

# **CALL TO INTEGRATION**

*Explorations in Spirituality, Theology,  
Philosophy and Artistic Horizons*

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Philosophy and Artistic Horizons*

**Editors**

**Babu Paul**

**George Kulangara**



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**Call to Integration: *Explorations in Spirituality, Theology,  
Philosophy and Artistic Horizons***

Editors

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**George Kulangara**

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## Preface

This volume emerges from a shared listening—to a call that has been sounding quietly yet insistently across disciplines, traditions, and lives: the call to integration. In an age marked by extraordinary intellectual productivity and unprecedented fragmentation, the need to recover coherence—within knowledge, within culture, and within the human person—has become both urgent and unavoidable. *Call to Integration: Explorations in Spirituality, Theology, Philosophy and Artistic Horizons* is offered as a response to that need, not through premature synthesis or conceptual closure, but through patient dialogue, contemplative attentiveness, and interdisciplinary hospitality.

The articles gathered here are the fruits of the first National Conference under *Legendary Visionary Conference Series* convened at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK), inspired by the life, thought, and spiritual vision of Rev. Fr. Dr. Francis Vineeth Vadakkethala CMI (1935–2021). Scholar, mystic, poet, teacher, and founder of Vidyāvanam Ashram, Fr. Vineeth embodied a rare harmony of intellect and contemplation, Eastern wisdom and Christian faith, artistic sensibility and theological rigor. For him, integration was never a methodological convenience or an abstract ideal; it was a way of knowing, a mode of being, and a spiritual discipline. His oft-repeated insight—“*Knowing is Becoming*”—encapsulates the animating intuition of this volume.

The present collection does not seek to systematize Fr. Vineeth's thought, nor to memorialize it in static form. Rather, it engages his legacy dynamically, allowing his integrative vision to converse with contemporary questions across spirituality, theology, philosophy, aesthetics, and lived religious practice. Each contribution approaches integration from a distinct angle, yet all resist the reduction of truth to a single register. What emerges is not uniformity, but resonance—a symphonic interplay of voices attuned to coherence without denying complexity.

The structure of the book itself reflects this movement. Part I situates the volume within memory, legacy, and institutional vision, grounding the call to integration in lived witness and communal inheritance. Part II establishes the epistemological and mystical core, exploring knowledge as transformation and contemplation as participatory awareness. Part III widens the horizon to lived, aesthetic, and philosophical praxis, where integration unfolds through art, embodiment, ethical existence, and spiritual discipline. Part IV moves decisively toward incarnation, examining how integration takes concrete form in ashram life, creativity, consecration, and communal practice. Part V opens the conversation outward, inviting dialogue between reason and imagination, scripture and philosophy, music and metaphysics.

Throughout the volume, integration is not presented as a final achievement but as an ongoing pilgrimage. It unfolds through silence and speech, discipline and creativity, fidelity and openness. It asks of the reader not merely intellectual assent, but attentiveness—a willingness to dwell within tensions, to listen across boundaries, and to allow one's own patterns of knowing and living to be gently reconfigured.

At a time when knowledge is often instrumentalized, spirituality privatized, and art commodified, this volume reaffirms the dignity of contemplative thought, the ethical demand of authenticity, and the transformative power of beauty. It insists that wisdom arises not where disciplines compete, but where they converse; not where certainty hardens, but where understanding remains porous to mystery.

We offer this book in gratitude – to the life and witness of Fr. Francis Vineeth Vadakkethala CMI, to the scholarly and spiritual community of DVK, and to all who continue to believe that the search for truth is inseparable from the search for wholeness. May these pages serve not as a destination, but as a threshold – inviting readers to hear anew the call to integration, and to carry it forward in thought, practice, and life.

Editors



# Introduction

In an age marked by unprecedented fragmentation—of knowledge, of disciplines, of cultures, and often of the self—the call to integration arises not as a luxury but as a necessity. The contemporary intellectual landscape abounds in specialization, yet remains vulnerable to isolation. Theology speaks, philosophy interrogates, spirituality yearns, and the arts imagine—often along parallel paths that rarely intersect. This volume emerges from the conviction that such separations neither do justice to the fullness of reality nor serve the deeper vocation of human inquiry. Truth, after all, is not monolithic but symphonic, unfolding most richly where diverse voices are allowed to resonate together.

Integration, as this collection seeks to explore, is both invitation and challenge: an appeal to reweave fragmented strands of understanding, and a summons to move beyond disciplinary enclosures toward a more holistic vision of life. It does not imply homogenization or the premature closure of questions; rather, it gestures toward a dynamic convergence—a dialogical space in which differences are engaged, tensions are neither denied nor hastily resolved, and fresh insight emerges through sustained encounter. It is this integrative ethos that inspired the National Conference, *Call to Integration: Explorations in Spirituality, Theology, Philosophy, and Artistic Horizons*, convened by Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK) in honour of Rev. Fr. Dr. Vineeth Vadakethala CMI (1935–2021).

Fr. Vineeth's life exemplified integration as a lived practice. A teacher, scholar, mentor, and visionary, he embodied a rare harmony of intellectual depth, spiritual wisdom, and personal

simplicity. His scholarship never remained abstract; it was animated by a profound concern for meaning, unity, and human flourishing. Across his writings, reflections, and leadership, he consistently sought to bridge divides – between faith and reason, tradition and modernity, contemplation and action, theology and the arts. Knowledge, in his understanding, was always relational, rooted in dialogue, nourished by humility, and oriented toward wisdom rather than mere accumulation of information.

The inaugural address by Archbishop Francis Kalist situated this call to integration within the lived and spiritual integrity of human life. Drawing on biblical exemplars such as Moses, the Samaritan woman, and Nathanael, he emphasized that integration begins with authenticity: the alignment of self-understanding, social identity, and divine calling, grounded in the God who declares, “I am who I am.” Against a contemporary world marked by duplicity and superficial appearances, the address affirmed that God’s transformative action occurs only when individuals embrace their true selves. In honoring Fr. Vineeth as a compelling witness to such integrity, the address underscored that integration is not merely theoretical but a concrete ethical and spiritual commitment, calling readers toward lived transformation.

The keynote address unfolded as a contemplative homage to Fr. Vineeth’s vision, interpreting his legacy through the insight that “knowing is becoming.” Rather than approaching knowledge as accumulation, it was presented as transformation—an awakening into participatory consciousness, rooted in the ancient wisdom that to know the Divine is to be inwardly reshaped by that knowing. Drawing from Upanishadic intuition, Christian mystical theology, and Fr. Vineeth’s own Asian vision of God, Dr. Peter Tylor articulated an integrative epistemology uniting reason and experience, theology and contemplation, intellect and heart.

Emphasizing silence, mantra, breath, and ashram spirituality, he framed integration as a gradual unlearning that moves beyond conceptual clarity into lived wisdom. Fr. Vineeth's life, marked by simplicity, hospitality, compassion, and solidarity with the poor, exemplifies this path, revealing a spirituality both contemplative and radically engaged. The keynote thus set the tone for the volume: intellectual inquiry that opens toward inner transformation, where the pursuit of truth culminates not in possession, but in becoming.

Integration emerges not only in thought but in the aesthetic and lived patterns of daily life. It can be seen as a continuous process of becoming, enacted through gestures, rituals, and the careful harmonization of experience. Drawing on Baumgarten's aesthetics, Kant's notion of judgment, and Dewey's philosophy of experience, Dr. Sebeesh Vettiyadan CMI presents integration in multireligious contexts as an aesthetic, existential practice, where individuals are artists of their own lives, shaping cultural and religious plurality into a felt coherence. This perspective reveals integration as ongoing self-authorship, a rhythm of perceiving and shaping in which beauty itself becomes the immediate language of plural belonging.

Within the Indian aesthetic tradition, the intertwined practices of Nāṭya, Nāda, and Kalā illuminate integration as a path of spiritual realization, where art functions not as representation but as revelation. Dr. Jojo Parecattil CMI interprets Fr. Vineeth's vision of *samanvaya*, portraying drama, sound, and artistic form as incarnational modes through which the divine becomes sensuously present. Nāṭya emerges as theology in action, Nāda as the vibrational ground of creation, and Kalā as the sacramental transfiguration of matter into theophany. By bridging Indian aesthetic philosophy with Christian mystical traditions, the essay affirms Vidyāvanam as

a sacred space where spiritual, intellectual, and artistic dimensions converge in luminous harmony.

A life fully integrated manifests in the harmonization of contemplation and action, faith and culture, spirituality and philosophical wisdom. Dr. Saju Chackalackal CMI presents Fr. Vineeth as a consecrated pilgrim and prophetic voice, interpreting his journey through the lens of consecrated life as pilgrimage, anchorage, care, and fraternity. Shaped by silence, simplicity, ecological sensitivity, and compassionate service, his founding of Vidyavanam symbolizes an exodus from ego toward communion, while his commitment to interreligious dialogue and ecological care exemplifies a life deeply rooted in contemplation yet radiating hope and authenticity for the wider human family.

Artistic creation itself becomes a path toward reintegration, uniting fragmented dimensions of life. Dr. Sebastian Eluvathingal CMI interprets art not as technique but as transformation, revealing how the creative act unites matter and spirit, shaping both the artwork and the artist, who gradually becomes a “work of art” himself. Tracing this trajectory from external form to inner intention, and illuminated through a biblical vision of creation, loss, and restoration, the essay culminates in Christ as the supreme “Art of God,” through whom broken humanity is recreated in love. Art, thus, emerges as both expression and instrument of reintegration, leading life itself toward beauty, meaning, and communion.

Integration emerges as the central and unifying vision in the writings of Fr. Francis Vineeth, shaping his engagement with philosophy, theology, poetry, prayer, and ecclesial life. Within this broad and diverse corpus, Dr. Babu Paul CMI highlights how Vineeth understands authentic human and spiritual life as grounded in the unification of existence

around an interior centre rooted in God, rather than in fragmented or isolated domains of truth. Inward reflection, meditative practice, poetic solitude, prophetic critique, and prayer as transformative power together form a coherent spiritual path. Integration thus appears not merely as a theoretical ideal but as a lived way of being—one that heals fragmentation, restores inner coherence, and enables a life marked by depth, freedom, responsibility, and compassionate communion.

The harmonization of body, mind, and spirit also constitutes an integrative practice. Dr. Augustine Thottakara CMI presents Yoga as a profound psychology of integration, a holistic spiritual science rooted in Indian philosophical wisdom. Grounded in Patañjali's Yoga-sūtra, Yoga becomes a disciplined path toward harmonization, where liberation unfolds through mastery of consciousness and transformation of inner dispositions. By reading the eightfold path as a graded psychological and spiritual therapy, the essay portrays Yoga as bridging reason and experience, philosophy and mysticism, offering a universal language of wholeness aligned with the overarching call to integration.

Authenticity, realized selfhood, and attentive engagement with the world form the existential axis of integrated living. Fr. Kurian Kachappilly Joseph CMI presents Fr. Vineeth as a life devoted to integration, *samanvaya*, and Yoga, interpreted through Heidegger's lens of *Eigentlichkeit*. Authenticity emerges as lived "ownness," shaped by silence, conscience, and engagement with the marginalized. Through this reflection, Fr. Vineeth's life becomes an enduring invitation to inhabit one's unique place in the world with integrity, clarity, and responsible discourse, navigating the passage from inauthentic absorption to realized being.

Integration finds a tangible locus in spaces of communal and contemplative practice. Drawing on fifteen years of lived engagement with Fr. Vineeth, Dr. Anto Vattakuzhy CMI portrays Vidyavanam as a “School of Integration,” where the rhythms of prayer, work, silence, and community converge. The ashram emerges as a transformative milieu in which the fragmented self attains wholeness, compassion matures from contemplation, and faith manifests in service, dialogue, and ecological sensitivity. It stands as a prophetic, sacramental expression of divine-human harmony and a living testament to Fr. Vineeth’s vision of life wholly integrated with God, self, and the world.

Integration also resides in the anthropology of the human and religious experience. Dr. Jose Nandhikkara CMI and Fr. Joel Chiramel CMI portray Fr. Vineeth as a spiritual anthropologist, weaving reason and heart, intellect and affect, contemplation and action into a seamless vision. Drawing on *jnana*, *bhakti*, and *karma margas*, they reveal a journey where self-realization and God-realization unfold together—where “knowing is becoming.” Rooted in Christ’s Sacred Heart, this vision unites interior transformation with compassionate mission, exemplifying a pathway toward an integrated existence marked by personal holiness, justice, and divine communion.

A life attuned to truth, goodness, and beauty manifests integration as incarnational being. Dr. Paulachan Kochappilly portrays Fr. Vineeth as a pilgrim navigating the interior and exterior realities of life with contemplative attentiveness and lived experience. Rooted in Eastern wisdom, enriched by Western insights, and anchored in Christ, he transforms the pilgrim into poet, prophet, and participant in the divine dance of *sat-cit-ānanda*. Through dialogue, inclusion, and compassionate action, such a life exemplifies authentic

wholeness and the joyful flowering of human and divine potential.

The journey of integration can be deeply personal, luminous, and transformative. Dr. Anto Amarnad's article, "Walking with Prof. Vineeth: A Disciple's Integration of Guru's Charisma," offers an intimate exploration of Vineeth as a master of integration, where intellect meets mysticism, East converges with West, and art flows into theology. Through memories, poetry, bhajans, and theological reflection, the study illuminates how his mantra, "Knowing is Becoming," translated speculative theology into experiential wisdom.

Fr. Vineeth Vadakkethala's reflections on Indian spirituality present Indian spirituality as a living, experiential tradition centred on inward transformation rather than external religiosity. Within this perspective, Dr. Binoy Chekkonthayil CMI brings into focus how Vadakkethala reinterprets core Indian spiritual concepts as an "inner pilgrimage" oriented toward self-knowledge and liberation (moksha), distinguishing experiential consciousness (anubhava) from the ritualistic and dogmatic tendencies of institutional religion. By addressing contemporary psychological and existential crises through this ancient yet dynamic framework, the study presents Indian spirituality as a vital resource for inner freedom, ethical grounding, and coherence in a fragmented modern world.

Dr. Peter Tyler examines Fr. Francis Vineeth CMI's theological vision through the foundational insight that "knowing is becoming," wherein the spiritual journey is understood as the progressive awakening of Christ-consciousness within the human person—a horizon he extends beyond Christianity to encompass all humanity. Drawing on both his writings and public reflections, the study

investigates the nature of the *vidyā* he proposes, the modes and contexts of its realisation, and its transformative significance. Fr. Vineeth's thought is thus situated within a participatory epistemology, where knowledge is inseparable from existential transformation and lived communion with divine consciousness.

The interplay of reason, spirit, and feeling finds its ultimate expression in art and music. The panel presentation, *Reason Expressing Itself in Art and Music*, draws together multiple perspectives: Alberic Nimal Retnam demonstrates how art and music manifest Absolute Spirit, harmonizing sensual and spiritual; James Nathan traces structure and sensation from Pythagoras to Aquinas, revealing rational order as emotionally resonant; Sr. Rachita illuminates the biblical dimension, portraying creation as divine-human dialogue. Together, these perspectives converge, showing art and music as luminous spaces guiding the soul toward inner harmony, universal resonance, and contemplative encounter with the transcendent.

In these pages, the call to integration is neither fully defined nor conclusively realized; it is an invitation, a threshold, a horizon. It is a summons to dwell within complexity without fear, to allow multiple modes of knowing to inform and transform one another, and to approach life with wonder, responsibility, and hope. Rooted in the life and vision of Fr. Vineeth Vadakethala, this volume stands as a living mosaic: a testimony to integrative thought, a dialogue between disciplines, and an enduring call to live, think, and create in the luminous unity of the human and the divine.

Editors

## **Part I**

# **Memory, Legacy, and Institutional Vision**

## **Messages**



# Message – I

Rev. Fr. Varghese Vithayathil CMI  
Rector, Dharmaram College, Bengaluru

Most Reverend Francis Kalist, Archbishop of Pondicherry; Reverend Father Mathew, President; Reverend Father Saju, Provincial; Professor Taylor; Fathers; my dear students; and esteemed guests – especially the Fathers from the Province of Coimbatore, and Mr. Antu Vadakkethala, a close relative of Father Vineeth Vadakkethala.

I am very happy to be part of this National Conference dedicated to Father Francis Vineeth Vadakedala. What I wish to share with you is not a studied academic paper, but a reflection born of personal experience and long acquaintance with Father Vadakkethala from the year 1970 onwards.

From 1970 to 1972, I was in the novitiate at Karukutti, and one of the annual retreats during that time was preached by Father Vineeth. I still vividly remember the manner in which he conducted that retreat. To be honest, many of us did not fully understand everything he said. As we all know, he was deeply philosophical and profoundly theological, and we novices, coming from humble backgrounds, were unable to grasp all that he communicated. Yet one thing was unmistakably clear: the retreat preacher was a man of substance.

That first impression of Father Vineeth – and the way he communicated his vision of life, a vision of integration – has

remained with me ever since. Later, when I came to Dharmaram College for my philosophical, theological, and collegiate studies, he was away for the first two years pursuing higher studies. When he returned, I did not have the privilege of being his student in the classroom, but I did have personal contact with him. I observed closely how he spoke to us, how he delivered discourses and lectures, how he prayed, and how he related to people. All of this left a deep impression on me.

From these experiences, I would like to highlight four aspects of Father Vineeth that I continue to remember with deep appreciation.

First, his integration of faith and reason. Father Vineeth firmly believed that faith is not opposed to reason; rather, the two are mutually enriching, complementary, and supportive. For us, as young students of philosophy and theology, this was an invaluable lesson – one that called us to intellectual integration. As both philosopher and theologian, he demonstrated that authentic thinking leads to faith, and that genuine faith seeks understanding. His writings, discourses, talks, and classes consistently reflected a creative dialogue between head and heart.

Second, his integration of Indian and Christian spirituality. This synthesis was evident not only in his writings but also in the very fabric of his life. He was deeply rooted in Indian spirituality – marked by silence, meditation, and simplicity – while at the same time being profoundly united with the Gospel of Jesus, who went about doing good. I have seen him pray in Padmāsana, Sukhāsana, Vajrāsana, and other traditional postures. Indian spirituality was part of his very being, yet he was also a true Karma Yogi. In him, the Jñāna Yogi and the Karma Yogi met in harmonious balance. As we know, he founded Vidyavanam to make this

integration a lived experience for many. In this respect, he stands in continuity with great mystic saints such as Saint Teresa of Avila, who united deep mystical life with the founding of centres, monasteries, and communities for the good of the Church.

Third, his integration of contemplation and action. Father Vineeth was a man of deep prayer, yet never withdrawn from the world. His contemplative depth inspired practical engagement in every sphere of CMI life—education, formation, and dialogue. He was deeply oriented toward discussion and encounter, capable of engaging with people of all backgrounds, because his primary concern was the search for truth rather than the imposition of personal opinions. In this sense, he was truly objective. His serene presence and joyful service testified to the truth that contemplation must overflow into love and service. As President of this Athenaeum, as a religious superior, and as the founder of several centres—especially Vidyavanam—he proved himself to be both a visionary and a man of action, truly in the spirit of our founder, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

Fourth, his integration of individuality and community. Father Vineeth deeply respected individuality and valued each person, while at the same time always working for communion. His gentle way of relating to others and his openness to new ideas were truly remarkable. I still remember three of my friends—Father Sebastian Eluvathingal, who is present here; Father Mathai Valyagandam, now in Bijnor; and Father Johny Manavalan, of happy memory. Observing what they perceived as the relative luxury of Dharmaram College, they desired to experiment with a simpler way of life.

At that time, our campus was filled with grass for cows. We had nearly seven hundred cows and about three hundred seminarians—such was the census then. The college block where we studied housed only around three hundred students. These friends built a small thatched hut on campus—a single-room dwelling with very basic facilities—and Father Vadakkethala readily volunteered to be their guide and mentor. He visited them regularly and offered Mass for them. I remember this vividly, Father Sebastian.

I too assisted them during that period, as I was working as an electrician. Initially, they had no electricity and were content without it. However, due to the presence of many snakes—especially cobras—in the area, I felt it was safer for them to have some lighting, and I helped arrange it. After a few months, however, they were asked to return to the main house, having completed their experiment in simple living, which had been inspired in part by the spirit of liberation theology prevalent at the time.

What I wish to emphasize here is that Father Vadakkethala, despite being a professor and intellectual, willingly became their guide and companion, taking great personal trouble to support and encourage them.

Dear friends, in celebrating Father Vineeth, we are celebrating the ideal of the integral human person—the dream of our CMI founder, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara. These qualities make Father Vineeth a true and faithful follower of our founder.

Father Vineeth and his vision are particularly relevant today in a world marked by fragmentation—between body and soul, religion and spirituality, sacred and secular, East and West, Orient and Occident, majority and minority, and among different religions. In such a fractured world, his life and teachings speak with prophetic clarity. These divisions

threaten the values of inclusivity for which our Lord Jesus Christ and many great leaders have given their lives.

Father Vineeth's call is to overcome these divisions through inner transformation that unites all dimensions of existence, drawing inspiration from Indian philosophy and the Christian mystery of the Incarnation. He proposed a spirituality that bridges cultural and religious boundaries. The integration he envisioned is both personal and cosmic – personal in calling each individual to inner harmony and authenticity, and cosmic in leading to communion with God, humanity, and all of creation.

For Father Vineeth, Jesus Christ is the perfect model of integration: God becoming human and reconciling heaven and earth. A follower of Jesus is therefore invited to live an incarnational spirituality that unites contemplation with compassion, knowledge with love, and prayer with service.

Ultimately, this call to integration is an invitation to live a life of wholeness rooted in the Spirit—to harmonize the riches of Indian religiosity and Christian faith, and to rediscover God's presence in the depths of one's being, in the community, and in the universe. It is a timeless message of unity, peace, and spiritual maturity in a divided world.

Dear friends, may Father Vineeth, through his life and legacy, continue to inspire us to become integrated persons – thinking deeply, loving sincerely, and living harmoniously. I am confident that you will benefit greatly from this conference, where so many distinguished scholars and thinkers will enlighten us. I wish this conference every success. On behalf of Dharmaram College, I offer my humble tribute and gratitude.



## Message – II

Dr. Mathew Attumkal CMI  
President, DVK, Bengaluru

Your Grace, Right Reverend Francis Kalist, our beloved Fr. Rector, Rev. Fr. Saju Chackalackal, Provincial of Preshitha Province, Prof. Peter Taylor, Fr. Paulachan, former Deans and Presidents of DVK, staff members, distinguished family members of Fr. Vineeth, members of Preshitha Province, and my dear friends. Jai Yesu!

It fills my heart with great joy to stand before you on this remarkable occasion as we embark upon a new era – one that seeks to promote and share with the wider world the Carmelite scholarly blueprints crafted by the legendary visionaries of our CMI congregation. Though today's initiative may appear a humble beginning, I foresee in it the promise of a strong and enduring path ahead, as we spread the thoughts of those luminaries who enriched Dharmadham and other ecclesiastical institutes in India and abroad with freshness of thought, originality of vision, and depth of insight.

From the very inception of our congregation in 1831, many of our fathers have contributed profoundly to the growth of the Indian Church, beginning with our beloved founders themselves. They were men of integrity and deep spiritual wisdom. As we often acknowledge, we stand on their shoulders – inheritors of their courage, their convictions, and their contemplative spirit.

The same enthusiasm that moved our founders and their immediate successors found renewed strength after the Second Vatican Council, particularly through the life and work of Fr. Francis Vineeth and other visionaries of the Dharmaram ecclesiastical fraternity. In 1933, our fathers ventured courageously into the field of ecclesiastical education, and in 2033, we will celebrate 200 years of dedicated service in this noble mission.

Interestingly, it was only in 1846, with the establishment of a Sanskrit school, that our services were extended into the secular sphere for promoting the intellectual and cultural enrichment of society at large. This conference marks the first in a series designed to proclaim to the world the original theological and philosophical vision of our Dharmaram—or rather, CMI—pioneers, and to explore how their insights have shaped the missionary and intellectual life of the Church.

Among these missionaries, Fr. Francis Vineeth stands out as a living synthesis of contemplation and creativity. He was not merely a scholar but, for many of us, a living footnote—one whose words and example continue to illuminate our paths.

I recall vividly one of his reflections from our licentiate classes around the year 2001. He once drew a simple yet profound distinction between offering someone a bouquet bought from the market and offering flowers grown in one's own garden.

Buying a bouquet from the market, he said, is a respectful and traditional gesture. It acknowledges the value of the other's presence. But when one plants, nurtures, and grows roses in one's own garden and offers them as a gift, the act becomes deeply personal.

Those flowers carry one's own story, labour, and relationship. In offering them, we share not merely a gift but a part of ourselves. They bear the fragrance of one's own toil and love. That simple reflection has stayed with me over the years.

I am sure that many of you have your own treasured memories and insights drawn from Fr. Vineeth's words and life. His thoughts were never borrowed blooms; they were ideas cultivated in the garden of his own soul—deeply Indian, deeply Carmelite, and profoundly Catholic. It is therefore truly fitting that this new series begins with a conference dedicated to him.

I take this opportunity to thank Rev. Fr. Saju, our beloved Provincial, who first mooted this idea, and the previous administrative team under Rev. Fr. Joy, who envisioned this event on campus. Today, looking back, I can only see the gentle providence of God at work, guiding us to this moment of remembrance and renewal.

I warmly congratulate the organizers and all the participants. May your discussions be fruitful, your reflections be deep, and your fellowship be joyful. Let this conference inspire all of us to carry forward the legacy of our pioneers with renewed zeal, creative fidelity, and wisdom.

Thank you, and God bless you.



## Message – III

Dr. Saju Chackalackal CMI  
Provincial, Preshitha Province, Coimbatore

Your Grace, the Most Reverend Dr. Francis Kalist, Archbishop of Pondicherry; Reverend Father Varghese Vithayathil, Rector of Dharmaram College; Reverend Father Mathew Atumkal, President of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram; Dr. Peter Tyler, my friend and keynote speaker of the day; honourable members of the staff; dear Fathers, especially from Preshitha Province; and my dear students.

I have known Father Francis Vineeth for forty-five years. The first five years were from a distance, as I was a candidate in initial formation. From 1985 onwards, when I arrived on the Dharmaram campus, I enjoyed a very close association with him. From that time on, he became my mentor, teacher, and guru, playing an immense role in shaping the person I have become.

Fr. Francis Vineeth Vadakethala stands tall before us – as a Christian disciple, as a religious, as an ordained priest, as a professor of philosophy, theology, and comparative religion, as the founder of an ashram, and as a person who realized Jesus Christ deeply in his own life. He truly stands tall, and I am grateful that we have come together to commemorate and celebrate this great personality: a great son of India, a great sannyasi, who carved out a unique space for himself, particularly in Indian Christian spirituality.

I would like to limit this message to three personal experiences: one related to his life, a second of a slightly academic nature, and a third with a spiritual dimension.

As some of you may know, Fr. Francis Vineeth fell seriously ill during the COVID period. He was admitted to Amala Hospital in Thrissur, and due to the infection, he was kept in isolation. None of us could be around him. One afternoon, we received a message from the hospital stating that his condition was critical. Soon after, he was declared dead. Under those circumstances, it was impossible to give him a traditional burial, and we decided to cremate his body.

The cremation was carried out at Palakkad. As we prepared the pyre, the person in charge of the electric crematorium asked me to light it. It was an intensely painful moment, yet also profoundly meaningful for me, as I consider myself a disciple of Fr. Francis Vineeth. According to Indian custom, it is usually the children who light the pyre. In that moment, I had the honour and privilege of performing this final act of respect.

His mortal remains are interred in Palakkad, but his memory lives on among his students and the many seekers he guided and inspired. Since we were unable to give him a proper farewell at the time, we initially planned a small provincial-level workshop. A small committee was constituted, comprising members living in Bengaluru along with Father Wilson Chakkiyath, who helped prepare the initial plan.

As time passed, and recognizing that Fr. Francis Vineeth had spent a major part of his life on the Dharmaram campus, I spoke with the former President, Father Joy Kakanath, and invited him to be part of this initiative. Later, when Father Mathew Atungal assumed office as President, he took the project forward. I am grateful to both Fr. Joy and Fr. Mathew

for accepting this request and helping to develop it into a larger program.

What began as a small initiative has now evolved into a national conference, with the participation of eminent academicians and distinguished personalities associated, in one way or another, with Fr. Francis Vineeth. This has given us a meaningful opportunity to celebrate his life and achievements.

I sincerely thank Father Mathew, President of DVK; Father George Kulangara, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy; and Father Babu Paul, my classmate, who meticulously coordinated and programmed this entire event. I also thank everyone who has contributed to and supported this project. What I initially envisioned as a modest initiative has now become the precursor to a promising series known as the Legendary Visionaries Conference Series, of which this is the first.

Father Babu has already mentioned the incident that occurred during Dr. Peter Tyler's travel to India for this conference. When Dr. Tyler was questioned by the visa authorities, he offered the necessary clarifications but remained uncertain whether the visa would be granted. He himself testifies—using that word consciously—that he sought the heavenly intercession of Fr. Francis Vineeth, praying that if it were God's will, the visa would be granted so that he could participate in this event. The very next day, the visa was approved.

Following this, Dr. Peter Tyler suggested that we might consider initiating the process to declare Fr. Francis Vineeth a Servant of God. Having some experience in such matters from my tenure as Provincial, I am aware that official recognition by the Church requires the support and approval of ecclesiastical authorities. Convincing them of the holiness

of a religious is not an easy task. To be frank, it is a long and demanding process, and I myself have been involved in such efforts over the past five years without success.

Nevertheless, I am personally convinced of the holiness of Fr. Francis Vineeth. I was closely associated with him at many levels, and I know that his life was holy and deeply inspiring. The Church raises holy lives not merely for intercessory purposes, but as models of Christian discipleship. In this sense, Fr. Francis Vineeth truly stands tall.

This national conference marks an important first step in celebrating his life, vision, achievements, and indeed his holiness. May the Lord inspire us to imbibe his spirit and translate it into our own lives. Let us leave the official recognition of his holiness to the Church, but let us celebrate his life, absorb his spirit, and strive to become holy Christian disciples ourselves.

May God bless each one of us. Thank you, Father Mathew, once again, for organizing this wonderful conference on the life, achievements, and holiness of Fr. Francis Vineeth Vadakethala. May God bless you all.

# Inaugural Address

## Spiritual Dimensions of a Life of Integration

Archbishop Francis Kalist  
Archbishop of Pondicherry

Dear Reverend Father Varghese Vithayathil, Rector of Dharmaram College; Dear Reverend Father Mathew Atumkal, President of DVK; Dear Reverend Father Saju Chackalackal, Provincial of Prishita Province, Coimbatore; Eminent professors; Dear brothers and sisters,

I am very happy to be here with all of you today, celebrating the memory of this great person. Father Saju Chackalackal mentioned that Father Francis Vineeth Vadakethala would be a fitting candidate for sainthood. We can certainly try for it, but as he rightly said, convincing the bishop is not easy—unless we convince him through holiness.

At present, I am involved in the canonization process of Veeramahamnavar Joseph Constantine Biskey. As you know, the process must begin in the diocese where the person is buried. Although Biskey is buried in Ampalakadu, which belongs to the Diocese of Kottapuram, I am from the Diocese of Pondicherry–Kudallur. Therefore, I had to write a special letter to the bishop of that diocese—first to Bishop Joseph Karikasseril, and now to Bishop Ambrose. From both, I

obtained the required no-objection certificate, and the process was initiated. Since the person is buried in Palakkad, it ultimately becomes the responsibility of the Diocese of Palakkad. If that diocese refuses, they must at least give a no-objection certificate so that the cause can be initiated elsewhere.

Now, a question arose in my mind: why am I here as part of this conference? I am neither a philosopher nor a theologian. I am a simple pastor. Here, there are many philosophers, eminent theologians, and professors.

So I asked myself: why did I accept this invitation? I only knew the title—“*Integration.*” That word attracted me: integration, integrity of life, authenticity. That alone was enough for me to say yes. Now, having listened to the sharing of my predecessors, I realize that Father Francis Vineeth was indeed a great person—a man whose life was marked by integrity and whose mission was one of integration. He has begun a lasting legacy of integrity, and that is why I am very happy to speak about him.

The topic given to me is “*Spiritual Dimensions of a Life of Integration.*” I will go straight to Scripture. In the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 7, verses 20–43, we find the speech of Saint Stephen before his martyrdom. In this passage, Stephen speaks about the life of Moses, dividing it into three periods of forty years each.

The first forty years were Moses’ childhood and life in the palace of Pharaoh. The second forty years were spent in Midian, in the desert, after he fled for his life. The third forty years began with his encounter with God in the burning bush, after which God empowered him and sent him back to Egypt to liberate the people from slavery.

From this account, we understand why Moses initially failed in his attempt to liberate the people. At that time, he

was not yet a person of integrity or authenticity. Later, God transformed him by revealing Himself as a God of integrity. In the burning bush, God reveals His name for the first time: “I am who I am.” Nothing more, nothing less. Nothing to add, nothing to hide. That is authenticity, transparency, sincerity, and integrity.

God is a God of integrity, and we are created in His image and likeness. Therefore, our real nature and calling are to live lives of integrity. This, I believe, is the spiritual foundation of the call to integration.

When Moses first intervened, two crucial questions were raised: “Who are you?” and “Who sent you?” These are questions that all of us face at some point—especially after ordination, when we begin our ministry. “Who are you?” refers to three images: the image I have of myself, the image others have of me, and the image God has of me. If these three images are one and the same, then I am a person of integrity and authenticity.

I believe that Father Francis Vineeth understood this deeply and tried to live it fully. That is why today we reflect on this theme of integration in his memory. Later, Moses acknowledges his limitations—his fear, his inability to speak fluently—and accepts his true self. Only then does God empower him. This is what it means to be a person of integrity. God is a God of integrity, and we are called to reflect that integrity in our lives.

This theme is also evident in the Gospel. In John 4, the Samaritan woman begins as a fragmented and unauthentic person. Through her encounter and dialogue with Jesus, she becomes an integrated and authentic person. She then becomes a missionary, proclaiming, “Come and see a man who told me everything about me.” She had nothing to hide and nothing to add. She became what she truly was.

Similarly, in John 1:47, Jesus says of Nathanael, “Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no guile.” Nathanael spoke honestly, without duplicity. Jesus appreciated this authenticity. In contrast, Jesus strongly condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. His harsh words were directed not at sinners, but at those who lacked integrity.

Why must we be authentic? First, because God is authentic: “I am who I am.” Second, because Jesus is fully authentic. He says, “My food is to do the will of my Father,” and “When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that I am.” Third, Jesus expects His disciples to be authentic.

How do we become authentic? Through right motivation, a deep life of prayer, self-denial, and sincere love for Christ. These qualities were clearly visible in the life of Father Francis Vineeth.

I conclude with a few personal experiences. As a young priest and parish priest at Christnagar in Ghaziabad, I faced pressure to give bribes to upgrade a school. I refused, believing that running institutions to impart Gospel values cannot be done by violating those very values. Though I was considered a failure at that time, I believe I remained faithful to the Gospel.

Later, as Rector of a philosophy seminary in Agra, I again faced demands for bribes to secure electricity and institutional permissions. I refused each time. It took patience, struggle, and sacrifice, but eventually the work was accomplished honestly. These were small attempts to witness to integrity in a world increasingly dominated by falseness and diplomacy.

Today, we live in a world where fake things appear more real than reality, where diplomacy often replaces truth. In such a world, integrity and authenticity seem to have little

value. That is why the life and witness of Father Francis Vineeth Vadakethala are so relevant and inspiring today.

He was a person of integrity. His mission was integrity. His life was a life of integrity. That is what attracted me here, and that is why I am happy that, for the next three days, you will reflect on this most relevant theme.

We have before us a living example in Father Francis Vineeth Vadakkethala. I honour him. I salute him. I am grateful that I have come to know him better today. I will try to read his writings and deepen my understanding of his vision. And if needed, I am ready to support the cause for his sainthood.

Thank you. God bless you all. I wish you a fruitful and meaningful conference. Do not let these three days be merely a seminar of listening and leaving unchanged. Take something with you. Practice it in your life. Become persons of integrity. That is my humble request.

Thank you. God bless you.



## **Part II**

# **Epistemological and Mystical Foundations: Knowing, Becoming, and Transformation**



## Keynote Address

### Knowing Is Becoming: Participating in Divine Consciousness – A Conversation with Fr. Francis Vineeth CMI

*Dr. Peter Tyler*

It is a great honour and privilege to be here and to be back here, a place I feel is like a second home. You have already heard the first story about the visa, so I will not repeat it—but there is another story.

I first came here fifteen years ago, in the other hall, when there was a large conference on mysticism convened by Father Kurian, who is sitting here in the front. It was very impressive—all these great academics.

You know how conferences go. This was a three-day conference, and after a couple of days of academic sessions, one begins to wilt a bit. You look at your watch and start counting the hours. We did not have mobile phones in those days. On the third day, Father Vineeth—Father Francis—appeared. He had come down with Father Anto from Vidyavanam.

It was amazing. His presence was incredible. Many of you know Father Vineeth far better than I do; some of you may not know him or may never have met him. But his presence was truly his greatest attribute. So, when I was preparing this

talk for you this morning, rather than giving an academic paper—which I am happy to do—I thought it was more important to convey a sense of his presence, because I believe that was his greatest gift.

That is why I have called this paper “*Knowing Is Becoming*.” I love this phrase of his—participating in divine consciousness. I have subtitled it “*A Conversation with Father Francis Vineeth*.” To be honest, when I wrote this paper, I had no idea what the other conference papers would cover. I only found out this morning, and I was delighted to see that many of the themes I touch upon in this opening address will be explored further by the other wonderful speakers.

In a way, what I am giving you this morning is an overview. I urge you to stay for the next three days, including the visit to Vidyavanam. You will find yourself immersed in that presence, entering into the divine presence under the guidance of Father Vineeth. That is our journey.

As I said, I was very attracted to this phrase of Father Vineeth’s—“*Knowing is becoming*.” He himself adapted it from a verse in the third chapter of the *Mundaka Upanishad*. Excuse my Sanskrit:

*“The one who knows the supreme Brahman verily becomes Brahman.”*

Therefore, what is described in this talk today is not merely the acquiring of knowledge. Our mobile-phone culture is about procuring and consuming information. This is the work of the ego—the hungry ego, or the first-year undergraduate student. Rather, what we are seeking, and what we will explore over the next three days, is a golden thread that weaves through Father Vineeth’s life and work, as was beautifully portrayed in the video earlier.

I can promise you that if you follow this thread, you will be transformed. This is a philosophy of transformation: we are transformed as we participate in divine consciousness, the Christ consciousness. Hence the subtitle of my talk.

If I have understood Father Vineeth correctly, by acquiring this knowledge we become new selves. As the Archbishop said just now, we are transformed as we acquire that divine consciousness which was so central to him.

This is reflected in two quotations. This morning, I am drawing from his books—which I hope will be available for you to purchase during the conference—as well as from conferences and retreats I attended online. I attended some of the last retreats he gave at Vidyavanam and was fortunate to record his talks and conduct interviews with him. To prepare for today, I listened to those talks again. It was wonderful to hear his voice.

The first quotation comes from January 2016: *“We do not need knowledge of Jesus anymore, but participation in the consciousness of Jesus.”* Father Vineeth himself said he taught through small phrases. He called them mantras or mudras—short, powerful expressions. This was part of his gift.

His second comment concerns *avidya*, that is, lack of knowledge. *Avidya*, he said, is not academic ignorance. One can have a doctorate and still be in *avidya*. This is a critical insight.

From these quotations arises the theme of my talk: the process of the spiritual journey for Christians is the awakening of Christ consciousness within us. We could go further and say that this Christ consciousness extends beyond Christianity to all humanity.

This is easy to say, but two challenges arise. First, it is not easy to achieve. For me, it has required much effort. I am now

in my early sixties, and only now am I beginning to glimpse what this journey entails. I have been pursuing this dharma for forty years, and it feels as though I am only beginning again. This wisdom is not head knowledge; it is heart knowledge.

Second, it is very difficult to talk about. Father Vineeth himself preferred brief phrases. Throughout Christian history, this transformative way of speaking has required its own language, which can be difficult to understand. I teach a course on mystical theology to third-year students, and last week two of them told me they had not understood anything I had said for four weeks. I replied that this is the nature of the subject.

In the Middle Ages, people spoke of three levels of consciousness. The first was ignorance, which we want to avoid. The second was knowledge—head learning—which you are all engaged in through philosophy, theology, ethics, and systematic theology. But that was not the end. After completing theological studies, one then studied mystical theology, which was almost a process of unlearning.

To describe this process, I draw on Father Vineeth's book *The Asian Vision of God*, which I highly recommend. In it, he outlines what might be called an eightfold path of transformation. These include: an experiential approach to the divine, a contemplative rather than analytical approach, apophatic mysticism, hermitage and ashram spirituality, the use of sutras and mantras, the breath of life, contemplation as the goal, and finally, the Asian Jesus and the poor of Asia.

It is impossible to cover all of this in forty-five minutes, so I have reduced it to five key questions: what, how, where, why, and who.

What is the wisdom we seek? It is experiential, realizational, and contemplative, rather than purely rational and analytical.

How do we achieve it? Through sutras, mantras, mudras, and the breath of life.

Where does it take place? In the hermitage and the ashram, embodied most clearly at Vidyavanam.

Why do we do this? For inner serenity – not as an escape from the world, but as a deeper engagement with it.

Who is it for? For all, but especially for the poor of Asia, with whom Jesus identified himself.

Father Vineeth embodied this vision through simplicity, hospitality, and deep compassion. His spirituality was not inward-looking, but a call to action – to care for humanity, communities, and the planet.

To conclude: *"Knowing is becoming."* With the Jesus of Asia – simple, unassuming, and unarmed – we are invited into transformation. Like his Satguru, Father Vineeth lived this simplicity and communicated a profound change of heart.

I hope that spending these days reflecting on his thought and presence will lead you, too, from knowing to becoming. I leave you with his words:

*"Our attention is called to an experiential and realizational way of knowing God, fostering a contemplative and apophatic approach to reality. We need both reason and experience."*

*Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti*



## **Part III**

# **Integration as Lived, Aesthetic, and Philosophical Praxis**



# Art, Everyday Aesthetics, and Integrated Living

*Dr. Sebeesh Vettiyadan CMI*

## **Abstract**

The idea of integration in multireligious cultures must be understood as an existential imperative and a phenomenon of lived aesthetics, rather than a merely abstract or socio-political concept. Drawing on Baumgarten's notion of aesthetics as sensuous cognition, Kant's account of aesthetic judgment as the free harmony of the faculties, and Dewey's conception of art as experience, I argue that authentic integration is a continually enacted aesthetic process in the lived field of religion and culture. Integration occurs not through conceptual synthesis alone but through aesthetic choices – the embodied acts by which individuals, much like artists, weave together heterogeneous cultural and religious forms (dress, food, gesture, ritual) into a coherent and felt unity of life. Such everyday art-making reveals integration as a lived synthesis – a rhythm of perceiving, responding, and shaping – that mediates between the sensuous and the reflective, the individual and the communal. By analyzing ordinary aesthetic practices as expressions of existential self-authorship, the paper reframes integration as an ongoing creative task: the cultivation of coherence amid diversity, where beauty becomes the most immediate language of plural belonging.

I employ a phenomenological–hermeneutics grounded in aesthetic inquiry to portray integration through the textures of lived experience—examining how individuals perceive, embody, and artistically configure cultural and religious plurality in their daily lives. Drawing from aesthetic phenomenology, the study will attend to the forms of feeling and acts of making through which unity is experienced sensuously before it is conceptualized. Textual analysis of Baumgarten, Kant, and Dewey will serve as a philosophical scaffolding to interpret these phenomena: Baumgarten providing the sensuous foundation of perception, Kant the reflective dynamics of judgment, and Dewey the experiential continuum between art and life. Through reflective observation, narrative vignettes, and analysis of everyday aesthetic practices, the method unfolds integration as an embodied and creative hermeneutic act—a way of interpreting and shaping one’s world through the ongoing artistry of living.

## **I. Introduction**

For exemplary figures like Fr. Vineet, whose life informs this reflection, integration was not a concept to be analysed but a way of being—a harmony to be lived and embodied. Fr Vineet’s approach was profoundly phenomenological, allowing the synthesis contemplated in the mind to unfold in the concrete rhythms of daily life. This transformation of thought into lived practice, exemplified by the ashram (intense effort) , constitutes an art form shaped by experience and illuminated by beauty. Thus, integration can be fundamentally viewed as an aesthetic and spiritual pursuit grounded in participatory experience.

The core thesis advanced here is that genuine integration is achieved through an Aesthetic of Participation, where truth, communication, and harmony are movements within a single aesthetic of existence. This participatory aesthetic mirrors the

shift in modern art that transforms passive viewers into active co-creators, emphasizing process and relationality over static form. We assert that the beautiful is not a private revelation but a shared, relational event, demanding reciprocity and co-creation.

To develop this argument, I will trace three interwoven paths:

First, I explore the philosophical foundations of art—how human art philosophically mirrors our creative and integrative nature. Second, I demonstrate how meaning-making is grounded in the everyday aesthetics of life—in the gestures, encounters, and forms that give coherence to our being. Finally, I show how this theory finds fulfillment in a life of harmony and holiness, exemplified in the creation of the ashram as a lived symbol of integrated existence.

My reflections will draw on the insights of three key thinkers—Immanuel Kant, John Dewey, and Paul Evdokimov—synthesized with my own phenomenological encounters with art and ashram life. Together, these thinkers provide the conceptual ground for integration as free harmony, rhythmic continuity, and spiritual radiance, demonstrating that the aesthetic, moral, and communal converge in a participatory mode of being. This paper thus positions integration not merely as a theory, but as a daily practice of beauty and participation

## **II. From Observation to Participation: The Modern Aesthetic Shift**

The transformation of integration from an abstract concept to a lived reality finds a profound parallel in the evolution of modern art itself. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century artistic practice increasingly understands itself not as the presentation of static objects but as participation—a relational discipline that shares, co-creates, and transforms experiences of beauty

through interaction. This seismic shift reframes beauty as something to be lived and exchanged rather than merely possessed or observed.

### **The Relational Turn in Modern Art**

Modern movements began a radical process of dismantling the conceptual and physical boundary between “artist” and “audience”. Movements such as Dada, Fluxus, and the Happenings of the 1960s deliberately positioned the public as collaborators rather than mere spectators. Participatory art thus transforms passive viewers into active co-creators, placing emphasis on process, dialogue, and collective creativity instead of focusing on static, final form. Crucially, the artistic act is rendered incomplete unless participants actively engage; the artwork is truly realized only through their input and response.

### **Beauty as Shared Aesthetic Experience**

In this contemporary sense, beauty, harmony, and integration cease to be a private, contemplative revelation and become a shared event. Theorist Nicolas Bourriaud explored this under the rubric of “relational aesthetics,” arguing that art serves as a space for human interaction, a “social interstice” where viewers meet, converse, and build relations through the aesthetic experience. The beautiful, therefore, becomes the very quality of the relationship itself – a resonance of mutual recognition and understanding enacted between persons. This redefinition finds its philosophical corollary in the aesthetic readings of Kant, Dewey, and Evdokimov, where beauty functions as relational integration, the felt unity of diversity, now enacted communally rather than solely within the inner faculties.

### **Art as Ethical and Communal Practice**

The convergence of aesthetics and ethics culminates in the “social practice” model, where contemporary projects

explicitly foster community dialogue, empathy, and co-creation through participatory engagement. Artists such as Marina Abramović, Yoko Ono, and JR's Inside Out project invite audiences to make decisions, share stories, or even co-construct the artwork's physical form. This embodies what has been called "art as communication in action". Participation, in this light, becomes a deeply moral and creative exercise, where each participant bears responsibility for the meaning that emerges.

### **Toward an Aesthetic of World-Making**

The philosophy of modern participatory art aligns closely with the idea of integration as aesthetic holiness. To share beauty through participation is to engage others in acts of world-making—transforming both the self and the community into expressions of coherence and radiance. This aesthetic willingness to engage the other mirrors the spiritual readiness of communion; art becomes a practice of openness, reciprocity, and co-creation. In this view, art's purpose lies not solely in producing beauty but in propagating it through relation. Beauty manifests where people meet to shape meaning together—the artwork becoming a living dialogue, a space where the aesthetic and the ethical converge to renew the shared world.

### **III. The Triadic Ground of Aesthetic Integration**

The transition from external aesthetic observation to participatory engagement finds its essential philosophical grounding in three distinct yet complementary conceptions of harmony and integration. Across Immanuel Kant, John Dewey, and Paul Evdokimov runs a shared conviction: that true integration is achieved through a dynamic, rhythmic alignment, whether within the self, between the self and the world, or between the self and the Transcendent.

## **Kant: The Aesthetic Ground of Integration, Beauty as Inner Balance**

Immanuel Kant, in *the Critique of Judgment*, established that the aesthetic experience of beauty resides in the subjective, felt relation between the cognitive faculties. Beauty occurs when imagination and understanding enter into a state of "free harmony" (or free play). This harmony is characterized by "purposiveness without a purpose," meaning there is no external rule or predetermined concept constraining the judgment; rather, there is only the internal, spontaneous feeling that the faculties align – the sensation that "everything fits". This experience yields a disinterested pleasure because it subjectively validates the mind's inherent capacity for order and coherence. Applied to life, integration, in the Kantian sense, is the achievement of this same internal "art of balance". It means achieving an internal equilibrium where thoughts and emotions align freely, providing the essential foundation – the aesthetic ground – for harmonious external engagement. The experience of beauty thus mirrors a state of freedom and coherence within ourselves, presenting integration as a necessary inner balance.

