Condolences on the passing of Fr. Vineeth. I was lucky to study under him in my philosophy years, and specially to have him as the guide for my BPh thesis. Such a gentle, kind soul. Fr. Saju, I know you had a profound relationship with him. May his soul rest in peace!

