



FRANCIS VINEETH VADAKETHALA CMI

Footprints of a Philosopher-Theologian Mystic

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My Reminiscences about Revered Francis Vineeth Vadakethala CMI



Some years back a *Festschrift* was published to honour Prof. Dr. Francis Vineeth Vadakethala CMI. I presume that it happened on the occasion of the golden jubilee of his ordination to priesthood. I have contributed an article entitled “*Sannyāsa: Concept and Dynamics of the Life of Renunciation in Hinduism*” to

this special volume. In it, I tried to depict Father Vineeth as a genuine *sannyasin*, who tried to harmoniously combine in his life and in his worldview the Oriental Christian, Carmelite, and Indian ideals of *sannyasa*, the triple root of the CMI charism and spirituality.

Father Vineeth did his doctoral studies in the European universities, and came back to Dharmaram in 1966. I was doing at that time the third year of my

philosophy course. The young professor Vineeth taught us Metaphysics. Being his first teaching assignment, the inexperienced *vadhyaar* started his lecture with perceptible tension and apprehensive trepidation. I remember him repeatedly saying “Being, Being...” I did not understand what this ‘Being’ is! I am not much wiser in this issue even today! He tried to combine Western concept of Metaphysics with Indian deliberations on the vital concept ‘Sat’. The key concept of *Sat* is expressed in the two following Upanisadic sentences: *sad-eva saumya idam agra asit/ eka eva advitiam!* “O my dear, only *Sat* existed in the beginning, one without a second,” and *ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*, “*Sat* is only one, the learned people express it differently.” Towards the end of the course, he invited us to ask questions, or seek clarifications on any issue of the course. In those days, seminarians were very timid, docile, and diffident to stand up and ask doubts. If at all one dared to do that, it was considered

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as an act of plucky heroism and great gallantry. I stood up and asked a very naïve and obvious question: “What is this being?” and sat down triumphant as if I had accomplished an exceptional feat. The young professor was shocked, stunned, and consternated, and replied in a pathetic voice: “My dear brother, in the last forty hours, I was trying to do precisely that; and now you are asking this; I am humiliated.” Today seminarians are much more confident, enlightened, and courageous, and have good command of language. They show no qualms to question the professors, and, if necessary, to confront them amicably.

In the years 1971-1973, 1980-1984, 1997-2005, 2008-2011, and 2014-2017, I served as teacher at Dharmaram and was a colleague and co-worker of Father Vineeth. My dealings with him and other senior professors was marked with utmost deference and admiration. Father Vineeth was Professor at Dharmaram from 1966 to 1993.



1. *Kranta-Darsi*: *Kavīh kranta-darsi*, goes the saying, meaning, a poet is the one who sees details beyond and behind the objects of experiences, which are conditioned by space, time, and material dimensions. The minds of the poets and sages (*rsis*) enter behind the presented objects and capture extra details, intense sentiments, and new meanings. While sages become transcendental seers through the sublimation of the spirit and by yogic powers, the poets become supernormal visionaries through the power of imagination and intuition (*pratibha*). Father Vineeth, through his *kranta-darsitvam*, could find new meanings and new applications for philosophical concepts and themes.

Father Vineeth possessed the mind of a poet. He composed hymns (verses) in Sanskrit, and twice or thrice he had approached me to correct the text. Just a few weeks back somebody brought to me an incomplete verse in Sanskrit jotted down by Father Vineeth for correction and completion.



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2. *Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram*: Truth, Auspiciousness, and Beauty. Being innately a poet, Father Vineeth was an admirer of beauty. Inherently and obstinately, he was an optimist and possessed a positive attitude and approach to events, things, and persons. “Beauty is not in the face; beauty is a light in the heart” (Khalil Gibran). Father Vineeth knew to enjoy beauty with his senses and with his mind and heart. As an eminent scholar said, “Your outer beauty will capture the eyes, your inner beauty will capture the heart.”

3. *Puja-mulam guror padam*: “This Atman can never be comprehended if taught by an inferior person. Unless it is taught by a competent person (Guru), there is no way to find it” (*Kaṭha Up.* II.8). “The knowledge directly learnt from one’s own *Guru* becomes most beneficial” (*Chāndogya Up.* IV.9.3). In fact, when we bring the person of Father Vineeth to our mind, the first thing that crosses our mind is the figure of a suave and refined *Guru*, who exudes serenity, tranquillity, and equanimity. I have attended two or three meditation sessions offered by Father Vineeth. The scene evoked in the imagination the picture of the *rsis* of ancient times, who imparted knowledge and wisdom of the soul-culture to genuine seekers. Indian spiritual tradition, especially as it is demonstrated in

the Upanisadic body of literature, is very emphatic and clear on the need of the help of a *Guru* in the pilgrimage of the spiritual seeker to perfection and liberation. *Muṇḍaka Up.* I.2.12-13 speaks about three qualities or characteristics of a *Guru*. *Vidvan*: he should be a learned person; *Srotriya*: he should be a person of deep knowledge of the scriptures (*sruti*); and *Brahmanistha*: he should be a person already established in Brahman. It is evident that Father Vineeth, who had radically and uncompromisingly committed himself to consecrated life in the CMI Congregation, possessed all these ingredients of a *Guru* and priest.

*Puja-mulam guror padam dhyana-mulam guror murti /
Mantra-mulam guror vakyam moksa-mulam guror
krpa!*

4. *Sthita-prajna*: Established in Wisdom: *Gita* II.54-72 explain the salient features of a spiritual aspirant who has acquired the discriminative knowledge and is firmly established in it, *sthita-prajña*. A *sthita-prajña* is one who has total control over his mind, senses, body, and passions; who has totally and efficiently detached himself/herself from worldly propensities, desires, and objects; who has conquered completely the evil enemies of spirituality like lust, anger, avarice, infatuation, pride, and jealousy (*kama-krodha-lobha-moha-mata-matsarya*);

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who has acquired abiding equanimity and equipoise, inner peace and bliss; who remains indifferent in joys and sorrows, and sees everything and every person in the same way; who is always firmly anchored in the Divine. These characteristics, with some exceptions, I believe, are applicable to the eminent *sannyasin* Father Francis Vineeth. A few verses from the *Gita* would clarify this statement:

O Arjuna, when one abandons all the desires of the heart and is satisfied in the Self by the Self, then he is said to be one established in wisdom.

He whose mind is not perturbed by adversity, who does not crave for happiness, who is free from attachment, fear and anger, he is called a sage of constant wisdom.

He who is unattached everywhere, who is not delighted at receiving good nor is dejected by adversities, his wisdom is well established.

He who can withdraw his senses from sense-objects like a tortoise withdraws its limbs, his wisdom is firmly established... (II.55-58).

This is the ideal state of a spiritually mature person



who treads the path of spirituality. Employing spiritual *sadhanas* like the four means advocated by Sankara, he/she has purified himself/herself and prepared himself/herself, and is now well on the way to perfection.

5. Harmonious Blending of *Karma*, *Jnana*, and *Bhakti*: Not only Father Vineeth, all Catholic priests, by the very nature of their call, duty, and ministry, should necessarily have these three ingredients: (i) A life of action and performance of duty, (ii) Knowledge and wisdom about the holy scriptures, tenets of Christian faith, knowledge of the natural laws and precepts of God, etc., and (iii) unalloyed devotion to and love of God.

I bow down my head with humility and deference, and salute with utmost reverence, gratitude, and admiration Father Francis Vineeth Vadakethala, a great stalwart and a precious jewel of the CMI Congregation! I feel fortunate and privileged to have personally known this great soul (*majatman*).

Jay Yesu! Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu/ subham astu!