## **Dewey: Experience as Rhythmic Continuity, Life as Creative Rhythm**

John Dewey took the aesthetic idea out of the realm of the abstract and firmly embedded it in the rhythms of everyday life. For Dewey, art and beauty are not isolated from ordinary experience; rather, every genuine experience – from cooking to building to teaching – possesses an inherent rhythm comprising tension, movement, and resolution. Art merely serves to make this rhythm visible. Integration, therefore, means participating rhythmically in life – being keenly aware of the dynamic conversation between the self (organism) and the world (environment), and responding appropriately.

Through this rhythmic exchange, even the most ordinary actions can become aesthetic and profoundly meaningful.

### **Evdokimov: The Personalization of Holiness, Beauty as Presence**

Paul Evdokimov, drawing from modern Orthodox thought, introduces a spiritual depth, calling the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of Beauty”. For Evdokimov, beauty transcends mere form; it is about presence—the shining of the Transcendent within ordinary reality. Critically, beauty seeks incarnation: it must take flesh in the person who lives beautifully. Holiness thus becomes the highest aesthetic act, where the human being is transfigured into a living icon of divine harmony. This is the moment when life itself becomes a work of art—luminous, relational, and whole. It is the ultimate personalization of beauty, where truth, goodness, and grace radiate through one’s entire being.

### **IV. Participation and the Aesthetics of Communion**

The aesthetic and spiritual discourses of Kant, Dewey, and Evdokimov are bound by a shared core conviction: that beauty and integration arise universally through a participatory mode of being. Integration is not a static state of wholeness but a condition of relational reciprocity—an ongoing co-creation between the self, others, and the world.

### **The Unifying Principle of Participation**

The three perspectives, though distinct in their focus, collectively illuminate participation as the mechanism of integration:

For Kant, participation is internal: it is the free play and mutual exchange of imagination and understanding in a cognitive dynamic.

For Dewey, participation is environmental: it is the rhythmic and continuous exchange between the organism and its environment, making life itself a conversation.

For Evdokimov, participation is transcendent: it is the person and the Spirit uniting in the creation of incarnate beauty and transfigured personhood.

This shared emphasis demonstrates that an integrated life—a life of aesthetic holiness—requires a fundamental willingness to participate with the other. It necessitates viewing selfhood as inherently communicative and striving to inspire others into shared acts of meaning-making.

### **Integration as Relational Reciprocity**

Integration is thus defined not by flawless internal perfection but by dynamic, reciprocal relationships. The self is not a complete, isolated entity, but a node within a network, constantly shaping and being shaped by its environment and its interlocutors. This relational reciprocity—this willingness to be both artist and audience, creator and participant—is what allows life to achieve its rhythm and harmony.

### **The Ethical Call of Aesthetic Holiness**

The shift to a participatory aesthetic carries profound ethical consequences. In a fractured world, this mode of being restores communion by transforming existence itself into relational creativity. The term aesthetic holiness signifies a state where ethical responsibility and aesthetic sensibility merge. To be holy, in this sense, is to be hospitable to beauty—to become a dwelling place where difference finds unity and where art, ethics, and spirit converge. This is the ultimate act of world-making, demanding that the integrated self engage openly and reciprocally with the other.

## **V. The Ashram: A Dwelling of Aesthetic Integration**

In the Indian philosophical and spiritual imagination, the ashram embodies a profound ideal of integrated existence. It stands as a concrete, lived manifestation of the aesthetic principles of harmony, simplicity, and participation discussed philosophically by Kant, Dewey, and Evdokimov.

### **A Model of Integrated Living**

Initially conceived as a space for *sādhanā*—the intense cultivation of spiritual awareness and discipline—the ashram evolved into a working model of integrated life. Within its structure, essential human activities like work, prayer, and art coalesce into one continuous rhythm. It is far more than a mere retreat; it is a dwelling of harmony, a place where the material and spiritual dimensions of life converge through the beauty of ordered simplicity. The ashram's ethos, defined by self-restraint, communal labor, and contemplation, directly reflects the aesthetic wholeness that each of the three thinkers envisioned, albeit in distinct registers.

### **Enacting the Aesthetics of Participation**

At its heart, the ashram enacts the aesthetics of participation. It recognizes the self not as isolated, but as radically relational, necessitating the integration of the individual into the wider fabric of community, nature, and spirit.

The daily practices within the ashram embody this relational reciprocity:

The stillness of its courtyards and the rhythmic recitation of prayer symbolize the harmonization of the inner and outer worlds through mutual participation. The collective meal and communal labor transform individual tasks into shared aesthetic and ethical experiences.

In such a setting, holiness becomes not a private possession but a shared radiance. This communal nature parallels the ideal sought by modern participatory art. Like interactive installations that rely on the engagement of others to reveal their meaning, the ashram requires participation to be complete; its beauty is communal, arising from coexistence and correspondence.

### **The Luminous Paradigm of World-Making**

In a fractured and restless modernity, the ashram stands as a luminous paradigm of integration. It is a dwelling where life itself becomes art, and where ethics and aesthetics flow seamlessly into one another. It manifests the powerful principle that to be holy is to be in harmony, and to be in harmony is to live beautifully with others. The aesthetic holiness of the ashram lies not merely in its physical simplicity but in its invitation to co-create a world where beauty is lived, shared, and renewed through daily participation. It demonstrates that the striving for holiness is not a withdrawal from the world, but its most radiant form of participation.

## **VI. The Evolution of Beauty: From Observation to Incarnation**

This inquiry into integration reveals a profound symmetry between the trajectory of modern art and the aspiration of spirituality.

Art, as we have seen, has evolved dramatically. It has abandoned the fixed presentation of objects and transitioned into an Aesthetic of Participation. The viewer is no longer a passive observer but an active co-creator, transforming beauty from a contemplative possession into a shared, relational event. Yet, this participatory shift paradoxically seeks the highest form of personalization – the artist’s work is fully realized only through the intimate, individual response and input of others. The artwork is incomplete until the person

engages, making meaning-making a communal yet deeply personal act.

Spirituality, at its core, holds an identical aspiration: to transform abstract belief into a lived, personalized reality. Just as the artistic act seeks incarnation in the participant, the spiritual journey culminates in the self becoming a vessel for transcendent presence. We trace this convergence through the great thinkers: the pursuit of free harmony within (Kant), the achievement of rhythmic continuity with the world (Dewey), and finally, the radiant transfigured personhood (Evdokimov).

## **VII. Conclusion: The Art of Living Beautifully**

Integration is not merely a psychological or ethical concept but a state of being best understood through an Aesthetic of Participation. True integration is a coherence, a lived, relational achievement.

### **Integration as a Communicative Whole**

To live beautifully, therefore, is to live in integration. This means forging a communicative whole by uniting the processes of thinking, feeling, and acting into a coherent form. Such a life moves beyond mere personal achievement; it is a shared calling—a participation in the world's ongoing creation of beauty. The integrated self recognizes selfhood as inherently relational, striving to inspire and engage others in shared acts of meaning-making. In this sense, the luminous quality of a unified life becomes a gesture of radical reciprocity.

### **The Ashram: The Pinnacle of World-Making**

The life model of Fr. Vineet, where thought transformed into the ashram, stands as an exemplary realization of this participatory aesthetic. His endeavor demonstrates that the cultivation of spiritual awareness (*sādhanā*) leads to a dwelling

where ethics and aesthetics flow seamlessly into one another. The ashram, structured for simplicity and the disciplined pursuit of harmony, is thus revealed as the most profound articulation of this theory in practice. It is a living paradigm where holiness is not an act of withdrawal or isolated perfection, but the most radiant form of participation in the shared world. By enacting the principle that to be in harmony is to live beautifully with others, the ashram embodies the truth that the art of living beautifully is the highest form of integration and the most complete act of world-making.

# ***Nāṭya, Nāda* and *Kalā* as Expressions of Spiritual Experience**

*Dr. Jojo Parecattil CMI*

## **Abstract**

Rooted in the Indian aesthetic tradition, *Nāṭya* (drama), *Nāda* (sound), and *Kalā* (art) are not viewed as distinct artistic categories but as integral pathways of transcendence that mediate the presence of the divine within human experience. For Fr. Francis Vineeth Vadakkethala CMI, spirituality does not signify an escape from culture but rather its profound *samanvaya* (integration) – a dynamic harmony wherein philosophy, theology, and art converge to reveal the fullness of life.

Indian aesthetics situates beauty within a metaphysical horizon: art is manifestation rather than imitation, revelation rather than representation. Thus, *Nāṭya* is understood as the ‘fifth Veda,’ a divine gift for humanity’s moral and spiritual welfare, embodying a theology of incarnation where the divine takes form in gesture, rhythm, and story. *Nāda* expresses the vibrational essence of creation, from the cosmic syllable *AUM* to the subtle *anāhata nāda* (unstruck sound) experienced in mystical silence. *Kalā*, encompassing visual and material forms, manifests the sacred through proportion, symbol, and sacramental presence, transforming matter into

theophany. Together, these disciplines reveal art as a spiritual discipline, not mere ornament or entertainment.

Fr. Vineeth embodied this integrative vision through his teachings, writings, poetry, meditations and liturgical reflections. For him, artistic expression was not performance but prayer, a path to *anubhava*—direct realization of the divine. His poems and *bhajans* illustrate how rhythm, sound, and imagery converge to evoke *rasa*, the distilled relish of spiritual experience. By uniting Indian aesthetic insights with Christian mystical traditions, where gesture, music, and silence manifest divine radiance.

The conclusion situates this vision within modern challenges. In an age where art is increasingly commodified and detached from transcendence, the risk is the degeneration of sacred expression into spectacle—*nāṭya* without transcendence, *nāda* without resonance, *kalā* without presence. Drawing on the legacies of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Fr. Vineeth, the paper argues for the renewal of the house of vision (*Darśana-vīt*) against the danger of its degeneration into a house of display (*Pradarśana-vīt*). It was to safeguard this vision that Fr. Vineeth founded Vidyāvanam, as a living sanctuary where spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic dimensions converge in harmony, forming generations rooted in integration and inner radiance.

### **1. Word, Meaning, and the Mystical Eye: Fr. Vineeth's Vision of Spiritual Aesthetics**

Let me begin with a personal memory. While serving as section master for Philosophy students, my teacher and guide in metaphysical thought, Fr. Francis Vineeth, once visited Dharmaram from *Vidyāvanam*. He approached me with a simple request. Preparing a book of poems, he wanted a few illustrations to accompany the verses: “Can you help

me/ find a brother/ who is good at drawing?” I suggested a student, Deepu Joy, now serving at Kristu Jayanti Deemed to be University. At once, Fr. Vineeth’s eyes lit up with delight: “What a beautiful name! Deepu means light, and Joy – spiritual bliss,” a connection I had never considered/ despite using the name frequently. That moment revealed something deeper – the contemplative sensibility/ with which he perceived word and meaning/ (*śabda* and *artha*) as intimately united. His insight recalls the ancient wisdom of the *Rgveda* (10.71.4), which portrays *Vāk* – the Word – as revealing herself/ only to those who are truly illumined:

Uta tvāḥ paśyan na dadarśa vācām

Uta tvāḥ śṛṇvan na śṛṇoty enām

Uto tvasmai tanvaṃ vi śaśrāṇā

Amuṃ syāmā śucir ā vavṛtsva (RV 10.71.4)

“Indeed, one sees you, yet does not perceive speech; another hears you, yet does not truly hear you. But to another – like a wife, adorned in bright garments, who longs for her husband – you reveal your body.”

The mystical depth of this verse finds a poetic parallel in Kālidāsa’s *Raghuvamśa* (1.2), where the poet compares the unity of word and meaning to that of Śiva and Pārvatī:

Vāgarthāviva saṃpṛktau vāgarthapratipattaye, Jagataḥ  
pitarau vande pārvatiparameśvarau (Raghuvamśa (Canto 1,  
2).

I bow to Pārvatī and Parameśvara, the parents of the universe, who are united like word and meaning, for the attainment of perfect speech and understanding.

Both Vedic seer and Sanskrit poet intuit the same mystery – the inseparability of sound and sense, of expression and essence. Fr. Vineeth lived from within this mystical awareness. For him, names, words, sounds, and

images were never merely functional; they were gateways to deeper meaning. To see *light (dīpa)* and *joy (ānanda)* in a name was to affirm that all expressions—verbal, visual, and musical—carry a spiritual surplus/ pointing beyond themselves. His sensibility was shaped by a profound attentiveness to the divine presence shining through creation. As he confesses in the preface of *Songs of Solitude*: “I thank the Lord for the little things in nature, such as a plant, a tree, a bird, which, as the unwritten word of God, speak to me with ineffable eloquence.”<sup>1</sup> These words unveil the inner rhythm of his spiritual aesthetics. For Fr. Vineeth, the world was not mute matter/ but a living text—a scripture of symbols through which God speaks in silence.

This insight forms the core of the present reflection: the integration of *Nāṭya* (drama), *Nāda* (sound), and *Kalā* (art) as expressions of spiritual experience. In the Indian tradition, these are not autonomous domains of aesthetics divorced from metaphysics, but paths of transcendence—channels through which the human person touches the divine. Fr. Vineeth embodied this vision, where art, philosophy, and spirituality interpenetrate, forming a harmonious synthesis of beauty, being, and belief.

## **2. Integration (*Samanvaya*): The Soul of Fr. Vineeth’s Spirituality**

The general theme of the Conference, *Call to Integration: Explorations in Spirituality, Theology, Philosophy and Artistic Horizons*, reflects the life and vision of Fr. Vineeth, whose pursuit of *samanvaya* (integration) was never a mere intellectual abstraction but a holistic spirituality. For him, spirituality was harmony—of body and spirit, word and silence, human and divine—where philosophy, theology,

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<sup>1</sup> Vineeth V. F., *Songs of Solitude* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1992), 8.

spirituality, and art converge in the fullness of life. His vision invites us to see spirituality not apart from culture or aesthetics but as their unifying depth.

In the preface to his work *Call to Integration*, Fr. Vineeth writes: “Call to integration is primarily neither a philosophical nor a psychological work. It is a theological interpretation of religious life, an earnest search into the meaning of one’s unconditional dedication to God.”<sup>2</sup> This insight serves as a hermeneutical key to his vision: integration as a theological and spiritual quest rather than a purely intellectual exercise. It is in this spirit that the present paper is framed, resonating deeply with the conference theme.

### **3. Beauty as a Path to Transcendence: Indian Aesthetic Vision**

In Indian thought, beauty (*sundaram*) is not mere pleasure but a revelation of truth (*satyam*). The experience of art is a moment of union between the finite and the infinite.

Modern Western aesthetics, from Aristotle onward, often treats art as – an imitation of life. But Indian aesthetics sees it as manifestation of reality.

A sculpture of Śiva as Naṭarāja is not a likeness but a living embodiment of cosmic rhythm. Similarly, *Bharatanāṭyam* is not just a dance but a *pūjā* – a liturgy in movement.

Indian art thus unites the sensory, the symbolic, and the spiritual. This integrative approach is beautifully expressed in the Sanskrit definition of literature: *sāhitya* is that which brings about unity or harmony – *sahitayor bhāvam eva sāhityam* – “the union of word and meaning is literature (or

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<sup>2</sup> F. Vineeth Vadakethala, *Call to Integration: A New Theology of Religious Life* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1979), 7.

poetry).” In that same spirit, *Nāṭya*, *Nāda*, and *Kalā* unite body, sound, and form as one sacred act. Each reveals the invisible through the visible and the eternal through the temporal.

#### 4. *Nāṭya*, *Nāda*, and *Kalā* – The Three Pathways of the Spirit

In Indian classical aesthetics, the triad of *Nāṭya* (drama/dance), *Nāda* (sound/music), and *Kalā* (art/visual form) emerges as a comprehensive system for understanding the spiritual function of art. Each represents a fundamental dimension of human perception and expression:

a) *Nāṭya*: the sensorial and narrative dimension of art, rooted in body and movement. It externalizes spiritual truths through enactment.

b) *Nāda*: the auditory and vibrational dimension, rooted in sound and music. It internalizes spiritual awareness through resonance.

c) *Kalā*: the visual and formal dimension, rooted in painting, sculpture, and architecture. It manifests the sacred in tangible form.

##### a) *Nāṭya*: Theology in Movement

According to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, when the world fell into discord, the gods appealed to Brahmā, who in response created *Nāṭyaveda*—a divine scripture composed of movement, music, and emotion. It is called the “fifth Veda,” open to all and intended for *loka-saṃgraha*—the welfare and harmony of the world (I.14–15).<sup>3</sup> *Nāṭya* was meant for everyone, irrespective of caste or learning. It was revelation through story and gesture—a theology of incarnation, where

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<sup>3</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.14–15, trans. Manomohan Ghosh, *The Nāṭyaśāstra: A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy and Histrionics*, Vol. I (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1950), 5–6.

the divine takes form in movement, rhythm, and the human voice.

In every performance, the actor becomes a medium of the sacred. The spectator, tasting *rasa*, experiences a reflection of *brahmānanda* – the bliss of Brahman. Thus, *Nāṭya* is not mere entertainment but an embodiment of truth – a *pañcama Veda*, revealing God through the language of beauty.

### **b) Nāda: Sound as the Pulse of Creation**

If *Nāṭya* is the body of art, *Nāda* is its breath. The Vedas proclaim, “*Vāc is the mother of the gods*” (*Rgveda* 10.125). The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* declares, “All this is AUM.” In Indian spirituality, sound is not an accident – it is the vibration of being itself.

External sound points to inner sound – the eternal vibration of the heart/ heard in deep meditation. The *Nāda-Bindu Upaniṣad* (verses 38–41) declares: “When the mind, absorbed in sound, becomes steady and motionless, it dissolves in the soundless, and there arises the infinite knowledge – abiding in Brahman.” This inner stillness, born of listening, reveals sound as a bridge from the audible to the ineffable. Echoing this ancient intuition, Indian sound designer Resul Pookutty, while receiving the Oscar Award for Best Sound Mixing (2008) in Los Angeles, remarked: “I come from a country and a civilization that gave us the Universal Word. That Word is preceded by silence, followed by more silence. That Word is Aum.” His words beautifully affirm that all true sound leads back to silence – the primordial resonance of the Divine.

Indian music flows from this vision. Each *rāga* is a living energy, attuned to time, season, and emotion. Śārṅgadeva’s *Śaṅgītaratnākara* affirms: “*Nāda* is the very essence of music, arising from body, breath, and consciousness” (1.3).

In the *bhakti* traditions, sound becomes sacramental. When a devotee chants “Rāma” or “Kṛṣṇa,” the Name and the Named become one. This mirrors the Christian experience of the proclaimed Word becoming the living presence of Christ. Thus, *Nāda* bridges the human and the divine. It teaches us that when sound becomes prayer, music becomes theology.

### c) *Kalā*: The Visibility of the Invisible

*Kalā* literally means “a ray” or “a portion.” Every artwork is a fragment through which the Infinite shines. The *Śilpaśāstras* teach that art is sacred/ when it follows cosmic proportions – when it reflects divine archetypes.

The ritual of *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* – infusing life into a statue – shows that form becomes presence. The artist, or *śilpin*, is not a craftsman but a yogin; before creating, he fasts and prays, seeking self-effacement so that divine form may emerge.

As Ananda Coomaraswamy reminds us, Indian art is *prescriptive*, not descriptive. It reveals essence, not surface. The elephant-headed Gaṇeśa, the dancing Natarāja, the serene Buddha – all are epiphanies, not portraits. *Kalā*, then, is not decoration; it is revelation – matter becoming luminous with spirit.

## 5. Fr. Vineeth’s Vision: The Marriage of Christian Faith and Indian Culture

For Fr. Vineeth, the marriage of Christian faith and Indian culture was not merely an aesthetic ideal but an artistic vocation. *Nāṭya*, *Nāda*, and *Kalā* were, for him, not cultural artifacts but languages of grace – mediums through which the divine presence is mediated in human experience. His poetry, theology, and spirituality all flowed from this profound conviction that art, when rightly understood, becomes a form of contemplation.

In the *Preface to Meditation: Dhyanasādhana*, he describes meditation as both “an art of prayer” and “an art of living,”<sup>4</sup> revealing how aesthetics and spirituality converge in the very rhythm of daily life. Similarly, in *Songs of Solitude*, he reveals, “These ‘songs’ are not really songs, nor are these ‘poems’ metric poems; they are simply the songs of my soul and the poems of my heart.”<sup>5</sup> Through this confession, Fr. Vineeth discloses that authentic artistic expression is not the crafted construction of metre or rhythm but the spontaneous outpouring of the spirit. For him, art awakens *anubhava* – the direct, lived realization of the divine – rather than serving as ornamentation for aesthetic pleasure. True art, he believed, is a sacramental encounter, not a spectacle. As in classical Indian aesthetic thought, art’s essence lies in evoking *rasa*, the refined delight of inner experience that dissolves the boundaries between the creator, the creation, and the divine.

Thus, Fr. Vineeth’s writings themselves become a form of spiritual *sādhana*, where beauty is not a product to be consumed but a path to be lived – a journey that bridges the aesthetic and the mystical, leading the soul toward communion with God.

This integrative approach is evident in his poem *The Author of Life and Beauty*, where nature, rhythm, and transcendence converge into a single hymn of praise. The “planets of the sky” and the “plants of the earth,” the “clouds of heaven” and the “roses of the garden” are not mere poetic images; they are mediators of the Divine, revealing that every

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<sup>4</sup> Vineeth V. F., *Meditation: Dhyanasadhana* (Bangalore, Vidya Vanam Publications, 2003), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Vineeth V. F., *Songs of Solitude* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1992), 7.

rhythm of creation carries within it the music of God.<sup>6</sup> The poem unfolds like a liturgical dance—from cosmic harmony to the evolutionary yearning of life, and finally to the delicate beauty of the rose. The natural world is not depicted as object but as *theophany*, a revelation of divine order (*rta*) and the sustaining presence of God, uniting Upaniṣadic insights with biblical affirmations of God as author and sustainer of life (Is 42:5).

Music, for Fr Vineeth, is the fragrance of eternity, a medium through which the divine touches the human soul.<sup>7</sup> He authored countless poems, bhajans, and hymns that combine theological depth with poetic simplicity. One of his famous bhajans, composed for a Dharmaram College album, celebrates Jesus as eternal light: “*Jyōti, jyōti, jyōti nitya sanātana jyōti.*” This work demonstrates his mastery in condensing profound spiritual meaning into concise, lyrical forms, capable of being chanted for hours without losing their contemplative depth.<sup>8</sup> Another hymn exemplifies this spiritual rhythm:

Ōm guru, Ōm Guru Yeśu  
Tava charaṇam mama śaraṇam

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<sup>6</sup> Vineeth V. F., *Songs of Solitude* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1992), 42-44,

<sup>7</sup> Anto Amarnath, “Music, the Fragrance of Eternity on Earth,” in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, ed. Saju Chackalackal (Bengaluru: Vidyavanam Publications & Preshitha Communications, 2009), 488-489.

<sup>8</sup> Anto Amarnath, “Music, the Fragrance of Eternity on Earth,” in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, ed. Saju Chackalackal (Bengaluru: Vidyavanam Publications & Preshitha Communications, 2009), 490.

Here, sound and rhythm resonate with inner devotion, exemplifying *nāda* as living spiritual mediations.

Fr. Vineeth recalls that once, while serving under him, Fr. Anto Amarnad, who tuned the bhajans, asked permission to buy a mouth organ. Fr. Vineeth gently smiled and replied, “Great things do not come from great instruments, but great minds.”<sup>9</sup> The remark reveals his conviction that the true source of beauty lies not in the tool but in the spirit that exercises it – a vision that shaped his entire approach to art, music, and spirituality.

In *To Restore the Lost Rhythm* (from *Songs of Solitude*), he writes:

Now he comes,  
To restore the lost Rhythm in your life,  
To bless you with heavenly harmony,  
To enrich you with His undisturbed peace.<sup>10</sup>

For him, when rhythm is lost, life becomes dissonant; when restored, it becomes peace. *Nāṭya*, *nāda*, and *kalā* thus become channels of grace, mediating divine balance, evoking transcendence, and opening the human person to God.

Fr. Vineeth’s integrative vision shines forth even in his collaborative projects. During the 1980s, the CMI diary carried his reflections on the liturgical year, enriched with illustrations by Fr. Joy Elamkunnappuzha. Together, they embody content that is deeply Christian yet profoundly indigenous in expression. In his own words, “For many years

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<sup>9</sup> Francis Vineeth Vadakethala, “In Search of the Ineffable,” in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, ed. Saju Chackalackal (Bengaluru: Vidyavanam Publications & Preshitha Communications, 2009), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Vineeth V. F., *Songs of Solitude* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1992), 61.

these drawings found their pride of place in the CMI liturgical calendar.”<sup>11</sup> What could have been a mere record of dates was thus transformed into a spiritual companion – guiding the CMI community through the rhythms of liturgy while seamlessly merging theological insight with artistic expression.

This vision of integration reflects Vineeth’s profound understanding of Christian liturgy. For him, prayer, gesture, music, and silence converge into a single sacred offering. Nowhere is this more tangibly expressed than in *Vidyāvanam*, the *āśram* he founded. At its heart stands a unique chapel, adorned with striking artworks that embody the spirit of Christian *sādhana* and witness to its transformative power.

*Vidyāvanam* Chapel, constructed in the model of a tertiary and a *gharbha-grha* integrated into one, invites every seeker to enter there and be part of this transformative process, which is focused on the person of Jesus Christ. Both the central glass panel depicting the Tree of Eternity with *ūrdhvamūlam* that grows into the world – with the unique blend of banyan and neem trees symbolizing the divine and human blended into one – and the liturgical cycle of the Syro-Malabar Church immortalized on the beautiful glasses provide the necessary orientation and invitation to participate in the becoming process centred around the person of Jesus depicted in the Gospels and enlivened in spirit of the liturgical seasons.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Vineeth V. F., “In Search of an Indian Christian Art,” in *Icons of the Unseen: Asian Theology through the Eyes of Artist Joy Elamkunnappuzha CMI* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2002), 94.

<sup>12</sup> Saju Chackalackal, “Towards New Horizons of Indian Christian Living,” in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, ed. Saju Chackalackal (Bengaluru: Vidyavanam Publications & Preshitha Communications, 2009), 82.

For Fr. Vineeth, the essence of life was a pilgrimage inward—a journey into the sacred depths of the self where God and creation meet. As he discloses in *Songs of Solitude*:

In constant search and in solitude, with silent steps and in soundless melody, May I make this journey of mine a journey into my own inner depth.<sup>13</sup>

This interior quest defines the heart of Fr. Vineeth's spiritual aesthetics. For him spiritual experience is never divorced from aesthetic expression; the movement of the soul toward God unfolds through the language of beauty. *Nāṭya* (dance), *nāda* (sound), and *kalā* (art) become a cosmic liturgy, a choreography of the soul in which creation itself is sacrament and every human expression an offering.

His life and works thus testify to an integrative vision where philosophy, theology, and art converge, revealing a cosmos covered with divine presence—a universe in which all beings move in the eternal rhythm of divine harmony.

## **6. Conclusion: Safeguarding the Sacred Rhythm**

Today, art faces new challenges. Beauty has often been separated from transcendence; dance and music risk becoming commodities; sacred forms are reduced to cultural displays. As noted at the beginning, when *word* is separated from its *meaning*, communication collapses. Likewise, when art loses its soul, it becomes show rather than revelation.

The Indian tradition offers a corrective. When *Nāṭya*, *Nāda*, and *Kalā* are rooted in vision (*darśana*), they mediate divine presence—gesture becomes prayer, sound becomes resonance, form becomes presence. When reduced to display, they become empty—*nāṭya* without transcendence,

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<sup>13</sup> Vineeth V. F., *Songs of Solitude* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1992), 13,

*nāda* without resonance, *kalā* without spirit. The outer form remains, but the sacred rhythm is lost.

This same confrontation is also necessary in the field of religious life. St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara envisioned the CMI mother house at Mannanam as a *Darsana-viṭ*—a house of vision, where interior transformation shapes every gesture, sound, and form. His concern was the danger of degeneration into a *Pradarśana-viṭ*—a house of exhibition—where external rituals persist while the inner flame dies. Religious life then risks slipping into performance: beauty becomes display, discipline becomes routine, and spirituality becomes display. Perfectly timed prayers, decorated chapels, or disciplined choirs may impress externally, yet without the inner fire of divine vision, they remain empty shells.

Remaining faithful to the ideals of a *Darśana-viṭ* demands continual rooting in the original charism of consecrated life: to seek God and radiate His presence. Prayer must become contemplation, community must become communion, and ascetic discipline must become purification for love. The external forms—ritual, structure, observance—are not to be discarded but infused with spirit, so that they become revelation when lived in faith, freedom when rooted in love, and vision when directed toward God.

The Indian aesthetic triad of *Nāṭya*, *Nāda*, and *Kalā* provides a powerful lens to understand this spiritual tension. When animated by vision, they mediate divine presence—gesture becomes prayer, sound becomes resonance, form becomes presence. But when detached from inner vision, they collapse into emptiness: *nāṭya* turns into *kapāṭa-nāṭya*—mere play-acting; *nāda* becomes noise; *kalā* becomes decoration. The same danger threatens religious life—*prayer without devotion, ritual without faith, community without love*—

transforming the *Darśana-viṭ* into a *Pradarśana-viṭ*: a house of exhibition rather than of vision.

Against this danger stands the luminous witness of Fr. Francis Vineeth Vadakethala CMI. His life exemplified the very opposite of *kapāṭa-nāṭya*: he was not a performer of holiness but a seer of vision. In him, art, philosophy, and spirituality interpenetrated, converging into a single experience of divine radiance. Poetry, music, and silence—*Nāṭya*, *Nāda*, and *Kalā*—became authentic pathways of *samanvaya* (integration), leading others toward God’s presence.

The legacies of St. Chavara and Fr. Vineeth converge in a single call: to safeguard the sacred rhythm of vision, and to ensure that our communities do not degenerate into places of display, but remain sanctuaries of radiance, integration, and revelation. A true *Darśana-viṭ* is not merely built in stone; it is embodied in lives that shine with vision. It is there—where art becomes revelation, ritual becomes encounter, and life itself becomes prayer—that the finite human being participates in the infinite God.

To embody this ideal, Fr. Vineeth founded an ashram, bestowing upon it the evocative name *Vidyāvanam*, in harmony with the founding fathers’ vision of *vana-vāsam* (forest life). He envisioned it as a living *Darśana-viṭ*—a house of vision where the spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic dimensions of life converge in harmony, nurturing generations to embody integration and radiance in their search for God.

Reflecting on the ashram ambience of *Vidyāvanam*, he once wrote: “Surrounded by mounts and clouds, rocks and trees, I could feel more at home, because here the ineffable utters in utter silence, through the immaculate nature. In this ambience, all are symbols which both hide and show God’s

face, revealing and concealing Himself at the same time, where He dwells as the One symbolized by all what I was watching and wondering, relishing and relinquishing, at the same time.<sup>14</sup> His vision remains a call—to artists, theologians, philosophers and seekers alike—to rediscover the sacred rhythm at the heart of creation and to make of our lives a cosmic liturgy of integration.

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<sup>14</sup> Francis Vineeth Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, ed. Saju Chackalackal (Bengaluru: Vidyavanam Publications & Preshitha Communications, 2009), 32.

# **A Pilgrim and Prophet of Hope and Peace in the Indian Church**

## **Impact of Consecration and Integration in the Life of Francis Vineeth Vadakethala CMI**

*Fr. Saju Chackalackal CMI*

### **1. Introduction**

Let me begin with the concluding remark in my introductory article on Father Francis Vineeth Vadakethala, which was published in the *Festschrift* presented to him in 2009,<sup>1</sup> in which I had quoted his own statement on an authentic person from his book *Foundations of World Vision*: "... Such a man we call simple. He lacks duplicity. In him there is perfect synthesis of the internal and external, of thoughts and their expressions. Such a man is loved by all, because he reflects the divine."<sup>2</sup> The integration or *samanvayam* that Fr. Francis Vineeth had attained made him simple and authentic, reflecting the divine, as it was perceived by those who closely associated with him during his lifetime.

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<sup>1</sup>Saju Chackalackal, "Towards New Horizons of Indian Christian Living" in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, ed. Saju Chackalackal, 49-83, Bengaluru: Vidyavanam Publications, 2009.

<sup>2</sup>Vineeth, V. F., *Foundations of World Vision: A Guide to Metaphysics, Eastern and Western*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1985, 41.

Being in the year of Jubilee 2025, I propose to begin my re-visiting of Fr. Francis Vineeth by superimposing an external structure upon his person and thoughts. In my effort to unravel his simple and authentic self, I try to introduce a pattern or structure from a brief but two-page communication from the Dicastery for Consecrated Life,<sup>3</sup> taking cue from the teachings of Pope Francis, and addressed to the Major Superiors of religious congregations and various forms of consecrated life. This letter, in my reading, frames the life of consecration as an ongoing pilgrimage aiming at hope with its roots and fruits, as proposed for review and practice during this year of jubilee celebration. The roots are constituted by (1) anchoring and (2) pilgrimage, and the fruits consist of (3) care for the poor and the marginalised, (4) care and protection of nature, and (5) care for humanity and fraternity. These aspects considered to be essential to Christian consecration (as roots and fruits), I believe, also did shape Fr. Francis Vineeth into a consecrated pilgrim and a prophet of hope and peace.

## Part 1: Roots of Consecration and Integration

### 2. Solid Anchoring in the Lord

An oft-repeated statement of Fr. Francis Vineeth in his lectures and meditation (citing *Mundaka Upanishad* III.2.9) was "... you become what you meditate."<sup>4</sup> In his quest to become an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ, Fr. Francis Vineeth carefully and earnestly engaged himself in a relentless process of appropriating the person of Jesus Christ by way of his meditative and contemplative prayer and

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<sup>3</sup>de Aviz, João Braz Card. (Prefect of the Dicastery for Consecrated Life), Email Letter, dated 12 September 2024.

<sup>4</sup>Vadakethala, Francis Vineeth, "In Search of the Ineffable" in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, ed. Saju Chackalackal, 49-83, Bengaluru: Vidyavanam Publications, 2009, 20.

being. He captured the goal by claiming that "... knowing is becoming and becoming is realizing"<sup>5</sup> with its solid and absolute foundation in the person of Jesus Christ. Later, in no uncertain terms Fr. Francis Vineeth asserted about the final outcome of this process of Christian becoming: "... when we realise Christ in us, [we] become another Christ..."<sup>6</sup> As a philosopher-theologian, backed up with his credible research and compelling experience and expertise, as a teacher and spiritual guide, he insisted that "sanctity is never the academic knowledge of truth but the actual realization of truth in one's own life."<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is very obvious, both from the personal life of Fr. Francis Vineeth and from his extensive writings, that he drew the lifeblood of his very enlightened existence from the person of Jesus Christ and it shaped his thought and action.

The clarity with which his life's anchor was unequivocally maintained is easily grasped from his lectures, writings, meditations, etc. For example, in commenting on *Gayatri Mantra*, as part of a meditation, he wrote: "A Christian may even look at this *mantra* as a trinitarian hymn. The great adorable Sun is the source of all light and thus points to the Father. His divine splendour has been revealed to us through Jesus Christ and is now made accessible through meditation. The goal, however, is that His Spirit may illumine my mind that I become a living ray of that divine light in this world which needs constant transformation into the Divine."<sup>8</sup> Naturally, then, a person anchored in Christ adopts a vision that is akin to that of Christ and a life perspective that is animated by a new life-vision that is anchored in the Gospel:

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<sup>5</sup>Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," 20.

<sup>6</sup>Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," 20.

<sup>7</sup>Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 57.

<sup>8</sup>Vineeth, V. F., *Yoga of Spirituality: Christian Initiation in Indian/Asian Spiritual Traditions*, Bangalore: Vidyavanam Publications, 1995, 6.

“Once the Absolute Being is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, then Christ and his teachings become very central to our life. It controls our vision and characterizes our thinking. Those who believe in Christ now have a new vision, a theological vision or a Christian vision. Christian theology, properly understood, is a way of looking at everything enlightened by this new vision.”<sup>9</sup>

This anchoring in the Divine includes a dynamic and transformative process that envelops the whole person and initiates a metamorphosis within oneself. True to his focus on Christic identity, Fr. Francis Vineeth asserted: “Faith in Jesus as far as a good Christian is concerned is not merely a rational, dogmatic assertion but an existential grafting into an all-pervading reality in which experience becomes very much central to that person. Christ as a living person who enters into his/her life, and abides in the depth of his/her heart through his Spirit, transforms him/her, changing his vision, values and lifestyle, so much so that now he could say ‘it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me’ (Gal 2:20).”<sup>10</sup> This is found to be literally captured by Fr. Francis Vineeth in his effort to symbolize the divine incarnation of Jesus Christ on a glass panel placed on the backdrop of the sanctuary at Vidyavanam Ashram chapel (Bengaluru): following the description of *Katha Upanishad* about *urdhva moolam* (*Katha Up* II.3.1), Jesus’ incarnation is depicted in the form of a tree “with the roots above and the branches below,” and the tree being a combination of banyan tree and neem tree (as if they are grafted together to form a single tree), “symbolizing divinity and humanity respectively, both of which are united into one tree by the work of the Holy Spirit.” Fr. Francis Vineeth understood and interpreted this

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<sup>9</sup>Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 7.

<sup>10</sup>Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, 2.

tree as Jesus Christ who comes down from heaven to establish us in truth, bless us with the divine life, and show us the way to heaven (Jn 14:6) (refer the back cover of *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living*). This Indian symbolic interpretation of divine incarnation of Jesus Christ using the description of *urdhva moolam*, to my mind, is the most sublime and impactful theological articulation of the anchoring that Fr. Francis Vineeth had realized in his life.

In fact, the focus with which Fr. Francis Vineeth conducted all his endeavours ensured that the synthesis that he was aiming at between the Christian and the Indian, the Oriental and the Western, philosophy and theology, all climaxed for him in his realization of the Divine. As he had perceived it, "What is salutary in the Indian approach to wisdom is that it unconditionally demands the eradication of ego, the *ahamkara*, originating from the false identification of the human with the Divine (*avidya*). The true wisdom, on the contrary, is the wisdom of faith which perceives the divine Spirit in the inner man (Eph 3:16) and allows him to be strengthened by it and ultimately becomes the real and the all-pervading agent in him as the vine in all its branches (Jn 15:1)."<sup>11</sup>

As he conceived the way of realization, in its processing from the human side, silence and meditation had key roles to play. He relished the inner silence, which, according to him, led him to encountering the Divine: "When languages fail, words disappear and systems of knowledge fall, man begins to understand that which is ineffable in an amazing gaze, in an enrapturing silence. The knowledge that surpasses every knowledge is revealed to us through the Spirit. 'For the Spirit searches everything even the depths of God' (1 Cor 2:11).

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<sup>11</sup>Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, 2.

This sacred knowledge communicated through the Spirit is relished in silence."<sup>12</sup>

Anchoring in the Divine, Fr. Francis Vineeth knew, will lead to union with God and communion with fellow beings. The ultimate goal of getting anchored in the Lord could be made visible in the efforts made by a religious person in the form of communion that he or she cherishes and facilitates: "... Spirit liberates him/her from all enslaving bondages, brings in freedom to transcend everything and at the same time the power to love everything and everyone very dearly and affectionately, yet ever remaining free and in union with God and all fellow beings."<sup>13</sup>

### **3. A Pilgrimage on the Path of Truth and Peace: Seeking with Openness and Humility**

It was Pope Francis who had perceptively stated that every Christian, all the more so every consecrated person, must experience an exodus within oneself: "continuously making an 'exodus' from yourselves in order to *centre your life on Christ and on his Gospel*, on the will of God, laying aside your own plans."<sup>14</sup> It is an exodus from one's own ego to the needs of others, from self-centredness to other-centredness and, ultimately, to God-centredness. In this process, Fr. Francis Vineeth insisted that "as awareness deepens, our values change, and we become more and more liberated."<sup>15</sup> Christian existence, following the paradigm of Jesus himself, should remain dynamic in letting oneself die to oneself so that reaching out to others and giving them life in abundance

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<sup>12</sup>Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, 34.

<sup>13</sup>Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," 10-11.

<sup>14</sup>Pope Francis, "Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the International Union of Superiors General" on 8 May 2013.

<sup>15</sup>Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," 8.

(Jn 10:10) becomes essentially constitutive: in fact, a Christian's identity shall be defined in terms of his or her ability to reach out to the other in need; Christian existence, seen from this perspective, is a constant becoming, the climax being every Christian becoming an *alter Christus*.

The spiritual realization firmly grounded in his aspiration for communion with Jesus Christ, in whom he wished to be solidly anchored as his life progressed, made Fr. Francis Vineeth a pilgrim of truth and peace. As he himself had insightfully articulated it, "a person given to prayer, meditation and action ... is a wayfarer, a pilgrim. He/she journeys from the outer world to the inner forest, from his/her own external layers of awareness to the internal ones, and ultimately rests in that inexhaustible depth of his/her being where the Divine dwells. In the passage, he/she experiences tranquillity and joy from within, communes with the Divine incessantly and gets transformed into it."<sup>16</sup> Although he was never perceived as a revolutionary who broke away from the established perspectives and patterns, his commitment to the ever-unveiling truth, which he anchored in the person of Jesus Christ, made him an eternal pilgrim, who was involved in a constant search and an unending becoming process. As he wrote, "holiness demands a becoming process, and in the Christian sense, a becoming of another Christ. If we look with this eye into the Upanishadic search for divine wisdom, it will make greater sense to us and pave the path of spiritual realization."<sup>17</sup>

As a person who was philosophically and theologically comfortable with the inner becoming process, aiming at the transformation of his spiritual outlook and practices, Fr.

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<sup>16</sup>Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, 1.

<sup>17</sup>Vineeth, V. F., *The Asian Vision of God*, Bangalore: Vidyavanam Publications, 2004, 28.

Francis Vineeth was comfortable with the ongoing pilgrimage as well as the exodus in his life. For example, the most conspicuous but tough (as seen from outside) exodus that he had undertaken was his decision to move out of his life at Dharmaram College and to found Vidyavanam Ashram, a move which was perceived by many known to him as an impossible turn, especially from the point of view of the struggles involved in the initial phase of construction of buildings and the setting up the Ashram campus for programmes. Call it an exodus or a pilgrimage, for Fr. Francis Vineeth it was a leap of faith into the unknown, but totally relying on the Divine Providence. He said: "Ashram was perhaps an expression of my searching desire. The underlying thought is 'not this, not this' (*neti, neti*), that is, not this way of life, not this academic excellence; but something different, something not so definite, yet unfolding in the vagueness of an immaculate beauty, which I fell in love with, but unable to grasp and much less to embrace for many years..."<sup>18</sup> As he recalled it, "Ashram was an option, an option to go away. Its first inspiration was not a destination, but a departure which says not here, not here..."<sup>19</sup> For, he believed that "every fixed place is an attempted articulation of the inarticulate, which, once too much solidified, may miss the mystery of the Ineffable that ever reveals and ever conceals itself."<sup>20</sup> Hence, the way out he had conceived was to remain a pilgrim for ever: "A concrete, solid *ashram* is not the final end of this search. The search will ever continue. All real articulations will have the limitations of a 'facticity' and we are always in a struggle to transcend this limitation. Though human soul is theoretically finite, it has an opening to the Infinite and the Ineffable, which is by nature infinite

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<sup>18</sup>Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," 11.

<sup>19</sup>Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," 13.

<sup>20</sup>Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," 13.

and everlasting. This is the inner core of the interior search which never ends. Hence, establishing the *ashram* is not the final end of the search. It should ever remain open, ever ready to leave the very ashram, if God so wants.”<sup>21</sup> Beautifully and intelligently, in the following verse, he captured the inner dynamics of the search that he was involved in:

“There is nothing as beautiful as ‘search’, which has no end.  
Real search is always humble because the seeker is still on the path.  
No claim of final destiny, no disappointment either  
About not yet having reached the final goal.  
Ever moving forward, ever open to the vast expanse of the universe,  
And ever beyond the universe, where mysteries of that Ineffable one  
Will be unveiled, one by one,  
Yet ever remaining hidden in my searching mind,  
In a world of unfinished wonder and silent utterance.”<sup>22</sup>

It was his conscious choice to keep the focus on the indefinite and the ineffable; he wanted to keep himself open toward the Divine that, to his mind, continues to reveal, as a never-ending process of *avarana-vikshepa*, a continuous *aletheia*. Hence, in the same line of thought, a reference to the way he looked at the whole process of spiritual search, a dynamic pilgrimage to the Ineffable, may enlighten us:

“In this dilemma of the definite and indefinite,  
Articulate and inarticulate vision,  
In a way oscillating between the certainty of the mind

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<sup>21</sup>Vadakethala, “In Search of the Ineffable,” 14.

<sup>22</sup>Vadakethala, “In Search of the Ineffable,” 5-6.

And the dismay of the intellect,  
Which always tended to read more  
Into what has been readily manifested,  
I opted for myself the indefinite  
An inarticulate dismay of the intellect  
Rather than the clear cut, certain,  
Articulated vision of my own mind.

Indeed, the search can ever be continued without an end.”<sup>23</sup>

Having realized the centrality of eternal openness to the unfolding reality, Fr. Francis Vineeth prescribed this for practice for everyone, particularly the universal church: “The universal church, for its growth and beauty, variety and vitality, needs such newness of expressions in every country where the Good News is to be inculturated.”<sup>24</sup> As we are in 2025, it is quite promising as well as reassuring to note that Pope Leo XIV has stated two days ago at the Vatican (that is, on 26 October 2025) that “we must all listen to one another. No one is excluded; we are all called to participate. No one possesses the whole truth; we must all humbly seek it and seek it together.”<sup>25</sup>

How beautiful is the vision of looking at Christian life as an ongoing pilgrimage? It is interesting to see the apparent contradiction that his life was solidly anchored in the person of Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and eternally open to unfolding reality; he had no qualms in subscribing to the definitive revelation of Jesus Christ received in history and appropriated by the Church over a period of two millennia and the scope for the same Ultimate Reality being

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<sup>23</sup>Vadakethala, “In Search of the Ineffable,” 7.

<sup>24</sup>Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, 14.

<sup>25</sup>Pope Leo XIV, “Homily,” Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies, 26 October 2025.

approached in the form of an incessant process of revelation. For him, it had to do more with the dynamic reality of the Ineffable and the human reality of contingency and limitation. He, I believe, understood the expression “already but not yet” quite well and incorporated it into his spiritual pilgrimage; it made him, to my mind, a better person and better disciple of Jesus Christ, as he could keep himself open to varied forms of divine revelation made available in human history.

## **Part 2: Fruits of Consecration and Integration**

### **4. Commitment to the Little Ones: Listening to the Cry of the Poor**

Jesus had a preferential option for the poor and the marginalized as it could be easily made out from the Gospels. As his teachings reveal, compared to many others, the poor and the marginalized seem to be closer to the Kingdom of God that he had unveiled as the final destiny of all human endeavours. The rootedness that Fr. Francis Vineeth had in the person of Jesus Christ and the experience of openness and continuous search made him a seeker of the Kingdom of God and a person open to all, especially to the poor and the needy. Very perceptively, in the context of looking down upon people in the name of their social identities and status, widely practised in India within the inhumane caste system, Fr. Francis Vineeth wrote the following brief statement: “it is me you have looked down upon, treated as an outcaste.”<sup>26</sup> This is quite impressive from the point of view of his spiritual realization of Jesus Christ, who had identified himself with the poor and the marginalised; it corresponds with the aspiration of late Pope Francis himself, who had clearly echoed his wish to see “a Church that is poor and for the

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<sup>26</sup>Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, 179.

poor" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 198), as Jesus himself was poor and lived for the poor.

One of the favourite explanations of Fr. Francis Vineeth about the Vidyavanam Ashram Chapel is to look at the anthill model as symbolic of Mount Tabor where Jesus had revealed or unveiled (*aletheia*) himself before his three beloved disciples Peter, Jacob, and John. Though presented disproportionately in the whole depiction on top of the Vidyavanam chapel, these three disciples are seen below the huge statue of Risen Jesus, gazing with amazement and delight at Jesus on his heavenly glory. However, following the Gospel paradigm, at the landing of the chapel, a healing scene of Jesus is also vividly depicted (again, these images are also very small in stature, but with a powerful existential message), which is reminiscent of the healing that Jesus had carried out as they climbed down from the mountain: grasping the heavenly glory is perceived to meaningfully climax in extending the healing touch of Jesus to the vulnerable and needy. Fr. Vineeth had captured the approach or the mindset of Jesus, namely, His perspective of keeping within the horizon of heavenly glory (reminiscent of Fr. Francis Vineeth's natural bend for a contemplative orientation) the vulnerable and the sick, who are in need of preferential attention, especially for those who have had, or even aspire to have, a glimpse of the heavenly glories; if the latter does not follow, the former would remain suspect of its genuine value and heavenly grandeur: God is not a god exclusively of the glories removed from the poor and the needy, but the closest to them and having His preferential option for their wellbeing. Within the spiritual theology of Fr. Francis Vineeth, if the poor and the marginalized are not cared for, even the height of contemplation would be suspect of its genuine foundations in Christ-consciousness.

Fr. Francis Vineeth was known among his colleagues and friends, and even among his students, as a compassionate person, who would make himself available, or make provisions for the needy. There are umpteen examples of such needy persons who had received his support and patronage, and, in turn, became his lifetime friends and companions; their lives were touched by Fr. Francis Vineeth at a time when they were in need. There were instances of some of the scholastics from different congregations or dioceses, who were his students to whom he offered spiritual guidance as well as financial assistance at crucial moments. There were a few families living in Bengaluru, who were both spiritually and financially supported by him and they became his long-time friends and collaborators. Fr. Francis Vineeth had a special inclination to support those who were weak and marginalized, and to reach out to them in their needs. This was quite visible in his approach to his friends as well as those who were the weaklings within his family and social circles. The vulnerable, be it in his family or among his friends, had a special place, a preferential place, in his mind, and he reached out to them the best way possible. As it is stated in *Dilexi Te*, the first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Leo XIV, option for the poor is not necessarily to do so much for them in terms of sublime policies or huge projects, but to have them their due place in our universe, within our horizons (81). Indeed, those who have known Fr. Francis Vineeth personally would attest to the fact that he, even when he was engaged in his academic world, had openness as well as compassion towards the poor and the weak in his surroundings; in fact, Fr. Francis Vineeth's proximity with the poor and suffering made them feel respected and honoured, who, echoing Pope John Paul II, had embraced the ideal of "appreciating the poor in their goodness, in their experience of life, in their culture, in their ways of living the faith" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 199). The best of his response was

his ability to simultaneously deal with equanimity with his friends and acquaintances who came from the creamy layers of the socio-economic life and those who came from the margins. Personally, I have known instances in which he reached out to the poor and needy and made himself available to them. Indeed, he had also made use of his acquaintance with the financially rich (from his family and friends) to tap their resources in support of the needy whom he had known from far and wide. However, in all such instances, he strictly followed the Gospel command (Matt 6:3) and never spoke about all the good he had done for those in need, but treated them as his own close friends, thus, enhancing their own social status through his association with them.

### **5. Protecting and Safeguarding Creation**

Fr. Francis Vineeth had a synthetic vision of creation as a result of which he could see himself spontaneously forming part of nature. This vision emerged from his mystical orientation, cultivated through his insightful research and contemplative prayer. He valued the entire creation based on his conviction that the Lord of creation permeates the entire universe. His cosmic conviction is unambiguous: "As Christ is the Word who became flesh, through whom everything was conceived and created, through my eye of Christian faith, I see the touch of Christ in all creation and the Spirit of Christ operating everywhere..."<sup>27</sup> The spiritual realization that he had attained, according to him, should not only be capable of liberating himself from the bondages of the ego (*ahamkara*), but also of positively transforming the world: "A genuine search for depth as it liberates one from one's own ego, will certainly express itself in selfless and liberating

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<sup>27</sup>Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, 189-190.

actions for the transformation of the world.”<sup>28</sup> The transformation he aims at in the world, which also includes our response to the whole creation, is multi-dimensional. He wrote: “A scientist may subordinate nature to his tastes and needs. A *tapasa* (a person of *tapas*) adapts his tastes and needs to the availability of nature. Of course, it is good and necessary to control nature. But, if we do not know how to control ourselves, when nature fails, we will be nowhere. In a culture of absolute lack of moral self-control, we may not feel safe without police protection. This is the dangerous stage some cultures are now passing through. The value of *tapas* should once again strike us so that we may rediscover a world of deeper wealth and greater authenticity, leading to lasting peace.”<sup>29</sup>

Being realistic, Fr. Francis Vineeth is aware of the real-world situation where a lot of harmful activities are consciously initiated by many aiming at exclusive benefit for themselves, serving their own vested interests. As he sees it, “unfortunately the rhythm was tarnished. The result is chaos, disorder, global warming, melting of icebergs (mountains), rise of sea waters, threat of extinction to people living in small islands, etc.”<sup>30</sup> He insists that, in order to resolve the looming crisis resulting from the loss of nature’s rhythm caused mostly by human interventions, positive action should come from those who become aware of the onslaught of nature, but only by letting go the egoistic goals set by persons, families, and nations: “We humans are responsible for the loss of harmony in the universe, for the emission of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, for the pollution of the air, and consequently for the climate change and global warming. We

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<sup>28</sup>Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, 27.

<sup>29</sup>Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, 35.

<sup>30</sup>Vineeth, V. F., “An Outline of Eco-Theology,” *Journal of Dharma* 36, 3 (July-September 2011),243-256 (246).

should come to the negotiating table with an open heart to reduce, at least relatively, the emission of any polluting stuff into the air around us and the atmosphere above us. This means readiness to sacrifice the boosting of our own ego beyond certain limits. The *ahamkara*, understood as the enlarging of one's own ego, by unchecked trends of industrialization in the name of advance and progress, exploiting nature, by cutting trees for sale of woods, destroying sand beds on either sides of the running rivers, and any such action led by lucrative motivation of a private individual or group, at the expense of the just claim for a clean nature by all the people around is the person or villain (wrong-doer) responsible for the destruction of the ecological balance. All these demand shedding of our selfishly motivated ego on the altar of sacrifice."<sup>31</sup> He offers a simple but profound solution as follows: "The question is of the nature of relationship: Is it of love or utility? If it is of love, we will preserve nature in its purity, beauty and friendliness. If it is of utility, we will manipulate nature to our temporary and silly advantages, which, in the long run, will be extremely damaging. But a better attitude is just to learn to love nature, love trees, innocent creatures, be at home with all of them. Try to realize here a 'mini-paradise' in our own way."<sup>32</sup>

According to Fr. Francis Vineeth, although many speak about eco-spirituality, rarely we get to experience it in our surroundings: "In the modern world, filled with carbon, cravings, and constructions, we hear a lot about eco-friendliness and eco-spirituality. We hardly see it anywhere in the industrial world of ours, except in the *ashrams* or similar places where *sannyasins* opt to live with less structural

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<sup>31</sup>Vineeth, "An Outline of Eco-Theology," 248-249.

<sup>32</sup>Vineeth, "An Outline of Eco-Theology," 251.

amassment and more nature-friendly atmosphere.”<sup>33</sup> The two major campuses where he lived, namely, Dharmaram College and Vidyavanam Ashram, abound in enviable green cover and natural habitats. In fact, the commitment of Fr. Francis Vineeth for the protection and preservation of nature could be vividly experienced in the way he conceived and nurtured Vidyavanam campus. When the land was bought, practically the whole place had hardly one or two small trees; practically, it was a barren land filled with rocky ground. However, as he was bent on transforming the space into a real forest (*vanam*), he, with the involvement of many, initiated planting and nurturing trees all around the campus and, in a few years’ time, the whole Vidyavanam Ashram campus literally became a forest; I am happy to note that over the years, all those who succeeded him at the Ashram had invested resources to ensure that the campus protects and nurtures its beautiful green cover with the addition of new trees: Vidyavanam Ashram campus, green and gorgeous, remains a testimony of the commitment of Fr. Francis Vineeth for the protection and preservation of nature in its pristine purity.

Seen from the larger horizons of the society, consistent with his spiritual outlook, the positive perspective he has cultivated about the creation comes out strongly in his response to globalization: “In striking contrast to the globalization movement, where material things are made globally accessible, here it is the Spirit within us which becomes more and more cosmic, enfolding all humanity and its universe in a joyful embrace of love and self-giving.”<sup>34</sup> His proactive response to the harm done to nature is seen in the conscious efforts he had made in initiating and nurturing a perfect green

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<sup>33</sup>Vadakethala, “In Search of the Ineffable,” 15.

<sup>34</sup>Vadakethala, “In Search of the Ineffable,” 9.

cover within Vidyavanam Ashram campus; as it was an effort that spanned almost a quarter of a century, we can imagine the personal resolve and commitment that he had towards this sublime goal. Indeed, to my mind, this is also a testimony of his evolved spiritual outlook and enlightened Christian consciousness, which was all inclusive and caring, and had the place for taking care of our home (*oikos*) as well. It is also interesting to note that his prophetic approach in this regard is more practical and action-oriented: although there are a number of his writings that challenge the looming ecological crises that humanity encounters and a number of questions are raised against the damaging human consciousness and life-threatening practices, his practical approach was oriented more towards definitive and proactive action in the form of an alternative practice and creating a natural habitat where all of us could realistically experience the scope for a new natural horizon.

## **6. Commitment for Human Solidarity and Universal Fraternity**

The new vision emerging from the mystical communion leads us to the experience of unity among the human beings as well as within the entire creation: “When human beings, through their untiring search, learn to integrate the outer layers in their own innermost depth, where the Ineffable abides, the entire universe becomes splendid with the light and delight of the Ineffable, they all become one, as Jesus, the visible face of the Ineffable prayed: ‘May they be one, just as you are in me and I am in you’.”<sup>35</sup> This takes us to another plane of human existence where human fraternity would flourish: “What we need in the world is an undivided

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<sup>35</sup>Vadakethala, “In Search of the Ineffable,” 33.

humanity held together by the power of the Spirit where all are free, loving, self-giving, and caring for one another."<sup>36</sup>

Backed up by his theological vision and spiritual perspective, it was easy for Fr. Francis Vineeth to conceive of moving from 'I' to 'we', thus making it possible for a fundamentally Christian dialogical vision and conversion. This led to the emergence of a vision of solidarity among the human beings. As he put it, "... God is the loving Father and the benevolent king, and all his children live in harmony and unity of heart, not exploiting the wealth of the Father at the expense of other children, not only of this generation but also the generations to come."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the harmony and communion aimed at are essential ingredients of being Christian; for, being the church of Jesus Christ is to exist in communion; further, being ecclesial is to be necessarily dialogical.

The strong anchoring of Fr. Francis Vineeth's life in the person of Jesus Christ, seen from a truly Christian perspective, made him a true seeker, who was engaged in an ongoing but open search for truth. His noble effort was to explore the ultimate reality, the Ineffable, in its constant *avarana-vikshepa* (concealing-revealing dynamics), making it truly inexhaustible: "The inexhaustibility of the reality that is Christ needs many expressions so that our human understanding of Christ may grow and Christ's own self-revealing process may come to greater fullness. To achieve this, Christ needs other cultures and cultural expressions. India, as a country known for its high thinking, profound spiritual experience and manifold cultural expressions of the basic religious experience, is in a privileged position to offer to Christ, the Word who became flesh, the flesh for a new

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<sup>36</sup>Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," 9.

<sup>37</sup>Vineeth, "An Outline of Eco-Theology," 244.

incarnation..."<sup>38</sup> As the new but broader understanding of reality emerges, as a seeker, Fr. Francis Vineeth was ready to embrace the newly revealed dimensions always ensuring that his anchoring in Jesus Christ remained firm and unchallenged.

In this regard, although our society is literally plural and increasingly beset with trust deficit among various human segments, contributions of Fr. Francis Vineeth carry significant value in establishing the Centre for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) in 1973 and the publication of *Journal of Dharma* (a quarterly journal of philosophies and religions, began in 1975), two ground-breaking initiatives at Dharmaram that had significantly contributed to interreligious dialogue and better understanding among persons affiliated to different faith traditions. At a time when religious divide was eating into the Indian ethos and social fabric, Fr. Francis Vineeth, together with other stalwarts of Dharmaram College, trained in the insightful teachings of Vatican Council II and being true to the teachings of the Gospel, delved deep into the Indian reality and made pioneering systematic research in interreligious dialogue and ecumenism as a result of which better understanding could be nurtured and sustained in the Indian society. While CSWR offered a number of training programmes for the religious and seminarians (and occasionally to the general public) creating and nurturing openness towards members and systems of other faith traditions, *Journal of Dharma*, its publication wing, came up with excellent research publications with deeper understanding on the plurality of reality and the mutual appreciation needed among cultures and religions. Later, when a similar initiative was started at Divyodaya Interreligious Centre in Coimbatore by Fr. John

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<sup>38</sup>Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*, 13.

Peter Muringathery CMI, Fr. Francis Vineeth was an active collaborator and offered his proactive support (e.g., Fr. Francis Vineeth only proposed the name 'Divyodaya', meaning "Divine Dawn") in creating another model of human fraternity lived among the votaries of different religions among Tamil seekers.

True religion being in the realm of the Spirit, he ardently believed that efforts for communion that goes beyond the narrow boundaries of religious affiliations will open up new vistas of human solidarity and fraternity. In all these endeavours, the effort of Fr. Francis Vineeth and his colleagues was aiming at and cultivating a new spiritual culture that would take us far beyond the conditionings of the dividing material world. He was convinced that "... matter has an inherent tendency to divide, whereas the Spirit has by nature a tendency to unite."<sup>39</sup> While remaining a Christian pilgrim with openness to the Ineffable, being revealed through different religions and systems of thought, he had the prophetic courage to stand firm in the *catholic, universal, and inclusive* vision that the Church had bequeathed from the Gospel and reiterated by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, both of which propelled Fr. Francis Vineeth to celebrate them in and through his enlightened life and selfless ministry.

## **7. Conclusion**

A pilgrim is a person who, having identified someone or something holy, gets involved in a journey towards the holy and, at the end of the process, attains a spiritual *darsan* and/or *sparsan* of the holy of holies, culminating in an appropriation of the holy and consequent inner transformation (*metanoia*) of his/her own self. A prophet, understood in a religious context, on the other hand, having been convinced of the values or

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<sup>39</sup>Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," 9.

principles associated with the holy, stands firm in challenging oneself as well as others to transform (*metanoia*) their lives, in tune with the perception of the holy, and align themselves with the holy of holies. As for Fr. Francis Vineeth, the ultimate focus in his life was summarily captured in a little verse that he coined in Sanskrit with his characteristic Gospel foundations: "*Pita, tava cit bhavana; sada mama hrt sadhana,*" meaning, "Father, Thy Will is always the way of my heart!"<sup>40</sup> This prayer was his inner motivation as well as his ultimate goal that shaped his life's pilgrimage and prophetic mission. Both of them, then, are found to primarily orient themselves towards inner transformation of their own lives and, in turn, the lives of others. Compared to a pilgrim, however, a prophet is generally perceived to stand firm in directly challenging others with courage and determination, so that the expected outcome, namely, the transformation on a large scale, is definitively attained.

Having made a cursory pilgrimage through the person and thought of Fr. Francis Vineeth, we get to understand the comprehensive pattern of Christian discipleship that he led as a consecrated person. While he remained absolutely anchored in the person of Jesus Christ, he could graciously embrace the unknown dimensions of the ultimate being revealed, thus, keeping him open in his pilgrimage of life: in fact, this defined his approach to God and to his fellow beings and shaped his integral worldview and comprehensive lifestyle as a unique disciple of Jesus Christ. Being a consecrated person - a professionally accomplished philosopher-theologian as well as an experienced Acharya and realized Guru - he remained closer to God and human beings; thus, he could always keep his hopes alive for

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<sup>40</sup>Cited in Chackalackal, "Towards New Horizons of Indian Christian Living," 84.

ongoing encounters during his lifetime and the final encounter with the Ineffable on the eternal horizons. He insisted on his own inner transformation (*metanoia*) and was instrumental in facilitating the same in others through his teachings and writings; his spiritual outlook, as it evolved, was not aiming at a revolutionary change but slow and steady inner transformation of consciousness (to use an imagery repeatedly employed by Fr. Francis Vineeth, like a bud that opens up own its own), facilitated through silence, self-study, meditation, and contemplation. Whether as a professor of philosophy, theology, and comparative religion, or as a spiritually realized Guru, his life turned to be a soothing presence that was capable of slow and steady inner transformation within his confreres, students, and followers. We find him, for example, on the eve of his life, quite composed and settled within himself as to what he ultimately came to be (*sthithaprajna*): someone who is composed in himself, constantly engaged in a saga of seeking, himself being a pilgrim and a prophet at the same time.

Summing up his life, Fr. Francis Vineeth concluded his article "In Search of the Ineffable" in the *Festschrift* presented to him in the following verse:

"Yet, the little flame of hope burning in my heart  
Still tells me, one day you will come to me,  
Read my poems, sing my melodies  
And take me to your Majesty's Golden Palace.  
"Until that day, lighting all the flames of my little lamp,  
I will wait for you, singing  
"The heavens magnify the Lord!"  
"My soul too magnifies the Lord my God!"<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Vadakethala, "In Search of the Ineffable," 34.

Thus, at the end of this personal pilgrimage that I made through the life and thought of Fr. Francis Vineeth, I hope you all would agree with me that the structure I have introduced to review and assess his life and thought with perspectives emerging from the impact he has made during his lifetime is not superimposed but spontaneously and substantially emerging from his own life itself. His life and ministry, fundamentally shaped by his consecration to Lord Jesus Christ and an ever-transforming Christ-consciousness, branched out into the lives of his family and friends, colleagues and confreres, as well as his students and disciples, critics and adversaries alike with hope and peace, the sublime impact of his deep but all-encompassing life of consecration. In fact, the roots and fruits we identify in his life not only constitute his integral life as a consecrated person, but also challenge us to be pilgrims of hope and prophets of peace in our contemporary society where both these are found rarities.

# Artistic Activity for a Life of Integration

*Dr. Sebastian Eluvathingal CMI*

## Abstract

This paper explores how art becomes a path toward wholeness, harmony, and divine union. Human life is a continuous search for meaning and integration. We are born into a fragmented world and spend our lives longing for fulfilment and unity. Integration involves harmonizing our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions – aligning head, heart, and hands into one creative flow.

Art is both the means and the expression of this integration. It is not merely technique but a creative and spiritual process through which the material and spiritual unite. Every true artwork reveals this unity: matter is shaped by spirit, and spirit gains expression through matter. Thus, the artist's creative act becomes a transformative experience – shaping not only the artwork but also the artist, who gradually becomes a “work of art” himself.

The presentation traces the historical movement of art from objective realism to subjective expression. Earlier art, such as Renaissance classicism, emphasized perfect external forms. Modern and contemporary art shifted inward – toward the artist's emotions, perceptions, and intentions. Abstract and conceptual art, as seen in Duchamp's *readymades* or Malevich's *Suprematism*, demonstrates how

creativity can lie more in intention than in physical creation. Modern art further expands from *art objects* to *art spaces* – installations and environments that invite participation, dissolving the line between art and life.

This artistic understanding can be connected to a biblical vision. The Bible narrates a journey from the loss of the original creative space in Eden to its restoration through God’s redemptive plan. Sacrifice, both in the Old and New Testaments, is portrayed as a creative act that transforms matter into spirit-filled communion. The supreme example is Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross – the ultimate work of divine art that restores creation.

Taking a cue from the Bible St. Augustine calls Christ the “*Art of God*” – the divine Wisdom through whom all things are created and recreated. In Christ, the broken humanity is reshaped into beauty through love and sacrifice. Thus, human creativity, when united with divine inspiration, becomes a journey of reintegration and transformation – leading every person to become God’s own masterpiece.

## **Introduction**

Human life is a creative journey – a search for meaning, unity, and wholeness. Though everyone who is born must die, between birth and death we are given the precious opportunity to live meaningfully. So the real question that makes us think is: How do we make our lives whole, beautiful, and complete?

### **1. Human Life: A Search for Wholeness**

We are born into a fragmented world—divided, restless, and incomplete. But within each of us lies a deep longing for fulfilment, a desire to unite what is scattered within. This movement towards inner unity and harmony is what we call integration. In the process of integration, we strive to bring together the different aspects of our life—the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual—into a harmonious whole. When the head, heart, and hands work together—when thinking, feeling, and doing unite—our life becomes whole.

### **2. Existential Fragmentation and Integration through Sacrifice (Yajña)**

It is interesting to note that, in the Indian Vedic tradition, creation is understood as a process of fragmentation. It is described as the primordial sacrifice (*yajña*), in which *Puruṣa*, the Cosmic Person, is dismembered and scattered<sup>1</sup>. This act results in the multiplicity and diversity of the visible world. The universe is reintegrated and unified again through the cosmic *yajña* (sacrifice). *Yajña* is, therefore, both creative and restorative. Moreover, sacrifice sustains the cosmic order (*rta*). Considering the all-pervading influence of sacrifice, the universe is said to have been woven by sacrifice, and it is understood to possess a sacrificial texture. The role of art in human life is similar to the role of *yajna* in cosmic reintegration. In this paper our effort is to show how the activity of art promotes the process of integration in human life.

### **3. Art and Integration in Human Life**

Integration does not take place in a casual manner. It is not a mechanical process but a creative one. Creativity involves

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<sup>1</sup> R̥gveda – 10.90 (RV 10.90) – *Puruṣa Sukta*

free and intelligent human activity. It works on the principle of art. According to Thomas Aquinas, art is the right reason applied to things that are made<sup>2</sup>. Whatever is made properly and well is made according to art. Hence, art is the method of making anything in a creative manner—beautifully and harmoniously.

Art is not only a method but also the expression of the artist's spiritual integration and their experience of beauty and harmony. In his work *De Musica*, St. Augustine finds a correlation between musical rhythm and cosmic order<sup>3</sup>: to operate artistically and transform materials, the artist must undergo an inner ordering within themselves. Hence, we can say that the artist has to become beautiful in order to create beauty. The beauty and harmony that the artist produces in their works are expressions of the artist's inner experiences.

Each work of art is a visible sign of the artist's inner integration. Art gives unity and form to our fragmented experience. It transforms scattered elements—thoughts, feelings, and materials—into an organic whole. Artistic transformation is both material and spiritual. It brings about the unity of form and meaning, matter and spirit.

Through art, the artist transforms not only materials but also themselves. In the process, the artist becomes a work of art. The material transformation corresponds to an inner realization.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part (I-II), Question 57, Article 3: "*Ars est recta ratio factibilium.*" *Art is right reason about things that are to be made.*

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine, *De Musica*, Book VI, especially chapters 11-16: Here Augustine moves from external musical rhythm to interior rhythm of the soul

#### 4. Human Self-Awareness and Integration

The experience of integration is related to the different levels of awareness experienced by the human person. The deeper our awareness, the deeper our integration. According to the *Pañca Kośa* theory of awareness in the Upaniṣads, often employed by Fr. Vineeth to explain spiritual experiences, awareness may begin at the outer, material level – what the Taittirīya Upaniṣad calls *Annamaya Kośa* – and gradually move inward to the level of blissful consciousness, the *Ānandamaya Kośa*. It is a journey from the external world to the inner divine unity – the union of Ātman and Brahman, or the self with God.

#### 5. The Layers (*Kośas*) of Awareness

The understanding and appreciation of a work of art may be explained by referring to the levels of awareness mentioned in the *Pañca Kośa* theory as presented in the Brahmanandavallī of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad<sup>4</sup>. **a.** *Annamaya Kośa* – The Physical / Food Sheath. It is related to the body, made from food. It is the most external and gross layer. **b.** *Prāṇamaya Kośa* – The Vital Energy / Life-Force Sheath. It represents *prāṇa*, the breath that keeps the body alive. **c.** *Manomaya Kośa* – The Mental / Emotional Sheath. It concerns the mind, emotions, desires, and sensory impressions. **d.** *Vijñānamaya Kośa* – The Intellectual / Wisdom Sheath. It represents *buddhi*, the power of discrimination, reasoning, and intuition. **e.** *Ānandamaya Kośa* – The Bliss Sheath. It is the innermost sheath before the Self. It is not the ultimate *Ātman*, but a subtle veil of bliss. According to Taittirīya Upaniṣad, after moving through the five sheaths, one realizes the true Self (Ātman): pure consciousness, infinite awareness,

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<sup>4</sup> Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.1-2.5

untouched by body, mind, or emotions. This realization is known as Self-realization or Mokṣa (liberation).

## 6. Contemporary Art: Transition from Objective to Subjective Awareness

In the understanding and appreciation of a work of art, we may follow the same pattern of thought found in the Upaniṣads. They reveal a transition from the gross reality represented by *Anna* (food) to the subtle experience of *Ānanda*, which is a state of relishing the work at a spiritual level.

In the history of art, we find a gradual yet significant shift: artists moved from depicting the external world as it is (objectivity) to exploring their inner world—feelings, perspectives, and personal experiences (subjectivity). This movement is one of the defining features of modern and contemporary art.

For centuries, artists—particularly in the Renaissance and Classical periods—focused on the accurate depiction of reality<sup>5</sup>. They perfected their works by employing rules of proportion, symmetry, perspective, and anatomy. Their themes were universal, easily identifiable by all. The artist's personal emotions were rarely visible in the work; the artist was neutral, balanced, and realistic.

The emergence of photography in the 19th century marked a turning point. Photography could capture reality more objectively than painting. As photographers and scientists began to dominate the representation of reality, artists were compelled to ask deeper questions about their own unique field of creativity.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the works of Renaissance artists such as Michaelangelo, Raphael and others

This reflection led to the rise of modernist art movements such as Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, and Surrealism, which questioned traditional canons of art. They broke away from the tendency toward realistic representation. The effort of the modern artist was to show how the world appears to the artist rather than what it objectively is. This shift opened the door to the rich world of the artist's subjective experiences.

### **7. Contemporary Art – Beyond Definition and Open-Ended**

In contemporary art, beginning from the late 20th century onwards, personal and subjective experiences become central themes. Artists now focus on emotions and psychological states, and individual memories and viewpoints are represented in their works. They do not hesitate to express unique artistic visions, experiment with materials, or offer new interpretations of reality.

Subjectivity in contemporary art appears in many forms, such as abstract art that expresses inner feelings instead of depicting objects; performance art that uses the artist's body and lived experiences; installation art that creates environments reflecting personal or social questions; and conceptual art that emphasizes the artist's ideas or worldview more than physical beauty. The meaning of such works is often open-ended, inviting viewers to bring their own interpretations.

Contemporary art holds that reality is not fixed – it is shaped by one's emotions, culture, and experiences. In short, the movement from objectivity to subjectivity demonstrates how art has shifted from accurately representing the external world to expressing personal experiences, emotions, and perspectives, making art more individual, interpretive, and open-ended.

## 8. The Evocation of “Space” in Abstract Art

In contemporary art, the creative search is to unfold an unmanifest yet significant space rather than to fill space with visual representations<sup>6</sup>. Art becomes less about objects and more about presence, emptiness, silence, and transcendence. Space is understood as the realm of the invisible. Contemporary art attempts to evoke what cannot be seen amidst the visible world. It implies mystery, longing, and the awakening of inner consciousness.

Wassily Kandinsky’s abstract art is considered a search for the spiritual dimension in art<sup>7</sup>. For him, colours, forms, and compositions were not merely visual elements—they were tools to awaken the viewer’s spiritual consciousness. Abstract artists like Mark Rothko and minimalist artists like Agnes Martin create visual fields that function as meditative spaces, inviting contemplation. The black paintings of Kazimir Malevich reflect the supremacy of pure feeling (Suprematism) rather than representation. Through emptiness and the reduction of forms, the artist seeks to evoke an experience of space that stands for spiritual clarity and inner vision.

It is a space of interiority, where viewers encounter themselves—not in isolation but in relation to others. Art, in this sense, is not an aesthetic object but a space for spiritual encounter. It dissolves boundaries and enables participation in a shared experience. The artist invites the audience to step

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<sup>6</sup> "But, after all, the aim of art is to create space - space that is not compromised by decoration or illustration, space within which the subjects of painting can live." (Frank Stella (1986) quoted by Christopher W. Tyler, Amy Ione, in "Concept of space in 20th century art," Proc. SPIE 4299, Human Vision and Electronic Imaging VI, (8 June 2001); <https://doi.org/10.1117/12.429529>)

<sup>7</sup> W. Kandinsky, "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" (first published in 1911 in German as *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*).

into this creative space – to experience, participate, and even co-create.

The spiritual significance of space in art lies in its ability to lead viewers into silence, enabling them to experience a sense of “presence” within the inner realm of awareness. Space, in its creative sense, becomes revelatory of the invisible, the infinite, and the transcendent. It transforms the art experience from mere sense perception to meditation or contemplation. The dividing line between art and life dissolves. The artwork becomes a field of relationships, a space for communion. Art is no longer about “looking at something beautiful,” but about living an experience of unity.

### **9. Fr. Vineeth’s Ashram - a “Maṇḍala” / “Creative Space”**

Fr. Vineeth’s *Call to Integration* can be understood as a search for an ideal space of harmony, peace, and love. He envisaged the *āśrama* as such a space, where he tried to harmonize the life of traditional Christian consecration with the richness of Indian monastic traditions. He sought to live religious life by proposing a refreshed theological perspective that blended the models of Christian religious vocation and discipleship with an Indian ethos of interiority and experiential spirituality. With the concept of integration, he undertook a spiritual journey toward an interior depth, aligning all external activities with his inner spiritual transformation. The *āśram* became the venue – the creative field – of his spiritual transformation.

Fr. Vineeth conceived the Vidyāvanam Āśram as a “*maṇḍala*.” A *maṇḍala* is a symbolic diagram that represents a sacred space for inner transformation. Both *āśram* and *maṇḍala* arise from the same metaphysical vision. A *maṇḍala*, as a geometric pattern, represents the structure of the universe. The heart of a *maṇḍala* is its centre, represented by

a dot (*bindu*). It stands for the Absolute, the divine centre of the universe, which holds the diversity of reality in unity. An *āśram* is a living *maṇḍala*. It is a field of spiritual energy designed for the transformation of the *sādhakas* of the *āśram*. Its central point is an altar, a temple, or the seat of a *guru*. In all traditional *āśrams*, we notice a rhythm of life—prayer, silence, work, and study—ordered around the altar. The centre of the *āśram* corresponds to the inner creative space within the heart of each *sādhaka*. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* calls it “*antarhr̥daya-ākāśa*.”<sup>8</sup>

The deepest interior of the person is identical with cosmic space (*ākāśa*). Thus, there is a correlation between the heart—the creative centre of the *sādhaka*—the altar of the *āśrama*, and the centre of the universe. This is geometrically represented in the *maṇḍala* diagram. Hence, one may say that an *āśram* is a *maṇḍala* you live in; a *maṇḍala* is an *āśram* you contemplate.

## 10. Vidyāvanam Āśram - A “Christa-Maṇḍala”

The geographical space of an *āśram* becomes a *maṇḍala* for the *sādhakas* (disciples) who follow the rhythm of *āśram* life, performing *sādhanās*. The silence, meditation, work, and study of *āśram* life are creative insofar as they transform the *āśram* into an “energy field.” The *sādhakas* become participants in that space, experiencing personal transformation.

The “energy-space” of Vidyāvanam Āśram is the venue where the *sādhakas* are transformed by Christ Consciousness<sup>9</sup>, making it a *Christa-Maṇḍala*. Integration is

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<sup>8</sup> Chandogya Upanishad 8.1.1-3: :Within this heart there is a small lotus-abode; within it is a tiny inner space (*antar-ākāśa*). Within that dwells the Purusha, mind-formed, immortal, golden.”

<sup>9</sup> Vineeth, Francis. *Call to Integration*. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, various sections on integration, Trinitarian spirituality, and Pauline Christology.

essentially Christ-centred, consisting in an inner conformity with Christ. It is the unification of the human person – body, psyche, and spirit – around a single living centre: Christ. Christ becomes the inner organizing principle of consciousness. The fragmented self is reorganized around Him. Consciousness is no longer ego-centred but Christ-centred.

This Christ-centred consciousness is expressed by St Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

The Cross is a central aspect of Christ-consciousness. It encapsulates the mysteries of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hence, the Cross is the summit of Christ-consciousness. St Paul writes to the Philippians: “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, ... made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ... He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!” (Phil 2:5–8).

All the *sādhanās* of the *āśram* are marked by the sign of the Cross. It is the memorial of Jesus’ total self-emptying and the highest revelation of divine love.

### **11. Biblical Understanding of Salvation - Redeeming the Lost Space**

Interestingly, there is a strong biblical foundation for understanding salvation in terms of redeeming a lost space. The ideal space of Paradise was lost through the sin of the first parents, Adam and Eve. This loss caused destruction and disintegration within the human person, in society, and in the universe. In the Old Testament, there are various ritual

efforts to reunite heaven and earth and to regain the lost space of cosmic harmony. For instance, Noah, after the flood, built an altar and offered sacrifice (Gen 8:20) as a symbolic act of rebuilding the dissolved world. Each sacrifice was both a ritual and a work of art, transforming space into a meeting point of heaven and earth.

In the New Testament, this cosmic restoration reaches its fullness in the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Jesus' mission on earth was to restore Paradise as the Kingdom of God through his unique sacrifice on the Cross. It was a decisive moment for reopening Paradise to the saved, including the repentant thief crucified at the right side of Jesus. On the Cross Jesus said: "You will be with me in Paradise today" (Lk 23:43).

The Cross, with its design and purpose, can be considered the ultimate work of divine art through which suffering is transformed into love, death into life, and brokenness into beauty.

## **12. Christian Creativity: Becoming God's Masterpieces**

Following Christ in discipleship is a creative journey. To imitate Christ is not to copy Him mechanically, but to strive consciously toward the ideal—to be transformed into His image. St. Paul beautifully states in Ephesians 2:10: "*We are God's masterpiece, created anew in Christ Jesus.*" Every believer is a work of art in progress—being shaped, polished, and perfected by the Divine Artist.

In Romans 8:29, Paul adds: "*Those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.*" The goal of the Christian life, then, is conformity to Christ—the divine model of beauty, love, and harmony.

Transformation is both sacrificial and creative. Romans 12:1–2 urges us: "*Present your bodies as a living sacrifice... be*

*transformed by the renewal of your mind.*" To imitate Christ is to allow God's creative Spirit to remake us into His masterpiece.

### **13. Christ – The Art of God**

Taking a cue from the Bible, St. Augustine expresses this idea most beautifully. He says: "*Christ is the Art of God.*" For Augustine, *art* means the divine wisdom and order through which all things are made. Christ, the eternal Word—*Lógos* (Λόγος)—is God's perfect design.

As the Gospel of John says: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through Him*" (Jn 1:1-3).

According to Augustine, Christ is the pattern not only of creation, but also of salvation: "*By the Art of God we are made; by the Art of God we are remade.*" Even the Cross, he says, is the supreme work of divine art—where apparent ugliness becomes the means of ultimate beauty: love and salvation.

Hence, the Cross is the sacred space in which the drama of salvation was enacted and brought to its climax. St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians (1:15-17) reveals a harmonious vision of a universe centered on Christ: "*In Him all things were created... and in Him all things hold together.*"

Christ is the harmony of creation—the visible image of the invisible God, the eternal blueprint of divine beauty. In Christ we find the original *mandala* of creation. St. Paul said: "*For in Him we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28).

### **Conclusion**

Artistic creativity is more than producing objects—it is a spiritual journey toward unity and meaning. Art transforms materials of various kinds and, in doing so, transforms the artist.

It awakens deeper awareness, heals fragmentation, and restores harmony. Art reconstructs not only individual lives but the entire universe. In God's redemptive plan, Jesus Christ is the supreme *Ars Dei* (Art of God) – the pattern, the model, and the perfect image through whom creation and restoration are accomplished.

Therefore, our call as human beings – as artists of our own lives – is to allow the Divine Artist to work within us, so that our lives may become masterpieces of love, harmony, and integration. Let us remember: We are not just makers of art – we are God's artwork, being shaped through every joy, struggle, and act of love into the beautiful image of Christ – the *Ars Dei*.

# **Gathering the Fragments: Toward Integration in the Writings of Fr. Vineeth**

*Dr. Babu Paul CMI*

## **Abstract**

Much of contemporary reflection—philosophical, religious, and cultural—proceeds through specialization and separation, often leaving human experience internally divided and existentially restless. It is precisely this condition that Fr. Francis Vineeth addresses integration as the ground of authentic human and spiritual life. Across philosophy, theology, poetry, prayer, and ecclesial engagement, Fr. Vineeth insists that truth is not discovered in isolated domains but in the unification of life around an interior center rooted in God.

This paper, “Gathering the Fragments: A Call to Integration in the Writings of Fr. Vineeth,” examines integration as the organizing vision that underlies Vineeth’s diverse corpus. From inward inquiry and meditative practice to poetic solitude, prophetic critique, and prayer understood as transformative power, integration emerges as both method and meaning—where knowing matures into becoming and spirituality unfolds as responsibility. By tracing this vision across his major works, the study argues that Vineeth articulates integration not merely as an ideal but as a lived way of being that heals fragmentation, restores

coherence, and enables a life marked by depth, freedom, and compassionate communion.

## **Introduction**

Modern human experience is marked by fragmentation—between faith and life, knowledge and existence, body and spirit, self and world. Against this backdrop, the writings of Fr. Francis Vineeth articulate a sustained theological response that may be described ‘toward integration’. The title ‘Gathering the Fragments’ captures both the condition his work addresses and the movement it proposes: a patient reweaving of what modernity has scattered. Across his corpus, Vineeth consistently resists reductionist spiritualities and purely psychological accounts of wholeness, insisting instead on an integrative vision rooted in the Word, where knowing becomes participation and becoming.

This paper reads Fr. Vineeth’s writings as a coherent project aimed at restoring unity at multiple levels—personal, relational, ecclesial, and cosmic. Integration, in his thought, is neither mere harmony nor moral balance but an interior synthesis achieved through intense union with God, the innermost centre of human existence. By retrieving theological insights while engaging contemporary questions of identity, embodiment, and authenticity, Vineeth offers a spirituality that is both deeply incarnational and critically aware. To gather the fragments, for him, is to allow the Word to become the organizing principle of life, drawing flesh, consciousness, relationships, and the world itself into a transformative unity in Christ.

## **Call to Integration as the Core of Religious Life in Fr. Vineeth**

In *Call to Integration, A New Theology of Religious Life*, Fr. Vineeth proposes integration as the defining category for understanding religious life in the contemporary world.

Religious life, he argues, is not primarily characterized by external observances or institutional roles, but by a profound interior vocation: "Religious people are those who are called in a special way to interior integration."<sup>1</sup> The religious person is thus meant to be an integrated human being — one who has discovered wholeness at the deepest level of existence and who, by that very fact, becomes significant for a fragmented world.

Integration, as Vineeth understands it, cannot be reduced to psychological balance or functional harmony, though it includes these dimensions. While the term may be used in psychology, Vineeth deliberately employs it in a theological and mystical sense. Integration is "an internal synthesis worked out in the innermost depth of our being," but it is always humanity's integration in God, who dwells "as the innermost centre of our own being."<sup>2</sup> Integration therefore names not self-possession but self-grounding in God; it is an interior communion rather than a technique of self-mastery. At the same time, the psychological resonance of the term is not lost: this union brings about 'soundness and wholeness,' healing the divided self from within.

Within this framework, Vineeth draws a decisive connection between integration and sanctity. Many modern seekers, especially those influenced by Eastern spiritual traditions, speak less of holiness and more of integration. Fr. Vineeth does not see this as a loss but as a translation: "a deeper analysis of sanctity will show us that sanctity is nothing other than integration of oneself in God."<sup>3</sup> Holiness, then, is not moral exceptionalism or ascetical heroism, but the

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<sup>1</sup>F. Vineeth Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration: A New Theology of Religious Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 17.

realization of one's authentic self in its divine source. Integration and sanctity converge as two languages naming the same interior truth.

This integration is articulated biblically through the symbol of the Word. "The integrated person abides in the Word and the Word abides in him."<sup>4</sup> For Fr. Vineeth, this mutual indwelling has implications that extend beyond the individual. When rootedness in the Word is neglected, disintegration spreads, eventually threatening the coherence of the world itself. By contrast, the integrated person becomes a stabilizing presence—"the saving factor of the world"—by holding reality together through fidelity to the Word. Integration thus assumes a relational and even cosmic dimension: the interior wholeness of the person becomes a point of healing for the wider world. Fr. Vineeth situates this vision within a theological anthropology grounded in creation. The biblical Adam, created in the image of God, is presented as an original figure of integration. Adam's humanity reflected the divine Word, making him a dwelling place of divine consciousness on earth. Patristic theology interpreted Adam's gifts—divine life and immortality—as signs of this integrated state.<sup>5</sup> Sin, in contrast, is described not merely as disobedience but as disintegration: a turning away from God that simultaneously becomes a turning away from one's true self. The result is inner division, loss of harmony, and alienation.<sup>6</sup>

Religious life, therefore, emerges as a deliberate response to this condition of disintegration. Religious persons are those who "take seriously the challenge of becoming fully integrated human beings" and commit their lives to this

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<sup>4</sup> Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 21.

task.<sup>7</sup> This integration is never achieved through human effort alone; God remains “the deepest foundation of their life and the inner core of their interior being.”<sup>8</sup> Integration is thus fundamentally graced, realized through surrender rather than control. In Christian religious life, this integrative vocation is shaped by the mystery of the Incarnation. The Incarnation reveals that authentic humanity is fulfilled – not diminished – in union with the Word. Religious life seeks to embody this incarnational pattern through concrete forms of self-offering. Celibacy, for Fr. Vineeth, signifies the offering of one’s whole self to the Word, expressing an undivided interiority rather than mere renunciation.<sup>9</sup> Poverty extends this integration to one’s relationship with the world: not simply the absence of possessions, but the surrender of one’s entire ‘larger self’ – possessions, concerns, and attachments – to God. When both *being* and *having* are offered to the Word, integration becomes total.<sup>10</sup>

This process of integration is lifelong and dynamic, sustained above all by prayer. Prayer is the practical means through which integration moves from concept to lived reality. Through prayer, thought, desire, and action are gradually aligned with the Word, allowing wholeness to take shape in daily life. The fruit of such integration is peace, understood across traditions as the serenity born of inner harmony. Vineeth draws here on both the Bhagavad Gītā’s vision of the *sthitaprajña* and Christ’s gift of peace, suggesting a shared religious intuition that integration culminates in stillness and freedom.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 35.

<sup>10</sup> Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 78.

The fullest realization of integration, however, is found in Jesus Christ. In Christ, humanity and divinity are perfectly united; his human consciousness is wholly oriented toward the divine will. Fr. Vineeth presents Jesus as the unsurpassed embodiment of integration, revealing the true destiny of human existence.<sup>12</sup> Religious life, in this light, is participation in Christ's own integrated life, gradually conformed to the Word through prayer, surrender, and love.

Seen as a whole, *Call to Integration* offers a coherent vision of religious life as the gathering of fragmented existence into a unified whole centered on the Word. Integration, for Fr. Vineeth, is not withdrawal from the world but deeper rootedness within it; not self-assertion but self-surrender; not isolation but mediation. The integrated person becomes a dwelling place of divine consciousness and, through that indwelling, a quiet but transformative presence in the world.

### **Integration as Asian Theological Vision in *The Asian Vision of God***

While *Call to Integration* articulates integration primarily as interior synthesis within religious life, *The Asian Vision of God* extends this insight into a broader interreligious and cultural horizon. Here, Fr. Vineeth approaches integration as a theological method for holding together the diverse ways in which God is known and experienced in Asia—without collapsing immanence into transcendence, or plurality into uniformity.<sup>13</sup> At the heart of the work lies a non-objectifying understanding of knowledge. Drawing on the Upanishadic notion of *sakshatkara*, Vineeth presents knowing God as realization rather than conceptual mastery. God is encountered not as an external object but as the inner Self

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<sup>12</sup>Vadakkethala, *Call to Integration*, 78.

<sup>13</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God* (Bangalore: Vidyavanam Publications, 2004), 5.

already present at the depth of human consciousness. This emphasis on interiority, however, is deliberately balanced by the devotional theism of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which affirms God's transcendence while naming God as the 'inner controller. Together, these traditions exemplify Fr. Vineeth's integrative logic: God is neither distant nor absorbed into the self, and knowing becomes a transformative participation in divine life.

The structure of the book itself reflects this integrative intent. Written across different stages of the author's inward journey and arranged thematically rather than chronologically, the work traces the human search for God through nature, reason, experience, and faith. Fr. Vineeth acknowledges the genuine insights offered by nature symbolism and philosophical reasoning, yet consistently points to their limits. Reason, whether Eastern or Western, yields only partial disclosures of divine reality. Faith, by contrast, emerges as a deeper mode of knowing—one that transcends reason without negating it. Influenced by both Indian philosophical traditions and Christian mysticism, Vineeth insists that authentic knowledge of God is received through surrender. Knowing, once again, is understood as becoming.<sup>14</sup>The engagement with Hinduism and Buddhism further clarifies this integrative vision. Hindu traditions are presented not as a monolithic system but as a plurality of paths oriented toward interior transformation. Buddhism's disciplined silence regarding God is interpreted not as negation but as a radical inward journey, where liberation unfolds through experiential transformation rather than doctrinal assertion. Integration here does not eliminate difference; it gathers diverse paths into a deeper unity of meaning.

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<sup>14</sup> Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, 5.

In the second part of the book, Vineeth places Asian religious insights in dialogical relationship with Christian faith. Interiority becomes the shared ground where immanence and transcendence converge. The Upanishadic search for inner depth and the Eastern Christian emphasis on the heart are shown to resonate profoundly. This dialogue culminates christologically: in Jesus, Fr. Vineeth identifies the convergence of Asian interiority and Christian revelation. Christ is disclosed not only as transcendent Lord but as the inner ground of authentic human action. Integration thus becomes a lived spirituality, uniting traditions, experiences, and consciousness into a coherent way of being.

The later chapters translate this integrative vision into ecclesial and social engagement. Inculturation, dialogue, and religious pluralism are treated not as pragmatic strategies but as expressions of integrated consciousness. By distinguishing pluralism as a historical fact from its theological interpretation, Fr. Vineeth preserves both openness and rootedness. Integration does not dissolve religious identity; it deepens it. Peace, the final horizon of the book, is understood as the fruit of integration—arising when inner division is healed and diversity is embraced through mutual respect and fidelity to one's own tradition.

Seen as a whole, *The Asian Vision of God* extends Fr. Vineeth's call to integration beyond religious life into the wider terrain of interreligious theology. What is gathered here are not systems but experiences, not doctrines but depths—revealing integration as a way of seeing, knowing, and becoming whole in God.

### **Integration as Method: *Discovery of Being***

If *The Asian Vision of God* extends Fr. Vineeth's call to integration across religious traditions and experiential horizons, *Discovery of Being* demonstrates how integration

also functions as a method of inquiry. The work adopts an explicitly integrative approach that resists fragmented readings and isolated analyses, seeking instead to understand thought from within its own horizon. Meaning is allowed to emerge through convergence rather than reduction, as text, context, and interpretation are held together in a unified movement of understanding. Methodologically, *Discovery of Being* approaches Heidegger's philosophy not as a sequence of disconnected stages but as an internally coherent vision. The three phases of Heidegger's thinking – Being and Time, the later question of Being, and the articulation of the ontological difference – are read as interconnected dimensions of a single concern rather than as chronological breaks. Each phase is already implicitly present from the beginning and unfolds in continuity with the others, preserving earlier insights while deepening them.<sup>15</sup> Integration here names a hermeneutical stance that privileges continuity over rupture and synthesis over fragmentation.

This integrative orientation is especially evident in Heidegger's appropriation of phenomenology. Rather than treating phenomenology as an external technique borrowed from Husserl, Heidegger internalizes it as an interior mode of thinking ordered to the question of Being. Phenomenology becomes inseparable from its subject matter, allowing Being to disclose itself from within lived experience.<sup>16</sup> Integration, in this sense, signifies a creative synthesis in which inheritance and originality, method and meaning, are woven together into a coherent philosophical vision. Such an approach finds a clear theological resonance in Fr. Vineeth's

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<sup>15</sup> Francis J. Vadakkethala, *Discovery of Being* (Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 1970), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Vadakkethala, *Discovery of Being*, 19.

understanding of integration as interior synthesis. Just as Heidegger resists grounding Being in something external to itself, Vineeth cautions against spiritualities that seek unity through external structures, disciplines, or conceptual systems alone. True integration, for Fr. Vineeth, occurs when the human person discovers God as the innermost centre of existence. Integration thus becomes an inward grounding—where flesh, consciousness, and world are unified in the Word who dwells within.<sup>17</sup> In both thinkers, integration safeguards depth and authenticity by allowing meaning to arise from interior transcendence rather than imposed exterior foundations.

The same integrative logic governs the relation between truth and ground in *Discovery of Being*. Heidegger's engagement with Leibniz enables him to hold together truth and ground without reducing truth to mere logical correspondence. Truth emerges instead as a relational process rooted in the grounding of Being itself.<sup>18</sup> This refusal to isolate judgment from reality parallels Vineeth's insistence that truth cannot be reduced to doctrinal correctness or moral conformity. Truth, for Fr. Vineeth, is participatory and experiential—disclosed through interior alignment with the Word. Integration restores truth to its proper ground by uniting knowing and being, thought and life. As the inquiry deepens, ground, truth, and transcendence are shown to converge in a single dynamic movement. Approaching the essence of truth simultaneously brings one closer to the ground of Being, revealing their inseparability.<sup>19</sup> This convergence finds a striking parallel in Fr. Vineeth's theology of interior integration, where the spiritual journey is

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<sup>17</sup> Vadakkethala, *Discovery of Being*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Vadakkethala, *Discovery of Being*, 33.

<sup>19</sup> Vadakkethala, *Discovery of Being*, 35.

understood as a movement inward toward God as the deepest ground of the self. Integration becomes both path and fulfilment: the space where truth becomes lived, Being becomes grounded, and transcendence becomes experiential rather than abstract.

The later analyses reinforce this vision through an account of reciprocity. Being and the human person are presented as mutually belonging to one another: Being discloses itself only through human attentiveness, while human identity unfolds through openness to Being.<sup>20</sup> Fr. Vineeth articulates a parallel reciprocity in theological terms. God is not encountered apart from the self, nor is the self realized apart from God. Integration names this co-emergence of human identity and divine presence within interiority, where knowing and becoming are inseparable.

Finally, thinking itself is described as a dynamic, dialectical process of becoming rather than a static act of cognition. Human understanding advances through tension, partial insight, and openness to what exceeds it. Integration here does not eliminate tension but inhabits it fruitfully.<sup>21</sup> This dialectical movement closely mirrors Vineeth's conviction that spiritual knowledge is never a finished possession but an ongoing transformation. Knowing God is not the acquisition of answers but a progressive interior awakening to the Word. Seen in continuity with *The Asian Vision of God, Discovery of Being* reveals integration as both method and meaning. What Fr. Vineeth articulates theologically as interior synthesis finds a methodological analogue in a mode of inquiry that resists fragmentation, honors depth, and allows truth to emerge from within. Integration thus governs not only the content of Vineeth's

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<sup>20</sup> Vadakkethala, *Discovery of Being*, 65.

<sup>21</sup> Vadakkethala, *Discovery of Being*, 114.

vision but also the way in which reality – philosophical and theological – is to be understood.

**Integration as Worldview and Pedagogy: *Foundations of World Vision***

If *Discovery of Being* demonstrates integration as a philosophical method that resists fragmentation, *Foundations of World Vision* extends this integrative impulse into the sphere of worldview, education, and lived spirituality. The work emerges from Fr. Vineeth's sustained concern that modern humanity, despite unprecedented scientific and cultural advancement, risks losing coherence by neglecting interior depth. Against cultural plurality, philosophical specialization, and religious compartmentalization, Vineeth proposes integration as the task of holding together inward and outward, faith and reason, East and West, contemplation and action within a single, living vision.<sup>22</sup>

At the heart of the book lies the conviction that human beings are oriented toward a double journey: the exploration of the world and the discovery of inner depth. Modern civilization has achieved remarkable success in outward mastery – symbolized by technological progress and even the exploration of outer space – yet often at the cost of interior awareness. Conversely, ancient traditions, particularly in the East, emphasized inward realization without always integrating it fully with historical and cultural engagement. Vineeth refuses this dichotomy. True integration, he insists, occurs only when these two movements are held together. External exploration finds its fulfilment when grounded in interior realization, and inward

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<sup>22</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*. V. Francis Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision: A Guide to Metaphysics Eastern and Western* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2007), vii.

awakening returns the person to the world with renewed clarity and responsibility.<sup>23</sup>

This integrative vision resists cultural monopolies and unilateral claims to truth. Vineeth presents the achievements of Eastern and Western traditions not as competing paths but as complementary expressions of a shared human quest. The realization of *Ātman* and the conquest of space are not opposed achievements; both gesture toward the discovery of the boundless. Integration, therefore, does not mean homogenization but a discerning synthesis that honors difference as a resource for wholeness. Human fulfillment lies in holding together transcendence and immanence, inner awakening and outward engagement, within a coherent vision of life.<sup>24</sup>

A significant contribution of *Foundations of World Vision* lies in its articulation of an integrative pedagogy, especially in philosophical and theological formation. Vineeth argues that education must move beyond abstract speculation and cultivate a worldview capable of sustaining faith and life. Metaphysical reflection, prayerful attentiveness, ethical responsibility, and cultural wisdom are not competing domains but mutually enriching dimensions of a single educational process. While philosophy retains its autonomy, it discovers its true purpose when it illumines existence and deepens religious commitment. Integration thus becomes the goal of education itself: the formation of persons capable of coherent thought, responsible action, and spiritual depth.<sup>25</sup>

This vision is given conceptual clarity in Vineeth's insistence on the unity of truth and life. "True knowledge," he writes, "required sequence between theory of reality and

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<sup>23</sup> Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, vii.

<sup>24</sup> Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, viii.

<sup>25</sup> Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, viii.

theory of morality (rules of action). The former defines the vision of life while the latter describes the scheme of actions to be performed in view of achieving the goals of life.” Knowledge severed from action, or truth detached from moral responsibility, results in fragmentation. Authentic learning, by contrast, “aimed at achieving perfect harmony between the perception of truth and the execution of it in actual life,” holding together the theoretical and the practical, the physical and the spiritual, the perishable and the permanent within an integral vision of existence.<sup>26</sup>

Read in continuity with *Discovery of Being, Foundations of World Vision* reveals integration as both epistemological and existential. What is at stake is not merely a coherent philosophy but a way of living in which reason and faith, knowledge and action, inner realization and cultural engagement converge. Integration thus becomes the condition for meaningful human existence in a pluralistic world—a worldview in which truth is not only understood but lived.

### **Integration as Lived Contemplation: *Ekanthagīta* – Songs of Solitude**

If *Foundations of World Vision* articulates integration as a coherent worldview uniting inward realization and outward engagement, *Ekanthagīta: Songs of Solitude* embodies this vision at the level of lived interior experience. Written during periods of silence and withdrawal from active academic and pastoral responsibilities, these poems do not signal escape from the world but a return to its deepest centre. Solitude, for Fr. Vineeth, is not isolation but the privileged space where

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<sup>26</sup> Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 107.

fragmentation is gathered, life is re-centered, and knowing ripens into being.<sup>27</sup>

Across the collection, integration unfolds as an inward movement rather than an external achievement. Truth is disclosed not through conceptual mastery but through attentive presence. In *A Journey into My Inner Depth*, the repeated descent into interior silence presents integration as an inward pilgrimage in which dawn and dusk, sound and silence, heaven and earth are reconciled within the self. The poem portrays knowing as awakening to the divine life already kindled in the heart – an experiential realization that gathers consciousness, cosmic rhythm, and prayer into a single, unified movement.<sup>28</sup>

This inward consolidation is deepened in *My Guru*, where integration appears as a transformative encounter with wisdom that is no longer merely external. The discovery of the Guru marks an interior initiation in which fragmented seeking yields to unshakable peace. Knowledge here transcends discursive reasoning and matures into lived insight; silence replaces abstraction, and presence replaces effort. Integration is realized as inner unity, where intellect, intuition, and spirit are gathered into a single, grounded awareness.<sup>29</sup>

Several poems explicitly extend integration beyond contemplation into ethical and relational life. *My Prayer* presents interior transformation as inseparable from outward responsibility. Drawing implicitly on the discipline of *yama-niyama*, the prayer insists that contemplation must

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<sup>27</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Ekanthagita: Songs of Solitude* (Bangalore: Dharmaram School of Printing, 1992), Introduction.

<sup>28</sup> Vineeth, *Ekanthagita: Songs of Solitude* "A Journey into My Inner Depth," 13.

<sup>29</sup> Vineeth, *Ekanthagita: Songs of Solitude* "My Guru," 16.

flow into concrete attitudes toward all forms of life. To “bear witness in all situations of life” expresses Vineeth’s conviction that integration unites prayer, character, and action, shaping the whole person—thought, intention, and behavior—into a coherent way of living.<sup>30</sup>

Nature functions repeatedly as a symbolic locus of integration. In *The Lily in the Wilderness*, wholeness is expressed through humility, rootedness, and self-giving love rather than power or recognition. The lily’s unnoticed beauty and quiet resilience embody Vineeth’s vision of integration as the harmony of being and giving, where authenticity emerges from interior alignment rather than external validation.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the mountain poem presents integration as the unity of immanence and transcendence. Firmly rooted in the earth yet oriented heavenward, the mountain symbolizes a centered existence where stillness preserves depth without withdrawal from life. To dwell, even momentarily, in its “abode of stillness” is to enter the space of integration itself.<sup>32</sup>

The poems do not deny moments of disintegration. *Confession of Failure* names inner inattentiveness, fatigue, and misalignment as conditions in which the self falls “out of wavelength” with wisdom. Yet failure is never final. Integration is restored through divine initiative: grace reaches into fragmentation, rekindles light, and regathers the scattered self. In Vineeth’s vision, such moments of breakdown become thresholds through which deeper integration is born.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Vineeth, *Ekanthagīta: Songs of Solitude* “My Prayer,” 19.

<sup>31</sup> Vineeth, *Ekanthagīta: Songs of Solitude*, “The Lily in the Wilderness,” 27.

<sup>32</sup> Vineeth, *Ekanthagīta: Songs of Solitude*, “The Mountain,” 36.

<sup>33</sup> Vineeth, *Ekanthagīta: Songs of Solitude*, “Confession of Failure,” 45.

The Christological depth of this integrative vision emerges poignantly in *Who Bothered about You, Lord?* Here Jesus is encountered not in glory or recognition but in ordinariness—walking dusty roads, offering simple help, living quietly in Nazareth. Divine presence is fully integrated into the fabric of human life without spectacle. Holiness, the poem suggests, is complete without acknowledgment; it is fulfilled in faithful presence rather than public notice.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, *This Is the Gate of Heaven* discloses integration at the intersection of spirituality and social reality. Spaces marked by poverty and marginality are revealed as inwardly rich with peace and divine presence. The “gate of heaven” is not a place removed from the world but a transformed way of seeing, where inner awareness recognizes God dwelling within concrete human conditions. Integration here unites the spiritual and the social, revealing holiness as a lived attentiveness to God’s presence among the humble and the forgotten.<sup>35</sup>

Taken together, *Songs of Solitude* presents integration as a rhythm of life—between solitude and service, silence and speech, inward depth and outward responsibility. What *Foundations of World Vision* articulates philosophically, these poems enact contemplatively. They reveal integration not as an abstract ideal but as a lived process in which the human person becomes whole by gathering life around its innermost centre, where God is encountered not as distant but as intimately present.

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<sup>34</sup> Vineeth, *Ekanthagīta: Songs of Solitude*, “Who Bothered about You, Lord?,” 55.

<sup>35</sup> Vineeth, *Ekanthagīta: Songs of Solitude*, “This Is the Gate of Heaven,” 92.

## Integration as Interior Awakening: *Enne Orukku Nee*

If *Ekanthagīta: Songs of Solitude* presents integration as a contemplative gathering of life around its innermost centre, *Enne Orukku Nee* deepens this vision by framing integration as the outcome of a sustained interior inquiry into the self. The work is structured around the fundamental human question – “*Who am I?*” – which Fr. Vineeth treats not as an abstract philosophical puzzle but as an existential summons engaging the whole person. Integration begins when this question is allowed to interrupt ordinary life and draw the individual inward, beyond identities shaped by wealth, power, pleasure, or social recognition.

Vineeth describes this question as “the fundamental inquiry of a human being,” the basis of authentic self-understanding.<sup>36</sup> In the routines of everyday life, this inquiry is easily forgotten, but it re-emerges with urgency in moments of solitude, suffering, or crisis. Such moments become thresholds of integration, opening new horizons of awareness and reorienting life from within. The search for the self, Vineeth insists, is not merely intellectual; it is an existential journey that involves mind, heart, and concrete existence.

Drawing explicitly on Upanishadic wisdom, *Enne Orukku Nee* understands true self-knowledge as realization rather than abstraction. The Upanishadic insight that “the innermost reality of the human being is the same as the supreme reality of the universe” grounds Vineeth’s conviction that integration is not constructed but uncovered.<sup>37</sup> To realize this truth is liberation: a return to an original wholeness obscured by distraction and superficial

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<sup>36</sup> Francis Vineeth, *Enne Orukku Nee* (Bangalore: Vidyavanam Publications, 2007), 10.

<sup>37</sup> Vineeth, *Enne Orukku Nee*, 10

identification. Integration, in this sense, is an awakening to the ground of being already present within the self.

Crucially, this inward realization does not result in withdrawal from the world. Vineeth repeatedly emphasizes that authentic self-knowledge transforms one's relationship with life itself. When the self is discovered at its deepest level, relationships, responsibilities, and actions are reoriented and gathered into coherence. "Life then becomes integrated and meaningful," Vineeth notes, whereas without such inward awakening, "human life remains fragmented."<sup>38</sup> Integration thus signifies the harmonization of interior awareness and lived existence, where knowing oneself becomes the foundation for authentic living.

Read in continuity with *Songs of Solitude, Enne Orukku Nee* shows that integration is not confined to moments of contemplation but unfolds as a re-centering of life as a whole. The inward journey initiated by the question "Who am I?" leads not away from the world but back to it, now grounded in depth, freedom, and authenticity. Integration emerges as the movement from disintegration to coherence, where inner truth and outward life are brought into unity. In Fr. Vineeth's vision, a life rooted in this interior awakening is no longer scattered or divided, but gathered, meaningful, and whole.

**Integration as Disciplined Interior Practice:**  
*Meditation: Seven-Day Meditation Course (Sapta-dina-dhyāna-sādhanā)*

If *Enne Orukku Nee* presents integration as an existential awakening initiated by the question "Who am I?," *Meditation: Seven-Day Meditation Course (Sapta-dina-dhyāna-sādhanā)* translates this inward discovery into a concrete, disciplined spiritual practice. Conceived as a simple handbook for daily

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<sup>38</sup> Vineeth, *Enne Orukku Nee*, 11

use, the work is designed to help seekers practice meditation within ordinary life, guiding them methodically into their own interiority.<sup>39</sup> Integration here is no longer only a matter of insight but a sustained formative process that shapes consciousness, body, and life.

The structure of the handbook reflects this integrative intent. Each day offers two sets of meditations, with the first series (Series A), recommended for early morning practice, functioning as a gradual entry into interior depth. These meditations are not presented as isolated techniques but as stages of an inward journey, each accompanied by a brief introduction that situates the practice within a wider spiritual horizon. Vineeth draws primarily from the classical Indian yogic tradition, yet he deliberately highlights convergences with Christian mystical paths articulated by figures such as John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and Francis de Sales. Across traditions, similar movements recur: the cultivation of bodily stillness, the silencing of senses and mind—often described as the “dark nights”—and the transformative passage toward divine union, peace, and serenity reigning in the heart.<sup>40</sup>

From Fr. Vineeth’s perspective, meditation is fundamentally an act of interior unification rather than an external technique. It is not an intellectual exercise or ritual performance aimed at completion, but a state of deep rest and full awareness in which thinking recedes and the whole person becomes present to being. In this interior stillness, consciousness is awakened not by reasoning but by attentive

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<sup>39</sup> V. F. Vineeth, CMI, *Meditation: Seven Day Meditation Course (Saptadina-dhyāna-sādhanā)* (Bangalore: Vidya Vanam Publications, 2003), 5.

<sup>40</sup> Vineeth, *Meditation*, 5.

presence. The fragmented self gradually settles into unity as body, mind, and awareness are harmonized.<sup>41</sup>

When such awareness is oriented toward God, meditation becomes prayer in its deepest sense. The silencing of the mind is not negation but interior synthesis, where intellect, will, body, and spirit converge. Vineeth thus understands meditation as a transformative movement from dispersion to communion, from divided activity to unified being-in-God. Integration here names the convergence of human inwardness and divine presence at the innermost center of the person.<sup>42</sup>

Crucially, this interior integration does not terminate in private spirituality. Vineeth insists that what one meditates, one becomes. Meditation reshapes character, action, and relationships, allowing prayer to flow outward into a way of life marked by selflessness, attentiveness, and compassionate engagement with others. In this sense, meditation integrates contemplation and action, interior transformation and social humanization. It becomes a formative practice through which personal holiness and responsibility for the world are held together in a single movement of grace.

Read in continuity with *Enne Orukku Nee, Sapta-dina-dhyāna-sāadhanā* shows that integration is sustained not merely by insight but by daily discipline. The inward awakening to the self must be nurtured through concrete practice if it is to permeate life as a whole. Meditation thus emerges as a privileged path of integration—where prayer, life, and transformation are gathered into a lived unity rooted in the deepest center of the human person.

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<sup>41</sup> Vineeth, *Meditation*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Vineeth, *Meditation*, 9.

**Integration as Ecclesial Praxis:**  
*Justice and Reconciliation: The Sad but a Living Story of a Church in Fetters*

If *Meditation: Seven-Day Meditation Course (Sapta-dina-dhyāna-sādhana)* presents integration as disciplined interior unification, *Justice and Reconciliation: The Sad but a Living Story of a Church in Fetters* reveals how such interior integration must necessarily unfold within ecclesial and historical reality. In this work, Fr. Vineeth situates theology not in abstraction but in the concrete struggles of the Indian Church, presenting integration as the task of holding together truth, justice, reconciliation, and lived experience. Theology, for Vineeth, becomes credible and transformative only when it remains rooted in the real conditions of Church life.<sup>43</sup>

The text recalls the context and reception of Vineeth's paper, "*The Struggle for Justice in the Church and the Call for Reconciliation*," which provoked strong reactions within ecclesial circles. Rather than viewing these responses as signs of division alone, Fr. Vineeth interprets them as indications of a living Church grappling with truth. Integration, in this context, does not mean avoiding conflict or muting prophetic critique. On the contrary, Vineeth insists that authentic reconciliation can emerge only when injustice is clearly named and confronted.<sup>44</sup> Integration thus demands courage—the willingness to expose wounds in order to heal them.

This perspective reveals Vineeth's distinctive understanding of reconciliation. Reconciliation is not a superficial harmony achieved by suppressing dissent, but a

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<sup>43</sup> Vineeth, *Justice and Reconciliation: The Sad but a Living Story of a Church in Fetters* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1983), 8.

<sup>44</sup> Vineeth, *Justice and Reconciliation*, 8.

deeper unity born of truth-telling and ethical responsibility. Justice and reconciliation are therefore not opposing poles but complementary dimensions of a single integrative vision. When theology dares to unite denunciation of injustice with a genuine commitment to communion, it becomes a force for renewal rather than polarization. Integration here signifies the convergence of critical realism and hopeful fidelity to the Church.

The book further articulates an integrative vision for the Indian Church itself. Vineeth rejects uniformity as the basis of unity and instead proposes integration grounded in mutual acceptance, freedom, and love. The future of the Church in India, he argues, lies in embracing cultural, spiritual, and religious diversity not as a threat but as a source of richness. Integration, in this sense, means allowing diversity to flourish without domination, while remaining bound together by dignity, faith, and fraternity.<sup>45</sup>

This vision extends to ecclesial structures and traditions. The Indian Church, composed of distinct rites, cultures, and spiritual sensibilities, is called not to erase differences but to live them in harmonious coexistence. Each tradition contributes unique insights into faith and religious realization, revealing complementary dimensions of the same truth. Dialogue, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence become essential practices of integration, transforming plurality into a gift rather than a cause of division.

Ultimately, *Justice and Reconciliation* shows that integration is not only an interior or spiritual achievement but an ethical and ecclesial commitment. True integration preserves what is essential to Christian faith while remaining

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<sup>45</sup> Vineeth, *Justice and Reconciliation*, 9.

open to genuine cultural values. It calls for a Church that is both courageous and farsighted—rooted in the Gospel yet responsive to India’s pluralistic context. Unity, in this vision, arises not from enforced sameness but from a shared commitment to justice, truth, and love. Integration thus emerges as the condition for an authentic ecclesial communion capable of healing its wounds and bearing credible witness in the world.

**Integration as Interior Unification and Symbolic Return:**  
*Mathrubhāvangaḷiloode Makante Tīrtha Yāthra (A Son’s Pilgrimage toward Maternal Consciousness)*

If *Justice and Reconciliation* articulates integration as an ecclesial and ethical task—holding together truth-telling, justice, and communion—*Mathrubhāvangaḷiloode Makante Theertha Yāthra (A Son’s Pilgrimage toward Maternal Consciousness)* deepens this vision by returning to the interior ground from which all social and ecclesial unity must arise. In this work, Fr. Vineeth presents integration as the unification of the human person at the deepest level, without which neither knowledge nor devotion can yield authentic fulfilment. Fragmentation—between thought and life, faith and action, prayer and responsibility—emerges as the root of both personal unrest and social disintegration.<sup>46</sup>

The text insists that external achievements, intellectual pursuits, and even religious practices lose their meaning when they are not grounded in an integrated inner self. “Human life does not become meaningful merely by being filled with external achievements,” Vineeth writes; when knowledge and devotion remain fragmented, they fail to bring fulfilment. What is required instead is “an inner integration that holds together thought, experience, faith,

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<sup>46</sup> Francis Vineeth, *Mathrubhāvangaḷiloode Makante Tīrtha Yāthra* (Bangalore: Vidyanam Publications, 2011), 10.

action, and relationship.”<sup>47</sup> Integration here is not an added virtue but the condition that allows all dimensions of life to cohere.

This interior emphasis is inseparable from Vineeth’s social vision. A divided person, he argues, inevitably gives rise to divided families, communities, and institutions. When inner harmony is absent, social structures become spaces of tension rather than communion. True growth, therefore, does not lie in multiplying activities or structures, but in deepening interior unity. Only the integrated person is capable of responding creatively and responsibly to the demands of life.<sup>48</sup> In this way, *A Son’s Pilgrimage toward Maternal Consciousness* provides the anthropological foundation for the ecclesial concerns articulated in *Justice and Reconciliation*: social brokenness is understood as the outward expression of inner disunity, and renewal begins from within.

Central to this process of integration are prayer, silence, and reflection. Far from being escapes from the world, these are privileged spaces where the self encounters its deepest truth and is re-centered in God. Through such inward encounter, the person rediscovers right relationships— with oneself, with others, with creation, and with God. Authentic life, Vineeth emphasizes, flows from within rather than from external validation. Integration thus binds contemplation and action into a single rhythm of life, where interior depth becomes the source of outward responsibility.<sup>49</sup> The imagery of “maternal consciousness” gives this integration a distinctive symbolic depth. It evokes not regression but return— a pilgrimage back to the nurturing ground of being where life is received as gift. In Vineeth’s theological

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<sup>47</sup> Vineeth, *Mathrubhāvangaḷiloode Makante Tīrtha Yāthra*, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Vineeth, *Mathrubhāvangaḷiloode Makante Tīrtha Yāthra*, 11.

<sup>49</sup> Vineeth, *Mathrubhāvangaḷiloode Makante Tīrtha Yāthra*, 12.

imagination, this maternal dimension signifies wholeness, belonging, and trust, countering the anxiety and competitiveness produced by fragmented existence. Integration here is not self-assertion but surrender to the source of life, where identity is secured and fear dissolved.

The freedom that emerges from such integration is therefore not autonomy from others but liberation for relationship. Interior integration frees the person from fear, egoism, and compulsive self-assertion, enabling compassionate and courageous engagement with the world. A life shaped by such freedom becomes a silent but powerful witness – where truth is not merely professed but embodied, and love is not merely spoken but lived.<sup>50</sup> Read in continuity with *Justice and Reconciliation, A Son's Pilgrimage toward Maternal Consciousness* reveals the interior ground of Vineeth's integrative theology. What is demanded of the Church at the level of justice and reconciliation is first realized in the person through inner unification. Integration thus emerges as the maturation of faith into a unified way of being – where interior harmony gives rise to social communion, and the healing of the self becomes the beginning of the healing of the world.

### **Integration as Transformative Power: *Prayer and Power***

If *Mathrubhāvangaḷiloode Makante Tīrtha Yāthra* locates integration in the inward pilgrimage toward wholeness and freedom, *Prayer and Power* reveals how this interior unification is sustained, deepened, and released into life through prayer. In this work, Fr. Vineeth presents prayer not as a verbal exercise or ritual repetition, but as a transformative event that integrates the whole person at the deepest level of being. True prayer, he insists, happens in the

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<sup>50</sup> Vineeth, *Mathrubhāvangaḷiloode Makante Tīrtha Yāthra*, 13.

heart, where thought, emotion, body, and spirit converge in a decisive movement toward Transcendence.<sup>51</sup>

The power of prayer lies precisely in this integrative depth. Prayer is not an escape from reality but a radical interior journey that simultaneously leads the person downward into self-emptying and nothingness, and upward into divine fullness and joy. This paradoxical movement heals fragmentation by purifying wounds, burning away false layers of the self, and restoring clarity and discernment. Prayer thus becomes both a cleansing fire and a consoling presence—destroying what divides and strengthening what unifies.<sup>52</sup>

For Fr. Vineeth, prayer integrates the polarities that often fracture human existence: suffering and hope, darkness and light, weakness and strength. The passage through inner obscurity is not denial but a necessary phase of integration. As he writes, prayer “takes us into a blinding darkness, which later reveals itself as the prelude to the overflowing light.”<sup>53</sup> Darkness becomes a threshold rather than an end, preparing the soul for deeper illumination. In this sense, prayer integrates experience and transformation, allowing pain and struggle to be transfigured from within rather than bypassed.

Prayer also integrates time and eternity. Whether one passes “through the darkest clouds or the brightest sunshine,” prayer carries the person “to the other shore, where the day never ends, the light never fades.”<sup>54</sup> The scattered moments of life—joy and sorrow, success and

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<sup>51</sup> V. F. Vineeth, V. F. Vineeth, *Prayer and Power*, rev. 2nd ed. (Bangalore: Vidyavanam Publications, Vidyavanam Ashram, 2005), 6.

<sup>52</sup> Vineeth, *Prayer and Power*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Vineeth, *Prayer and Power*, 15.

<sup>54</sup> Vineeth, *Prayer and Power*, 18.

failure—are gathered into a single horizon of meaning and permanence. Integration here signifies the healing of temporal fragmentation, where life is no longer lived as disconnected episodes but as a unified journey oriented toward fullness.

Most profoundly, prayer integrates the human and the divine. The soul encounters God not merely as an external Other, but as the fulfilment of its deepest longing: “that Immortal Face for which she has longed all the days of her life, and which is now seen shining on her own face.”<sup>55</sup> Identity itself is healed in this encounter, as divine light is reflected within the human person. Integration, therefore, is not absorption or loss of self, but the restoration of true identity through communion.

Finally, prayer integrates person and place. Emerging from the silence of the ashram, prayer resonates with the whole of creation, where “birds and bushes, rocks and trees... whisper words of wisdom to each of us.”<sup>56</sup> Interior integration opens the person to a deeper harmony with the world, allowing creation itself to become a partner in contemplation. Prayer thus binds inner silence and the living cosmos into a single field of meaning.

Read in continuity with *A Son's Pilgrimage toward Maternal Consciousness, Prayer and Power* presents prayer as the dynamic heart of Fr. Vineeth's integrative vision. The inward awakening to unity matures through prayer into a quiet but potent power—not domination or control, but the liberating power of inner integration. Such prayer makes the person whole, free, and capable of compassionate action. Integration here reaches its mature expression: a life gathered around

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<sup>55</sup> Vineeth, *Prayer and Power*, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Vineeth, *Prayer and Power*, 44.

God, radiating strength, peace, and transformative love into the world.

### **Conclusion: Integration as a Way of Being**

Across his diverse writings—philosophical, theological, poetic, pastoral, and contemplative—Fr. Francis Vineeth consistently returns to a single, unifying conviction: integration is the deepest vocation of the human person. What appears in different registers as interior awakening, disciplined practice, contemplative solitude, ethical struggle, ecclesial renewal, and transformative prayer is, in fact, one coherent movement toward wholeness. Fragmentation—between thought and life, faith and action, prayer and responsibility, self and world—is identified as the fundamental disorder of human existence; integration is its healing. This study has shown that Fr. Vineeth’s vision of integration is never abstract or merely conceptual. It unfolds as a lived process in which knowing becomes becoming, and spirituality matures into responsibility. Whether through inward inquiry, meditative discipline, poetic contemplation, prophetic critique, or prayer as transformative power, integration is always grounded in interiority and always oriented toward communion. The integrated person, in Fr. Vineeth’s thought, is not withdrawn from the world but deeply present to it—rooted in God, free from fear, and capable of compassionate engagement.

In a cultural and ecclesial context marked by specialization, division, and restlessness, Fr. Vineeth’s vision of integration emerges as both a spiritual and ethical imperative. It invites persons and communities to gather the fragments of life around their innermost centre, where God is encountered not as distant but as indwelling. Integration, in this sense, is not simply a theme within Fr. Vineeth’s writings; it is the horizon that gives them unity and enduring

relevance—a summons to live a coherent, truthful, and reconciled way of being in the world.

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# Yoga as Psychology of Integration<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores Yoga as the psychology of integration, presenting it as both a philosophical system and a spiritual science rooted in the Indian tradition. Beginning with the theological tension expressed in Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's document *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, which cautions against adopting Eastern meditative practices such as Yoga, the study argues that Yoga, when properly understood, offers a comprehensive psychology of integration rather than a rival spirituality. The Sanskrit term *Yoga*, derived from *yuj* (to unite), denotes union or integration—first, of the psychosomatic and spiritual dimensions of the human person, and ultimately of the individual self with the Supreme Reality.

The paper situates Yoga within the Six Orthodox Systems (*ṣaḍ-darśanas*) of Indian philosophy, emphasizing that Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra* (ca. 200 BCE) provides not merely a metaphysical doctrine but also a systematic psychology and a practical guide to spiritual realization. Through its definition—*yogaḥ citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ* (“Yoga is the control of the modifications of the mind”)—Patañjali articulates a

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is the edited, updated and adapted version of the paper I presented at the National Seminar on ‘Yoga Psychology’ at the Vishwajyothi College, Perumbavoor on 21-23 June 2025.

profound psychological insight: liberation is achieved through mastery of mental processes (*vṛttis*), afflictions (*kleśas*), and levels of consciousness (*citta-bhūmis*).

Drawing upon the dualistic metaphysics of the *Sāṃkhya* system, Yoga views *citta* as a material yet dynamic faculty composed of *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, and *manas*. Its transformations can lead either to bondage or liberation, depending on discipline and detachment. Patañjali's eightfold path (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*) – comprising ethical restraint, self-discipline, bodily and breath control, sense-withdrawal, concentration, meditation, and absorption (*samādhi*) – is interpreted here as a graded psychological and spiritual therapy leading to integration and freedom (*kaivalya*).

Ultimately, Yoga is presented as a holistic psychology uniting body, mind, and spirit in pursuit of transcendental wholeness. It bridges philosophy and mysticism, reason and experience, offering an integral vision of human growth and liberation that continues to hold universal significance.

## 1. Introduction

Let me commence my presentation with a Peace Chant, a *Santi Mantra*, taken from *Yajur Veda*.

Om dyau santir antariksam santih prthivi santih  
Apah santih osadhayah santir vanaspatayah santih /  
Visve devah santih brhama santih sarvam santih  
Santir eva santih sa ma santir edhi // santih, santih,  
santih //

Peace unto heavens, peace to the mid-space, peace to the earth, peace to the waters, peace to the medical herbs, peace to the trees, peace to all the quarters of the earth, peace to Brahman, peace to all, peace verily peace! May that peace always increase peace in me. Peace, peace, peace.

## **2. A Personal Note**

Before I go into the details of Yoga Philosophy, spirituality and psychology, let me strike a personal note: I go back to the days of my philosophical course at Dharmaram: myself and my group of Philosophy students were the first students of Father Francis Vineeth Vadakethala at Dharmaram. It was in 1966-67. We were doing the third-year course of Philosophy. In those years, Philosophy at Dharmaram was a three-year course. As third year-students, we considered ourselves as veteran and adept Philosophy students, with certain amount of over confidence and self-assurance. Eminent scholars like Fathers John Brito Chethimattam, Theophane Kanjooarambil, Mansuetus Andumalil, and Werner Chackalackal were our esteemed professors. Father Vineeth landed at Dharmaram after his higher studies abroad as lecturer of Philosophy. He taught us metaphysics. It is with apprehension, nervousness, and some amount trepidation that this young professor faced us. All throughout his lectures he repeated the word 'Being' again and again. We the students did not understand what this 'Being' is. After fifteen years, after my higher studies abroad, I joined the teaching fraternity of Dharmaram, and Father Vadakethala was my senior colleague.

## **3. A Historical Note**

At the outset, I would also like to refer to a document published by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI (1927-2022), while he was the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (formerly known as the 'Holy Office'), titled "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation." In this document he cautions against the use of Eastern methods of prayer and meditation. 'The expression "eastern methods" is used to refer to methods which are inspired by Hinduism and Buddhism, such as "Zen," "Transcendental Meditation"

or "Yoga." Thus, it indicates methods of meditation of the non-Christian Far East which today are not infrequently adopted by some Christians also in their meditation.' Catholics are cautioned against the use of these methods of prayer and meditation. Indian theologians were not very happy about this caution against using Yoga methods in Christian spirituality and religious practices.

#### 4. Yoga

The key concept of this Seminar is 'Integration'. To my mind the corresponding Sanskrit and Indian concept to integration is 'Yoga'. The word 'Yoga' means union, integration, fusion, amalgamation, etc. It is derived from the verbal root 'yuj', which means to unite, to yoke together, to join, to integrate, etc. This integration happens in two levels: First - the integration of the psycho-somatic-spiritual powers and energies of the yogin in his/her pilgrimage to total concentration and absorption (*Samadhi*). Secondly - Yoga is the integration or union of soul/self with the Supreme Being. It is the goal of spiritual life. I should however, state here that Patanjali and his Yoga-sutra do not subscribe to this second meaning of Yoga, namely, it is integration with the ultimate Being.

So, Yoga means the spiritual efforts (*sadhana*) or the path (*marga*) to obtain this goal, namely, integration with Divine, that is, liberation from embodied existence. Thus, we speak of *Karma-yoga/marga*, *Jnana-yoga/marga*, *Bhakti-yoga*, etc. So, the word 'Yoga', can, according to context, signify both, namely, means and goal. As means, as spiritual path, there can be many Yogas, many paths. *Hatha-yoga*, *Laya-yoga*, *Mantra-yoga*, *Japa-yoga*, *Tantra-yoga*, and then the classical three yogas, namely, *Karma-yoga*, *Jnana-yoga*, *Bhakti-yoga*. Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) speaks of *Anasakti-yoga*, 'Yoga of Detachment'. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) advocated the Integral Yoga. Many modern Gurus propose their own

Yogas, like *Sahaja-yoga*, *Transcendental Yoga*, etc. All these systems of Yoga adopt much of Patanjali's Yoga-techniques, moral precepts and psycho-physical exercises. None of these Yogas is exclusive. There are common elements, like bodily discipline, breath-control, renunciation, self-control, detachment, etc., in all forms of Yoga.

*Bhagavad-gita* chapter II gives two definitions of Yoga: "Equanimity (of mind) is called Yoga", *samatvam yoga ucyate* (II.48). "Yoga is the dexterity in actions", *yogah karmasu kausalam* (II.50).

## 5. Yoga Psychology

My intention here is to deliberate on the Yogic-psychology expounded in the *Yoga-sutra* of Patanjali. Yoga is one of the Six Orthodox or Vedic Systems of Indian philosophy, the other five systems being, Samkhya propounded by sage Kapila, Nyaya by sage Gautama (Gotama), Vaisesika by sage Kanada, Mimamsa by sage Jaimini and Vedanta by sage Vyasa, who is also known as Parasara and Badarayana. So, Yoga is a philosophical system. At the same time, Yoga of Patanjali is also an eminent treatise on psychology, and also a text book of Indian spirituality.

I would like to make start with some preliminary remarks:

(i) Patañjali is the founder of Yoga system, which we call the Yoga proper, or Raja-yoga, the Royal Yoga. He might have lived around 200 BCE. Two other important works are attributed to Patanjali: The *Mahabhasya*, meaning, the 'Great Commentary'; *Mahabhasya* is an elaborate commentary on the *Astadhyayi*, the famous work on grammar in *sutras* by the great grammarian Panini (ca. 500 BCE); and another work on *Ayur-veda*, namely, *Patanjala-tantra*. Yoga deals with mind, *Mahabhasya* is a grammar book, and deals with language, and *Patanjala-tantra* is on medicine, and deals with the body. Therefore, Patanjali has purified the mind by his *Yoga-sutra*,

purified the language by his grammar, the *Mahabhasya*, and purified the body by his work on medicine. Patanjali is venerated with a verse:

yogena cittasya, padena vacam, malam sarirakasya ca  
vaidyakena /  
yo apakarot tam patanjalin pranjalim anato'smi //

"I salute Patanjali, who has removed the dirt/filth of mind by Yoga, the dirt of language by grammar, and the dirt of the body by medical treatise."

But the question whether the authors of these three works were the same person is still disputed among scholars.

(ii) *Yoga-sutra*, written by Patanjali, is the basic text of this Yoga-system. It has 195 *sutras*, divided into four chapters.<sup>2</sup> The first chapter is called *Samadhi-pada*, the chapter on contemplation or concentration. It deals with the nature and aim of concentration, the last stage of the eight-membered Yoga. The second chapter is called *Sadhana-pada*, the chapter on the means for realizing this concentration. It mainly deals with the eight members of Yoga. The third chapter is called *Vibhuti-pada*, the chapter on the supra-natural and supra-normal powers which can be obtained by the practice of Yoga. The fourth chapter is called *Kaivalya-pada*, the chapter on *Kaivalya* and deals with the nature of the state of liberation according to Yoga.

(iii) Psychology, especially in the West, is the scientific study of mind; it analyses and studies the conscious and unconscious behaviours of the mind. The three main

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<sup>2</sup>The word 'sutra' primarily means a thread, string or cord. But here it means an aphorism, a pithy saying, very laconic in nature. This is a method to say as much as possible in as few words as possible.

*svalpaksaram asamdigdham saravad visvatomukham /  
astobham anavadyam ca sutram sutravido viduh //*

functions of the mind are thoughts, feelings and desires. Psychology critically explains these functions philosophical language and terminology. It is an applied philosophy. It is also a social science, which analyses the social behaviours of individuals and groups. Psychologists explore behaviors of humans in societal life, as well as, as mentioned above, the thoughts, feelings and desires, which can be extended to activities like sense perception, emotions, concentration, motivations, relationships, etc.

(iv) The Indian thought and ancient works in Sanskrit in general do not have clear-cut divisions of philosophy, theology, religion, ethics, spirituality, etc. This is true also in the case of the so-called Six Systems of Philosophy. In fact, all the Six Systems are a mixture of logic, metaphysics, religion, spirituality, psychology, ethics, aesthetics, etc. Though they are called systems of philosophy, they sometimes even draw inspiration from myths and legends of old and even cite them to prove their particular standpoints.

(v) The all-pervading nature of spirituality. Philosophizing is also a spiritual act in so far as it is an intense quest to know the essence of human person, and thereby understand the mystery of life and self. It is quest also to grasp the permanent, steady and central principle beyond the finite, changing and unsteady body and bodily structures. Usefulness of philosophy is not only correction of distorted vision of life and reality, conceptual clarity, power of discrimination and ability to form correct judgments, but also ethical excellence and spiritual perfection. Intellectual clarity and conviction are to be converted into direct vision of the Reality (*darsana*). A philosopher in this respect, is not only a lover of wisdom, but also a lover of spiritual vision of reality. In fact, these Six Systems of philosophy are outcomes of such direct, experiential vision and insight of sages and

saints of the past. They thus try to present a holistic approach to life and human existence.

(vi) Indian philosophical systems are not to be viewed as the philosophical schools of the West, which have no concern for the ultimate aim of human life, and these Six Systems are not to be considered as pure philosophical systems, in the sense it is understood in the West. Their ultimate aim is to show the seeker the way to liberation. They also, thus, deal with the eschatological dimensions of human existence. Even a system like Nyaya, which deals with logic and epistemology, ultimately asks the question: would this knowledge lead the knower to the other shore, to the final liberation? Direct, transcendental vision or insight is the content as well as the goal of these systems. Only a direct vision can provide the whole truth

(vii) This presentation is based on this foundational text of Yoga philosophy, namely the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali. Being the analysis of a Sanskrit text, this paper contains perhaps an overdose of Sanskrit words and concepts. Please excuse me. The paper is rather technical and is studded with divisions and subdivisions, which, again, may not be very pleasant to the reader.

Patanjali defines Yoga in the second *sutra* of his *Yoga-sutra*: *yogah citta-vrtti-nirodhah*, 'Yoga is the control of the activities of mind' (*Yoga-sutra* I.2). An analysis of this *sutra* will also delineate the essential elements of Yoga psychology.

### 5.1. *Citta*

The key-word in the *sutra* is *citta*. *Citta* is usually translated as 'mind'. Actually, the proper word for mind is *manas*. Patanjali uses the word 'citta' for mind, and *citta* is a complex faculty. To understand that, we need to know the background of Yoga philosophy. Yoga is traditionally mentioned together with Samkhya system of sage Kapila (ca.

600 BCE). Samkhya philosophy, propounded by Sage Kapila, is the oldest philosophical system of the Six Systems. Yoga has borrowed the Samkhya metaphysics and epistemology for its rational framework and philosophical foundation. Samkhya is avowedly a dualistic philosophy and adamantly atheistic. Dualism in philosophy signifies the acceptance of two supreme, ultimate, uncreated and independent realities. In Samkhya, these two principles, or realities, are Purusa and Prakrti. Purusa is pure consciousness without attributes; it is inactive, that is, it does not know, does not act, and does not enjoy or suffer; it is male; subjective, spiritual and pluralistic. Prakrti is one; always active; possesses three gunas, namely, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*; female; and is the material cause of all the realities of the world; it is the mother and matrix of all material objects of the world. Prakrti manifests itself, or evolves itself, into twenty-three evolutes, twenty-three manifestations, or principles, which encompass all the material objects of the world.

The main differences between the Samakhya and Yoga are: (i) Samkhya is atheistic, but Yoga is theistic; it believes in God. It should, however, be remembered here that the God of Yoga is not a God in the sense we understand the God-concept. God of Yoga is not the creator; he is neither the saviour; he is super self, not subjected to the law of *karma*; and is attributed with qualities like omniscient, omnipotent, etc.; he is only a help for meditation and only guides the process of evolution of Prakrti. (ii) Samkhya believes that the path for liberation is the metaphysical knowledge about the truth of the real nature of Purusa, but Yoga gives importance also to ascetic, spiritual and moral practices and meditation. Yoga stresses the need of external and internal disciplines and controls for arriving at the state of contemplation, and thereby liberation. Samkhya and Yoga may be considered as the theoretical and practical sides of one system.

The twenty-three evolutes, or manifestations of Prakrti are: *Mahat* (*buddhi*: cosmic intelligence); *ahamkara* (ego-substance; individualized intelligence); *manas* (mind); five sense organs (eye, nose, tongue, skin, ear); five organs activity (hands, feet, speech, anus, genitals); five subtle elements and five gross elements (elements are: earth, water, fire, air and space).

Now *citta*, which is often translated as mind, for Yoga is actually the combination of first three evolutes/manifestations of Prakrti, namely, *mahat* (the cosmic intelligence), *ahamkara* (I-substance, individualized intelligence) and *manas*, mind.

It is interesting to note that *citta*, mind, is a product of matter, the primeval matter, the Prakrti; it is material. The system of Vaisesika philosophy says the same thing. Vaisesika is philosophy of nature. It divides the entire nature and world into seven basic categories, namely, substance (*dravya*), quality (*guna*), activity (*karma*), generality (*smanaya*) particularity (*visesa*), relationships (*samavaya*) and non-being, or non-existence (*abhava*). The substance (*dravya*) is divided into nine: They are: the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space), time (*kala*), directions of the world (*dik*), self (*atman*) and mind (*manas*). Vaisesika categorizes the eternal self of humans (*atman*) and mind (*manas*) as substances. But they are not substances like the five elements; five elements are material substances (*jada-dravya*), while self and mind are spiritual substances (*ajada-dravya*).

### 5.1.1. The Activities of the Citta (*citta-vrtti*) (YS I. 6)

*Yogah citta-vrtti-nirodhah*, 'Yoga is the control of the activities of the mind'. What are the activities of the mind? We have learned in our Psychology class that the mind has three basic functions: thinking, feeling, and wanting; thoughts, feelings and desires are the tasks of mind. Patanjali

explains two sets of actions of the mind. Basically, *citta* has three activities: it knows things, it does things, and it enjoys, or suffers: it is *jnata* (knower), *karta* (doer) and *bhokta* (enjoyer). These basic actions are elaborated in the two sets of actions, as explained below:

I. The first set of five actions gives importance to the ratiocinative role of the mind; the mind that reasons, thinks and knows. There are five actions of the *citta* in this category. They are:

(i) Right knowledge (*pramāna*): Like in Samkhya, Yoga too recognizes three ways, or means, for right knowledge. [a] Sense Perception (*pratyakṣa*): the *citta* comes into contact with external objects through the sense organs and assumes their forms, and gathers information, and *citta*, which also includes intelligence, makes the judgement: 'This is a book'. [b] Inference (*anumāna*): the *citta* knows the generic nature of things through reasoning. Senses do not play any role here; the object of knowledge is not observed by the senses. Intellect makes the reasoning and comes to the knowledge-statement. [c] Verbal testimony (*śabda*): knowledge is acquired through written or spoken word; knowledge from the scriptures and from the words of trustworthy persons (*apta-vakya*) (YS I. 7).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Different systems of Indian philosophy have proposed various means for right knowledge. (i) The *Carvakas* (Indian materialists) accept only one means for right knowledge, namely, Sense Perception (*pratyakṣa*). (ii) The *Vaisesika* philosophy and *Yogacara* School of *Vijnana-vada* Buddhism recognize Perception and Inference (*anumana*) as means for valid knowledge. (iii) The *Samkhya* system and *Visistadvaita Vedanta* of *Ramanuja* have three: Perception, Inference and Verbal Testimony (*śabda*). (iv) The *Nyaya* School adds one more to the three mentioned above, namely, Comparison or Analogy (*upamana*). (v) The *Mimamsa* of *Prabhakara* accepts five means for right knowledge: four are mentioned above, the fifth one is

(ii) Wrong knowledge (*viparyaya*): Knowledge due to illusion or other defects, like mistaking a piece of rope for a snake. (YS I. 8)

(iii) Imagination (*vikalpa*): Knowledge of things which exist only in imagination or in words, like the existence of the horns of a horse (YS I. 9).

(iv) Sleep (*nidra*), absence of knowledge: This is a state of mind in which the senses and mind are inactive. Although there is no knowledge in sleep, after the sleep a person says, 'I slept well and knew nothing'. This awareness is passive knowledge, and is a modification of *citta* (YS I. 10).

(v) Memory (*smṛti*): *Citta* recalls the past experiences (YS I. 11).

These five states have two inherent tendencies. Through passions and desire for pleasures they can lead us further to repeated worldly existences (*samsāra*). It is the afflicted way (*klista*); it is the negative result of the karmic law. But they can also through self-negation and discipline lead us to liberation. It is the unafflicted way (*aklista*) (YS I.5). Thus these five states of mind can lead us to further bondage, or to liberation. Therefore, ultimate liberation is also an innate and inherent tendency of *citta/prakṛti*. It is not simply a forced desire for happiness in human beings. It is an inbuilt and innate tendency in humans. A similar explanation of one's life on earth is described in *Katha Up*. It speaks of two paths: the path of worldly passions which leads to enjoyment of pleasures (*preyas*) and consequently further rebirths, and the

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Presumption (*arthapatti*). (vi) Finally, the Mimamsa of Kumarila and Advaita Vedanta School of Sankara accept six means for right knowledge. They are: Perception, Inference, Verbal Testimony, Comparison, Presumption and Non-perception of the Perceptible (*anupalabdhi*).

path of renunciation and knowledge which leads to liberation (*śreyas*).

These five actions of *citta* can be controlled by practice and non-attachment (YS 12). Here practice means, "Practice is the repeated effort to follow the disciplines which give permanent control of the modalities and activities of mind" (YS I. 13).

II. The second set of four actions are inspired by moral principles, or lack of them.

(i) White actions (*śukla-karma*): Virtuous actions, which lead to merits (*punya*) and transient happiness (not the happiness of liberation).

(ii) Black actions (*kṛsna-karma*): Wicked action, which lead to demerits (*papa*) and sorrow.

(iii) White-Black actions (*śukla-kṛsna-karma*): They lead to mixed results, to merits and demerits.

(iv) Actions which are neither white nor black (*aśukla-akṛsna-karma*): They lead to final liberation. They consist in desireless actions, meditative exercises, self-negation, self-discipline, concentration, yogic practices, etc. A seeker of liberation has to foster these actions. "The karmas of yogi is neither white nor black. The karmas of others are of three kinds: white, black or mixed" (YS IV.7).

### 5.1.2. Five *Klesas* (Afflictions)

These modifications and actions of the *citta*, if not controlled, cause further problems, namely, bondage of the Purusa, and the consequent births, deaths and rebirths, etc. Purusa, who is inactive, due to ignorance, imagines that it experiences joys and sorrows.

Yoga speaks of five kinds of afflictions or sufferings or sorrows (*klesas*) for the migrating self in body. It should be

stressed here that the Purusa is always inactive, it does not know, it does not act, it does not enjoy or suffer. But through ignorance it imagines that it is a knower, doer and enjoyer, and it is subjected to afflictions and pains. The five afflictions, or sorrows, are:

(i) Ignorance (*avidyā*): As mentioned before, it is the false identification of intellect with the Purusa. Through ignorance, consciousness is ascribed to *buddhi* (intellect), and it falsely believes that this identification is permanent and will lead to happiness.

(ii) Egoism (*asmitā*): It is the false sense of 'I' and 'mine'. It is the 'I-ness'. It is false belief that worldly objects and experiences are real and that they belong to the self.

(iii) Attachment (*rāga*): Attachment to these pleasures and experiences.

(iv) Aversion/hatred (*dvesa*): It is the antipathy to unpleasant experiences and things.

(v) Clinging to life and fear of death (*abhinivesa*): It is the intense desire to live on in body.

These infirmities torment man in his bodily existence. These afflictions cause the *citta* to do further actions, which in turn again cause ignorance, rebirth, etc. It is to be noted here that in transmigration the self/soul is accompanied by the *buddhi* which is loaded with all these *klesas* and results of *karmas*. These results accumulate in the *buddhi*, and when the ripe and right time for their fructification comes, the self gets a new body in the process of evolution of the primordial matter.

### 5.1.3. Five Stages/Levels of the *Citta* (*Citta-bhumī*)

We spoke about the modification of the *citta* and the results of these modifications. *Citta* acts in five levels or five

modes of existence, which are known as *citta-bhumi*. These levels are due to the predominance of one of the three *gunas*. The *gunas* of Prakṛti, and thereby also of *citta*, are: (i) *Sattva*: it is the principle light, knowledge, enlightenment, virtue, nobility, etc. (ii) *Rajas*: it is the principle of activity, effort and movement. (iii) *Tamas*: it is the principle of darkness, ignorance, wickedness, passivity and lethargy. Based on these factors, Patanjali speaks of five levels, or modes, of *citta*.

(i) Restless or tumultuous or wild (*ksipta*) level: This is the lowest level. *Citta* has the predominance of *rajas*. It is thrown to different sense-objects through passions. Restlessness, worries, negative attitudes, etc., are the characteristics.

(ii) Lethargic and ignorant level (*mudha/pramudha*), where the *tamas* has the predominance, and it creates ignorance, sleep and inaction. Sloth, indolence and apathy are the side-effects.

(iii) The level of distraction and unsteadiness (*viksipta*): Here *sattva* predominates, but *rajas* is also active. *Citta* slowly starts to concentrate for short periods due to momentary steadiness; but is also active and restless. *Citta* can concentrate and positively influence the Puruṣa at lucid intervals.

(iv) The level of concentration and one-pointedness (*ekāgrata*): *Sattva* predominates and *citta* can concentrate totally on the object of meditation for a long time.

(v) The highest level is that of total arrest/cessation of modifications (*niruddha/nirodha*): Mental modifications and actions are restricted and suppressed; they do not surface any more. It is a stage of supreme concentration. But the latent impressions may remain till the goal of Yoga is attained. The fourth and fifth levels are suited for a yogic life.

## 5.2. The Means to Control Actions of *Citta*

### 5.2.1. The Eight-membered Yoga (*Astanga-Yoga*)

The goal of Yoga is *samādhi*, the eighth member of the eight-membered Yoga. It is the state of total cessation of the modalities, modifications and activities of the *citta*. This state leads to *kaivalya*, the Samkhya-Yoga concept of liberation. *Samādhi*, which is the last (eighth) stage of Yoga, is obtained through the seven stages of disciplines. These seven stages or members of Yoga consist in a progressive control over and discipline of the social life, personal life, control of body, control of senses and finally control of the mind by the yogin. Actually, deliberation on these eight members of Yoga is the central theme of Patanjali's sutras.

(i) *Yama*: It means abstention; and its content is self-control and a spirituality-oriented self-discipline in the social life of the person. It is proper and positive regulation of social behaviour of the practitioner. There are five kinds of abstention and controls: [i] Abstention from violence and injury (*ahimsā*). Positively it means showing love and mercy to all living-beings; universal love. [ii] Abstention from falsehood and untruth (*satya*). Positively it means to be truthful in thought, words and deeds. [iii] Abstention from stealing and larceny (*asteya*); not to steal. It also means not to hoard material things which are not essential for life. [iv] Abstention from lust and bodily passions (*brahmacarya*). It demands a life of celibacy and sexual restraint. [v] Abstention from avarice and greed (*aparigraha*). This is detachment from and renunciation of possessions and bodily comforts. This demands to accept and use material objects which are absolutely necessary for life. The observance of the *Yamas* is the remote preparation for Yoga. It demands a disciplined and righteous life in the society.

These five principles are ancient values mentioned also in Dharma-sastras as *maha-vratas*, the great vows. The Hindu sannyasins observe these great vows. Buddhist monks too follow them with a slight modification; instead of *aparigraha*, renunciation, Buddhists practice 'abstention from alcohol' as the last vow. The Jain monks observe these as the great vows (*mahavratas*) and Jain laity keeps them as simple vows (*anuvratas*). These were also the first five of the eleven vows of Gandhian Asram.

(ii) *Niyama*: It means self-control; control in personal life. It includes personal discipline, self-culture and purifications. The *niyamas* too are five in number. [i] Internal and external purification (*śauca*). External cleanliness through proper ablutions and internal purity through spiritual practices. [ii] Contentment (*santosa*). To be happy with what you are and what you have. [iii] Practising austerity and asceticism (*tapas*). The habit of undergoing willingly privations in life and practising austerities like keeping silence, fasting, etc. [iv] Study of the sacred scriptures (*svādhyāya*). Sacred books contain guidelines for an ethically and morally correct life; and [v] Devotion to and worship of God (*Īśvara-pranidhāna*). Worship of God cleans the *citta*. By the *niyamas* the day-to-day personal life of the seeker has to be sanctified.

Yoga philosophy adds to these personal practices five other moral values and attitudes<sup>4</sup>. They are: [i] To think the opposite of evil (*pratipaksa-bhāva*): When evil and selfish thoughts occur, the seeker should think and practice the opposite virtues. [ii] Friendliness (*maitri*): One should think always that all others are his friends. [iii] Kindness (*karuna*): Showing kindness and mercy to those who suffer and are less fortunate. [iv] Feeling happiness for others (*mudita*): To be

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Dasgupta, A *History of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Banarsidass, 1978, Vol. I, p.270.

happy at the success and progress of others. [v] Equanimity at the defects of others (*upeksa*): To be indifferent and unconcerned over the evil character of others. As is evident, all these moral disciplines are meant to foster good and pleasant relations with others.

(iii) *Āsana*: It means steady and comfortable posture; practice of Yoga-asanas. The *Yoga-sūtra* of Patañjali alludes to postures. Later systems of Yoga, like Hatha Yoga, have developed numerous postures, some of them extremely difficult. *Asanas* control the functions of body and are physical helps for meditation. Yoga-asanas prepare the body for meditation; they are also helpful for bodily health.

(iv) *Pranāyāma*: It is the control of breath; breathing exercise. It is very important for the concentration of the mind, and is helpful for bodily and mental health. It deals with the control of breath in inhalation, retention and exhalation. It has developed into a complicated science. But it has to be performed under the guidance of able teachers, to avoid undesirable effects.

(v) *Pratyāhāra*: Withdrawal and control of the sense organs. Senses, which have always the tendency to go out to the material objects, should be checked and withdrawn, and should be directed to the inner self. The activities of the five senses, namely, eye, nose, ear, tongue and touch, should be controlled and disciplined. It is a process of internalization and introversion.

We can easily perceive a gradual progression from exteriority to interiority in these different controls. From the control of social life, the seeker travels through control of personal life, control of body, control breath and control of senses. These five members of Yoga are called external aid to Yoga and meditation (*bahir-anga*).

(vi) *Dhāraṇa*: It means the steady and constant fixing of the mind on the object of meditation. It is retention of the mind from false objects, and directing it to yogic objectives. We are now dealing with internal psychic forces, which are to be concentrated on the object of meditation. The objects are like the tip of the nose, the mid-space between the eyebrows and the lotus of the heart, etc. They can also be external objects, like the image of the deity, a religious symbol, etc. “Dharana is holding the mind steadily on a particular object” (YS III.1).

(vii) *Dhyāna*: Meditation. It is the continuous, unbroken and undisturbed contemplation. In a way it is the prolongation of *dharana*. It is the immediate step for the *samādhi*, the last stage of Yoga practices.

(viii) *Samādhi*: Total absorption and concentration. The mind is totally absorbed in the object of meditation. In a way this is the goal of Yoga practices, because once in *samādhi*, the liberation from embodied existence is sure. There is no subject-object distinction here. The mediator and the object of meditation are identified. The relation with the external world is broken in this ecstatic state. The modifications of the mind cease to show up here. The yogi has to pass through this stage for the final liberation, namely, *kaivalya*.

The last three members of Yoga, namely, *dhāraṇa*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*, are called internal aids to Yoga (*antaranga sadhana*).

These are eight members or stages of Yoga. *Samādhi*, and through it the liberation, is the goal. As is evident, there is gradual progress in these spiritual practices. Each succeeding stage is higher and better. In *Samādhi*, the *buddhi* attains its pure form and ultimate perfection. It realizes that it has nothing to do with the self, and self is left alone.

### 5.2.2. *Samādhi*: Yoga Meditation

*Samādhi*, the last stage of the yogic journey, is, as said above, a kind ecstatic absorption. It is the supreme form meditation and concentration. Patañjali-Yoga is a Yoga of meditation. *Samādhi* is of two kinds:

(i) Conscious *Samādhi* (*samprajñata samādhi*) (YS I.17): The seventh member of Yoga, as we have already seen, is meditation (*dhyana*). After sufficient practice in it the mind attains the power to make itself totally steady. The meditator and the object of meditation are fused together, yet the consciousness of the object persists. It is the fourth level of mental life (*citta-bhumi*), namely, *ekagrata*, one-pointedness (see above).

This type of *samādhi* has four progressive states: [i] *Savitarka*: This is the concentration of the *citta* on a gross object like the tip of nose, the mid-space between eyebrows, or the image of the deity. There is a discursive dimension for this type of concentration. Mind concentrates on objects and can remember their names and specific qualities (YS I.42). [ii] *Savicāra*: Here the concentration of the mind is on a subtler object like the subtle elements (*tanmatras*). This concentration is accompanied by thought of the object with its qualities (YS I.44). [iii] *Sānanda*: the concentration of the *citta* is on still subtler objects, for example on *buddhi* and its functions and pleasures. It is accompanied by experience of joy. [iv] *Sāsmīta*: *citta* concentrates on the ego-substance itself without modifications, which is the self itself. It is the state of conscious ecstasy. However, the consciousness of the object and of individuality does not disappear. It should be remembered that it is the *citta* that does the concentration. Concentration in these stages is gradual; in each succeeding stage the concentration becomes greater and stronger, and the yogi's wisdom increases in each stage.

(ii) Supra-conscious *Samādhi* (*asamprañāta samādhi*) (YS I.18): This is the highest form of concentration or absorption. It is also known as *nirodha-samādhi*. In the supra-conscious concentration, the meditator and the object of meditation are totally fused together, there is no more any consciousness of the object. The modifications of the *citta* are effectively checked and wiped out. The impressions of former modifications are gradually destroyed. This state is the highest level of mental life (*citta-bhumi*), namely, *niruddha*, where the modifications are restricted (see above). It is the highest form of Yoga. But a yogi who attains it, cannot remain in it longer; his material body will break down and he will pass over to the state of liberation (*kaivalya*).

### 5.3. Other Disciplines

(i). Basic Attitudes: Yoga demands also some other basic attitudes and moral disciplines to arrive at this supreme stage of concentration. (i) The attitude of self-negation and renunciation (*vairāgya*); (ii) The discipline of constant practice (*abhyāsa*) of virtues mentioned in the eight members of Yoga; (iii) Strong faith and confidence (*śraddha*); (iv) A strong resolve and steadfastness in executing these disciplines (*virya*); and (v) The consequent wisdom (*prajna*) which increases in each succeeding stage (YS I.20).

The concept of wisdom (*prajna*) needs more explanation. This wisdom is different from the knowledge obtained by the means of knowledge like perception, inference, etc. *Prajna* has no limitations; it penetrates into the core of objects. As this wisdom increases, the ordinary knowledge decreases. Ultimately, a yogi who has reached the supreme state of concentration remains always in this wisdom.

The final *prajnas* which lead to liberation are of seven kinds, namely, (1) I have known the world, the object of suffering and misery, I have nothing more to know of it. (2) The

grounds and roots of *samsara* have been thoroughly uprooted, nothing more of it remains to be uprooted. (3) Removal has become a fact of direct cognition by inhibitive trance. (4) The means of knowledge in the shape of a discrimination of *Purusa* from *Prakrti* has been understood. The other three are not psychological but are rather metaphysical processes associated with the situation. They are as follows: (5) The double purpose of *buddhi*, experience and emancipation (*bhoga* and *apavarga*), has been realized. (6) The strong gravitating tendency of the disintegrated *gunas* drives them into *Prakrti* like heavy stones dropped from high hill tops. (7) The *buddhi* disintegrated into its constituents the *gunas* become merged in the *Prakrti* and remain there for ever. The *Purusa* having passed beyond the bondage of the *gunas* shines forth in its pure intelligence<sup>5</sup>.

(ii) Other Means: Patañjali proposes again other means and attitudes to obtain perfect calmness of mind and concentrations. YS I.33 says, "Perfect calmness of mind is attained by cultivating loving friendship with all, compassion, avoidance of excessive joy, practice of indifference, equanimity in happiness and sorrow, merits and demerits". "The mind may also be calmed by control of breath in expulsion and retention of breath" (YS I.34). "Concentration can also be attained by fixing the mind upon the inner light, which is not touched by sorrow" (YS I.36). In the following *sūtras*, Patañjali goes on to say that concentration of mind can be attained also by fixing the mind on any divine form, or symbol that is dear to the practitioner.

## 6. supra-normal Powers (*Siddhis*)

*Yoga-sūtra* chapter three speaks about certain supra-normal or supra-human powers that can be obtained by the practice of Yoga. Mind is a formidable force and contains

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<sup>5</sup>Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p.273.

enormous possibilities. By controlling it and focussing its powers on desired effects, a yogi can do wonders. As the Yogi progresses in *samādhi* he attains these miraculous powers. These extraordinary powers can be accompanied by many temptations. But a true seeker for perfection would avoid these *siddhis*, and fix his mind without any relaxation and distraction on the final liberation; ‘they are obstacles to *Samādhi*’ (YS III.38). Many supra-normal powers are explained in YS chapter III, like yogi can enter into the body another; he can walk on water; he can live in the midst of fire; he can fly in the air; he obtains mastery over elements; he can become as tiny as an atom; etc. (YS III.37 ff.). But a true yogi will give up these powers for the sake of liberation. “By giving up these powers, the seed of evil is destroyed and liberation follows” (YS. III.51).

Yoga may not have a lofty concept of God. But its time-tested concepts on spirituality psycho-physical exercises intended to elevate a genuine seeker above the empirical limitations into a state of absolute tranquillity and spiritual illumination cannot be negated.

## **7. The God of Yoga**

As mentioned earlier, unlike Samkhya, Yoga is theistic; it accepts the existence of God. Patañjali defines God as a special kind of super-*Purusa*, who is free from pain, actions, changes and impressions (YS I.24). He is eternally free and is above the karmic law. He has the attributes like omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. *Yoga-sutra* says that he is the teacher of the sages of old and imparts the knowledge of the Veda. The sacred syllable ‘Om’ is his symbol.

There are some proofs for his existence: (i) The scriptures tell us that he exists. (ii) The continuity in the world points to a higher knowledge and perfection, which should be God. (iii) God removes the obstacles for the liberation of the

*Purusa*. (iv) Devotion to him is a means to obtain the state of concentration and thereby liberation.

But Patañjali's interest in God seems to be simply practical, namely, just a help for concentration. This God does not have the cosmic functions, as other systems attribute to God, namely, he is not creator, preserver or destroyer or giver of liberation. He cannot punish or reward selves. He is not directly involved in the bondage or liberation of individual selves. And finally, liberation of the individual self does not mean union with God. All that Patañjali's God can do is to guide the evolutionary process of the *Prakṛti*, remove the obstacles on the way to concentration and help the seeker to reach the level of concentration.

## 8. State of Liberation

Yoga, like Advaita Vedanta and Samkhya, admits the possibility of liberation in body (*jīvan-mukta*). Even after the dawn of right knowledge, the self may continue in body for some time, due to the force of past *karma*, and for the benefit of others. The self still may have to suffer or enjoy the fruits of the *karmas* already ripened. Then it rejects the body too.

Strictly speaking, liberation, like the bondage, is phenomenal. The *Purusa* is ever-free, eternal and absolute. It is not bound, and is not subjected to transmigration or liberation. It is the ego, and consequently the *Prakṛti*, which is bound and liberated.

What is the nature of the state of liberation of the self? It is complete isolation and alone-ness (*kaivalya*). The self in isolation is not a knower, enjoyer or doer. It exists like a stone! It has already been mentioned above that the state of liberation in Yoga is not union with God, or enjoying God's presence. Yoga totally accepts the Samkhyan concept of liberation. Liberation means the dissociation of the *Purusa*

and *Prakrti*, and thereby the regaining the pure, pristine and original state of *Purusa*.

### **9. Yoga Literature in Sanskrit**

Vyasa has written a commentary, *Vyasa-bhasya*, on the *Yoga-sutra* around 400 CE. It is perhaps the most important classical work on Yoga. There are a number of commentaries on *Vyasa-bhasya*: Vacaspati (ninth century CE) wrote *Tattva-vaisaradi*, Bhoja (tenth century) wrote *Bhoja-ortti*, Vijnanabhiksu (sixteenth century) wrote *Yoga-varttika* and Nagesa (seventeenth century) wrote *Chaya-vyakhya* on *Vyasa-bhasya*.

### **10. Yoga in the Modern World**

Yoga is perhaps a unique contribution of India to the entire world. Yoga centres and Yoga institutes are now spread all over the world. People in the Western world see Yoga as an antidote to the stress and hectic of modern life. Practitioners of Yoga testify that it pacifies the mind and invigorates the spirit. But many of these centres teach only part of Yoga system. They impart knowledge about the *asanas* and the *pranayama*. Yoga is taught in these centres to tone up bodily health, to get rid of the tensions and pressures of modern life and to bring about calmness of mind. The ultimate aim of Yoga, actually, is eternal liberation from the sorrowful existence in this world, which is marked with ignorance, sorrow and repeated births, deaths, and rebirths.

I should also mention here the International Day of Yoga. 21 June is celebrated as Yoga Day all over the world since 2015. 21 June is the longest day in the year and the United Nations General Assembly unanimously declared this day as the Yoga Day. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was instrumental for this new venture.

## 11. Observations

11.1. Concept of God: Yoga's God-concept is quite unsatisfactory. This God is no creator, no preserver and no giver of salvation. He only helps the yogi by way removing obstacles on his way to concentration. God for Yoga is only a super-*Purusa*, who is above the law of *karma*. His attributes like omnipotence, omniscience, etc. cannot be understood in the literal sense. After all, this God has no power to create, to give liberation to selves, etc.

11.2. Lack of the idea of grace: God's grace is not necessary for the individual selves for the ultimate liberation. By discipline, self-negation and constant practice of virtues and meditation, one has to conquer the liberation.

11.3. Ultimately, Yoga philosophy is Samkhyan. To Samkhyan metaphysics, it adds the concept of God and psychosomatic practices and disciplines for self-purification and liberation. Therefore, many of the criticisms levelled against Samkhya are also valid in the case of Yoga.

11.4. But Yoga offers an excellent system of bodily exercises and spiritual practices. These internal and external practices are very systematically and scientifically organized. Even modern psychology has much to learn from the Yoga.

11.5. Yoga definitely offers immense helps for the physical and mental health of man.

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# A Man of Authenticity Confrere-Musings on Father Vineeth

*Fr. Kurian Kachappilly Joseph CMI*

## Abstract

“Integration, authenticity, *samanvaya*, *yoga*, *eigentlichkeit*,” etc. are words or concepts so dear to Fr. Francis Vineeth. No wonder, it’s so with a man, who specialized on Martin Heidegger’s “existentialism” at the Gregorian University, Rome; and who studied at Oxford, under the guidance of the Scottish theologian-philosopher John Macquarrie, who translated Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* into English (*Being and Time*). Some of the very titles of his works testify his love for these words, for example, *Call to Integration* (1979), *Sannyasayogam* (1981), *Yoga of Spirituality* (1995), etc., to name a few. His own writings and messages offer ample evidence to his favouritism to these words: “[...] Remaining hours in utter silence and yet moving around among the poorest of the poor, was your integrated lifestyle, which people liked and loved [...] and may be a reflective remembrance of your life of authenticity” (V.F. Vineeth, May 16, 2016).

In his magnum opus *Being and Time*, Heidegger introduces a series of distinctions that redefine the nature of human existence (*Dasein*). Among them, the differentiation between *das Man* and *der Mann*, reveals a fundamental ontological tension between authenticity and inauthenticity. The

inauthentic mode of being (*das Man*) manifests, through what Heidegger calls “fallenness,” the condition of being lost in the distractions of the world: chatter, curiosity, and ambiguity. In contrast, *der Mann* points to Dasein’s capacity for individuation and authenticity, which emerges through the “call of conscience,” and which calls Dasein back from its absorption in *das Man* toward its “ownmost” potentiality-for-Being, which is disclosed through realization, understanding and discourse.

Finally, Martin Heidegger, in his *Being and Time*, analyses human being as “Being-towards-death.” Being-towards-death refers to a process of growing through the world, where a certain foresight guides human person towards gaining an authentic perspective. I do believe that Fr. Francis Vineeth, the Heideggerian, might view his death as an invitation to authenticity. Indeed, time flies, but memories never die. Distance does not matter, for they remain in our heart-beats. The fond memories of Father Francis Vineeth, remain in our heart-beats, “for he taught [us] as one having authority” (Mt. 7: 28-29). In the life of a Heideggerian like Father Vineeth, “authority” is conceived and construed in terms of “authenticity,” the translation of the German word *Eigentlichkeit*, meaning ‘my ownness’ or “being true to oneself.” For Heidegger, authenticity refers to the unique and special moment in human existence, when there is clarity about the self, thereby carving out one’s ‘unique’ and ‘authentic’ place in the world, doing one’s work with special intent and self-knowledge. Yes, “uniqueness” (authenticity) was the hallmark of Father Francis Vineeth’s life, characterized by realization, understanding and discourse.

## **Introduction**

“Integration, authenticity, *samanyaya*, *yoga*, *eigentlichkeit*,” etc. are words or concepts so dear to Fr. Francis Vineeth. No wonder, it’s so with a man, who specialized on Martin

Heidegger's "Existentialism" at the Gregorian University, Rome; and who studied at Oxford, under the guidance of the Scottish theologian-philosopher John Macquarrie, who translated Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* into English (*Being and Time*). Some of the very titles of his works testify his love for these words, for example, *Call to Integration* (1979),<sup>1</sup> *Sannyasayogam* (1981),<sup>2</sup> *Yoga of Spirituality* (1995),<sup>3</sup> etc., to name a few. His own reflections and messages offer ample evidence to his favouritism to these words. On the sad demise of our dear Swami Sadananda on May 16, 2016, Fr. Francis Vineeth wrote:

"O My dear Swami, ever pleasant (*Sada-Ananda*), 'To be in time and transcend time at the same time' was the gifted nature, our Lord has blessed you with. Even during the most difficult moments of your life, you went forward, always surrendering all to the will of God. Remaining hours in utter silence and yet moving around among the poorest of the poor, was your *integrated* lifestyle, which people liked and loved and even the rich and the powerful silently admired. The sudden news of your great departure, of course, is sad, but what I felt immediately was a peace-emanating farewell, and may be a reflective remembrance of your life of *authenticity*. May this inspiration flow and bear fruit in us, your companions."<sup>4</sup>

In a similar vein, when I received the sad news of Fr. Vineeth's demise due to covid at Amala Hospital (Trichur, Kerala), I penned a short, memorable though, tribute to my

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<sup>1</sup>V.F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration: A New Perspectives in the Theology of Religious Life*, London: Crossroad, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> V.F. Vineeth, *Sanyasayogam*, Mannanam: Sanjose Book Stall, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> V.F. Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality: Christian Initiation into Indian Spiritual Traditions*, Bangalore Vidya Vanam Publications, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> V.F. Vineeth, "Letter to the Provincial, Fr. Kurian Kachappilly CMI," May 16, 2016.

guru and mentor, Fr. Francis Vineeth: “For some moments in life, there are no words.” Death is such a moment, when words fail, not because of pain and sorrow of farewell, but due to the ‘enigma/mystery’ of death, which calls for authenticity. I do believe that Fr. Francis Vineeth, the Heideggerian, might view his death as an invitation to authenticity. Martin Heidegger, in his *Being and Time*, analyses human being as “Being-towards-death” (*Sein zum Tode*). Being-towards-death refers to a process of growing through the world, where a certain foresight guides human person towards gaining an authentic perspective.”<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, time flies, but memories never die. Distance does not matter, for they remain in our heart-beats. The fond memories of Father Francis Vineeth CMI, remain in our heart-beats, “for he taught [us] as one having authority” (Mt. 7: 28-29). Students, who followed the lectures of Father Francis Vineeth on “Metaphysics,” or “Existentialism,” would have such gut feelings as “Wow,” “Super!” But, I doubt, how many would attest that Father Vineeth lived and acted, as if he had authority! Yes, indeed, Father Vineeth had authority, for he adorned himself with several offices in the DVK, like Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy; Vice-President and President of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK), the highest office of the Pontifical Athenaeum. But I don’t think he has ever wielded his power over others, either in the class room or in the office. On the contrary, as his very name “Vineeth” suggests, he was ‘humble’ and ‘humane’ with his characteristic pedagogy of the heart.

Hence the question remains: What does it mean to say “he taught [us] as one having authority”? In the life of a Heideggerian like Father Vineeth, “authority” is conceived

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<sup>5</sup> Kurian Kachappilly, “A Tribute to Fr. Francis Vineeth CMI,” May 30, 2021.

and construed in terms of “authenticity.” In *Being and Time*, “authenticity” is the translation of the German word *Eigentlichkeit*, meaning ‘my ownness’ or “being true to oneself.”<sup>6</sup> For Heidegger, authenticity refers to the unique and special moment in human (*Dasein*’s) existence, when there is clarity about the self, thereby carving out one’s unique and authentic place in the world, doing one’s work with special intent and self-knowledge. Fr. Francis Vineeth, in his book *Foundations of World Vision*, has spelled out the nature of an authentic person: “[...] Such a man we call simple. He lacks duplicity. In him there is perfect synthesis of the internal and external, of thoughts and their expressions. Such a man is loved by all, because he reflects the divine.”<sup>7</sup>

Within his monumental work *Being and Time*, Heidegger draws a distinction between *das Man* (the impersonal, anonymous “they”), and *der Mann* (the individualized ‘man’ or ‘person’), reveals a fundamental ontological tension between authenticity and inauthenticity.<sup>8</sup> Although *der Mann* does not appear as a formal Heideggerian concept in the same systematic way as *das Man*, its contrastive use illuminates the existential structure of *Dasein* within the social world. At first glance, the two terms may appear linguistically similar, but they demarcate a fundamental

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans., John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962, 2, 24, fn. 3: “The adverb ‘eigentlich’ occurs very often in this work. It may be used informally, where one might write ‘really’ [...] or, in a much stronger sense, where something like ‘genuinely’ or ‘authentically’ would be more appropriate.”

<sup>7</sup> V.F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision: A Guide to Metaphysics Eastern and Western*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1985, 41.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 24, 149, fn. 1: “[...] Heidegger introduces this word with a definite article and write ‘das Man’ [...] and we shall translate this expression as “the they.”

existential divergence between the anonymous, conformist mode of being (*das Man*) and the individualized, potentially authentic existence (*der Mann*).

### **I. *Das Man* ("the They")**

Heidegger's notion of "*das Man*" expresses the everyday mode of existence in which Dasein is absorbed into the public sphere of shared meanings and conventions. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes: "In utilizing public means of transport, in making use of information services such as the Newspaper, [...] we read, see and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge,"<sup>9</sup> Dasein is thus tranquilized by the 'they'." The "they-self" substitutes for the authentic self, providing ready-made interpretations that relieve Dasein of the anxiety of choosing. As Heidegger observes, "The 'they', which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness."<sup>10</sup> Thus, *das Man* becomes the locus of inauthentic existence, a state in which Dasein's potentiality-for-Being is levelled down by the public normativity of "everyone and no one." Here, *das Man* represents the existential tendency of human beings to conform to what "one" does, thinks, or says. This inauthentic mode of being manifests through what Heidegger calls "fallenness" (*Verfallenheit*), the condition of being lost in the world's distractions, like idle talk (*Gerede*), curiosity (*Neugier*), and ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*).<sup>11</sup>

#### **1. Idle talk (*Gerede*)**

Heidegger introduces idle talk as a fundamental mode of everyday discourse, where communication degenerates into

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 27, 164.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 27, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 38, 219: "Idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity characterize the way in which, in an everyday manner, Dasein is its 'there' - disclosedness of Being-in-the-world."

idle repetition of what is already said rather than genuine understanding. In *Being and Time*, he writes that *Gerede* is “the kind of Being of discourse which belongs to Being-with-one-another in the everyday manner” and that it “discloses everything and nothing.”<sup>12</sup> In this sense, idle talk is not merely “gossip” but a structural phenomenon of public communication, where language circulates without grounding in authentic understanding. As Hubert Dreyfus notes, Heidegger’s analysis of *Gerede* reveals how “the everyday world is permeated by a background of public meanings, which both enable and limit our understanding.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, idle talk functions both as an enabling condition of social existence and as a barrier to authenticity.

## 2. Curiosity (*Neugier*)

If idle talk is the superficial circulation of words, curiosity is the restless movement of perception. Heidegger describes “curiosity” as “a peculiar tendency-of-Being which belongs to everydayness – the tendency towards ‘seeing’. [...] the tendency towards a peculiar way of letting the world be encountered by us in perception [...], but rather seeking novelty and constant change.”<sup>14</sup> This mode of existence is marked by distraction, an endless turning toward the new without dwelling on the meaningful. In *Neugier*, Dasein is fascinated by the spectacle of the world, yet this fascination prevents it from encountering beings as they truly are. Heidegger writes that curiosity “concerns itself with seeing, not in order to understand what is seen, [...] but just in order to see.”<sup>15</sup> Such curiosity is emblematic of modern existence,

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 35, 211.

<sup>13</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991, 222.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 36, 216.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 36, 216,

where the pursuit of information or novelty replaces contemplative engagement. The structure of curiosity thus reveals a paradox: though curiosity appears as an openness to the world, it is, in fact, a mode of flight from authentic self-understanding.

### **3. Ambiguity (Zweideutigkeit)**

The third existential structure, ambiguity refers to the indistinctness that arises when understanding is guided by idle talk and curiosity. Heidegger defines ambiguity as the condition in which “everything looks as if it were genuinely understood, grasped, and spoken of,” yet this understanding remains indeterminate and equivocal.<sup>16</sup> In ambiguity, distinctions between genuine and superficial understanding collapse. The world appears transparent, but this transparency conceals rather than reveals. Heidegger writes that everything seems to be accessible, and yet no one can really grasp anything in its true being for two reasons. First, the ambiguous man lives on the surface of the reality, without getting deeper into the nature of things, and, second, since he has no in-depth knowledge about reality, he is carried away by the opinions of others, but, all the same, he is not sure about the veracity of these opinions. As Charles Guignon observes, “ambiguity makes possible the seamless functioning of the public world by masking the absence of authentic understanding beneath the appearance of agreement.”<sup>17</sup>

Idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity (*Gerede, Neugier, und Zweideutigkeit*) are not isolated traits but interdependent aspects of Dasein’s everyday fallenness.<sup>18</sup> Idle talk produces

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 37, 217.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983, 98.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 37, 219.

a circulation of meanings detached from their origin; curiosity drives the restless seeking of new experiences; and ambiguity maintains the illusion of coherence amid superficiality. Together they constitute the existential atmosphere of inauthenticity, an ontological condition rather than a moral fault. However, the call to authenticity requires not the negation of these structures, but a “retrieval” of them in a more unique way. In another words, the analyses of chatter, curiosity, and ambiguity open the path toward authenticity: an existence that listens, dwells, and discloses Being. In this way, idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity are both symptoms of fallenness (*Verfallenheit*), and necessary conditions for the possibility of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*).

## II. *Der Mann* (“the Person”)

Unlike *das Man*, *der Mann* (literally “the man” or “the individual”) signifies the concrete person as a singular (unique) *Dasein*. Employing a linguistic contrast, Heidegger underscores a vital ontological distinction: whereas *das Man* refers to the anonymous and dispersed mode of being, *der Mann* points to *Dasein*’s capacity for individuation and authenticity. Authentic existence emerges through the “call of conscience” (*Ruf des Gewissens*),<sup>19</sup> which calls *Dasein* back from its absorption in *das Man* toward its “ownmost” potentiality-for-Being.<sup>20</sup> This awakening leads to ‘resoluteness’ (*Entschlossenheit*), through which *Dasein* assumes responsibility for its existence. This resoluteness signifies authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*), a way of being in which *Dasein* no longer evades the question of its Being through conformity.

Heidegger argues that certain existential structures, or characteristics, distinguish *der Mann* from *das Man*, among

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 5, 322ff.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 314-316.

these are understanding (*Verstehen*), discourse (*Rede*), and what can be called self-realization (*Verwirklichung*).<sup>21</sup>

### **1. Understanding (*Verstehen*)**

The term “understanding” had become a cliché in Father Vineeth’s lectures, meditations and reflections. Father Vineeth used to ask “understand?” almost always at the end of each sentence. For the Heideggerian Vineeth, ‘understanding’ did not mean imposing your vocabulary on others, or making claims of understanding other in your own terms and conditions. For Heidegger writes: “When we are talking ontically, we sometimes use the expression ‘understanding something with the signification of ‘being able to manage something’, ‘being a match for it’, ‘being competent to do something’.”<sup>22</sup> As a true Heideggerian, understanding, for Father Vineeth, is a process of making explicit that which was already implicitly present. Heidegger defines understanding as “the existential Being of Dasein’s own potentiality-for-Being; and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what is Being capable of.”<sup>23</sup> In understanding, Dasein is its possibilities, and it is so in such a way that it understands itself in terms of these possibilities and thus projects itself upon them. For Heidegger, understanding is closely intertwined with ‘interpretation’, (for, as Heidegger affirms, “all interpretation is grounded on understanding”)<sup>24</sup>, the capacity to reveal the purpose, or function, and the totality of involvement associated with an entity. The right disposition to understand and interpret,

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31, 32, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31, 183: As Heidegger observes, “[...] ‘vorstehen’ (to manage, to be in charge) is here connected with ‘verstehen’ (to understand).”

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31, 184.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 33, 195.

Father Vineeth would add, must be the basic openness to the disclosure of beings.

## 2. Discourse (*Rede*)

If understanding is the projection of possibilities, “discourse” (*Rede*) is their articulation. Heidegger defines discourse as “the articulation of intelligibility,” adding that “discourse is existentially equiprimordial with attunement (harmony) and understanding.”<sup>25</sup> Discourse, in brief for Heidegger, “is the basic signification of logos.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, discourse is the meaningful articulation of the discovered intelligibility of humanity’s ‘being-in-the-world’. Father Vineeth, the Heideggerian, takes ‘discourse’ a step further as meaningful articulation of words that are life-giving. *Logos* in Greek means ‘word’, for example, the first uttered word. As St. John, the Evangelist, testifies, “[...] the *logos* was with God and the *logos* was God” (Jn 1:1). In the final analysis, discourse, therefore, is the word of God, which is life-giving or salvific. That is why St. Peter, representing the disciples, said to Jesus: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6: 68). In the true sense, the discourses of Father Vineeth, whether they were lectures in the class rooms, meditations in the chapel, or reflections and input sessions at seminars and conferences, were really inspiring, for they were the disclosure of his own life and vision. Hence people –students, friends and well-wishers– followed him wherever he had been, for he spoke with ‘authority’, or better in Heideggerian terms, he spoke with ‘authenticity’.

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §34, 204.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 34, 209.

### 3. Self-realization (*Verwirklichung*)

“Realization” is the process by which Dasein actualizes (makes real) its possibilities, especially authentic ones, bringing them into its being rather than remaining in the “they-mode.” Realization is a continuous process of discovering the ‘real-self’ (real+i+zation). Father Vineeth, throughout his life, sought the meaning of self in its manifold relationships. As his book, *Call to Integration*, suggests, “human reveals in its networking or harmonious relationships.”<sup>27</sup> And in the authentic person, “there is a perfect synthesis of the internal and external, of thoughts and their expressions.”<sup>28</sup> Harmony *ad intra* (internal) for him, involves the integration of all the human faculties: the cognitive, the conative and the affective; and, on the other hand, harmony *ad extra* (external) envisions integration of the self with other, nature and God. Father Vineeth always tried to maintain an ‘integral’ approach’ in his life, which also helped him to delve deeper into the nature of things.

It is interesting to note how understanding, discourse, and realization interplay in Dasein’s life. Understanding gives the horizon: it is the mode in which Dasein projects itself into possibilities. Discourse articulates that horizon: it is how the world, as understood, is expressed, shared and exposed. And realization is the enactment: it is Dasein’s making its projected possibilities concrete in its life. Without understanding, there is no projection; without discourse, the projection remains unarticulated; without realization, they remain unrealized potential.

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<sup>27</sup> V.F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration: A New Perspectives in the Theology of Religious Life*, 52.

<sup>28</sup> V.F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 41.

### III. The Woodman's Way (*Holzwege*)

The "Woodman's Way" serves as a metaphor for authenticity in Heidegger's thought, linking his early existential analysis in *Being and Time* with his later reflections on the ways of thinking in *Holzwege*<sup>29</sup> and *Was Heißt Denken?*<sup>30</sup> The way (*der Weg*) becomes the existential form of Dasein's search for itself: a wandering that resists closure, yet opens the possibility of dwelling authentically within the clearing (revelation) of Being.

The term "*Holzwege*" literally means "wood-paths," the trails made by woodcutters that lead deep into the forest but do not reach a destination: "Wood is an old name for forest. In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden. They are called *Holzwege*."<sup>31</sup> In German idiom, a person is "on a wood-path" (*ist auf dem Holzweg*), when he follows a trail that ends abruptly in the thicket. As Heidegger observes, "woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a *Holzweg*."<sup>32</sup> The *Holzweg* represents the difficult, uncertain, and solitary journey by which Dasein may recover its "ownmost" Being. Just as the Woodman's path diverges from the well-trodden roads of the village, so the authentic individual must step away from the anonymous pathways of *das Man*.

In Heidegger's later writings, especially *Was Heißt Denken?* the notion of "the way" shifts from existential decision to meditative openness. Thinking is described not as

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<sup>29</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege (Off the Beaten Track)*, trans., Julian Young, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Was Heißt Denken (What is Called Thinking)*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1954.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*, "Preface."

<sup>32</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*, "Preface."

a technical activity but as a way of allowing Being to reveal itself.<sup>33</sup> This later sense of “the way” deepens the meaning of authenticity. Whereas in *Being and Time* authenticity involved resolute self-ownership, in *Was Heißt Denken?* it becomes a mode of releasement from the wilful domination of beings. The authentic person no longer seeks to master Being but to dwell within its unfolding.

Authenticity, however, is not a state achieved once and for all, but a mode of being in which Dasein takes up its finite existence resolutely (*Entschlossenheit*). Authentic existence, therefore, is a way, not a possession, a continual movement of self-disclosure in relation to Being. Given this understanding, the Woodman’s Way gains existential significance. The woodman’s task is to move through the forest, creating paths that may not reach a clear destination, yet each step participates in the ongoing revealing of the landscape. Similarly, authentic existence is not about reaching an ultimate truth but about remaining faithful to the way of questioning. In *Being and Time*, Dasein’s authenticity is tied to its awareness of mortality; in the *Holzwege*, authenticity becomes attunement to the withdrawing presence of Being. Both senses converge in the image of the way: “The way is itself what is to be thought,” Heidegger writes; “thinking does not transport us to a goal, but keeps us on the way.”<sup>34</sup>

Like Heidegger,<sup>35</sup> Fr. Vineeth himself lived this metaphor literally. His *Vidyavanam Ashram* near Bannerghatta (Bangalore) was both his dwelling and his place of thinking.

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is called Thinking*, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Heidegger had a chalet (his dwelling place) near Todtnauberg in Black Forest, where he wrote portion of his major work, *Being and Time*.

The forest (*vanam*) paths around it were the terrain of his meditation (*dhyana*), wisdom (*vidya*), and action (*karma*). As he himself testifies, “a person given to prayer, meditation and action, is a wayfarer, a pilgrim. He journeys from the outer world to the inner forest, from his own external layers of awareness to the internal ones, and ultimately rests in that inexhaustible depth of his being where the Divine dwells.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, the *Holzweg*, for Francis Vineeth, signifies not an abstract philosophical image, but an existential practice, a way of dwelling near Being. To walk such a path (*der Weg*) is to live authentically, because one lives in the nearness of what is most essential, namely the *Satguru*, the TRUE MASTER!

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<sup>36</sup> V.F. Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality: Christian Initiation into Indian Spiritual Traditions*, 1.

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## **Part IV**

# **Embodiment and Incarnation: Ashram, Art, and Integrated Life**



# Ashram as a Lived Expression of Integration

*Dr. Anto Vattakuzhy CMI*

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the ashram not merely as a physical dwelling but as a theological and existential reality—an embodiment of integration between the divine and human, contemplation and action, solitude and solidarity. Drawing from nearly fifteen years of lived experience with Fr. Francis Vineeth Vadakkethala CMI, the founder of Vidyavanam Ashram, this reflection interprets his vision of *samanvayam*—a holistic synthesis of faith, culture, and life.

Fr. Vineeth, a scholar-mystic trained in both the Western and Indian traditions, envisioned the ashram as a “School of Integration,” where prayer, work, community, and silence merge into a single rhythm of being. Rooted in the Sanskrit term *srama* (effort, discipline), the ashram becomes a contemplative milieu in which theology transforms into *theoria*—a vision of divine reality beyond logical comprehension. In his writings such as *Call to Integration*, *Asian Vision of God*, *Songs of Solitude*, *Prayer and Power* and *Yoga of Spirituality*, Fr. Vineeth articulates a contemplative theology wherein God simultaneously immanent and transcendent—“the most Immanent is the most Transcendent.”

Silence and solitude, for him, are not negations but the fertile ground where the fragmented self attains wholeness. Contemplation thus matures into compassion, awakening a love that reverences all life. The *ashramites*, filled with the Indwelling Spirit, becomes a presence of harmony and peace in the world. Hence, ashram life does not retreat from society but radiates contemplative energy into active service and dialogue.

For Fr. Vineeth, his theology offers a profound call to integration-of the self, with God, and with the world. The Blessed Mother is identified as the anchor of his faith and the perfect model of this integrated spiritual life. Ultimately, his work casts life as integration, framing it as the pilgrimage of the soul.

In an age marked by materialism, division, and ecological crisis, Fr. Vineeth's ashram spirituality stands as a prophetic alternative-a gospel of integration. It calls for a renewal of the inner sanctuary where God's Indwelling Spirit unites all opposites. The ashram, in this vision, becomes both symbol and sacrament of divine-human communion-a lived expression of integration in the heart of creation.

## Introduction

It gives me great joy and reverence to present this paper on the theme "Ashram as a Lived Expression of Integration." At the very outset, I wish to recall my own privileged experience of living with Fr. Francis Vineeth CMI for nearly fifteen years, from the inception of Vidyavanam Ashram, Bangalore. Fr. Vineeth was not only the founding director of Vidyavanam (1995-2017) but also its living spirit—a true *acharya*, embodying the synthesis of East and West, philosophy and theology, contemplation and action, faith and reason. As a guru or *acharya*, Fr. Vineeth tried to carve out the form of the formless in the cave of the heart of the

disciples. Kabir Das, a fifteenth century mystic once said, “If both guru and God stand before me whose feet shall I touch first, I shall touch yours O guru for you have revealed God to me.” Fr. Vineeth’s yearning to experience God in the depths of the soul is popularized through the ascetical and mystical life in the ashram. He was a renowned and widely respected Acharya guided many disciples to Jesus, the eternal Guru. Fr. Vineeth realized that the ultimate reality is not mere an object to be worshipped but is to be realized as the very subject of one’s being. He was a true synonym of determination, truthfulness and simplicity. Integration (*Samanvayam*) was the central thread of his creative thinking. His life was an integration of *Sravanam*, (Listening), *Mananam* (Reflection), *Nidhidyasanam*, (Contemplation) *Bhakti* (Devotion), *Karma* (Action), and *Jnana* (Knowledge). He did everything with *nishkama karma* (Selfless action). He stood for *Satyam* (Truth), *Brahmam* (The Ultimate Reality) and *Anandam* (Bliss/Joy).

### **1. A Biographical Sketch of Fr. V. F. Vineeth CMI**

Fr. V. F. Vineeth, a member of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), was born in 1937 in Kerala, India. After his priestly formation and theological studies, he pursued advanced research in philosophy and theology, earning a doctorate from the Gregorian University, Rome and a doctorate from Oxford University, England. His scholarly and contemplative journey was deeply shaped by both the Christian mystical tradition and the Indian spiritual heritage.

Recognizing the need for an authentic Indian Christian spirituality, he founded Vidyavanam Ashram in Bangalore in 1995 – a spiritual and intellectual center for inculturation, dialogue, and contemplative living. There he lived for over two decades, until 2017, embodying what he called *samanvayam* – the integration of life, faith, and culture.

Fr. Vineeth's thought and writings reflect a profound synthesis of Hindu and Christian mysticism. His works such as *The Asian Vision of God, Prayer and Power, Songs of Solitude, Yoga of Spirituality, Call to Integration* and *Contemplative Prayer* express a spirituality rooted in silence, simplicity, and the mystical realization of the Divine as both immanent and transcendent. His life and writings invite us to rediscover the contemplative dimension of human existence as the foundation for integration and peace.

## 2. The Meaning and Roots of the Ashram

The word *ashram* derives from the Sanskrit root *śrama*, meaning "effort" or "discipline." Historically, ashrams were hermitages of sages (*rishis*) where disciples lived a disciplined life of study, meditation, and service. The ashram tradition in India embodies a holistic vision—spiritual, ethical, social, and ecological. Fr. Vineeth writes, "Reality for India is the ultimate spiritual Reality, the Subsisting Consciousness, the Brahman. Since Reality is consciousness and consciousness is found in every human being, the Indian approach to Reality is predominantly introspective and intuitive" (*Yoga of Spirituality*, 19).

In the Christian context, the ashram movement emerged in the 20th century through pioneers such as Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda), and Bede Griffiths, who sought to integrate Christian contemplative life with the Indian spiritual ethos. For Fr. Vineeth, this movement reached its authentic maturity in Vidyavanam Ashram, where the Christian mystery was lived in Indian simplicity and depth.

The ashram, therefore, is not simply a physical space but a *way of life*—a *school of integration* where prayer, work, community, and silence merge into a single rhythm of being.

### **3. The Contemplative Vision: Knowing the Absolute beyond Logic**

Fr. Vineeth's contemplative theology begins with the conviction that God is not merely an object of worship but the very ground of being itself. He writes:

"The Absolute is better known by the contemplative gaze of the inner eye which is beyond logic and is perhaps experienced in the depth of one's own being in an abounding sense of mystery and faith, rather than in the conceptualized thinking of one's own mind." (*Asian Vision of God*, 150-151)

This insight captures the heart of the ashram experience. The *ashramites* seek God not through intellectual abstraction but through interior transformation. The "inner eye" becomes the symbol of integration, where faith, intuition, and reason coalesce into one contemplative awareness.

Here, theology becomes *theoria*—a vision of reality. The contemplative journey thus transcends logic, leading the seeker to a participatory union with the Absolute.

### **4. The Immanent-Transcendent Mystery: God as Center of All Forms**

For Fr. Vineeth, the Absolute is both beyond and within creation. He affirms:

"The Absolute is that which transcends all forms and yet is the center of every form. The most Immanent is the most Transcendent" (*The Asian Vision of God*, 155).

This statement provides the metaphysical foundation for integration. The Divine is not detached from the world but dwells in its very heart. Every tree, bird, and human being becomes a manifestation of God's presence. When we started the ashram there weren't any plants or trees on the campus. We visited many nurseries and collected a number of saplings of both flowering and fruit trees and planted them.

We used to pray to St. Kuriakose Elias, our founder, to make the ashram campus like a forest. This prayer was heard, and what we had planted grew up very fast and became like a forest. Wild animals like elephants, wild boars and monkeys became frequent visitors to the ashram. Fr. Vineeth, thus taught us to respect all life forms, seeing the sacred in the ordinary.

### 5. The Call to Contemplative Union

The contemplative vocation of the *ashramites* in Fr. Vineeth's words, is "Certainly a call to deeper divine union" (*Contemplative Prayer*, 23). The *ashramites*, as well as the people who visit the ashram, spend many hours in different forms of prayer and meditation. Fr. Vineeth leads them to prayer through guided meditation, teaching them to calm their minds in solitude empowering them to experience the divine.

My Master's course on Mysticism brought me to the ashram, where I learned from Fr. Vineeth. He didn't just teach the subject; he lived real mysticism through his classes, his example, and his steadfast daily rhythm. Being near him as his associate, I would witness him in the chapel almost every morning and evening, utterly lost and consumed in deep prayer and contemplation. I knew the difference between meditation and contemplation intellectually, but only by watching his life did I truly grasp the rare beauty of contemplation. He gazed upon the Divine, admiring God as the most present and ultimate reality-the Immanent and Transcendent-with his heart's eyes wide open. He would remain perfectly still on a cushion for what felt like endless hours. When meals arrived, I literally had to go gently call him back from that deep peace, urging him to open his physical eyes. This wasn't a rare moment; it was his frequent, daily encounter. This kind of prayerful surrender was never

for show or for praise, but was simply the genuine, quiet lifestyle he embraced.

In this union, prayer ceases to be mere speech and becomes the rhythm of existence. Silence, simplicity, and surrender are the means of participation in divine life. The *ashramites* learn to *be* rather than merely to *do*—to live in awareness of God’s indwelling Spirit.

Here, integration is not a theoretical construct but a lived reality, a communion between divine grace and human openness.

## **6. Silence and Solitude as Pathways to Integration**

Fr. Vineeth’s poetic spirituality portrays silence and solitude as sacred pathways. He prays: “In constant search and in solitude with silent steps and in soundless melody, may I make this journey of mine, a journey into my own inner depth” (*Songs of Solitude*, 13).

Silence, in his vision, is not emptiness but fullness—the fertile ground where the fragmented self finds wholeness. He continues: “The power of silence is very great. Silence liberates and sets us free from the clutches of the senses and of the mind which build up their own castles around the divine flame shining in our hearts” (*Prayer and Power*, 80).

The Christian ashram movement in India, which aims to integrate Christian spirituality with the Indian tradition of monasticism, places immense value on the practice of silence (*mouna*). This silence is not merely the absence of external noise but is seen as a profound spiritual discipline—an essential pathway for an inner pilgrimage toward God-realization and self-knowledge.

The significance of silence in Indian Christian ashrams is rooted in both Christian and Indian spiritual traditions. Just as Jesus frequently retreated to solitary places for prayer (Mk

1:35), retreatants seek to disconnect from daily life and focus solely on intimacy with the Divine. The Bible's call to "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10) serve as a core injunction. Ashrams adopt the ancient Indian practice of *mauna*, or ritual silence. This practice is believed to be a powerful aid in *sadhana* (spiritual practice). As Mahatma Gandhi referring Meher Baba noted, "Experience teaches that silence is the strength of all seekers of truth."

For Fr. Vineeth, silence was less about discipline and more an expression of deep interiority with the divine. He seamlessly integrated the ashram's serene atmosphere with a profound, spiritual intimacy with the Lord. Visitors experienced the inner solitude and contemplative ambiance simply being near Fr. Vineeth. His silent way of life taught us to confront our inner reality, providing an opportunity for profound self-knowledge. Furthermore, silence in Vidyavanam Ashram was inextricably linked to its commitment to simplicity-in vegetarian food, basic accommodation, and streamlined daily routines. At Vidyavanam Ashram, for instance, silence is observed even during meals, making the simple act of eating a contemplative practice. The true understanding and the discovery of truth do not come from external noise, debate, or even words, but from the inner strength gained through silence, introspection and meditation.

In this silence, ego dissolves, and the divine flame illumines the center of being. The ashram thus becomes a *laboratory of silence*—a place where human restlessness yields to contemplative harmony.

## **7. Compassionate Union: Love for All Life**

Authentic integration flowers as universal love. Fr. Vineeth's contemplative prayer expresses this ethical dimension: "Touch me today with thy spirit of gentleness

that I may love and respect all forms of life with which you have blessed the world of mine" (*Songs of Solitude*, 19). When sheep, cows, and other domestic animals wander onto the ashram campus, we used to chase them away by sending out our dogs. We wanted to erect walls around the property, but Fr. Vineeth always told us not to build a compound wall and not harm any animals with the dogs.

Here contemplation and compassion converge. The contemplative who perceives the divine in all is moved to act with tenderness toward all beings. This is the ecological and ethical fruit of ashram spirituality—a recognition that the divine mystery pervades the web of life.

The ashram thus becomes not only a space of prayer but also a cradle of ecological consciousness and social service.

### **8. The Spirit Within: Presence as Power**

At the heart of integration lies the experience of the indwelling Spirit. Fr. Vineeth writes:

"The Spirit is an abiding awareness within us. It is not a thing; it is a presence, a powerful presence" (*Prayer and Power*, 34). St. Paul writes, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God..." (1 Cor. 6: 19). The body of a believer is considered a sacred space where God's presence resides. This emphasizes that the Holy Spirit dwells within individuals who have accepted Jesus. This concept implies that believers should carry themselves with dignity and be mindful of their actions, treating their bodies as a holy dwelling for God's Spirit.

This dynamic awareness transforms the *ashramites'* consciousness. To live in the Spirit is to live in continual integration—between thought and action, interiority and

community. The Spirit harmonizes the diverse movements of life into one divine rhythm.

Thus, ashram life is not a withdrawal from the world but a transformation of consciousness that radiates peace and harmony outward.

### 9. Integration of Contemplation and Action

True to the model of Christ himself, the ashram refuses to separate contemplation and action. While silence and prayer remain central, they are inseparable from service. Gandhi's *Sabarmati Ashram* and the Christian ashrams that followed show that prayer can inspire justice, and simplicity can empower social renewal.

Once Fr. Vineeth and I went to attend the wedding of his nephew, Mr. Acto. Both of us were sharing a room for the night. Fr. Vineeth fell asleep almost immediately and began snoring. Because of the noise, I couldn't sleep. I got up and sat in a chair. After some time, he woke up and saw me sitting there. He asked me, why are you sitting there? Why aren't you sleeping? I answered, "Because of your snoring." He apologized and asked me to lie down and go to sleep. He said, he would sit in the chair and pray instead.

Fr. Vineeth's life reflected this synthesis. He balanced scholarly work, pastoral service, and deep contemplative prayer. His witness reminds us that holiness is wholeness—where the active and contemplative dimensions enrich each other in a seamless unity. This feeling of emotion is freely expressed in the following words: "*nithyavum nin pade dyanichirippanum sathyathin kanthima kanuvanum, sishiamennil nin rupam rejikkanum enne orukku ni jeevesuara*" "That I may always meditate at Your feet, and see the splendour of truth, and that Your image may be etched upon me, a disciple, prepare, O Jesus, the Lord/God" (V.F. Vineeth, *Enne Orukku Nee*, 25).

It is a beautiful prayer of Fr. Vineeth asking for continuous devotion, spiritual enlightenment, and transformation into the likeness of Christ. It perfectly captures the lifelong challenge of faith—not just knowing the truth, but having that truth fundamentally reshape who we are, transforming the disciple into a true reflection of the Master. It turns meditation from a passive act into an active request for divine transformation.

### **10. *Call to Integration***

When I read Fr. Vineeth's words — “Fully integrated persons, in whom the Word is expressed and realized in its fullness, can gather up the whole world around them in their own consciousness which is now totally of the Word” (*Call to Integration*, 10) — I am deeply moved. These words describe, for me, the heart of the spiritual journey — to become so united within ourselves that our very being reflects the divine presence.

To be fully integrated is not simply to live a balanced life; it is to live from the center — that sacred space within where the Word of God, the eternal *Logos*, dwells. In such persons, everything — thought, feeling, and action — flows in harmony with the divine rhythm. They live not out of division, but from a deep inner wholeness rooted in God. Fr. Vineeth lived his life true to himself.

For me, this vision is both humbling and inspiring. It reminds me that the journey of integration is really a journey toward God-centred wholeness. Every moment of silence, prayer, and loving service becomes an invitation to allow the Word to shape me from within. When I allow the Word to dwell deeply in my heart, even the ordinary moments of life become extraordinary. They become sacramental — moments where the divine and human meet.

Reflecting on my life in comparison with Fr. Vineeth, I often recognize how divided I can be within myself – pulled between many responsibilities, desires, and emotions. Yet I realize that peace is not found by withdrawing from these tensions, but by allowing the Divine Presence to hold them together as he did. Integration means letting the Word gather what is scattered within me, transforming restlessness into communion and anxiety into peace.

As St. Paul beautifully says, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). When the Word becomes the center of my consciousness, life is no longer fragmented. Every person, every experience – even my struggles – begins to reveal a hidden unity. I begin to see with the eyes of Christ and to love with His heart.

A truly integrated person like Fr. Vineeth carries a quiet stillness that unites rather than divides. Such a person may not preach many words, but their presence itself becomes healing. They gather together what is scattered simply by being who they are – because their consciousness is shaped by the Word, the divine energy that sustains all creation.

Fr. Vineeth, in his life and writings, was a shining example of this integration. He did not merely *write* about it – he *lived* it. His own life was a silent proclamation of the Word. In *Call to Integration*, he reminds all consecrated persons that “they are called, in a special way, to interior integration” (*Call to Integration*, 4).

Personally, I feel called to this same journey – to live from that inner center where Christ, the Word, dwells. I long to let my thoughts, emotions, and actions flow from that sacred space of communion. In that place, life becomes one continuous act of love, a living reflection of divine consciousness.

Integration, then, is not just about achieving personal peace; it is about becoming a living expression of the Word – the divine power that unites and holds the whole world together.

### **11. The Anchor of His Faith: Blessed Mother**

Mother Mary was his constant spiritual support, his intercessor, and his shield. He entrusted himself completely to her protection throughout his earthy journey. Indeed, I remember that Fr. Vineeth always carried a laminated picture of the Blessed Mother in his bag, a tangible sign of his devotion. He shared several stories with me about how the Blessed Mother miraculously saved him- most notably during the terrifying moments when he was attacked by robbers, to which Mrs. Moly Jose, his secretary, was an eyewitness.

Fr. Vineeth in his Malayalam book, *Mathrbhavangalilude Makante Theerthayathra*, writes, *Meriyude mughabhavam neelakasham pole nirmalavum Sudha jalam pole thelivarnnathumanu. Avide mayamilla, malinathayilla. Ellam sudharyam, surasundharam*" (66). "Mary's facial appearance is as clear as the sky and pure as water. There is no duplicity and maliciousness in her look and thought. Everything is crystal clear, straight forward, and perfectly immaculate." Purity of Character: Just like the description of the Virgin Mary, he possessed no deception or falsehood (no duplicity), and no malice or corruption in his heart. Everything about him was translucent and spiritually beautiful.

When I reflect upon Fr. Vineeth, I see a person who lived a life of absolute spiritual integrity. He was truly a man defined by his name, 'Vineeth' (Humble/Polite), and his actions consistently reflected this virtue. Fr. Vineeth, a true devotee of Mother Mary, lived a life in constant spiritual relation with her. Vidyavanam Ashram, situated near the

forest and National Park, was never free from the frequent visits and menace of wild elephants. Sometimes, a lone tusker would arrive, but other times pairs or entire herds would enter, consistently destroying our electric fence. With no other mechanism to safeguard our coconut, banana, maize, and jackfruit crops, I often had to get up in the middle of the night to ward off the attack using a large flashlight and fire crackers. Seeing me go out alone to chase the elephants, Fr. Vineeth would open the door and assure me that he would pray the Rosary and ask Mother Mary for my protection. He would only return to bed once I was safely back in the room, demonstrating his complete trust in Mother Mary.

**Integrity and Truthfulness:** He was fundamentally a straightforward person. I have never heard him utter a lie; he was consistently truthful in his words, deeds, and entire life. There was absolutely no hypocrisy in him. I remember an instance, once a herd of sheep somehow breached the compound of the ashram, devouring both our grass and the vegetables we had cultivated. Our dog, out of its cage unnoticed by any of us, suddenly chased down and killed one sheep, dragging it right to its cage- that's how we discovered the tragic event. To hide what happened, the ashram workers quickly dug a pit and buried the sheep behind the building, only communicating this news to Fr. Vineeth and me later. I remember the anxiety when, just a few hours afterward, the owner appeared, inquiring about his missing sheep; although we initially stayed silent, Fr. Vineeth completely disregarded the negative consequences and the secret we were keeping, simply stating, "Yes, the sheep was killed by our dog."

**A Man of Substance:** He was a man of heart who embraced simple living, remaining profoundly down-to-earth throughout his life, yet simultaneously demonstrating

high thinking and remarkable intelligence. As Fr. Vineeth grew older, he became physically weak and not eating much, even though the food was simple and vegetarian. I wanted him to eat non-vegetarian food and some other nutrients or supplements. However, he firmly refused, saying he was happy with what was cooked and served. He didn't want any special privileges or anything out of the ordinary. Fr. Vineeth's life perfectly encapsulates his deep spirituality making him a rare and inspiring person.

## **12. The Pilgrimage of the Soul: Life as Integration**

Finally, Fr. Vineeth envisions life itself as a continuous pilgrimage toward divine communion: "My life is a journey, a journey in the sea of God's merciful love. It is a pilgrimage to no country and to no end. In the tiny boat of my life, I sail all alone with my Lord, singing the hymns of His praise in silence and solitude" (*Songs of Solitude*, 100).

Fr. Vineeth's life was a journey, a voyage upon the boundless sea of God's merciful love. It was a continuous pilgrimage to no earthly country and to no finite end. In the small boat of his life, he sailed with his Lord, not in solitude but in sacred silence, continually singing the hymns of His praise.

These beautiful, poetic words, which he lived by, were profoundly realized in his sad passing. The circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic sadly enabled him to make this final, ultimate journey into God's merciful embrace. For Fr. Vineeth, it was not merely death, but a true pilgrimage—a final, silent, and solitary voyage to the eternal abode of God. Just as a stream finally merges with the ocean, he integrated himself fully into the One whom he constantly meditated upon and contemplated throughout his years.

In his final moments, we know he was at peace. Just as Jesus prayed on the cross, "Into Thy hands I commend my

spirit” (Lk 23:46), Fr. Vineeth breathed his last, commending his spirit into the hands of the Lord, guided by the comforting presence of the Blessed Mother. His earthly pilgrimage is complete. His song is now eternal. May his soul rest in God’s perfect peace.

This poetic self-understanding epitomizes integration: the finite human journey unfolding within the infinite ocean of divine love. Every experience—joy or suffering—becomes part of the same pilgrimage toward unity.

### **13. The Prophetic Relevance of the Ashram Today**

In a fragmented, consumerist, and conflict-ridden world, the ashram offers a prophetic alternative.

- Against materialism, it proclaims simplicity and interior freedom.
- Against individualism, it witnesses to community and shared life.
- Against religious exclusivism, it offers dialogue and hospitality.
- Against ecological exploitation, it lives harmony with creation.

Thus, the ashram embodies the *Gospel of Integration*—a spirituality that is holistic, contemplative, and incarnational. In Fr. Vineeth’s vision, the ashram becomes the microcosm of a redeemed creation: a dwelling place of peace, prayer, and communion.

### **Conclusion**

The ashram, as envisioned and lived by Fr. V. F. Vineeth, is not merely a retreat or a nostalgic return to ancient forms. It is a theological and existential statement—a lived experience of integration between the human and the divine, contemplation and action, solitude and solidarity.

Fr. Vineeth's life and writings unveil the ashram as a prophetic sign for our times: a call to wholeness in a divided world. It invites each of us to rediscover the inner sanctuary where God's presence unites all opposites and reconciles all tensions.

To live this vision is to become an *ashram within* – a living space of divine harmony. As Fr. Cyriac Kanichayi CMI aptly said of him:

“Kudos to Fr. Vineeth, the Doctor *Mysticus* of the CMI. You have created a niche for yourself in our hearts as an outstanding *Pater* and *Magister* of the Art and Science of Indo-Christian Geist!”

May his contemplative legacy inspire us to live integration—not only in our ashrams, but in our hearts, communities, and creation itself.

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# **Integration of Reason and Heart: *Darśan* and *Tapas* of Fr Francis Vineeth CMI**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the spiritual anthropology of Fr Francis Vineeth CMI, focusing on his central vision of *integration* as the foundation of authentic human and religious life. Fr Vineeth proposes that the religious person is an ‘integrated and integrating being,’ one who harmonises reason and heart, intellect and affect, contemplation and action. Drawing from Indian philosophical traditions—particularly *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma margas*—he presents self-realisation (*ātma sākṣātkāra*) and God-realisation (*brahma- sākṣātkāra*) as a unified process rooted in experiential knowledge: ‘knowing is becoming.’ This framework finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, the perfectly integrated human-divine model, whose Sacred Heart becomes the locus of unity, mission, and transformative love. Integration leads not only to personal holiness but also to outward-oriented service expressed through universal love, self-emptying, and concrete solidarity with the poor. The study highlights how a synthesis after Fr Vineeth mirrors contemporary magisterial insights, especially Pope Francis’s vision of the Heart of Christ as the unifying principle of all reality. Ultimately, this

exploration shows that the integrated life – rooted in interior transformation and expressed in compassionate mission – serves as a pathway to building God’s kingdom of love, justice, and harmony in the world.

## Introduction

“Let us be human.”<sup>1</sup> With these brief yet profound words of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Fr Jose Nandhikkara concluded his doctoral dissertation on *Being Human from a Religious Point of View after Wittgenstein*. In that work, he proposed a philosophical anthropology shaped by Wittgenstein’s later thoughts: to be human is to be rooted in nature, extended to community, and oriented to God. The present reflection seeks to carry that inquiry forward by entering into dialogue with the life and thought of Fr. Francis Vineeth CMI, a priest-philosopher-theologian-mystic whose vision exemplifies an Indian-Christian way of integrating reason and heart.

The theme, “Integration of Reason and Heart: *Darsan* and *Tapas* of Fr. Francis Vineeth CMI,” may therefore be read as a preliminary sketch toward a Philosophical, Theological, and Mystical Anthropology inspired by Fr. Vineeth. His thought offers a distinctive synthesis of Western and Indian classical traditions where the rational search for truth (*jñāna*), the intuitive seeing of reality (*darśan*), and the disciplined transformation of the self (*tapas*) converge.<sup>2</sup> While Western philosophical anthropology often emphasises rationality, moral agency, or narrative identity, Vineeth situates the human person within the broader horizon of Indian

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 44.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Vineeth CMI, *The Spirituality of the Indian Christian Sannyasa* (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 1980), 15–22.

spirituality, which perceives knowledge and contemplation as unified modes of being.

Indian Christian theology must integrate philosophical reasoning with lived spiritual experience, a conviction deeply embodied in Vineeth's own writings.<sup>3</sup> For Vineeth, the human person is not merely a rational subject nor solely a religious devotee; the person is a seeking self whose intelligence is purified by longing and whose longing is clarified by intelligence. This integration emerges only when *logos* and *eros*, intellect and spirit, are brought into harmony within the concrete human person.

Engaging with the life and works of Fr Francis Vineeth enables us to move beyond purely conceptual analyses of the human being toward a more holistic anthropology – one that includes not only reason, freedom, **and** embodiment, **but also** vision, discipline, mystical openness, **and** the dynamic encounter with the Divine. **In this** sense, the anthropology 'after Wittgenstein' finds a natural continuation in an anthropology 'after Fr. Vineeth:' an anthropology that is contemplative, relational, and profoundly human.

### **1. Integration (Yoga) as the Vision (*Darśan*) and Mission (*Tapas*) of Being Human**

The CMI spiritual heritage offers a profoundly Indian-Christian vocabulary for articulating the human journey toward fullness. The early expressions used by **St Kuriakose Elias Chavara** and the founding fathers of the CMI congregation – *Darśana vīṭu* (House of Vision), *Tapassu Bhavanam* (House of Mission), *Punya-saṅkētaṁ* (Abode of Holiness), and *Bēsrauma* (House on the Hilltop) – capture with remarkable clarity the essential pillars of Christian

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<sup>3</sup> Cyriac K. Kanichai, *Indian Christian Thinking* (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 1991), 12–18.

discipleship in an Indian context. These expressions signify more than architectural or institutional markers. They embody the CMI charism: vision, mission, and core values — a triadic dynamic that holds together contemplation, action, and transformation.

The life and works of Fr Vineeth show that he was a man of vision (*darśan*), mission (*tapas*) and holiness (*punayam*), and thereby became a house on a hilltop (*bēsrauma*) for his students and seekers of integration. Integration characterised his *darsan*, *tapas*, and *punyam*. These same terms illuminate the spiritual anthropology of Fr. Francis Vineeth CMI, for whom *darśan*, *tapas*, and *punyam* are not merely symbolic categories but existential movements of human becoming. To speak of Vineeth’s “vision” (*darsan*) is to speak of how the human person perceives the Real through a unified clarity of mind and heart. His *tapas* designates the lifelong discipline through which this perception is deepened and embodied in daily life. His vision of *punyam* points toward the sanctity that emerges when vision and discipline converge into a life transfigured by God.

At the foundation of Vineeth’s vision lies the concept of **integration** (*yoga*), which he identifies as both the essential human vocation and the culmination of existence itself. As he writes in *Call to Integration*, integration is “an internal synthesis worked out in the innermost depth of our being.”<sup>4</sup> This synthesis does not merely combine reason and emotion; it evokes a deeper encounter between **rational clarity** and **affective openness**, a harmony comparable to the classical Indian understanding of *buddhi* (illuminated intellect) united with *hrdaya* (heart-consciousness).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Vineeth CMI, *Call to Integration* (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 1990), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 12.

Integration, then, is not an external achievement but an interior movement leading the seeker toward authentic consciousness. To become integrated is to become **real**, transparent to oneself, others, and God. For Vineeth, such authenticity is realised most fully in an intense union with God, the source toward whom all human longing implicitly moves. This conviction resonates with the insights of CMI thinkers such as Cyriac Kanichai, who similarly interprets the human vocation as a movement toward wholeness grounded in divine relationality.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, Vineeth identifies this orientation toward integration as “the basic call every human being has received.”<sup>7</sup> It is not the privilege of monks or mystics alone; it belongs to the core of being human. Vineeth’s contribution lies in articulating this universal human call within the Indian-Christian vision of *yoga*—as a lifelong process of bringing body, reason, heart, and spirit into a luminous harmony.

## **2. Integration of Reason and Heart: *Darśan* and *Tapas* of Being Human**

A human being is a composite reality, integrating both the physical and the spiritual, the intelligible and the affective. This dual constitution reflects a universal insight shared by both Eastern and Western traditions: namely, that reason is indispensable for grasping reality, yet spirit is necessary for experiencing its fullness. Classical Indian thought—from the Upanishadic distinction between *śarīra* (body) and *ātman* (spirit) to the harmonising function of *buddhi*—affirms that rational clarity is essential for higher wisdom.<sup>8</sup> Western

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<sup>6</sup> Kanichai, *Indian Christian Thinking*, 24–31.

<sup>7</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 353–60.

philosophical traditions likewise insist on the disciplined use of reason: from Aristotle's *phronesis* to Aquinas' rational theology and Kant's account of rational autonomy.

Across cultures, therefore, an objective, reflective, and analytical approach to the world is not optional but foundational. Systematic education—both secular and sacred—is indispensable for cultivating what Vineeth calls an integral vision (*darśan*).<sup>9</sup> Interpreting lived experience requires an “even-minded activity of one's own inner spirit,”<sup>10</sup> a disciplined movement of abstraction, reflection, analysis, and synthesis. This corresponds to the Indian concept of *vivēka* (discernment), a capacity that is awakened only when rational clarity and inner depth are held together.

Historically, the **heart** (*kardía* in the biblical tradition and *hṛdaya* in Indian spirituality) has been understood as the locus where rational and spiritual dimensions converge.<sup>11</sup> Christian Patristic and monastic traditions identify the heart as the coordinating centre of the human person, the place where meaning is unified, and experience is integrated.<sup>12</sup> When the heart is ignored, a fragmented anthropology emerges—one that isolates mental powers such as rationality, will, or instinct and thereby obscures the living core of the person. Modern society, with its tendency to absolutise rational-technological mastery or instinctual impulses, often risks losing this **inner centre** that sustains harmony.

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<sup>9</sup> Francis Vineeth CMI, *The Spirituality of the Indian Christian Sannyasa* (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 1980), 21–25.

<sup>10</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Heart of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1980), 11–15.

<sup>12</sup> Kanichai, *Indian Christian Thinking*, 44–53.

For Fr Vineeth, integration occurs when reason and heart participate together in the pursuit of truth and goodness. In such an integrated state, both mind and will become instruments of the “greater good recognised by the heart.”<sup>13</sup> Authenticity, therefore, is not merely rational consistency or moral correctness but the harmonious convergence of cognitive insight and affective depth. Integration is also the final goal and terminus of human existence. As Vineeth insists, the integrated person attains an **authentic personality**, marked by profound joy, interior harmony, and peace. “Profound joy and a profound sense of satisfaction well up from the depth of his being.”<sup>14</sup> This is not simply psychological well-being but the fruit of a deeper ontological alignment: human consciousness harmonised with reason, heart, and God. Such joy signals the arrival of one’s true centre – the fulfilment of *darsan* in *tapas*, and the emergence of a life radiating *punyam*.

### **3. Integration of Reason and Heart: *Darśan* and *Tapas* of Being a Religious Person**

For Fr Francis Vineeth CMI, the religious person occupies a unique place within the broader horizon of human existence, precisely because the religious vocation intensifies the fundamental human call to interior integration. While every human being is invited to unify reason and heart, body and spirit, the religious person responds to this call with radical intentionality and lifelong commitment. Within Vineeth’s theological anthropology, the religious person becomes an *integrated and integrating* being – one who not only embodies internal harmony but mediates that harmony to others and to the wider community.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 125.

<sup>15</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 12.

A religious person, in this sense, is someone who has journeyed toward the “innermost depth of consciousness”<sup>16</sup> where the fragmented aspects of the self—rational, emotional, volitional, spiritual—are gathered into a unified centre anchored in God. Such a person becomes transparent to themselves and to God, discerning with clarity the movements of grace within the ordinary and the extraordinary. In this view, the religious becomes a living *darśan*, a manifestation of the divine presence, and a living *tapas*, a mission of self-gift directed towards the transformation of the world.<sup>17</sup>

From a Christian perspective, the culmination of this integration is union with God. For Vineeth, “the holy man of God” is not one who has withdrawn from the world but one who stands fully immersed in the divine life, radiating it outward. Holiness is therefore not primarily moral perfection but “integration of oneself in God,”<sup>18</sup> where the human faculties harmonise within the divine milieu. In this sense, holiness is neither an abstract ideal nor an esoteric achievement but the fullness of being human as God’s purpose in human creation – a state of being integrated and integrating, nature, community, and God.

This understanding resonates with the broader Catholic tradition and the CMI charism in particular. St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the founding father of the CMI congregation, speaks of religious life as the ongoing transformation of the person into “a living offering before God” through interior purification and daily fidelity.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Cyriac Kanichai

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<sup>16</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Vineeth, *Spirituality of Indian Christian Sannyasa*, 22–24.

<sup>18</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Collected Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. 2 (Mannanam: CMI Publications, 2008), 115–118.

CMI observes that the religious vocation entails becoming a “transparent vessel of God-consciousness,” where contemplative depth and apostolic zeal are inseparably united.<sup>20</sup> Fr Vineeth was a member of the CMI congregation, devoted to St Kuriakose Elias and worked with Fr Cyriac Kanichai, a confrère.

Thus, for Vineeth, to be a religious is not merely to be set apart but to be set in motion: to nurture integration within oneself and to awaken it in others. It is, ultimately, the journey toward sanctity. Echoing Pope Francis’s citation of Léon Bloy – “the only great tragedy in life is not to become a saint”<sup>21</sup> – Vineeth insists that the true measure of human fulfilment is holiness. The saint, then, is the fully integrated person; and Jesus Christ, the perfectly integrated human-divine exemplar, becomes the normative model. Through Him, the religious person realises their deepest identity as both seeker and sign of God’s integrative presence in the world.

#### **4. Seeking Self/God-Realisation through Reason and Heart**

The process of integration – central to the *darśan* and *tapas* of Fr Francis Vineeth CMI – demands a unified vision of reality, encompassing God, the self, and the world. Both Eastern and Western spiritual traditions converge on the conviction that the journey inward (“know thyself”) ultimately leads beyond the self toward the Divine. In the theistic and mystical streams of Indian thought, *ātma-jñāna* (self-knowledge) is inseparable from *Brahma-jñāna* (knowledge of Ultimate Reality). The individual self

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<sup>20</sup> Cyriac Kanichai CMI, *Anthropology of Indian Christian Spirituality* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004), 63–65.

<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018), para. 34.

(*jivātman*) attains its authentic identity only when rooted in and illumined by the Absolute Self (*Ātman*).<sup>22</sup>

Fr Vineeth appropriates this classical vision by emphasising that such knowledge is not merely conceptual but realisational—an experiential unification of reason and heart. Drawing from the Upanishadic vision, he holds that ‘knowing is becoming,’ for true knowledge transforms the knower. In this view, *ātma-sākṣātkāra* (self-realisation) is identical with *Brahma-sākṣātkāra* (God-realisation), because the depth of the human person is rooted in the depth of God.<sup>23</sup>

Vineeth interprets this integration through an Indian-Christian theological lens, drawing parallels between *jñāna* (wisdom) and *bhakti* (devotion). While *bhakti* opens the seeker to the Transcendent God through surrender and loving receptivity, *jñāna* awakens awareness of the Immanent God present within the depths of the self and the cosmos.<sup>24</sup> The union of *jñāna* and *bhakti* harmonises the human faculties: reason illuminates, while love integrates. This synthesis forms the core of Vineeth’s spiritual anthropology and shapes his understanding of religious life, contemplation, and mission.

Prayer becomes the privileged locus where this integration unfolds. For Vineeth, prayer is not merely vocal petitions but an inward movement that unifies fragmented consciousness. It addresses the totality of human experience— affective, intellectual, relational— and gradually draws the entire person into the divine milieu. The highest goal of prayer, therefore, is the integration of human

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<sup>22</sup> Francis Vineeth CMI, *Foundations of the World Vision* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1985), 10–12.

<sup>23</sup> Vineeth, *Foundations of the World Vision*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Vineeth, *Foundations of the World Vision*, 11–13.

consciousness into the divine consciousness.<sup>25</sup> This resonates deeply with Christian mystical theology, where union with God (*theosis*) is the culmination of both knowing and loving, and authentic prayer transforms the human person by integrating reason, desire, and will into the divine life. Echoing Vineeth's insistence on the inner movement from self-knowledge to God-realisation, Cyriac Kanichai notes that genuine Christian contemplation involves "a unitive consciousness wherein the seeker experiences God as the ground of one's own being."<sup>26</sup> Thus, the journey inward is inseparable from the journey upward; to know oneself is to discover God dwelling within, and to know God is to become one's authentic self.

Through this synthesis of reason (*jñāna*) and heart (*bhakti*), Fr Vineeth offers a philosophical-theological anthropology that is both Indian and Christian, both existential and mystical—a pathway toward holistic integration and divine communion.

### **5. Mission (*Tapas*) Rooted in Love and Service (*Karma Mārga*)**

The movement toward inner integration naturally unfolds into an outward dynamism of love and service. For Fr Vineeth, authentic integration—achieved through the harmonious operation of reason (*jñāna*) and heart (*bhakti*)—inevitably expresses itself in *karma mārga*, the path of selfless action. As he notes, "inner synthesis produces an outward orientation towards universal love,"<sup>27</sup> a love that is not selective but cosmic in scope. The integrated person becomes

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<sup>25</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 98.

<sup>26</sup> Kanichai, *Anthropology of Indian Christian Spirituality*, 72–75.

<sup>27</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 51.

an *integrating presence* in the world, radiating compassion, harmony, and service.

In this vision, the three classical paths of Indian spirituality — *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma* — are not alternatives but dimensions of a single integrated life. Vineeth interprets these three *mārgas* as the anthropological movements of reason, heart, and action, each indispensable for realising the fullness of human existence.<sup>28</sup> Integration of reason and heart reaches its fulfilment only when embodied in concrete works of love.

For Vineeth, the religious person, precisely because they have undergone interior integration, becomes inherently oriented toward universal love.<sup>29</sup> This universal love is not a vague sentiment but a radical availability to all, grounded in one's union with God. It is in this light that Vineeth interprets the evangelical counsels.

Celibacy, for instance, is not merely an ascetical discipline but “a sign of personal integration that opens the heart to universal love.”<sup>30</sup> The religious becomes capable of a love that transcends biological, cultural, or personal boundaries. This vision echoes the CMI charism rooted in St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who insisted that love of God must always manifest in love for neighbour, especially the poor, the marginalised, and the forgotten.<sup>31</sup> Kanichai similarly argues that an authentic Christian spirituality must unite interior mysticism with outward compassion, for “contemplative depth inevitably flows into diaconal service.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Vineeth, *Foundations of the World Vision*, 14–16.

<sup>29</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 58.

<sup>31</sup> Kuriakose Elias Chavara, *Collected Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. 2 (Mannanam: CMI Publications, 2008), 201–205.

<sup>32</sup> Kanichai, *Anthropology of Indian Christian Spirituality*, 82–85.

Vineeth offers a striking interpretation of poverty as “cosmic integration.”<sup>33</sup> Far from being a mere renunciation of material goods, poverty is the recognition that the human person is integrally connected to the entire cosmos and therefore must be free from possessiveness in order to serve all. Poverty becomes a total offering of oneself to *Christ-realisation*, a surrender that opens the person to universal responsibility. The integrated and integrating person experiences true freedom in self-emptying. This echoes both the *kenotic* Christology of St Paul (“though he was in the form of God... he emptied himself,” Philippians 2.6) and the *niṣkāma karma* of the Bhagavad Gita (2.27), where action is offered without attachment to results. The Christian and Indian traditions converge in affirming that self-gift is the path to authentic personhood.

For Vineeth, love for neighbour is the tangible verification of love for God.<sup>34</sup> Prayer, sacramental life, contemplation, and ascetic practice remain incomplete unless they culminate in concrete acts of compassion. This resonates with the broader Christian tradition, which asserts that faith devoid of loving action is dead (James 2.17,26). It also aligns seamlessly with the CMI heritage of education, social upliftment, and missionary service as expressions of contemplative integration. Thus, the mission (*tapas*) rooted in love and service is not an external obligation imposed on the religious person but the organic overflow of the vision (*darśan*) itself. The integrated person becomes a centre of unity, harmony, and liberation – revealing God’s compassion in the world.

## **6. The Heart of Christ and Realising God’s Kingdom**

The culmination of the integrative journey—reason and heart, *jñāna* and *bhakti*, contemplation and action—is found in the Heart of Jesus Christ. Christ represents the supreme

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<sup>33</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 51–52.

integration of divine and human love, the perfect union of transcendence and immanence. In the incarnate Word, the human consciousness is perfectly harmonised with the divine consciousness, revealing the fullness of what it means to be human.<sup>35</sup> This Christological foundation resonates with the theological vision articulated by Pope Francis in *Dilexit Nos*, where he describes the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the “unifying principle of all reality”<sup>36</sup> and the “blazing furnace of divine and human love and the most sublime fulfilment to which humanity can aspire.”<sup>37</sup> The Heart of Christ is thus not merely a devotional symbol but the metaphysical centre in which human existence finds integration, meaning, and destiny.

Vineeth interprets union with the Heart of Christ as the deepest realisation of the human person. When the individual heart—fragmented by desires, fears, and competing attachments—enters into communion with Christ's Heart, the person experiences profound interior identity and authentic selfhood. This union mirrors the mystical traditions of both East and West: the *sākṣātkāra* of the Upanishads, the *unio mystica* of Christian spirituality, and the *theosis* of Eastern Christian theology. In this transformative encounter, integration becomes not merely a psychological or ethical harmony but a participation in the divine life. As Cyriac Kanichai CMI notes, “the Christ-event becomes the interior horizon of human consciousness,”<sup>38</sup> enabling the seeker to realise their deepest identity as *imago Dei*. This union constitutes the highest form of self-realisation, surpassing purely intellectual or affective experiences. It is a unitive consciousness grounded in love.

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<sup>35</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Pope Francis, *Dilexit Nos* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2024), para. 31

<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis, *Dilexit Nos*, para. 32.

<sup>38</sup> Kanichai, *Anthropology of Indian Christian Spirituality*, 97.

The integrated life, grounded in the Heart of Christ, naturally expands into mission. Vineeth emphasises that profound interiority leads to profound exterior transformation. Integration culminates in a commitment to bring peace, harmony, and reconciliation into the world.<sup>39</sup> This outward dynamism aligns with Jesus's proclamation of the Kingdom of God—a reality marked by justice, compassion, freedom, and communion. Pope Francis affirms in *Dilexit Nos* that authentic devotion to the Sacred Heart must always manifest in efforts to build God's kingdom of love and justice in history.<sup>40</sup> The mystical and the prophetic are inseparable. The Heart of Christ becomes both the source and the model for transforming social structures, healing divisions, and fostering human dignity.

Thus, for Vineeth, integrating reason and heart, contemplation and service, is ultimately participation in the divine-human mission inaugurated by Christ. The integrated person does not merely contemplate God's kingdom but becomes an instrument of its realisation. By embodying the love of Christ, they contribute to the transformation of the world into a space of communion, peace, and justice.

In this vision, the journey inward (integration), the journey upward (union with Christ), and the journey outward (kingdom-mission) form a single unified pathway. This is the fullness of being human and the deepest meaning of Christian discipleship.

## **Conclusion**

The vision of Fr Francis Vineeth CMI offers a profound and compelling philosophical-theological anthropology for our time—an anthropology rooted in integration. Across his writings and personal witness, Vineeth foregrounds the central

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<sup>39</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Pope Francis, *Dilexit Nos*, para. 28.

intuition that to be human is to be integrated: integration of reason and heart, contemplation and action, self-knowledge and God-realisation. This dynamic inner harmony is a spiritual and existential orientation that reveals the deepest truth of human identity.

Drawing deeply from the Indian spiritual heritage while remaining anchored in Christian revelation, Vineeth synthesises the classical margas—*jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma*—into a holistic pathway toward human and divine fulfilment. The human person becomes truly themselves only when intellect, affection, and action converge into a unified consciousness rooted in Ultimate Reality. In this union, *ātma-jñāna* becomes *Brahma-jñāna*; self-realisation becomes God-realisation. Integration thus forms the meeting point of anthropology, spirituality, and mysticism.<sup>41</sup>

For the religious person, this integration takes on a particular intensity and mission. Through interior unification, the religious becomes an *integrated and integrating being*, one who not only embodies harmony but mediates it to others and to the world. The religious, in Vineeth's view, stands as a sign of universal love—one who radiates compassion, embodies solidarity with the poor, and engages in selfless service. The evangelical counsels become expressions of cosmic and Christ-centred integration, opening the human heart to universality.

This integrative anthropology finds its summit in the Heart of Christ. Jesus Christ, the perfect unity of divine and human love, reveals the ultimate meaning of integration. In Christ's Heart, human consciousness is harmonised with divine consciousness; human identity is fulfilled in divine intimacy. Through union with the Heart of Christ, the seeker realises not only authentic selfhood but also the mission to build God's

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<sup>41</sup> Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 12-17.

kingdom of love, justice, and peace. Integration, therefore, becomes participation in Christ's own mission—transforming the world into a communion of hearts.

In a fragmented age marked by technological overstimulation, social polarisation, and interior restlessness, the integrative vision of Fr Francis Vineeth stands as both critique and hope. It challenges modern humanity to rediscover the centre from which meaning flows; it offers a pathway to heal the fractures of the self and society; and it reminds us that true human fulfilment is found not in isolation or self-assertion but in communion, love, and self-gift.<sup>42</sup>

Ultimately, Vineeth's philosophical-theological anthropology affirms that holiness is nothing other than full humanity realised in God. As Pope Francis reminds us through Léon Bloy, "the only great tragedy in life is not to become a saint." In Vineeth's language, the tragedy is failing to become an integrated and integrating human being. The success of life, then, is integration—becoming fully human after the model of Jesus Christ, the perfectly integrated One. In this way, Fr Francis Vineeth's vision becomes not only a theological proposal but a practical roadmap for human flourishing, Christian discipleship, and the transformation of society.

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<sup>42</sup> Kanichai, *Anthropology of Indian Christian Spirituality*, 94-100.

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# Integration as Incarnational Being, Becoming and Going Beyond

*Dr. Paulachan Kochappilly CMI*

## Abstract

Life is a journey, experiencing and experimenting with all possible phenomena that unfold on one's path to wholeness and wellness, in the horizon of *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* (truth, consciousness, and happiness), through right relationships. As a consequence, one expresses and evangelises the natives based on the wealth of personalisation and contemplation.

Francis Vineeth Vadakkethala, CMI, was a genuine pilgrim (*tirthyātri*) of *satyam*, *shivam*, *sundaram* (truth, goodness and beauty), rooted in the Indian and Eastern Traditions, integrating Western insights, and anchored in Christ – the Word of God and the centre of human nature – and faithfully following the Way of life.

Encountering the interior and exterior realities makes people rich and resourceful in sharing experiential knowledge (*anubhava jñāna*) with their co-pilgrims, and they also learn wisdom lessons from wayfarers to expand their scope of inclusion and integration, making their lives more authentic and attractive.

Awakened consciousness of the elemental realities (*pañcabhūta*) and the layered sheaths (*pañcakōśa*) of the human constitution bespeak the fundamental openness to the

*Saccidānanda* of God, for the full flowering of the inherent image of God in the context of one's existence and excellence, embracing transformation into theosis through *Christogenesis*.

In realising and contemplating the world and the Word, nothing is alien to the pilgrims on earth, for their centre is the Word becoming flesh, and the human nature in Christ is the expression of the divine nature.

Alike the grain of wheat dying and rising to life, being inclusive and integrating, people nurture and foster the being to become and go beyond the limits of all human imagination, embracing nothing to possess everything.

Integration as inclusivity challenges the pilgrims to enter into dialogue with all the vicissitudes of life, keeping in mind the fundamental dignity and equality of all. The pilgrims become prophets, poets, and protestors to bring about harmony and joy in the community of life, wherever inequality and discrimination are perpetuated due to human misconceptions and mistreatment of the privileged members against the Cosmic Body of God and the Mystical Body of Christ. No one is saved alone, for all things are interconnected and interdependent.

In this pilgrimage of integration and inclusivity, people evolve a lifestyle of identity, plurality, and solidarity by engaging and navigating a joyful journey. The earth does not reject anyone, and the sky does not divide anyone, for the mercy pours down like rainfall and spreads like sunshine.

A pattern of integration and inclusivity is visible in the angelic hymn at the Nativity of Jesus: a mingling and merging of glorification of God, peace on earth, and hope to human beings in the journey of people towards the *darśan* of the Word made flesh in Bethlehem – the foundation, force, and focus of integration and inclusivity.

## **Introduction**

The paper will explore the insight of Vineeth on Integration as Inclusivity: Being, Becoming, and Going Beyond under three interconnected subheadings:

1. As the Relation, so is the Integration
2. As the Integration, so is the Celebration
3. As the Celebration, so is the Horizon

सर्वेषां स्वस्थिर भवतु, सर्वेषां शान्तिर्भवतु  
सर्वेषां पुर्ण भवतु, सर्वेषां मंगलं भवतु।

Awakened consciousness is the catchphrase of Vadakkethala Francis Vineeth, CMI. Due to his awakened stage of consciousness, V. F. Vineeth, through his pilgrimage on earth, etched out a niche of admiration and appreciation. Vineeth was a man for all seasons, leaving an indelible mark on everything he came in contact with. His look, talk and walk attracted many, for there was a fire burning in him, following the zeal of prophets, poets, artists and mystics. "He has a mystical mind and blend, appreciating truth, goodness, and beauty and challenging falsehood, evil, and ugliness or injustice, wherever found."<sup>1</sup> Vineeth was all these and much more. Nothing was alien to him, what God in his eternal providence keeps unfolding. He was open to dialogue and discernment. Thanks to the gentle, genuine and creative spark of the divine he carried in his heart. Consecrated to the rhythm of and reverence for the Word, Vineeth anchored and awakened his consciousness by the transforming Spirit of Christ, the source and summit of his life's journey.

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<sup>1</sup> Paulachan Kochappilly, "Christian Mysticism as Mysticism of the Mystery of Christ," in *New Horizons of Indian Christism LivingL A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr Vadakkethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, ed. Saju Chackalackal, Bengaluru: Vidyavanam Publicatons, 2009, 639.

Awakened consciousness is the flourishing of integration; they mirror each other. Call to integration is “a life-long process”,<sup>2</sup> open to possibilities going beyond the imagination of space and time. Nevertheless, integration attained leaves an imprint on the person and the mission. As people journey, they encounter new realities and enter into fresh relationships, neither abandoning their identity nor evading the plurality of experiences. A person on a pilgrimage faces others, and as a result, relationships build up. The more one interacts with the Other and others, the greater the integration.

### **1. As the Relation, so is the Integration**

Relationship is the key to integration. A person who is open to the surrounding realities advances towards integration through dialogue, discernment, and the assimilation of all that is conducive to organic development and flourishing. We are what our relations are. A relationship involves thoughts, words, people, things and actions. Whatever exists invites us to enter into a dialogue and build relationships, which, over time, make us a person of integration – one who adequately addresses each individual and is inclusive in nature. No one is exempt from these interactions and integrations; however, the degree of inclusivity and integration varies from person to person.

Human beings, sharing the image of God, have a fundamental openness to others and the Other. Vineeth banks on this inherent openness built into human beings to pave the way towards integration, which is a lifelong process. “Man is free because he is created with a radical openness to God (Being as such) and nothing other than God

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<sup>2</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration. New Perspectives in the Theology of Religious Life*, Trichur, Jyothi Book Centre, 1979, 54.

can really fill this openness.”<sup>3</sup> Augustine’s saying captures the restlessness inherent in this movement of integration: “You made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.”<sup>4</sup> Related to the foundation of one’s existence and excellence, a human being discovers freedom and joy. Joining at the source of one’s life and flourishing – awakened consciousness – people thrive in their relationship with all things in the universe. With the awareness of the connectedness with all things in the One, make all kith and kin, and there is no ground for considering others as strangers or enemies. All in the universe become friends and neighbours. Everybody in the world becomes incorporated into one’s body, part and parcel of life’s flourishing – a microcosmic consciousness of the macrocosmic reality.

In the vein of oneness in the One, we are tailored to the covenant community consciousness, where all are partners of the same bond. In the Pauline metaphor, we are the members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the head of which is Christ. The joys, sorrows, and hope of a member become the joys, sorrows, and hope of the whole body. Ubuntu, meaning “I am what I am because of who we all are”, explains the insight through belongingness. The interrelatedness of all beings is echoed in the Indian ideal, “*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*,” meaning the world is a single family.<sup>5</sup> This family bond is actually real when people follow the pervading presence of God in everything and enjoy things with a sense of renunciation, without coveting the wealth of

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<sup>3</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 47.

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine, *Confessions* I: 1, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, New York, Barnes & Noble Books, 1992, 21.

<sup>5</sup> अयं बन्धुरयंनेति गणना लघुचेतसाम्  
उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् (*Maha Upanishad* VI.71-73 ) ॥

others. *Isha Upanishad* outlines the path of relation and consequent integration:

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यां जगत्

तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्वध्दनम् (1)

Being rooted in the Lord sets the stage for belongingness. Belongingness is the core, and everything is governed and guided by the principle of participation – being becomes through belongingness. The source of being and becoming is the seed of the divine in each and everything. In the priestly prayer, Jesus airs the mutual union and communion, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me” (Jn 17:21). Jesus’ teaching, “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine” (Jn 15:4) alludes to the abiding presence of all things in the Lord for its flowering – an image of integration and inclusivity.

As the Incarnation, so is the integration. Father Vineeth considers the mystery of Incarnation – the centre of human nature – as pivotal in the process of human integration. The integration of a religious person centres around the Incarnate Word of God. By “the orientation to the Word,” a religious person becomes universal just like the Word became universal in his relationship to humanity.”<sup>6</sup> Paul Kalluveetil speaks about the hermeneutics of the Word of God, “The interpreter has to wake the word, so that it can become a speaking word, speaking word to my person in the existential context, evoking me, provoking me, energising me, stimulating me and motivating me.”<sup>7</sup> The author

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<sup>6</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 49.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Kalluveetil, *Word as Metaphor. Towards a Poetic Hermeneutics*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 2009, 14.

emphasises that the Word of God “enters the world and becomes, so to say, ‘worldly’.”<sup>8</sup> In the cosmic integration, Vineeth advocates that it “demands the complete surrendering of all to the Word.”<sup>9</sup> He sees the evangelical counsels as a consecration to the Word. Teilhard de Chardin meditates in a similar vein, “I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and suffering of the world.”<sup>10</sup>

Prayer and meditation are essential in the integration. Father Vineeth writes, “The religious is one who has been called to integrate himself in the Word. Given to the Word totally, he is expected to be in a continual process of such an integration.”<sup>11</sup> Addressing the question of how to realise integration, the simple one-word answer he proposes is prayer. According to him, “Prayer is the means of integration.”

Furthermore, Father Vineeth writes, “It is through prayer that the religious is led to this inner transformation which is the sum and substance of interior integration.”<sup>12</sup> The ultimate goal of prayerful meditation is “the divine transformation of human consciousness. This transformation is at the same time the integration of man’s consciousness in his own divine centre.”<sup>13</sup> Some of the key insights Father Vineeth borrows to explain the awakened consciousness are the following. The consciousness gets enlightened (becomes *Buddha*) by the light

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Kalluveetil, *Word as Metaphor*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 56.

<sup>10</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *The Mass on the World*, in *Hymn of the Universe*, London, William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1965, 19.

<sup>11</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 75.

<sup>12</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 77.

<sup>13</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 82.

of the indwelling spirit, the *antaryamin*. This awakening is his own self-discovery, and it is in this awakening that he finds himself integrated. The result is peace. Comfortably, he switches from one tradition to another in explaining the phenomenon of consciousness transformation, the prerequisite for integration. The vocabulary in the interpretation showcases his agility and ability to navigate the vast ocean of classical sacred literature in the field, using it profusely with ease. An extensive knowledge of cross-cultural insights and their effective application is a testament to the process of integration that has gone into the flow of ideas and ideals of integration. In this manner, the teacher undergoes a process of self-transformation, which only adds to the colour and flavour of integration attained through Incarnation. We get the taste of the author from the following lines:

Integrated man as the *Bhagavadgita* puts it, is a man of steady consciousness (*stitaprajna*).<sup>14</sup>

The mystery of Incarnation is precisely the mystery of becoming: remaining ever the same, the full expression of the Word as the Father, yet the same Word expressing itself as man, actuating and informing the finite human nature which the Word itself has become.<sup>15</sup>

The above explanation is a validation of the process of integration, which each one has to undertake in the journey of life. He presents Jesus – the Word Incarnate – as the perfect model of integration:

Christ himself is the perfect model of this integration. He is the most perfect union of humanity and divinity. In him the

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<sup>14</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 83.

<sup>15</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 90.

human consciousness was well subordinated to the divine always seeking the will of the Father who sent him.<sup>16</sup>

In Jesus Christ there is perfect integration. A perfect integration aims at such transformation of consciousness and character. Clearly, he states, “Christ is our model of perfect integration of the human and divine consciousness, in existence as well as in operation.”<sup>17</sup> Fathers of the Church expressed the wonder of the Incarnation and integration differently. For example, Athanasius writes, “God became man so that man might become god.” Ephrem muses, “He gave us divinity, we gave Him humanity.”<sup>18</sup> Remembering the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the Eucharistic Liturgy celebrates, “To make us share in Your divine life, You assumed our human nature.”<sup>19</sup> These texts witness to the participation and subsequent transformation – gradual integration in Christ – as human beings and begins concurrent life and operation in Christ and like Christ.

Meditation on Christ is the path to integration. Vineeth writes, “Christ being the ideal and the perfect model of integration, meditation on Christ is certainly one of the best means of working out this integration within ourselves.”<sup>20</sup> At the roots of human nature, Christ is the model of integration, “because in Christ the human nature is unambiguously integrated in the Word.”<sup>21</sup> Integration through prayer life has three main orientations, “the *social*, the *intellectual*, and the intimately *personal* consisting of affection, feeling, emotion,

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<sup>16</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 94.

<sup>17</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 94.

<sup>18</sup> St Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith* 5:17

<sup>19</sup> *The Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, 54.

<sup>20</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 98.

<sup>21</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 98.

and so on.”<sup>22</sup> Integration is holistic and permeating all things. It leaves an impression on every aspect of life:

The social type of prayers of a religious are certainly to be characterised by the intellectual and affectionate orientations. So also his personal prayer shall never be the prayer of a closed individual. The more intensely personal it is, the greater is the degree of openness and self-giving it contains.<sup>23</sup>

Prayer in the community helps the members have community integration. The impact of integration in one realm permeates other realms of life and activity. Writing about community integration, Vineeth says, “A personal prayer works out the integration of the person within oneself, the community prayer can marvellously work out the integration of the members into the community of the Lord.”<sup>24</sup> The Sacred Liturgy is the source and summit of Christian life. Vineeth emphasises the role of the celebration of the Liturgy on the path of integration:

The celebration of the Liturgy brings with it the awakening of a cosmic awareness in everyone of us, reminding us of the wide range of relationships we have with the world at large in and through Christ.<sup>25</sup>

Seen from this standpoint, the Eucharistic celebration is an activity of great integrating power: when we integrate ourselves into our community, our Church, and the world at large into the Lord.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 101.

<sup>23</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 101-102.

<sup>24</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 109-110.

<sup>25</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 110.

<sup>26</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 110.

Vineeth underlines the influence of the Eucharist in the cosmic integration into the Lord, which is underway. In this regard, Teilhard's theological insight into Christogenesis<sup>27</sup> is worthy of our attention. Christogenesis is a gradual process of evolutionary stages involving kosmogogenesis, biogenesis, and noogenesis. The upward and forward movement of creation culminates in Parousia. Teilhard's prayer echoes a universal consciousness: "It is in this dedication, Lord Jesus, I desire to live, in this I desire to die."<sup>28</sup> The heightened union and consequent consciousness come to light as Teilhard raises his heart in prayer, "For me, my God, all joy and all achievement, the very purpose of my being and all my love of life, all depend on this one basic vision of the union between yourself and the universe."<sup>29</sup> Vineeth strikes on the same note when he writes, "Endowed with the divine consciousness, they live as a heavenly community on earth. They have only one mission: to spread this divine consciousness wider and wider."<sup>30</sup> For him, "Religious life is integration in the Divine Consciousness. Evangelisation is the spreading of that divine consciousness on earth."<sup>31</sup>

Following the Incarnational mode of the Logos, all take a call on integration as a response to the awakened consciousness, inclusive of all without exception.

## **2. As the Integration, so is the Celebration**

The integration calls for a celebration. Celebration is a sign of integration of relationships. Integration and celebration depend on one's relationships, both internal and external. In

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<sup>27</sup> Christopher F. Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ*, New York, Image Books, 1968, 177.

<sup>28</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *The Mass on the World*, 35.

<sup>29</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *The Mass on the World*, 35.

<sup>30</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 117.

<sup>31</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Call to Integration*, 131.

other words, when one finds the rhythm of life, with God, creation, and fellow beings, celebration and integration start. We are what our relations are. Relationality is the key to integration and celebration. Where relations are harmonious, the celebration of life begins.

Yoga – consciousness of presence – is a school where people learn to be at home and at ease with themselves and everything that surrounds them. Vineeth opines, yoga “is primarily a spiritual discipline of integration. By practising concentration and meditation one brings about this much aspired integration in life.”<sup>32</sup> Equanimity or *stitapranja* is a state of integration and celebration. At the fecundity of integration springs celebration of life; “where no thief approaches and no moth destroys” (Lk 12:34). Resourcefulness and rejoicing characterise this state of life. Such a person is a grounded being, yet always open to becoming and transcends all limitations one can imagine. This experience of peace and joy is a mark of integration and celebration, where the sound of silence is eloquent and vibrant. There is merging and mingling of everything in the state of awakened consciousness. So, integration and celebration go hand in hand, and one mirrors the other. Maybe this realisation of equanimity and serenity, or in search of the power of the presence, people return to the lap of Mother Nature at the fag end of their life. Was this the disposition of Vineeth behind moving to *Vidyavanam, vanam* (forest), in celebrating *vidya* (wisdom)? Does his quest resonate with the ardent desire of the founding members of the Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate in the nineteenth century? The dawn of realisation!

The forest is a manifestation of integration and a non-stop celebration of relationships. Ephrem speaks of two books of

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<sup>32</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 55.

revelation: one, Nature, and the other, Scripture. Creation reveals the love, life, and light of God. Vineeth was engaging us students at Dharmaram College. He was lecturing on metaphysics. A discussion on the existence of truth shot up. He addressed the question with a simple note on verification. Then, there was a giant banyan tree giving green cover close to the then Adhyayana building (the former Post Office). Pointing to the veracity of the banyan tree, he said, there is no need for futile debate on the existence of the tree. Go to the site and see it for yourself. Simply an insightful and fascinating response. His reference was to a living tree, symbolic in many ways. Who knows whether the *bīja* of Vidyavana Asharam was in gestation in the womb of his creative imagination by affection!

In the discussion on the Eastern approach to reality, Vineeth describes *ātman* as *sat-cit-ānanda*,<sup>33</sup> meaning Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. This Eastern approach discloses a network of layers and relations, which takes us to the realm of realisation or integration. At the same breath, Vineeth points out the different layers of *ātman* as *anandamaya* (bliss), *vijnanamaya* (consciousness), *manomaya* (mind), *pranamaya* (life awareness), *annamaya* (body/world awareness).<sup>34</sup> According to him, "These attributes are different layers of consciousness in which *ātman* is both concealed and revealed."<sup>35</sup> Further, he points out, "The innermost cave after the fifth layer contains *ātman*, which is *sat* (pure being) by nature."<sup>36</sup> Within the scheme of *ātman* consciousness, there are six attributes to *ātman*. Out of the six attributes, three (body, life and mind) refer to *jivātman* alone,

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<sup>33</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision. A Guide to Metaphysics Eastern and Western*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1985, 35-39.

<sup>34</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 37.

<sup>36</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 37.

and the remaining three (existence, consciousness, bliss) belong to both *jivātman* and *paramātman*.<sup>37</sup> Through this distinction, the project of integration and harmony is safeguarded. However, this interpretation helps maintain the distinction between *jivātman* and *paramātman*, but it raises more questions than it answers. Mindful of the intricacies in drawing such distinctions, Vineeth adds, saying, “The *ātman* that is in the innermost core is pure being. It is a simple and undivided unity. There is nothing to impede its identity with itself. Hence, it is said to be one and non-dual (*ekam eva advadiyam*).”<sup>38</sup> At the end of a subtle analysis and synthesis, Vineeth states, “*Ātman* is *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* (being, consciousness and bliss).”<sup>39</sup>

Vineeth discusses the subjective and objective dimensions of the attributes of *ātman*. According to him:

*Ātman* is subjectively experienced as *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* – being, consciousness and bliss. Being is objectively seen as one, true and good. Reality has both these subjective and objective dimensions. East and West are really complementary in developing the subjective and objective dimensions of being respectively.<sup>40</sup>

From the complementary nature of objective and subjective dimensions of reality, Vineeth sees the synthesis in Jesus Christ, the Word of God – both human and divine:

Naturally, in the Christian vision, the ultimate synthesis is brought about in God through Christ. Christ, being the divine Word in whom and through whom humanity and the

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<sup>37</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 39.

<sup>40</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 55.

whole universe have been conceived, is the experienced synthesis of all, of all humanity and divinity in one.<sup>41</sup>

Though the author does not find such a synthesis worked out in the Indian vision, he foresees that it stands “for the cosmo-theandric synthesis to be realised in every man.”<sup>42</sup> Pointing to the ultimate of humanity, Vineeth says, “Christ is the Word in whom the greatest synthesis of all creation has taken place. From the Indian standpoint, what happened in Christ should take place in every man.”<sup>43</sup> To elaborate on this progress in the integration process, he borrows from the evolutionary theory proposed by Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard points to theosis through the stages of geosphere, biosphere, psychosphere, nousphere, Christosphere and Theosphere.<sup>44</sup> In the present scheme of life, all things are moving to God in Christ.

Such a synthesis is nothing short of the celebration of life in Christ. It is the integration of all possible spheres unto God through Jesus Christ. Integration - incorporating all relationships to oneself - is an epiphany of celebration - celebration of oneself in Christ. It is envisaged through the transformation of life through the commitment to the Word of God - Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of living synthesis of humanity and divinity, the subjective and objective reality. Integration as celebration, when seen as continued process, makes us participate in the existence, consciousness and bliss of God.

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<sup>41</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 57.

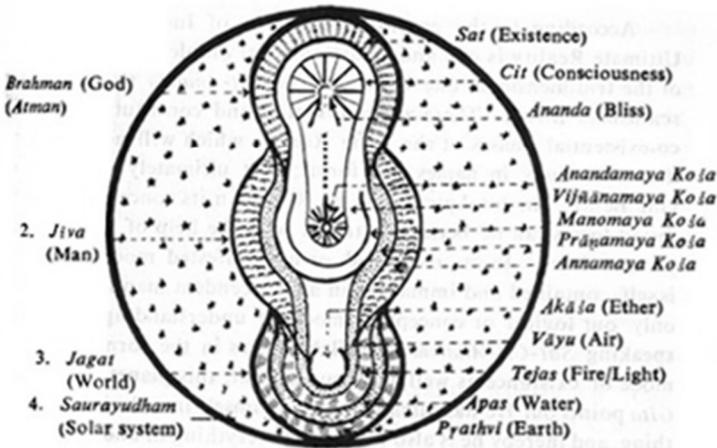
<sup>42</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 57.

<sup>43</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 57.

<sup>44</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Foundations of World Vision*, 56.

In his article on “Holiness as Harmony of Life,”<sup>45</sup> Thomas Manickam portrays a spectrograph of reality, which depicts the inherent interrelatedness and the integration leading to celebration of life in the whole world, incorporating the various layers of *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* with *pancha kosa*, and *pancha bhoota*.

## The Spectrograph of Reality The Harmony of Human Life



The above spectrograph showcases the range of integration through awakened consciousness of interconnectivity and the overflowing celebration of life through the incorporation of all things in the universe into one's body. Integration and celebration go hand in hand on

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Manickam, “Holiness as Harmony of Life,” *Journal of Dharma* 8 (1983): 192-204. See, Paulachan Kochappilly, “Harmony of Life: As the Way to Holiness and Happiness,” in *Eco-Philosophy and Harmony of Nature. Collected Works of Dr Thomas Manickam*, Sebastian Alackapally, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2019: 279-304.

the basis of relationality with reality, encompassing both its subjectivity and objectivity. The meeting and merging of the universe with the human being in the existence, consciousness and bliss of God cause celebration of life, and this celebration of life is anchored in the Word of God – Jesus Christ.

The link of *jagat*, *jīva*, and *ātman* establishes rhythm and harmony, the gateway to peace and joy. This rhythm of the *sauryudham* kicks off eternal celebration. People endowed with awakened consciousness realise the celebration of life in Christ, for “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people” (Jn 1:3-4). Saint Paul adds to the notion of integration and celebration of all things in Christ, “He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him” (Col 1:15-16). All are one in Christ and Christ is in all. The mystical touch of the integration and celebration reaches its zenith, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19-20). Teilhard de Chardin made his final reflection on this passage. On the eve of his death, he noted down in his diary the core of his evolutionary theory. Reflecting on the above passage, Teilhard wrote that the forward and upward movement of evolution culminates in Christogenesis. A palaeontologist theologian seems to propose a sort of mysticism – the pilgrimage of integration and celebration in Christ – seeing Christ in everything and everything in Christ.

Vineeth attempts to synthesise the objective and subjective attributes of reality in a simple yet profound

manner. Reality, according to him, “is *sat, cit* and *ānanda* which is reflected in every being as one, true and good.”<sup>46</sup> The beauty of these transcendental qualities is described as “a reflection of the Trinity in creation. God is *saccidānanda*, and the reflection of *sat-cit-ānanda* in creation is one, true and good.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, the creation is an epiphany of the joy, beauty and glory of the Holy Trinity, the ground of integration and perpetual celebration on the bedrock of the Trinitarian and Christological perichoresis.

### 3. As the Celebration, so is the Horizon

Where there is celebration, there is a larger horizon. Celebration offers a transcendental space-time to enter into a world beyond boundaries. A person of integration and celebration is free, friendly, and faithful in his awakened consciousness. Nothing is alien to such persons. They do not exclude anything; instead, they take delight in including and incorporating all things. At the same time, they work out on their being-in-relation to become-in-relation to the inner call of the spirit by going beyond all conventions and calculations. Rooted in the all-encompassing Word, people tread the path of creativity and novelty, ushering in contextual reading and interpreting the Gospel of Christ for the well-being of the world and all that is in it.

Fittingly, the angelic hymn at the Nativity of Jesus presents the directions of the horizon, ever expanding and inclusive in essence:

Glory to God in the highest  
Peace on earth  
Hope for human beings

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<sup>46</sup> V. F. *Foundations of World Vision*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> V. F. *Foundations of World Vision*, 62.

The celebration of the Incarnation sets the stage for the fundamental triadic relationships, namely, God, creation, and human beings. This three-edged celebration encompasses all possible relationships, comprehensively summarising them. Is the triad – God, creation, and human beings – not resembling the discussion on *jagat*, *jīva*, and *ātman*? In the process of integration and celebration, the Mystery of the Incarnation reveals the fundamental arena of God’s glorification, the establishment of peace, and the rendering of hope to human beings. One who establishes the triadic relationships, experiences and expresses the integration, inclusive of the truth, goodness, and beauty – *satyama*, *śivam*, *sundaram*. A person of integration dances to the tune of truth, goodness, and beauty, the splendour of which is Jesus Christ.

The angelic hymn paints a picture of harmony, where the Lord, land, and people are interconnected and integrated. Triadic realities have their specific place in the scheme of salvation. As the hymn delineates, the glorification of God, the establishment of peace on earth, and the rendering of hope to human beings are inherent interrelationships within the ecosystem. This mutual relationship between the threefold realities reveals the path to integration and celebration of life. They sing and dance in unison and cohesion. For instance, where there is peace on earth, there is hope for humanity, which is an assurance of God’s glory. That means glory, peace, and hope move together, enhancing the being, expediting the becoming, and enlightening to go beyond and embrace the horizon of transcendence.

**Cry for Justice:** Endowed with such an integration and celebration of relationships, one cannot be comfortable with any injustice prevalent in the community. The prophet, poet and politician in them rise to the occasion, with their imagination to restore rhythm and harmony. Vineeth makes

his voice heard through his prophetic cry for justice to reign among the Churches in India. Seeing the arrogance and unchristian mentality of the Latin Church towards the Oriental Churches, Vineeth writes, "Those who have occupied larger areas of territories, or to be exact, have declared territories to be theirs, simply refuse to allow others to come in, unless they give up all their individuality and patrimony. Our Hindu brethren do not demand this."<sup>48</sup> Sharpening his criticism, Vineeth raises the minimum programme:

The only thing this community demands is the right of self-rule as envisaged in Vatican II, which is a natural and fundamental right of any community on earth. The stubborn denial of this minimum demand and the unchristian arrogance with which it has been handled up to this day only made me think in such stern lines, much against my own natural inclination and way of writing.<sup>49</sup>

The prophet in him stood up; no more could he be silent to the injustice perpetuated on the false pretext of unity, ignoring the ecumenical principle of communion of Churches upheld by Vatican II and the human dignity of Christians, which otherwise heralded from housetops.

**Commitment to Christ and Open to Religions:** Vineeth embodied the celebration of life amidst the interreligious context of India, nurtured by the Thomas Christians of India, characterised by his commitment to Christ and openness to all religions.<sup>50</sup> He writes, "Born and bred in a land of many religions, religious pluralism is not anything new to us,

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<sup>48</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Justice and Reconciliation: The Sad but Living Story of a Church in Fetters*. Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1983, 4.

<sup>49</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Justice and Reconciliation*, 10-11.

<sup>50</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, Bangalore, Vidyavanam Publications, 2004, 200.

believers in India. We accepted it as a historical fact and developed a way of life of mutual understanding and cooperation."<sup>51</sup> In sharing the story, Vineeth highlights three key insights regarding Christian grooming in the Asian context: a spirituality of participation without domination, religious pluralism as a historical reality, and religious pluralism as a theological principle.<sup>52</sup> While appreciating the interreligious dialogue – a dialogue of life and cooperation – he does not compromise the identity and uniqueness of Christian faith. He writes:

Religious pluralism as a theological act depends heavily on this faith commitment to Christ. Now it is through the eye of Christ, which is the spirit of Christ abiding in me, that I look at other religions. As Christ is the Word who became flesh, through whom everything was conceived and created, through my eyes of Christian faith.<sup>53</sup>

This celebration of the plurality of religions helps Vineeth to rise above the confines of religious fundamentalism without diluting his faith in Christ. He clarifies, "Christ-experience as the eternal Word of the Father, who lived on earth, died for us, breathed his spirit into us, is certainly part and parcel of the content of the Christian faith."<sup>54</sup> Confessing one's faith without compromising its identity gives Vineeth wings to fly beyond the clutches of limiting factors and walk together with people of other religions. He argues, "If such an experience is deprived of the content of Christianity, there is nothing specifically Christian in it. There is nothing to share with other religions."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, 183.

<sup>52</sup> Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, 184-191.

<sup>53</sup> Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, 191.

<sup>54</sup> Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, 191.

<sup>55</sup> Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, 191.

Vineeth's thoughts on the commitment to Christ in a world of many religions are down-to-earth and inspiring, as he builds them on the basis of his life experience as a Thomas Christian from India. He identifies the characteristics of such a commitment to Christ as total and unconditional, the interpersonal dimension in religious commitment, and commitment and fidelity. Vineeth is eloquent on this celebration of life in Christ, embracing the horizon of Christ himself:

To stick to my commitment in spite of contrary challenges and temptations, I must renew my commitment creatively again and again, overcoming the forces of opposing movements both within and outside me. This makes my commitment ever creative and keeps it always alive. Selfless sacrifice is the bloodstream of any commitment. This is what we see in the life and death of Jesus. This must be seen also in the life and death of his disciples.<sup>56</sup>

Following the footsteps of Jesus, Vineeth proposes a path similar to Jesus' regarding the plurality of religions. Vineeth's approach to the historical fact of plurality of religions and his theological act is a symbol of the integration of faith in Christ, assuming the incarnational in living:

Hardly did Jesus criticise or condemn other religions. Instead, he has often criticised his own religion. He always appreciated deep and genuine faith. Let us also do the same. Jesus was always opposed to sin, whether it is in his own religion or in other religions and remained on the side of love, truth, justice and peace. Let us also be like him."<sup>57</sup>

**Ashram: An Abode of Celebration:** Vidyavanam Ashram, a brainchild of Vineeth, stands out as an epitome of integration and celebration. The lifestyle of the Ashram is a

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<sup>56</sup> Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, 199.

<sup>57</sup> Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God*, 200.

confluence of Indian, Eastern, and Christian impressions and imaginations. Once, when I visited the Ashram, we had the Eucharistic Liturgy. Vineeth presided over the celebration using the Addai and Mari Anaphora; it took place in a small room. It was the initial stage of the Ashram. When we stepped out of the prayer room, he shared his inner thirst and appreciation for the Eastern Liturgy, wishing it to be celebrated with the solemnity and serenity it deserves, and for the spirit of it to be carried forward in the Church for posterity. His heart throbbed with the spirit of the Indian and Eastern perspectives. This personal sharing was not sporadic, but rather the bedrock of his thought process. Vineeth's creative notes on the Liturgical Seasons, supported by the remarkable sketches of Joy Elamkunnapuzha in the 1980s, were a landmark artistic creation that captured the mystical and cyclic liturgical spirituality of the Eastern Church, resonating with the Indian mindscape. They provide ample space to script the progressive programmatic process of the spiritual journey with Jesus Christ, beginning with the annunciation to the dedication of the Church, the event in the eschaton.<sup>58</sup> These are theologically rich and spiritually resourceful spaces, which speak volumes about the integration and celebration of the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation on an Indian, Eastern, and Christian canvas. Today, they adorn the cave chapel of Vidyavanam

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<sup>58</sup> Paulachan Kochappilly, "Liturgical Seasons," in *Icons of the Unseen. Asian Theology through the Eyes of Artist Joy Elamkunnapuzha* CMI, Johnson Vadakumchery, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2002, 129. See also Jose Nandhikkara, "Knowing and Becoming: Dynamics at Vidyavanam Chapel", in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living. A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr Vineeth Vadakethala Francis Vineeth* CMI, Saju Chackalackal, ed., Bengaluru: Vidyavanam Publications, 117-125.

Ashram, recounting the saga of becoming another Christ. In Vineeth's own words,

These drawings were an exquisite blending of the oriental faith in liturgical seasons and the Indian symbols of art capable of engendering the same religious awe and joyful experience of the divine rhythm communicated to us through the season of the liturgical year. For many years, these drawings found their pride of place in the CMI liturgical calendar. Now, enchanted by the artistic beauty and the suggestive power of these drawings, I wish to immortalise them once again, depicting them in the cave Chapel of our Ashram.<sup>59</sup>

Vineeth's words of appreciation of Joy's search and sagacity of interpreting and integrating faith and art are a witness to the impeccable heart's desire of the author. His heart was where his treasure was found. An uninterrupted flow of thought with *raga*, *tala*, and *laya* accompanied him when he spoke.

The poet in Vineeth makes his life's journey with ease and awakened consciousness, finding rest in the Lord and becoming one with the *antaryamin* and *paramātman*. A wayfarer's theology or spirituality - *mārga* theology - conducive to the Indian and Eastern mindset, takes us to the horizon beyond imagination. To cite a poem of Vineeth entitled "My Life is a Journey" is fitting:

My life is a journey,  
a journey in the sea of God's merciful love.  
It is a pilgrimage

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<sup>59</sup> V. F. Vineeth, "In Search of Indian Christian Art," in *Icons of the Unseen. Asian Theology through the Eyes of Artist Joy Elamkunnappuzha CMI*, Johnson Vadakumchery, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2002, 94.

to no country and to no end.

In the tiny boat of my life  
I sail all alone with my Lord,  
singing the hymns of his praise  
in silence and solitude.

Each day I begin this lovely journey anew  
with a sense of freedom brought to me  
by the breaking of all the fetters that bind me.

I will wait for him,  
not stopping the melodies of my heart  
until he comes and makes his abode my  
heart.

Then onwards, it will be he  
Who lives in me  
and it will be my delight  
to melt and become one with him.<sup>60</sup>

The poet and mystic in Vineeth sees the integration and celebration of life through his harmonious blending of everydayness and eternity. All things flow freely into the ocean of *saccidānanda* under the arch of the rainbow and within the cave of starlit.

### **Conclusion**

Vineeth's awakened consciousness was for integration. Integration was the heartbeat of his life and ministry. In his search for integration, he anchored his thoughts on the mystery of Incarnation, the perfect image of the integration of humanity and divinity in his identity. For him, integration was an epiphany of celebration, stretching from elemental

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<sup>60</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Songs of Solitude, Ekanta Gita*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1992, 123-125..

things to transcendental realities. The icon of Jesus Christ – the Word of God – served as the key to his *sādhana* and *sādhya*. Jesus Christ, the *sadguru*, was his overarching consciousness. As the encounter, so is the enlightenment. Encountering the Word of God, Vineeth was enlightened by Jesus Christ, an experiential knowledge seasoned with agony and ecstasy. His Eastern perspectives of incorporation and transformation are close to the ideal of theosis. “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20) might showcase Vineeth’s horizon on integration and celebration. Through the path of integration and celebration of myriads of relationships – cosmotheandric – Vineeth excels in his journey to go beyond – *saccidānanda*. Utilising his versatility, simplicity and humility to embrace inclusivity, he scripts his being and becoming, always revealing and concealing.

Vineeth invites us to experience the state of *samadhi*. His description of *samadhi* is a fitting tribute to his insight into integration:

The state of *samadhi* is not a state of negative resting. It is not an inner or spiritual sleeping. It is a state of intense awareness and is the result of the integration of the outer layers into the innermost layer of Divine Consciousness within us, which is the Word, the Logos, abiding within us. *Samadhi* is a profounder consciousness, a participation of human consciousness in the consciousness of God.<sup>61</sup>

Participation of human consciousness in the divine consciousness – the epiphany of integration and celebration of relationships – strikes a balance and sustainability in the prayer of the heart echoed in the spirit of the age-old sages,

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<sup>61</sup> V. F. Vineeth, *Meditation. Dhyanasadhana*, Bangalore: Vidya Vanam Publications, 2003, 84.

which unveils the process of being, becoming, and going beyond:

असतो मा सद्गमया

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमया

मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमया॥

Vineeth's legacy invites us to live with awakened consciousness, to celebrate the divine rhythm in human life, and to celebrate life in Christ, a radiant epiphany of integration as showcased in the mystery of Incarnation.

# Walking with Prof. Vineeth: A Disciple's Integration of Guru's Charisma

*Fr. Anto Amarnad CMI*

## **Abstract**

This paper is both a testimonial reflection and a spiritual-philosophical study on the life, vision, and enduring influence of Prof. Dr. Francis Vineeth Vadakkethala CMI—scholar, mystic, poet, and founder of Vidyavanam Ashram. Written from the standpoint of a disciple, the paper offers an intimate portrayal of a guru whose charisma harmoniously united intellect and mysticism, East and West, art and theology. Through personal memories, poetic citations, and reflective analysis, it explores how Prof. Vineeth's call to *integration* continues to inspire creative discipleship and theological renewal.

The paper situates Prof. Vineeth as a luminous contrast to Merton's "three kinds of misguided masters." Transcending self-centeredness, sterile innovation, and rigid traditionalism, he embodied a fourth kind of master—an *Acharya of integration* whose wisdom radiated through simplicity, silence, and song. His mystical search for the ineffable found expression in poetry, inculturated liturgy, and the founding of Vidyavanam—an authentic Indian Christian ashram where Carmelite contemplation and Vedantic insight met in living harmony. Through verses,

bhajans, and theological reflections, the disciple-author traces how Prof. Vineeth's mantra, "*Knowing is Becoming*," transformed theology from a speculative discipline into a lived experience of divine communion.

The study highlights key aspects of his legacy: his fusion of Franciscan joy with Thomistic intellect, his synthesis of Vedanta and the Gospel as complementary revelations of truth, and his vision of education as *satsang*—a transformative communion of minds and hearts. As a teacher, he awakened not merely students but seekers; as a mystic, he bridged traditions through contemplative dialogue.

Ultimately, the paper celebrates Prof. Vineeth as a "flute of the Spirit"—a humble instrument through whom divine music awakened countless souls to integration and wholeness. Walking with him becomes a metaphor for the ongoing spiritual journey of discipleship, creativity, and harmony between the human and the divine. His life and thought remain a fragrant brook, refreshing the fields of humanity with wisdom, beauty, and grace.

## **1. Introduction**

It is a rare and humbling privilege to stand as a disciple of Prof. V.F. Vineeth CMI-- a distinguished scholar, gifted poet, and compassionate spiritual guide-- whose profound influence has shaped both my life and vocation. I was uniquely blessed to compose several of his hymns, participate in his illuminating classes, and accompany him in retreats by singing Bhajans and Slokas. Though Prof. Vineeth is no longer with us in person, his enduring spirit and legacy continue to guide and inspire me. This seminar is both a tribute to his pioneering role in bridging Indian philosophy and Christian theology, Art and Creativity, and a heartfelt homage to the guru who helped shape my identity and

calling. Through this reflection, I invite you to journey with me along the path of integration and humility that he so beautifully embodied.

As I was reading the substantial volume, “The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton” by Michael Mott, I came across a profound reflection in the chapter titled Mount Purgatory (pages 300–301). Merton, drawing from the Sufi writings of Ibn Abbad, offered a cautionary note to his novices: “Avoid three kinds of Masters:

1. Those who esteem only themselves-- for their self-regard is blindness; they are trapped within their own egos.
2. Those who esteem only innovations-- for their ideas are aimless, lacking meaning, and indifferent to the cries of the present.
3. Those who esteem only what is established-- their minds are frozen cells of ice, fearful of change.”

Merton’s caution against misguided masters led me to reflect on Prof. Vineeth, who stood in luminous contrast. I witnessed him rise above the confines of selfish blindness, hollow innovations, and rigid structures. He embodied a fourth kind of Master—one who embraced integration, radiated wisdom, and stood as a towering figure of creativity. Prof. Vineeth transcended the shadowed horizons of ignorance and passion, journeying steadily toward the brilliance of enlightenment.

The title of my paper is “**Walking with Prof. Vineeth: A Disciple’s Integration of the Guru’s Charisma.**”

To walk in the presence of a mystic is to breathe an air that expands the soul. To be a disciple near such a figure is to discover one’s pilgrim path gently illumined by his light. This has been my experience in the privileged relationship I shared with Prof. Dr. Francis Vineeth Vadakkethala CMI--

scholar, mystic, acclaimed author, founder of Vidyavanam Ashram, and revered Acharya of spirituality.

For decades, Prof. Vineeth served not merely as a professor at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, but more profoundly as a guru whose charisma invited seekers into wholeness. The citation on his 2017 Award Plaque attempts to encapsulate the richness of his gifts. Yet words remain mere fragments when set against a life that was itself a living text-- woven with contemplation, dialogue, and integration.

This paper seeks to transform scattered fragments into a lived portrait-- not merely academic, but deeply testimonial. It is an offering from a disciple who walked alongside Prof. Vineeth and came to perceive life, spirituality, and scholarship as harmonious streams flowing from a single, sacred spring. The purpose is twofold: first, to illuminate the major currents of Prof. Vineeth's charismatic legacy; and second, to articulate how his vision of integration continues to shape and inspire my own path of discipleship.

## **2. Award Citation:**

Allow me to read the citation I composed for Fr. Vineeth on the occasion of his award given to the prominent and creative professors of India, at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram in 2017:

Mystic, you walked in search of the ineffable,  
Driven by an inner passion to seek God.  
Asian monk, you carefully shaped Vidyavanam  
From the cave of your heart gushed a fragrant brook.

Oriental and Carmelite contemplation bloomed and flourished;

Around you gathered sādhakas in search of spiritual depth.

With dignity, you guided them toward transcendence and wholeness;

They heard your cherished mantra: "Knowing is becoming!"

Like a candle, you radiated the joy of your priesthood.

In you, East and West met-- Disciple and Guru became one.

"Call to Integration"-- your vision and mission danced in harmony.

An eminent academician, an Acharya of spirituality,

You embodied both Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas.

The seeds of Upanishads and Vedanta flowed like honey and milk.

Salutations, respect, and admiration to you, O Amazing Son of CMI!

The astounding flute that played divine melodies

Awakened human consciousness to the beyond.

We, the CMIs, acknowledging your unique contributions,

Offer our richest tributes and invoke God's countless blessings.

On Friday, 27 October 2017, at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bengaluru.

Let us now dive deep into the soul of this rare and radiant person.

## **2.1. The Mystic in Search of the Ineffable**

Prof. Vineeth's deepest identity was as a mystic. He was a man restless for the ineffable, one who refused to remain

confined by appearances or conventions. His spirituality was marked by an incessant turning inward: seeking God not so much in rational metaphysics-- though he was deeply trained in Western Philosophy-- as in still silence, contemplative listening, and a heart oriented toward transcendence.

For his students and disciples, the most striking quality was not his erudition, though he explained Philosophy and theology with crystalline depth, but rather his mystical presence. Speaking with him, one often encountered more than words: an aura of interiority, a felt pointer to the beyond. Silence was his teacher as much as books.

He constantly reminded us while we were in the 'hut for simple life' in 1978-79 in the Dharmaram campus, "The mystery of God is not a subject to be mastered, but a presence to be lived." This was his way of guiding seekers to anchor themselves not in abstract speculation but in an experiential union with the divine mystery. As a disciple, I found this emphasis transformative. He dislodged me from a mere academic accumulation of theological knowledge into a deeper openness to God within prayer, meditation, and silence. In his mystical searching, he stood firmly within both Carmelite contemplation and the Indian ashram tradition. Like a Carmelite, he emphasized the "inner cave of the heart" where God dwells in stillness; like an Indian sage, he embodied the ascetic simplicity, the guru-disciple model, and the listening to nature and cosmos as bearers of transcendence. These aspects are crowned in his establishment of Vidyavanam. For him, seeking the ineffable was not an escape from reality but an immersion in reality at its deepest root. Mysticism, he taught, is an act of integration-- bringing intellect, heart, and body into wholeness before the divine.

As a gifted poet, Fr. Vineeth used poetic expression as a powerful medium for inculturation-- the process of

embedding Christian faith and theology deeply within Indian cultural and spiritual contexts. His lyrics, such as those composed for Christian Bhajans, promotion of Khristu Sahasra Namam of Chev. I. C. Chacko and other devotional works, beautifully fused Biblical themes with Indian devotional forms, making Christianity accessible and meaningful within Indian spirituality. This poetic voice firmly positioned him as a pivotal figure in the movement for inculturation in Indian Christianity, advocating respect for native traditions while fostering authentic Christian expression.

## **2.2. Vidyavanam: The Asian Monastic Experiment**

If mysticism was his deepest identity, Vidyavanam was its outward embodiment. Founded as a Christian ashram rooted in Asian monastic traditions, Vidyavanam sought to live a life where East and West could meet in prayer, ritual, community, and dialogue. Once when I visited him in the solitude and beauty of Vidyavanam he asked me to compose music to a poem which contained 16 stanzas. I give here 3 stanzas to breathe his poetic imagination.

1. Enne oruku nee ennum oruku nee  
(prepare me, prepare me every day)  
Enthinannennathum cholka venda  
(and tell me not for what you prepare me)  
Enthenthu nin manam ennum ninakyumo  
(whatever your mind desires every day)  
Annannu njanathu cheythu kollam  
(I will do it day by day)
2. Nityavum nin pathe dhyanichirippanum  
(to sit every day at your foot in absorption)  
Satyathin kantima kaanuvanam

(and to see the brilliance of truth)

Sishyanam ennil nin roopam rachikyanum

(and to form your image within me, your disciple,

Enne oruku nee jeeveshwara

(prepare me, you Lord of life.)

3. Ennaka kaambile kalpaka valliyil

(in the imaginative garden of my inner self)

Nee thottunarthiya pookal choodi

(adorned by the flowers you touched and unfolded)

Nee paadum mauna manognamam ragangal

(the silent melodic framework you sing)

En mano veenayil ettupadam

(I will repeat in my mind's lyre).

These lines are the product of a mystic who could imagine the beauty of Christian discipleship and profoundly understand the meaning of religious self-gift and its golden rules of surrendering, silence, and contemplation.

### 2.2.1. The Significance of Place

Set amidst simplicity, away from the noise of the city, where natural surroundings could foster contemplative silence. Vidyavanam was not merely an architectural experiment, but a living pedagogy. It embodied inculturation, showing how Indian soil could host Carmelite roots-- the meeting point of Advaita and mysticism, Vedanta and Christ, guru and disciple, bhajan and Eucharist.

As a disciple, I can recall mornings beginning with *bhajans* sung in Sanskrit alongside Eucharistic celebrations-- moments where sacred sound merged traditions, not in syncretism but in genuine dialogue. Those who came to Vidyavanam-- students, seekers, monks, and

laypeople-- testify that they experienced a unique harmony: intellectual inquiry shaped by DVK, but rooted in practical spirituality nurtured by the Guru. In founding Vidyavanam, Prof. Vineeth was continuing a vision of *inculturated monasticism* that pioneers like Bede Griffiths OSB and Abhishiktananda (Swami Henri Le Saux) had explored. Yet his contribution was distinct: while Griffiths and others came as Western seekers into Indian traditions, Vineeth was an Indian son of the soil, embodying this dialogue from within his very identity. Vidyavanam was less about adaptation and more about authenticity-- a home-grown-Christian ashram where the seeds of Vedanta and the Gospel grew together as honey and milk.

### **2.3. From Inner Cave to Flowing Brook**

The image from the citation-- that from the inner cave of his heart gushed out a fragrant brook-- captures how his interior search was never self-enclosed. His life poured outward in refreshing clarity for others. The brook was his writings, his retreats, his teaching, his poems, and his everyday counsel. Central to this flow was his mantra: "Knowing is Becoming." For him, knowledge was never mere cognition. It was transformative: to know God truly was to become divine, to participate in God's own being. This conviction animated his theological anthropology and his pedagogy. As his disciple, I recall countless instances when his explanations were less about definitions and more about drawing us into lived transformation. He would press us: "You cannot study the Trinity as if in a laboratory. You are called to become Trinitarian in love and communion!" In these moments, theology became alive-- not pages in a library, but life in abundance.

## **2.4. East and West in Dialogue**

Prof. Vineeth stands as a bridge figure. His grounding in Thomistic philosophy and Catholic systematic theology allowed him to converse deeply with Western traditions. At the same time, his immersion in Vedantic thought, Upanishadic insights, and Indian monastic traditions allowed him to speak authentically as an Asian Christian monk. In him I saw realized the insight of many earlier pioneers: that dialogue is not an event but an identity. His very life held together Aquinas' rational clarity and Shankara's intuitive non-duality, Francis of Assisi's simplicity and the Upanishadic sense of cosmic unity. The East and West did not clash in him; rather, they found in him a contemplative harmony.

It was not unusual in classes to hear him cite philosophers like Aristotle and Shankara in the same breath, then open the Bible to show how Christ fulfills and yet transforms both horizons. For students like me, this was liberating: faith was no longer a narrow ideology, but an open horizon capable of integrating wisdom from diverse sources.

## **2.5. Call to Integration: His Charism**

If one word crystallizes his mission, it is integration. Indeed, his most influential book bears the title *Call to Integration*. For him, fragmentation-- between intellect and spirit, faith and culture, East and West, theology and mysticism--was the disease of modern humanity. Integration was the divine healing to which he dedicated his life. Integration did not mean forcing similarities but allowing a higher unity where differences are not erased but fulfilled. He envisioned integration as wholeness-- personal, artistic, cultural, and spiritual. A disciple walking with him constantly encountered this vision in practice: his lectures mingled philosophy and poetry; story and illuminating

imageries, theology and God experience, and his ashram mingled Sanskrit chants and Eucharistic celebration; his presence mingled the scholarly professor and the humble monk. The example is the Video Meditations produced by Preshita Province, Coimbatore. Personally, I began to see that integration is not merely external (East meeting West) but internal: uniting the fragmented self. Under him, disciples were gently challenged to reconcile head and heart, mind and soul, concept and silence.

## **2.6. Academy and Spirituality United**

At Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Prof. Vineeth was revered as an academic par excellence. His profound scholarship in philosophy, theology, and spirituality positioned him as a leading light-- not only within the CMI congregation but across the landscape of Indian Christian thought. Yet, unlike many scholars who dwell in ivory towers, his intellect was inseparably woven with spiritual depth. He lived the ideal of the Acharya-- a teacher whose wisdom is authenticated by the integrity of life.

When he spoke of Vedanta or Aquinas, it was never mere intellectual exposition; it was a transmission of truth as lived experience. His classes and retreats bore the texture of a satsang-- an assembly of seekers-- rather than a conventional classroom or prayer hall. This rare synthesis of rigorous academic insight and authentic spiritual guidance endowed him with a credibility few teachers possess. Prof. Vineeth's contribution to Christian higher education in India is immeasurable. He did not merely produce graduates; he formed seekers-- individuals who carried within themselves a spark of integration, awakened by his vision and presence.

## **2.7. Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas in Him**

The citation rightly calls him a union of Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas. Indeed, his personality held both

streams: the simplicity and joy of Francis, and the scholar's rigor of Aquinas. Like Francis, he radiated joy in his priesthood-- finding God in creation, in people, and in the rhythm of daily life. His gentle smile and attentive presence, even to the smallest details, revealed a Franciscan heart rooted in humility and love. Like Aquinas, he possessed a profound and structured intellect-- capable of penetrating analysis and elegant systematization. His mind was a cathedral of clarity, yet never divorced from devotion.

This rare balance made him truly unique: he could sing a Bhajan with childlike surrender, and in the next breath, expound a metaphysical principle with crystalline precision.

He once wrote: Om Guru Om, Om Guru Om; Tava charanam mama saranam, tava charanam mama saram. Religious life is a complete surrender at the feet of the Lord, and the Lord becoming one's sole refuge. In him, the mystic and the theologian danced in harmony. The fragrance of Francis and the brilliance of Aquinas found a home in one soul.

## **2.8. Vedanta and the Gospel: A Sacred Confluence**

Prof. Vineeth brought the treasures of the Upanishads and Vedanta into the soil of Christian theology with a grace that was both daring and devotional. His approach was never one of dilution, compromise, or syncretism. Rather, it was a deepening-- a sacred rooting of the Gospel within the contemplative heart of India. He recognized that truth is one, though its expressions may vary across cultures, languages, and spiritual traditions. To read his writings or to sit under his teaching was to encounter the Upanishadic spirit-- a gentle insistence that ultimate reality is not captured by words, but realized through being. Silence, presence, and surrender were not mere techniques but pathways to the Divine. His Christian faith did not stand in opposition to

Vedantic insights; instead, it illumined them with the light of Christ, revealing a deeper resonance between the Word made flesh and the wisdom that seeks the formless. In Prof. Vineeth's vision, the milk of Vedanta and the honey of the Gospel flowed together-- not in confusion, but in communion. He created a contemplative space where seekers could taste both traditions and find nourishment for the soul. His theological landscape was not a battleground of doctrines, but a garden of dialogue, where the fragrance of Indian mysticism and the radiance of Christian revelation blossomed side by side.

### **2.9. A Disciple's Testimony: A Personal Walk**

To walk with Prof. Vineeth was to walk with a Guru-- a presence whose very being was a teaching. He embodied what Indian traditions uphold as the highest principle of education: that the disciple learns not only through instruction, but through silent communion with the Guru's life. I remember sitting beside him in moments of meditative prayer during retreats, when words dissolved into silence and hearts opened to the mystery. In those sacred pauses, his presence spoke more than any lecture could. He listened to my struggles with patient attentiveness, never offering rigid advice, but guiding with gentle nudges-- like a breeze that redirects without force. When I composed hymns, he would listen with joy, sing along with quiet reverence, and affirm with a smile: "This too is a way of theology-- for true theology sings." From him I learned that discipleship is not imitation, but integration-- a slow unfolding of one's own calling, awakened by the Guru's charisma. If I can speak today of walking a path of integration, it is only because I first walked beside him-- step by step, heart to heart, in the light of his wisdom and the warmth of his presence.

## **2.10. His Legacy: Awakening Human Consciousness**

Prof. Vineeth's life can be symbolized by the flute mentioned in his award citation-- a simple, hollow vessel that becomes a channel of divine music when breathed into by the Spirit. He saw himself in much the same way: a humble instrument through which God's melody could awaken human consciousness to its deepest truth. His legacy is not confined to books, lectures, or institutions, though his writings, teachings, and the sacred space of Vidyavanam Ashram will continue to echo his wisdom for generations. His most enduring imprint lies in the lives he touched-- in the seekers he awakened, the disciples he formed, and the hearts he illumined. Every person who walked with him carries the echo of his transformative integration. I recall the retreats he conducted at NVSC, Pune and NBCLC, Bangalore, where participants spoke with awe of the depth of his insights and the radiance of divine experience he facilitated. In those sacred gatherings, he would offer shlokas from the Bhagavad Gita and his own lyrical compositions, inviting me to weave new melodies for prayer and meditation. Through these offerings, theology became song, and song became a path to the Divine. He often advised: "Let your singing be breathing-- so deeply connected to your being that it flows from the soul itself." His legacy is a living symphony, not performed on grand stages, but resonating in the quiet sanctuary of awakened souls.

## **3. Conclusion**

To walk with Prof. Francis Vineeth CMI has been for me to discover what it means to live a life of integration. The conversations I had with Fr. Vineeth could be compared to the reading of a bestseller book. "He awakened the composer within me; melodies blossomed at his gentle encouragement." I composed the famous Bhajan: Jyoti, Jyoti; Kristu Sahasra Namam (Thousand names of Jesus), Om Guru

Om Guru Yesu, and dozens of other bhajans because of Fr. Vineeth's motivation and encouragement. I became a retreat preacher, attending several retreats he preached in NVSC, Pune, NBCLC, Bangalore, and several other retreats he preached in various parts of India. I learned how to sit in silence and awaken my inner self and bring forth creative thoughts in my Catechetical and Pastoral Theology classes. In a way, my focus on creative Catechesis integrating psychosocial approach to faith formation is an outcome of my acquaintance with Fr. Vineeth. I learned how to swim deep and gather the pearls of wisdom.

Long before the rise of Artificial Intelligence, Fr. Vineeth's thoughts were filled with wisdom, clarity and novelty. You can ask him anything you want and then comes out from him a most appropriate and stylish thoughts for our needs. He was mystic and academic, monk and priest, Indian and Christian, East and West, guru and disciple. He showed that life is not divided into compartments but is one unified quest for the divine. As I offer this reflection, I do not merely recall a teacher from the past. I celebrate a guru whose spirit continues to invite us: to walk deeper into the ineffable, to live integration, and to radiate joy like a candle that consumes itself in love. For me, walking with Prof. Vineeth is not over. It is a continuing journey of allowing his charisma to awaken in me for my own integration. May his memory, vision, and music continue to flow as a fragrant brook refreshing the fields of humanity. May his light continue to guide all seekers toward integration, wisdom, and joy.

# **The Inner Pilgrimage: Vineeth Vadakkethala on Spirituality Rooted in Indian Tradition**

*Dr. Binoy Checkonthayil CMI*

## **Abstract**

This article examines the contemporary spiritual framework crafter by Fr. Vineeth Vadakkethala, which seeks to rejuvenate the core tenets of Indian tradition for the modern seeker. Moving beyond stereotypical perceptions of religiosity, Vadakkethala posits that the Indian spiritual legacy is fundamentally an experiential and inward journey, an "inner pilgrimage" aimed at self-knowledge and liberation (Moksha). He distinguishes this essential spirituality from institutional religion, arguing that the former focuses on direct consciousness experience (Anubhava) while the latter often emphasizes ritual and dogma. Vadakkethala's interpretation serves as a critical bridge, translating ancient metaphysical concepts into accessible, practical tools for navigating present-day existential challenges. Central to his discourse is the reclamation of Sadhana, integrated into daily life. He elucidates how paths like Karma Yoga (selfless action) and the principles of Svadharma (righteous duty) transform ordinary existence into a field for spiritual growth, fostering detachment, mindfulness and ethical integrity. Furthermore, Vadakkethala addresses the nuanced role of the Guru, reconceptualizing it as a guiding principle of

discernment that can manifest through various forms of awakened wisdom. In addition, Vadakkethala anchors this ancient wisdom to address contemporary crises. In conclusion, Vadakkethala's work presents Indian spiritual tradition not as a relic of the past, but as a vital, living system for achieving psychological clarity, ethical grounding and profound inner freedom in today's fractured world. It is a call to undertake the most significant pilgrimage: the journey from external identification to the discovery of the authentic Self. Thus, the paper is an attempt to elucidate Vineeth Vadakkethala's distinctive interpretive framework for understanding Indian spiritual tradition as a dynamic, inward journey of self-discovery.

### **Introduction**

In an age of relentless noise and external pursuit, the ancient call to turn inward feels both radical and necessary. For thinker and writer Vineeth Vadakkethala, this call is not a retreat from the world, but a deeper engagement with it, guided by the profound and timeless wisdom of Indian spiritual tradition. His exploration is not one of mere academic interest but a lived inquiry, a mapping of the inner pilgrimage that lies at the heart of India's philosophical heritage, made accessible for the contemporary seeker. Vadakkethala's perspective serves as a vital bridge, connecting the dense, often esoteric scriptures to the palpable anxieties and aspirations of modern life. He argues that at its core, Indian tradition is not a rigid set of dogmatic rules, but a sophisticated and experiential science of consciousness. It is a toolkit for the ultimate human project: self-knowledge. This vision emerges from a deep engagement with Advaita Vedanta and related philosophical systems that have shaped the spiritual landscape of the Indian subcontinent for millennia. Unlike doctrinal systems imposed from without, Indian spirituality invites direct experience and personal

verification, making it as relevant today as it was when the Upanishads were first transmitted orally. Thus, the paper is an attempt to elucidate Vineeth Vadakkethala's distinctive interpretive framework for understanding Indian spiritual tradition as a dynamic, inward journey of self-discovery.

### **Spirituality vs. religion: Reclaiming the Essence**

A central tenet of Vadakkethala's discourse is the careful distinction drawn between spirituality and institutional religion. He observes that while religion often provides a crucial framework of community, ritual and moral structure, it can sometimes ossify into formalism where the vessel is mistaken for the water within. This distinction is not one of antagonism but of clarity, recognizing that spirituality points to the experiential core while religion may sometimes emphasize the external trappings. Indian tradition, in his view, is fundamentally spiritual. Its primary quest is the direct experience of reality (*Anubhava*) and the liberation (*Moksha*) of the individual consciousness from the bonds of limited identity (). The gods, myths and rituals are profound psychological and cosmological metaphors, doorways to inner states, rather than ends in themselves. According to Advaita Vedanta philosophy, the core tenet is that *jivatman*, the individual experiencing self, is ultimately pure awareness mistakenly identified with the body and its senses and with thought-constructs and non-different from *Ātman/Brahman* or *sat*, the highest Self or Real. Thus, the true deity to be discovered is the Self (*Atman*) (Chauhan and Kumar, 2022). This reclaiming of the essence frees the seeker to engage with the tradition dynamically, focusing on its transformative potential rather than merely its outward forms.

The term *Advaita* literally means "not-two" or "one without a second," which means that only Brahman, 'the one', is ultimately real while *prapanca*, 'the second', 'the world' or

the multiplicity of thought-constructs, is not fully real. This understanding transforms how one approaches spiritual practice, not as an attempt to gain something external, but as a recognition of what already is. Vadakkethala's interpretation aligns with classical Advaita when he suggests that liberation (*moksha*) is attained when knowledge of Brahman is attained, recognizing the illusoriness of the phenomenal world and disidentifying from body-mind and the notion of 'doership'.

### **The Pilgrimage Is Inward: The Geography of the Self**

The motif of the pilgrimage (*Tirtha Yatra*) is ubiquitous in Indian culture, with millions undertaking journeys to sacred sites each year (Singh and Rana, 2023).). Vadakkethala brilliantly reframes this journey. The sacred places, he suggests, are replicas of the inner landscape. The ultimate pilgrimage is the journey of attention from the periphery of the senses to the silent core of one's being. This inward turn represents a fundamental reorientation of the spiritual quest, one that has been central to Indian philosophy since the earliest Upanishads. This inward turn is encapsulated in the great Mahavakya, "Tat Tvam Asi" (*Thou Art That*) where the teacher Uddalaka Aruni instructs his son in the nature of *brahman*, the supreme reality. The phrase literally translates as 'That Thou Art,' with *tat* referring to *sat*, 'the Existent' and '*tvam*' meaning 'you, thou' and '*asi*' meaning 'are'. In the Advaita Vedanta interpretation, this represents absolute equality of '*tat*', the Ultimate Reality, Brahman, and '*tvam*', the Self, Atman. The spiritual path, then, is a process of de-hypnosis, of shedding the layers of misconception (*Adhyasa*) that make us identify with the body, mind and social roles. It is a journey from being a fragment to recognizing our nature as the whole.

Vadakkethala points to the practices of meditation (*Dhyana*) and self-inquiry (*Atma Vichara*) as the quintessential

maps for this journey. Self-inquiry or *Atma-vichara*, is a disciplined investigation into the true nature of the Self. In Advaita Vedanta, this inquiry is not an experiment in meditation techniques, nor an attempt to produce an experience, but rather a thoughtful and systematic use of reasoning (*vichara*) in alignment with the Upanishads, guided by a teacher, to resolve the fundamental question: *Who am I?* They are not about acquiring something new, but about ceasing to look for oneself in the wrong places. The classical approach involves three stages: *sravana* (hearing the teachings), *manana* (reflecting on their meaning) and *nididhyasana* (deeply assimilating the vision through meditation). It should be noted that self-inquiry is "the most sacred of sacred," emphasizing that the mind must be brought back to one's essential feeling of 'I', that alone constitutes self-inquiry. This practice does not aim to produce self-realization but rather to remove ignorance, recognizing that the Self is ever-present and already free.

### **The Practical Toolkit: *Sadhana* in Daily Life**

Vadakkethala highlighted how Indian tradition ingeniously weaves spirituality into the very fabric of daily life. This is the realm of *Sadhana*, disciplined practice that transforms the mundane into the sacred. He elucidates concepts like *Karma Yoga*, the path of selfless action, where one learns to act without being chained to the fruits of action. True fulfillment comes from dedicating one's actions to a higher purpose rather than personal gain (Baumann and Ruch, 2025). More profoundly, *Karma Yoga* teaches detachment from the fruits of one's actions, where practitioners are advised to remain unaffected by success or failure and to act with equanimity. Maintaining mental equanimity in the face of success and failure is an important aspect of *Karma Yoga*, helping individuals remain calm and balanced, unaffected by external circumstances.

*Svadharm*a, the concept of one's righteous duty, operates as a complementary principle. Svadharm

a refers to an individual's inherent duty, aligned with their nature, societal role and cosmic order. It combines *sva* (one's own) and *dharma* (duty, righteousness, or moral responsibility), referring to the unique path of duty and purpose that aligns with an individual's nature, skills and circumstances. Unlike rigid caste doctrines that have been misapplied throughout history, the principle of svadharm

a invites authentic alignment as a parent, professional or citizen (Rastogi, 2018). When conflicts arise between personal duty (*svadharm*a) and universal duty (*dharma*), Vadakkethala's perspective suggests that dharma should take precedence, since dharma represents the overarching moral duty that applies to all individuals and is regarded as a loftier ethical obligation that supersedes personal duties and desires. Vadakkethala also emphasizes *mindfulness in ritual*, the performance of simple daily rituals (*Sandhyavandana*, lighting a lamp) with presence and symbolic understanding becomes an anchor for mindfulness, pulling the mind away from chaos and towards a sacred centre. This is not mere superstition or blind ritualism; rather, it represents the principle that the sacred can infuse every action when performed with conscious intention. The householder's life (*Grihastha Ashrama*) is not a barrier to spirituality, but its most demanding and rewarding arena.

### **The Guru Principle**

Navigating the inner world can be disorienting. There are pitfalls of spiritual materialism, where practices become ego-enhancing rather than ego-dissolving. There are the subtle traps of the mind that can masquerade as spiritual insight. Vadakkethala respectfully underscores the traditional role of the Guru, not as a personality cult leader, but as a guiding principle. The Guru is the one who "dispels darkness" (*Guru*),

a living embodiment of the teachings who can point out the seeker's blind spots (Balasubramanian, 2005; Sadhguru, 2016). He modernizes this concept by suggesting that the Guru principle can manifest in various forms: a traditional teacher, a compelling book, a moment of profound crisis, or even the consistent, quiet voice of one's own purified intuition (*Viveka*). The key is the disciple's readiness (*Adhikara*) and the quality of humble, receptive inquiry. In classical terms, the Guru acts within a structured relationship of transmission, not as a dispenser of favours but as a pointer to one's own deepest truth. The Guru's role is to create conditions for the student's own awakening, much as a mirror reflects the face precisely because it is unstained.

The discriminative capacity (*Viveka*) is particularly crucial in modern times. *Viveka* enables the spiritual seeker to distinguish between the eternal and the transient, the real and the apparent (Chaitanya, n.d.). In Jnana Yoga, *vairagya* involves forming a discrimination between the Permanent and Impermanent. In the path of knowledge, practitioners cultivate discrimination to discern between the eternal (*Atman* or *Brahman*) and the transient nature of the material world, leading to detachment. This inborn capacity for discernment becomes awakened and refined through both intellectual study and lived experience, enabling the seeker to navigate the complexities of modern life without losing the thread of their spiritual aspiration.

### **Detachment in a Materialistic World: *Vairagya* as liberation**

Perhaps nothing is more countercultural in contemporary consumer society than the concept of *Vairagya* - detachment or dispassion. In Hindu philosophy and spirituality, *Vairagya* holds a central place, signifying the practice of dispassion or detachment from the material world. *Vairagya* is considered an essential quality for spiritual seekers aiming

to attain higher states of consciousness and liberation (*moksha*), involving the cultivation of a sense of non-attachment to material possessions, desires, and the outcomes of one's actions.

Vadakkethala emphasizes that this does not mean hatred or repulsion toward the world. Contrary to a misconception, practicing *vairagya* does not necessitate avoiding responsibilities or abandoning duties; instead, it encourages individuals to develop an inner state of detachment while actively engaging in the world. True *Vairagya* refers to an internal state of mind rather than to external lifestyle and can be practiced equally well by one engaged in family life and career as it can be by a renunciate. *Vairagya* does not mean suppression of or developing repulsion for material objects; rather, through the application of *viveka* (spiritual discrimination or discernment) to life experience, the aspirant gradually develops a strong attraction for the inner spiritual source of fulfillment and happiness and limited attachments fall away naturally.

*Vairagya* has four progressive stages, providing a practical framework for development: *Yatamana*, which refers to the efforts to lead the mind away from sensual pleasures; *Vyatireka*, meaning "logical discontinuance," the stage that makes one aware of one's level of *vairagya* toward certain objects; *Ekendriya*, the stage in which the senses remain subdued with the mind having no attachment or aversion to an object and *Vasirara*, the highest stage in which there does not exist any temptation toward objects, no likes or aversions and this is when Self-realization and spiritual supremacy become possible (Aithal and Srinivasan, 2025).

In the context of modern consumerism, Vadakkethala argues that the practice of detachment (*Vairagya*) is the antidote to the consumerist mindset and addiction to

external validation. By recognizing that material possessions and external achievements cannot ultimately satisfy the deepest human need for meaning and peace, one becomes free to live authentically. As one contemplative tradition expresses it: when this detachment matures, one lives in the world as if in a dream, acting without attachment, loving without fear and resting in the eternal. Detachment in this sense becomes a form of profound freedom not escapism, but clear seeing.

### **The Nature of Reality: Maya, Mind and Perception**

Central to understanding Vadakkethala's vision is grasping the concept of *Maya* (cosmic illusion) which in Advaita Vedanta is described as *anirvachaniya* or indescribable and *maya*, which means neither real nor unreal. *Maya* is not a mere illusion in the everyday sense but a profound spiritual misconception that obscures the true nature of reality. According to Advaita Vedanta, *Maya* causes us to perceive a multiplicity of forms and identities, which distract us from recognizing the oneness of existence. How does *Maya* affect perception? *Maya* creates the illusion of duality, distinguishing between subject and object, self and other. This duality leads to the belief in a separate self and a world external to us. By experiencing life through the lens of duality, we become attached to the transient aspects of reality and forget our true nature. This misperception is not accidental but systematically reinforced by the very structure of perception itself. In Advaita Vedanta philosophy, *Brahman* (the Absolute Reality) alone is ultimately real and the world of multiplicity is *Maya* - an illusory appearance. Advaita acknowledges two levels of reality: the *paramarthika* (absolute reality) and the *vyavaharika* (empirical reality).

Remarkably, contemporary neuroscience provides unexpected corroboration of these ancient insights. The brain

constructs our experience based on incomplete data, filling gaps with assumptions and predictions. These neuroscientific findings show how deeply Maya influences our perception, reinforcing the elusive nature of the world as described in Vedantic philosophy. The underlying principle that consciousness, not matter, is primary in structuring what we perceive finds philosophical parallels in quantum mechanics' observer effect, where observation appears to collapse a quantum system into a definite state.

Vedanta teaches that *Brahman* is superimposed on much like a mirage superimposes water onto a desert; the true self or *Atman* is identical to *Brahman*, but this truth is obscured by Maya. Liberation comes from realizing this nonduality where this realization dissolves the illusions of separateness (Hossain,2024). Through recognition and transcendence, the veil of Maya can be lifted. By understanding illusion, consciousness does not escape reality; it reclaims its sovereignty over it. The understanding that the mind can be mastered, rather than being the master itself, offers liberation from the tyranny of anxiety, depression and cyclical thought. Long-term meditation appears to be linked with functional and structural changes in various regions of the brain (Guidotti *et al.*, 2023). The consistent practice of mindfulness meditation results in neuroplasticity, which brings about observable modifications in different areas of the brain associated with managing emotions, focusing and being conscious of oneself. The neurobiological changes provide scientific validation of what contemplative traditions have long claimed: that disciplined practice of meditation actually restructures the brain toward greater emotional resilience, clarity and compassion.

## **Oneness and Ecological Consciousness: A Tradition for Today**

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Vadakkethala's work is his application of this ancient wisdom to contemporary dilemmas, particularly the ecological crisis (Vineeth, 2011). The concept of oneness (*Advaita*) provides the ethical and psychological foundation for true ecological consciousness and social harmony, breaking down the illusion of separation that underlies both personal suffering and environmental destruction (Padhi, 2020). Spirituality encompasses interconnectedness, love, compassion, contentment, forgiveness, a sense of responsibility and harmony. When individuals acknowledge their role within the broader ecosystem, they are more inclined to adopt sustainable practices. The four key domains of spirituality that intersect with mindfulness and eco-consciousness are personal, communal, environmental and transcendental. The personal domain encompasses an individual's inner connection and sense of purpose. The communal domain focuses on relationships, fostering a sense of connectedness with others and the natural world. The environmental domain specifically explores the relationship between individuals and nature, emphasizing intrinsic motivation and interconnectedness. The transcendental domain explores the spiritual dimensions beyond the physical realm, such as a connection to something greater or divine.

Through spirituality, individuals gain enlightenment and align their life purpose with interconnectedness, embracing nature, the cosmos or the divine. By fostering mindfulness, spirituality also promotes sustainable consumption practices. This interplay between spirituality, mindfulness and eco-consciousness empowers individuals to embrace a holistic approach towards environmental preservation and sustainable living (Sharma, 2023; Tsevreni, 2024). Spirituality

does not ask us to abandon the world, but to see it correctly as a luminous expression of consciousness itself. This shift in perception brings about a natural state of compassion, contentment and responsible engagement. An essential part of awakening into oneness and its living interconnectedness is an awareness of how we are an integral part of the ecosystem of the planet. We can no longer afford to live in a Newtonian era of separation that sees the Earth as something separate from our own selves, as a resource to be used and abused to support our materialistic, fossil-fuel driven lifestyle. Recognition of our spiritual interconnection with the natural world naturally generates ecological responsibility. Spiritual beliefs that emphasize interconnectedness and values like compassion can influence how people view the environment, and mindfulness practices increase awareness of nature and foster a sense of responsibility for its protection.

### **The Four-fold Qualifications: Foundations for the Spiritual Path**

While Vadakkethala's contemporary approach is accessible, the classical Advaita tradition identifies certain qualifications as essential for the spiritual path. These constitute what are called the *Sadhana Chatushtaya*, the four-fold means of discipline. On the basis of his theory of knowledge, Adi Shankaracharya elucidates the fourfold (mental and physical) practices or qualifications to aid in the achievement of liberation: (i) the discrimination (*viveka*) between the permanent (*nitya*) and the impermanent (*anitya*) objects of experience; (ii) dispassion towards the enjoyment of fruits of action here and in heaven (iii) accomplishment of means of discipline such as calmness, mental control etc. and (iv) a longing for liberation.

These are not arbitrary requirements but psychological and spiritual prerequisites. Without discrimination, the

seeker cannot discern between genuine spiritual aspiration and the ego's desires for subtle rewards. Without dispassion, the mind remains entangled in seeking happiness through external means. Without the disciplines of calmness and mental control, the mind remains too agitated to perceive subtle truths. And without a burning longing for liberation (*mumukshutva*), the necessary intensity for the spiritual journey is absent. Yet Vadakkethala suggests these are not restrictive demands but invitations to mature understanding.

### **Mind as Instrument: Mastery through Understanding**

A sophisticated understanding that Vadakkethala draws from Indian philosophy concerns the relationship between consciousness and mind. The mind, in this view, is not the ultimate source of awareness but an instrument through which consciousness expresses itself. According to the traditional model, consciousness does not originate in the brain nor even in the mind, for that matter, because the mind merely passes on the light of consciousness. The brain, the mind and the body are merely physical mediums for the expression of consciousness. Moreover, the Yoga-Vedanta system of psychology asserts that thought, which is a specific type of consciousness, is a function of the mind, not the brain (Prabhu and Bhat, 2013). This represents a fundamental inversion of the modern materialist paradigm, which assumes consciousness emerges from brain activity. Instead, the Vedantic view suggests that consciousness is primary and the brain and mind are its functional expressions. This understanding has profound implications: if consciousness is our true nature, then the fluctuations and disturbances of the mind are not our essential condition but temporary modifications of an instrument we can learn to use more skillfully.

When one recognizes the mind as an instrument rather than the master, a new freedom emerges. Anxiety,

depression and cyclical thought patterns are seen as dysfunctions of this instrument, not as the truth of who we are. This distinction is liberatory which allows one to work with these mental states with greater spaciousness and insight, neither identifying with them nor repressing them, but observing them with the calm awareness of the consciousness that witnesses all mental activity.

### **Integration with Daily Life**

Vadakkethala's vision is particularly powerful in its validation of the householder's path - the life of family, work and social engagement. In traditional Indian culture, four life stages (*ashramas*) are recognized: *Brahmacharya* (student phase), *Grihastha* (householder phase), *Vanaprastha* (retired phase) and *Sannyasa* (renunciate phase). Rather than viewing spiritual development as exclusively the domain of the renunciate, Vadakkethala suggests that the *Grihastha Ashrama* - the householder's life - offers the most challenging and comprehensive arena for spiritual development. This is because the householder must synthesize spiritual truth with the demands of relationship, responsibility, livelihood and social contribution. It is easier to achieve equanimity in a cave than while managing conflicting needs and expectations. It is easier to cultivate compassion in isolation than in the crucible of family relationships. The householder who practices *Karma Yoga* develops a spirituality forged in the fires of real engagement with the world. Such a person serves as a living demonstration that enlightenment is not escapism but the fullest flowering of human potential within engagement.

### **Self-realization as Recognition**

Vadakkethala's exploration reminds that the inner pilgrimage mapped by Indian sages is not a relic of the past. It is an ever-present, ever-available journey from the

superficial to the substantive, from fragmentation to freedom. It is a tradition that invites questioning, experience and ultimately, self-realization. This is not the self-realization of modern psychology, which concerns the development and maturation of the ego-self. Rather, it is the recognition of one's true nature as consciousness itself, the witnessing awareness that has been present throughout all experience. What Vadakkethala emphasizes through his contemporary voice is that this recognition is not reserved for saints or cultural contexts separated from us by centuries. The fundamental human capacity for self-awareness, when turned inward with clarity and dedication, can flower into the direct recognition of our true nature. Modern seekers face unique challenges like unprecedented sensory overstimulation, attachment technologies designed to addict and cultures of perpetual dissatisfaction through marketing. Yet these very challenges create the psychological necessity for turning inward. As external pursuits prove increasingly hollow, the call to self-knowledge becomes urgent.

The three-fold practice remains as relevant as ever: *sravana* (hearing or studying the teachings through texts and teachers), *manana* (reflection and intellectual digestion of these teachings to resolve doubts), and *nididhyasana* (deep meditation that culminates in direct realization). The fruits of this practice are not esoteric experiences or extraordinary powers but the simple, profound transformation of living from a place of unity rather than fragmentation, from truth rather than conditioning, from peace rather than constant seeking.

## **Conclusion**

In his framing, spirituality rooted in Indian tradition is neither an escape nor a blind belief. It is the courageous and systematic exploration of the only territory that truly matters our own conscious existence. It is about becoming, in the

midst of life's tumult, what we have always been: whole, peaceful and free. The path is inward; the guide is wisdom and the time to begin is now. Vineeth Vadakkethala's articulation of this ancient vision offers contemporary seekers not a flight from the world, but a means of engaging with it more wisely, more compassionately and more authentically. Through the integration of self-knowledge with responsible action, through the balance of detachment with engagement, through the recognition of oneness underlying apparent multiplicity, the inner pilgrimage becomes not an escape from life but its fullest realization.

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# **‘Knowing is Becoming’ – Participating in Divine Consciousness: A Conversation with Fr Francis Vineeth CMI**

*Dr. Peter Tyler*

## **Abstract**

A key aspect of Fr Francis Vineeth’s teaching can be summarised in the statement: ‘The process of the spiritual journey (for Christians) is the awakening of Christ consciousness within us. And we could go further to say that this extends beyond Christians to all humanity.’ The lecture will explore this statement taking material from both Fr Vineeth’s writings and talks. In particular, it addresses five questions: What is the *vidya* that Fr Vineeth is describing? How is it achieved in this life? Where might it be achieved? Why should we pursue it?’ and ‘Who is this consciousness for?’

## **Introduction**

The title of this paper comes from one of Fr Vineeth’s key phrases or ‘mantras’: ‘Knowing is Becoming’. He himself having adapted it from a verse in the third chapter of the Muṇḍaka Upanisad:

*Sa yo ha vai tat paramam brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati:*

*The one who knows the supreme Brahman verily becomes Brahman*

(Muṇḍaka Upanisad 3.2.9 in Radhakrishnan 1953: 692)

If I have understood Fr Vineeth's message correctly, he suggests in this adage that by acquiring knowledge we become new selves – we are transformed as we acquire that divine Consciousness that was so important for him. This is reflected in two quotes I would like to start with that Fr Vineeth gave during a winter retreat at Vidyavanaam in January 2016 which I attended (one of his last):

'We don't need knowledge of Jesus but participation in the consciousness of Jesus.'

'*Āvidya* is not academic ignorance – you can have a doctorate in something and still be in *āvidya*. This is a critical situation.'

From these initial thoughts arises the theme of my paper which is simply put:

The process of the spiritual journey (for Christians) is the awakening of Christ consciousness within us. And we could go further to say that this extends beyond Christians to all humanity.

If we unpack this statement a little we can see two important aspects of it:

1. First that it is not necessarily easy to achieve this state (at least for me, others may find it easier) and
2. Secondly, it is even more difficult to talk about – it is really at the edge of words and explanation and why we must proceed with care in this exercise almost to the edge of logic, academic work and head knowledge, as indeed Fr Vineeth did during his own lifetime. When talking of

these things he suggested that 'the style and flow of language is then different, as theology becomes the searching commitment to God's words working in each one of us' (Vineeth 2004: 10) or in the words of one of my other beloved gurus, the Viennese philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein - at such points 'language goes on holiday...'

As part of his commitment to demonstrating this wisdom Fr Vineeth - who knew the West and its conquering ways well (he was born under the time of British control of India and studied for many years in the West) - would often like to contrast a 'Western' view of the divine and an 'Asian' view. Not as binaries, he was a great reconciler, but as two wings which we could use to fly to the divine (in this context he would often quote the encyclical of Pope St John Paul II 'Fides et Ratio'). However, he did feel that for many centuries - and in the Keralan context this would begin with the coming of Portuguese Catholicism to impose its ways on the original Thomas Christianity of that land in the 16<sup>th</sup> century - the West had had too much of a say as to how these spiritual matters should be ordered, practiced and talked about, and, in many ways his life, work, writings, liturgies etc. were correctives to this slant. Those who have visited Vidyavanam ashram will be familiar with the beautiful stained glass in the 'anthill chapel' commissioned from Fr Joy Elamkunnappuzha CMI. One of the most striking images (as explained to me by Fr Vineeth himself) depicts the church of the West, as ordered to the Roman mind by the Emperor Constantine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, being reconciled at the end of all time with the church of the East as represented in the glass by the light, radiance and fragrance of the Thomas Christian and ashram tradition. In many ways Fr Vineeth's life embodied this need for reconciliation between East and West - reason and intuition, head and heart - the integration as the theme of the present work.

In response to the rather grim universal situation of the world today Fr Vineeth was right, I think, to diagnose a present-day universal hunger for all things spiritual, especially Asian spirituality. It is in response to this ( 'let us present an Asian Jesus to the world', Vineeth 2004: 166) that in his 'Asian Vision of God' he outlines what we could call a 'Noble Eightfold Path' (a *vidyabhavaopad* if you like) for initiating the process of 'knowing is becoming' through the supreme reality (*satya*) of what he terms 'the Asian Christ' who will be our guide on the path. Accordingly I shall take this path for the structure of my paper. These eight steps being as follows:

1. The Experiential and Realizational Approach to the Divine
2. A Contemplative rather than an analytical approach to wisdom
3. The apophatic and mystic approach
4. Hermitage and ashram spirituality
5. *Sutras, mantras* and *madradas*
6. The Breath of Life
7. The goal of contemplation - (inner serenity)
8. The Asian Jesus and the poor of Asia

Which for the sake of ease of understanding we could break down into the following 5 questions:

First, the **What?** What is the *Vidya* we are seeking? This is answered by the first three points: the experiential, realizational, contemplative and apophatic nature of what we seek (as opposed to the analytical, rational and scientific).

The Second question encompasses the **How?** of achieving this? How do we acquire this *Vidya* - this Vineeth discusses

under the titles of the sutras, mantras and madrasas and the breath of life.

Then we have the question of the **Where?** Where does this process take place? The answer he provides by looking at hermitage and ashram spirituality.

Fourth, we have the question of the **Why?** What is the goal of this journey? Vineeth answers this simply as inner serenity.

And finally he asks **Who?** Who is this journey for? And to answer this he points us to children of the Asian Jesus - the poor of Asia.

So following this noble path let us look at each in turn as we walk it beside our beloved guru.

### **1. What? - Experiential, Realizational, Contemplative and Apophatic Approaches to the Divine**

I mentioned earlier that Fr Vineeth set up a dichotomy between what he calls the 'Eastern' and 'Western' approaches to the spiritual path. And, as I said, he was well qualified to do this having been deeply trained in both traditions. He also said that both approaches are necessary for the spiritual path - the head and heart, the rational and intuitive, the known and the unknown. In my own work over the last few decades I have also worked on this dichotomy, but in contrast to Fr Vineeth I have sought to integrate these differences from the dominant perspective I have found myself working in - the Western Christian tradition.<sup>1</sup> What is clear to me, as I have argued for many years now, is that these two dual aspects of the spiritual search *were* enshrined in the Western tradition but sadly became largely forgotten or lost. Interestingly

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Tyler 2011: *The Return to the Mystical: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila and the Christian Mystical Tradition*.

enough, historically speaking, the loss of that tradition coincides with the demise of the old Thomas Christian ways of living the Christian life - in that tumultuous, wonderful/terrible 16<sup>th</sup> Century. I don't think it is a coincidence that the events of that period are now being unpicked as we move into - or rather, live into - an equally tumultuous period.

So, when Fr Vineeth contrasts the East and the West and emphasises the new renewal that will come 'from the East', I would suggest that yes, there is a contrast, but it was not always so. Vineeth himself acknowledges this fact in his writings by stressing the importance of the teaching of the early father Dionysius the Areopagite and his influence, in particular, on Eastern Christianity. However, what I feel is important to note in order to supplement rather than supplant Vineeth's exposition, is that the Dionysian tradition not only flourished in the West, especially in the medieval period before the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, but was an essential element in forming the spirituality out of which Vineeth's own religious order, the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, arose. For, the key teachers of the Carmelite tradition, especially Ss Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, were both deeply immersed in this tradition.

So, in expounding Vineeth's 'What?' - the Contemplative, Experiential and Realizational Approach to the Divine as embodied in the apophatic and mystical approach - I find myself returning to that 'lost' tradition of the West - what is often called 'the mystical tradition', or as I prefer, the 'mystical theology' or 'theologia mystica'.

### ***Theologia Mystica: The 'Foolish Wisdom'***

What then is this tradition? Well, we can describe it as a way of knowing (or perhaps, better, a way of unknowing), a way of theology, a way of writing and a way of praying

developing in the schools of Paris, Chartres and Oxford from about the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards and relying heavily on interpretation and reflection on the foundational texts of Dionysius the Areopagite. Of Dionysius himself we know very little, in fact we only know what is written in his four surviving key texts: 'The Mystical Theology' itself, 'The Divine Names', 'The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy' and 'The Celestial Hierarchy'.<sup>2</sup> The nineteenth century German scholars, Stiglmayer and Koch, in their systematic analysis of the texts concluded that he was probably 5/6<sup>th</sup> century (not apostolic as he sometimes claims), from around the area of modern day Syria and most likely familiar with the teachings of the late Platonic academy in Athens (he may well have studied his philosophy there).

Whatever his origins his works represent the first systematic attempt by a Christian theologian to work with the theme that runs through Vineeth's work, that is, the limits of our 'knowability' of the divine and the expression thereof. Theologically speaking the problem can be simply expressed – anything we say of God *cannot* be God – we are creatures, God is Creator and therefore outside of creation, and so beyond our comprehension.

Theologians over the centuries have therefore debated how far we can express this 'gap' and by what means. Most have acknowledged the problem but different theologians have differed as to the response to it. Aquinas, for example, appreciates the problem (inherited for him largely from Dionysius) but sees 'analogy' as the solution – we cannot say *what* God is, but we can at least say *what God is like*.

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<sup>2</sup> See Luibheid's 1987 translation for a good modern version of these works.

Aquinas's fellow Dominican, Meister Eckhart, went further, arguing that whatever we say of God is not God and famously concluded with the enigmatic prayer 'God free me from God'<sup>3</sup> – a prayer that got him into a lot of trouble with the Inquisition in Avignon. Others, have (perhaps wisely) retreated into silence as the only solution to the problem – the option of the true mystic perhaps.

Dionysius himself, I would say, 'dances' with the problem – he sets up a beautiful choreography of 'saying' and 'showing' – showing and not saying which is formed of three basic dance steps:

speaking of God – what the later theologians call the 'cataphatic move'

not-speaking of God – later called the 'apophatic move' and showing God – the 'symbolic'

As he writes in the *Celestial Hierarchy*: 'it circles in immediate proximity to God. Simply and ceaselessly it dances around an eternal knowledge of him. It is forever and totally thus' (*Celestial Hierarchy* 7.4 in Dionysius the Areopagite 1987: 165). Which, fortuitously, corresponds with the three persons of the Trinity (what the early fathers call the perichoresis of the Trinity) – the unknowing of the Abyss of the Father; the 'ikon' of the Son who shows himself as the great cosmic *symbolon*; and the 'knowing' inspired by the Spirit who searches the heart in its unutterably groanings and opens the throats (the throat chakra) of the apostles on the day of Pentecost enabling them to go out throughout the whole world and proclaim the Good News of

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<sup>3</sup> 'Therefore let us pray to God that we may be free of God that we may gain the truth and enjoy it eternally', Sermon 'Blessed are the Poor in Spirit' (Quint 32) in Meister Eckhart 2009: 271.

Liberation/Enlightenment. Vineeth himself categorises these three dance steps as ‘the apophatic way of knowing God’, ‘the Symbolic Way of knowing God’ and ‘the Cataphatic Way of knowing God’ commenting:

Both symbolic and cataphatic ways of knowing God point to that which is beyond all symbols and concepts. The worshipper of God who makes use of symbols and concepts is therefore called to reach a state where the symbols and concepts are ultimately transcended and God is known in the unknowing. This is the core of apophatic theology of dark knowledge beyond the active and conceptualized knowledge of mind’. (Vineeth 2004: 158)

How this ‘what’, or better ‘not what’, is achieved in Christian life we turn to next as we look at the ‘how’ of Vineeth’s teaching.

## **2. How? - *Sutras, Mantras and Madrasas* - the Breath of Life**

To answer this question let us turn to Dionysius again:

Now we must wholly distinguish this negative method from that of positive statements. For when we were making positive statements we began with the most universal statements and then through intermediate terms we came at last to particular titles: but now ascending upwards from particular to universal conceptions we strip off all qualities in order that we may attain a naked knowledge of that Unknowing which in all existent things is enwrapped by all objects of knowledge, and that we may begin to see that super-essential Darkness which is hidden by all the light that is in existent things. (Dionysius *Mystical Theology* quoted in Vineeth 2004: 182)

This statement from the beginning of Dionysius’s ‘Mystical Theology’ is striking and has had an oversized impact on the subsequent history of Christian spirituality – Western and

Eastern. In my own country of England there was a very early attempt to put this statement into English by an anonymous author (like Dionysius himself, we do not know the identity of the author but think he may have been a Carthusian monk living in the English Midlands) which has subsequently acquired great fame – *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Now from the point of view of the ‘how’ as presented by Fr Vineeth this text is striking in that it anticipates two of the means that Fr Vineeth feels are necessary for achieving this *vidya* – that is harmony between our body and our spiritual search (and in particular our breath, I shall have more to say about that shortly) and the use of a small prayer word, or what is called the East, a mantra, to achieve that.

This is how the author of the *Cloud* describes what he calls ‘the werk’ of contemplation:

Take just a little word of one syllable: for so it is better than of two, for ever the shorter it is the better it accords with the work of the Spirit. And such a word is this word ‘God’ or this word ‘Love’. Choose whichever you will, or another; as you fancy, which you like best of one syllable. And fasten this word to your heart, so that it will never leave you no matter what happens. This word shall be your shield and your spear, whether you ride into peace or war. With this word you shall beat on this cloud and this darkness above you. With this word, you shall smite down all manner of thought under the cloud of forgetting. Insomuch, that if any thought press upon you to ask you what you would do, answer them with no more words but with this one word. (*Cloud of Unknowing* 1982: 15-16)

Such a method, according to this anonymous author, will ‘short-circuit’ the discursive rhythm of the intellect to allow the soul to rise to God through Vineeth’s unknown, apophatic path. This passage in *the Cloud* is, as far as I know, the first instance of a commentator on the Dionysian texts

taking the old monastic practice of the repetition of a simple word (what is usually referred to in the Orthodox tradition as the 'Jesus prayer' and in wider Eastern traditions as a use of 'mantra') and applying it as the means to enter the necessary affective space for the 'one-ing' with God. Herein the *Cloud* author certainly shows a bold originality. Of this method Vineeth writes in his usual erudition:

The word mantra is formed combining two Sanskrit roots such as man = to think and tra = to save. Mantra is that by the recitation of which one is saved: *mananena trayati iti mantra*. (Vineeth 2004: 174)

Just as the author of the *Cloud* showed great originality by linking mantra prayer with the Dionysian unknowing, so Vineeth himself shows equal originality by linking the mantra moment with the *prāṇa* - or breath of life - of the seeker. As he puts it:

Along with mantra the rhythm of breathing was also integrated into the art of meditation practiced by the religions in the East. Thus we have the pranayama tradition of India which integrates the rhythm of breath with a chosen mantra, which varies according to the taste of the devotee. (Vineeth 2004: 175)

At this point in his text Vineeth introduces us to one of the key influences which all who came to Vidyavanam would have engaged with as it was so central to his 'realized spirituality'. These are the *Yoga-sūtras* of Patañjali. This ancient Sanskrit text, so fundamental to much of Indian spirituality, had a profound impact on Vineeth and the way of yoga - baptised as it were by him for use by Christians - was (and I hope continues to be) central to the daily life of the

ashram.<sup>4</sup> Vineeth stresses how Patañjali lays out the path to divine initiation by another eight step programme, this time the famous *aṣṭāṅga* yoga set out in the *Yoga-sūtra* 2.29 - 3.8. Others will go into this path later in the book in more depth but to simply summarise here it comprises the first two steps of the five *yamas* and the five *niyamas*, that is the freeing of 'the mind from inordinate tendencies' and strengthening it on 'good patterns of behaviour' (Vineeth 1995: 94). The five *yamas* (restraints) being: *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), *satya* (truth-telling), *asteya* (not stealing), *brahmacārya* (celibacy) and *aparigraha* (not grasping) (see Vineeth 1995: 75). While the five *niyama* (ideals/observances) are as follows: *śauca* (purity), *santoṣa* (contentment), *tapas* (austerities/ascetic practices), *svādhyāya* (study) and *īśvarapraṇidhāna* (recollection of the Lord) (see Vineeth 1995: 76). Once we have assumed a comfortable but alert posture (*stira*, steady and *sukha* pleasant), the *stirasukhāsana* described in *Yoga-sūtra* 2.46 (see also Vineeth 1995: 93) we then concentrate on the vital breath which will allow the flow of life into the body (*prāṇāyāma*). This will lead to silencing of the senses and withdrawal from external forms to the internal world (*pratyāhāra*) and the fixing of the mind on the object of contemplation (*dhāraṇā*) before we enter into meditation and become one with what we meditate (*dhyāna*). This leads to 'unruffled serenity which is the real nature of genuine depth where now the soul rests' (Vineeth 1995: 94), for:

The Spirit is already in us (Jn 14.17) but not necessarily awakened. When the Spirit (*Atman*) is awakened it becomes

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<sup>4</sup> A good exposition of the key ideas of the text is also found in Thomas Kochumuttom's contribution to the 2009 Festschrift for Fr Vineeth edited by Fr Saju Chackalackal: 'A Christian Reading of Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra*' in Chackalackal 2009.

a ceaseless flow of divine awareness and as a result transforms our consciousness. (Vineeth 1995: 146)

*This* is the entering into divine consciousness or Christ consciousness which for Vineeth is the heart of the matter. This is not an 'ecstasy' but rather, for Vineeth, it is an equanimity (*samā-dhi*) which is the result of reaching the depth so that one finds 'the abiding Spirit of Christ as "the uncreated energy of God operating in us"' (Vineeth 2004: 91), the process called in the Christian East, theosis or deification: 'Meditation is in fact coming in touch with this unending divine source within and allows one's vision to be totally transformed to the Divine' (Vineeth 1995: 147).

Vineeth's own text 'Yoga of Spirituality', from which I have quoted liberally above, is in a way a *Summa* of this approach which he perfected both in his writings, his way of life and at Vidyavanam ashram, to which we will return shortly. However, before we do that it is worth expressing one reservation that still arises when any talk of yoga or a 'syncretic' approach to indigenous Indian practices are raised. That is, are we talking here about an autogenous practice here that can be practiced without reference to the divine, and especially Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

Vineeth tackles this criticism head on, and goes further in stating that many Christians will see 'the Father' or Christ as a distant entity to place on a pedestal rather than realising that the action of the spirit occurs here and now in the very fibre of our being (for knowing is becoming):

Yes, what has happened in Jesus must happen in every one of us. The will of the Father should be accomplished in our lives as well. In the final analysis the will of the Father is not anything external to us. It is the Divine that is within us; the design of the authentic humanity that we carry within us as we participate in the humanity of Christ. But this design is to

be realized in our humanity, in our human flesh. (Vineeth 1995: 83)

Reminding us of those beautiful lines from Dionysius that we mentioned earlier, Vineeth reiterates that the seeker in this state finds that their 'life becomes a dance to the music of the Spirit. The awakened Spirit is like a gentle melody heard in the depth of one's own heart. Due to the practice of concentration now he is in a position to listen to this inner voice and keep it constantly in his heart even in the midst of activities' (Vineeth 1995: 149) and it is to the stabilisation and habituation of that practice - the Where? - that we turn next.

### **3. Where? - Hermitage and Ashram Spirituality**

Following Patañjali, Vineeth in *Yoga of Spirituality* reiterates the need for the seeker to have a guru to guide them through this difficult process:

Guru is the experienced person who guides the aspirant to inner awakening. Drawing strength from his own experience of the Divine the true Guru guides the disciple not so much by instructions, rules and external observances but by the power of his presence, directing our actions from within. (Vineeth 1995: 84)

Unlike many other Indian traditions Vineeth is clear however that the *sadguru*, the true guru for all Christians, is Jesus Christ himself. Only Christ, for a Christian, can fulfil the ultimate aim of the guru:

Jesus, the Word which emerges from the depths of the Father's silence is also the Source of light in every human consciousness. Therefore by imparting the Father's consciousness He was actually awakening from the silent depth of every human being. The inner depth of every human being is the silent Word within. Jesus, the Word incarnate, is the Guru who leads us to the awakening of the abiding word. (Vineeth 1995: 85)

Traditionally in India the guru is the heart of the ashram and it is here that the seekers come to find that inspiration by their proximity to the one who has 'seen God'. Now, for Christians it is a different case. If Christ is the guru then the resident presiding over the ashram is the *representative* of Christ in that place. This is exactly how Vineeth saw the role of the guru when he established and presided over Vidyavanam. It was not an ashram set up for the glorification of Fr Vineeth but for the glorification of the sadguru – Jesus Christ. Hence, with Vineeth's passing the ashram can continue, and flourish, as it continues to do so today under Fr Johnson.

A few years ago I did some research and wrote a few articles on the French mystic Henri Le Saux (1910 - 1973), better known in India as Swami Abhishiktananda (see Tyler 2022). In that research I looked at how a Christian might relate to the traditional fourfold *āśramas* (which has the same root of the word ashram) as set down in the *Rules of Mani* and practised by countless generations of Indians since. That is, the classic four stages of life as set out in the text: *brahmacarya* (the initial period of discipleship and studentship), *gṛhastha* (the householder stage), *vānaprastha* (loosening of bonds from the householder stage and preparation for old age) and finally *sannyāsa* – the ultimate renunciation deriving from the Sanskrit roots of *saṃ*, total or complete and *nyās*, renunciation or abandonment.

In its early context *sannyāsa* is understood as a state that is only achieved after the first three stages have been completed: one must have undergone student formation and discipline according to Vedic principles, raised a family and lived the life of a householder performing necessary duties as a good citizen to benefit society and only then undergone the period of withdrawal as a 'forest dweller' on the outskirts of the village, assisted by members of one's family, before the

final total renunciation of *sannyāsa* is possible.<sup>5</sup> However, yet another debate arises in the Indian sources – is *sannyāsa* a fourth *āśrama* or stage of life or is it rather beyond all *āśramas*? This latter view has usually been the attitude to *sannyāsa* taken by the Christian ascetics with whom I have discussed it. Indian Christian religious have traditionally undergone a Western-style religious formation: that is a period of training and studentship, *brahmacarya* in Indian sense, before taking the traditional Christian vows of, for example, poverty, chastity and obedience. In so doing the Christian ascetics I have encountered, including Vineeth, have generally not undergone a *grhastha* (householder) or *vānaprastha* (forest dweller) stage but leapt straight into what could be termed Christian *sannyāsa*.<sup>6</sup> Such Christian *sannyāsis* may adopt the life of wandering ascetics, such as Fr Vineeth's fellow *sannyāsi* the late Swami Sadanand or settle in an ashram such as Fr Vineeth or Fr Thomas Kochumuttom CMI, the guru of the Jeevan Dhara ashram in the Himalayas. Amongst women *sannyāsinis* the same variation is seen between those who start and live in ashrams such as Vandana Mataji (one of the founders of Jeevan Dhara where Fr Thomas is now the guru),

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<sup>5</sup>In Vedic tradition, as Fr Augustine Thottakara points out, the phase of the householder is one of the most revered as he is the one who protects and nourishes people at all the other three phases, providing a safe and stable environment within which the other spiritual work can take place. As it is stated in the *Laws of Manu*, "Of all these four the householder, who performs Vedic and *Smṛti* rituals, is the noblest. He indeed protects all the other three. As the rivers find their rest in the ocean, so all the states of life find their support in the householder." Manu cited in Thottakara, *Sannyāsa*, p. 567.

<sup>6</sup> Although I have encountered Indian Christian ascetics who have undergone the householder and forest-dweller phase too but, by and large, they have never been part of a Christian religious order. There also Indian Christian ascetics who have left vowed religious life to get married and then moved back into celibate ascetic life later.

forest dwellers such as Prasanna Devi of Rajkot, Gujarat and wandering Christian *sannyāsini*, such as the *sannyāsini* Paulina I once encountered at Rishikesh. For Fr Kochumuttom all Christians consecrated to the religious life are, by definition, *sannyāsis/ sannyāsini*s, yet he distinguishes the Christian path from that of, say, Hindu or Buddhist asceticism, as a work of collaboration between the seeker and God. The seeker must undergo the necessary ascetic training or *tapas* but they must also be cognisant, as Christians, that such spiritual attainment is dependent upon the action and collaboration with God. What is good in the non-Christian traditions should be adopted, he advises, but always with right discernment to the wider Christian perspective.<sup>7</sup>

These views, for all the gurus mentioned, are I believe, very inspired by the founder and chief guru of the congregation of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, Saint Elias Chavara, who likewise lived a balanced life of intense prayer with service and help to the community around him (see Vineeth 2004: 172). They can be contrasted perhaps with those of Swami Abhishiktananda who in his own life and writings seemed to advocate a '*sannyāsa* beyond *sannyāsa*' where *sannyāsa* was not so much a fourth *āśrama* as rather a state beyond *āśramas*. As he wrote in his spiritual diary:

*Sannyāsa* involves not only withdrawal from society, from the social and religious framework, from social and religious obligations etc. but also a fundamental commitment beyond the intellectual framework of one's life. (Diary 7.1.54, p.88)

In contrast to this radical move, and here I am very much inspired by the lives and writings of pioneers such as Fr

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<sup>7</sup> Personal communication with the author, see also T. Kochumuttom, *Christian Life Amidst Many Religions*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram, 2015.

Vineeth and Fr Kochumuttom, I agree with Fr Vineeth that for the Christian the sadguru must be Jesus Christ and that the ascetic practice of Christian *sannyāsa* might perhaps ideally be expressed in the 'Where' of the Christian ashram such as Vidyavanam and Jeevan Dhara (although as visionaries such as Swami Abhishiktananda and Swami Sadanand show it is possible to be a Christian ascetic beyond the confines of the ashram but this is a most difficult, and possibly quite rare calling). This is how I put it in my earlier research:

For Christians practising *sannyāsa* in India today have learnt that the 'further shore' of *sannyāsa*, when it is practised in Christian context, needs to be held by the context and support of the ashram or wider religious community. In the Indian tradition, as we have seen, the *sannyāsi* 'owns no place and no person and has to be by definition a solitary wanderer' (Augustine Thottakara 2009, p.561). The Christian, in contrast, by virtue of their consecration to Christ, remains in service to the world even though they do not identify with the world's goals and aims.<sup>8</sup> Yet, in spite of the differences between the extreme Hindu version of *sannyāsa* (as attempted to be practised by Abhishiktananda) and the Christian versions of active holiness it is possible to see both Indian *sannyāsa* and Christian spiritual life as two aspects of the final encounter and relationship with the ultimate goal of human life - our encounter with the limit of human mortality (Tyler 2022: 207-8)

Or, in the terms I have used in the present paper borrowed from Fr Vineeth, the cultivation of Divine consciousness

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<sup>8</sup> Although, as Thottakara notes, in recent years Buddhists, Hindus and Jains have all taken to more communitarian models of *sannyāsa* imitating in many ways Christian monastic models of service to the world, the poor and downtrodden (2009, p.562).

within the seeker. And it is to the consequences of that practice – the Why and the Who – I shall conclude now.

#### 4. Why? - The Goal of Contemplation: Inner Serenity

Following my remarks just now what I conclude on this point – the goal of contemplation – will probably come as no surprise as it follows logically on. As in most things St Teresa of Avila, one of Fr Vineeth's key influences, put it better than I in the 5<sup>th</sup> Mansion of her celebrated 'Interior Castle'. Here she is considering the effect of the divine consciousness that we have explored in this paper and wondering whether such a sister who has encountered the divine like this should withdraw from society (in traditional Indian terms, to the forests) and have no more commerce with human society. Her response is typically robust:

When I see people very diligently trying to discover what kind of prayer they are experiencing and so completely wrapt up in their prayers that they seem afraid to stir, or to indulge in a moment's thought, lest they should lose the slightest degree of the tenderness and devotion which they have been feeling, I realize how little they understand of the road to the attainment of union. They think that the whole thing consists in this...

No, sisters, no! What the Lord desires is **works**. If you see a sick woman to whom you can give some help, never be affected by the fear that your devotion will suffer, but take pity on her: if she is in pain, you should feel pain too; if necessary, fast so that she may have your food, not so much for her sake as because you know it to be your Lord's will. That is true union with His will. (*The Interior Castle*: 5.3.11)

Again, I can attest from time spent with Fr Vineeth that he took these sayings to heart and did indeed practice them in his ministry of openness, welcome and hospitality for all at Vidyavanam.

The *samādhi* that Patanjali describes as the goal of the *yogapada* is not some 'holy huddle' on the top of a mountain (at least for Christians) but rather it is the springboard for action in the world. The embodiment of the divine in our service to the poorest and weakest in society (as so magnificently shown in the life and works of, for example, Swami Sadanand). This peace (promised by Christ) becomes 'an unending source of peace and joy in which the soul rests in spite of all the pains and problems of life' (Vineeth 2004: 177). For:

'meditation is no more a practice or exercise prescribed for some time, but far more an attitude and disposition of mind pervading all aspects of life' (Vineeth 1995: 149).

Yes, by all means cultivate an 'inner serenity', but all the teachers agree that serenity must not be at the cost of service to the wider human community. And key to understanding the fruit of that meditation is our attitude and relation to those around us (as St Teresa suggested), especially the poorest and weakest and it is with them that we conclude.

### **5. Who? - The Asian Jesus and the Poor of Asia**

To sum up, Fr Vineeth has, I believe, presented us with a radical programme of transformation. The seed of that programme is the Gospels and Christian tradition and theology to which Vineeth is completely loyal. However, the soil for its growth is the rich soil of Asia - the great gift of its people, traditions and practices to the world. As so many other world religions have developed in this fertile soil so Vineeth, following the prophetic inspiration of Pope St John Paul II in writings such as his 'Fides et Ratio' sees a new 'turning of the wheel of Dharma' as Asia embraces her Christ, and especially her poor. As he beautifully puts it in the *Asian Vision of God*:

Being born in a manger, among animals [Jesus] identified himself with the poorest of the poor and showed his tender love for all the simple and beautiful creatures of the world. His wealth was the excellence of his being. He lived as a person of being and not of having. (Vineeth 2004: 178)

The American Carmelite sister Constance Fitzgerald relates how if we embrace the path that we have explored in this paper we will be destabilised on three fundamental levels. On the primary level the encounter with the Divine subverts our self-image. The sovereign ego is dethroned and we are thrown into the confusion and seeming darkness of what St John of the Cross calls the 'dark night'. Concomitantly, as self-image is subverted in this Dark Night so our image of the Divine is likewise subverted. As she so eloquently puts it:

Dark night is not primarily *some thing*, an impersonal darkness like a difficult situation or distressful psychological condition, but *someone*, a presence leaving an indelible imprint on the human spirit and consequently on one's entire life. This image is the touch of God's hand marking, wounding, challenging, shaping, purifying and transforming human personality. (Fitzgerald 1995: 101)

Which conversion/subversion leads to Fitzgerald's third and final level of subversion – how we see and relate to the world and people around us:

At this point in life and prayer development, the images of the poor, the victimized, the oppressed, the exploited, and the suffering take on a clarity and significance that is overpowering. .. They are the darkness of humanity, they are *our* darkness. (Fitzgerald 1995: 101)

So, at this point, if we have entered fully into the Christ consciousness that Vineeth describes, the search for spirituality stops being a parlour game for well-off and well-

fed middle class people but rather a call to action – to save our planet, our communities, our eco-system and by so doing to save ourselves and find the happiness that is our birth-right. In Vineeth's words, the Asian Christ is a 'revolutionary'. And with the world in such a pitiful state right now, we certainly do need that revolution! We enter into a revaluation of our place in society and those around us, ultimately seeing, as Vineeth expressed it (and so well embodied in the life of Saint Teresa of Calcutta), the face of Christ in the poorest and weakest in our society.

### **Conclusion**

We conclude our journey then, our *vidyabhavapad*, from knowing to becoming with 'this Jesus from Asia' who, 'though he was the Word Incarnate was very simple. Unassuming and unarmed. He preached God's love in a simple and lucid language'. As Fr Vineeth once told me, this Jesus 'comes simply and sits under a tree, not like a superstar'. Like his *sadguru*, Fr Vineeth adopted this simplicity and with it, despite great academic learning and sophistication, he was able to communicate that essential change of heart so necessary for our religion and our world. I hope that the process of getting to know the thoughts of this spiritual master as you read and reflect on this volume will lead you too, dear reader, to 'becoming other' – the integration promised in the title of our book. So, in gratitude and thanks for this great teacher of our times I shall leave the last words with him:

Many of the insights I have given are drawn from the Asian religions, which were there before Christianity, and also from the Eastern Churches, which made the synthesis of faith and philosophy in the first centuries of Christianity. Our attention is called to an experiential and realizational way of knowing God, which fosters a contemplative and apophatic approach to reality. This we see in the ancient hermitages

and the Ashram spirituality of the East which are being revived today. The East also developed a method of sutras, mantras and madrasas and breathing meditation as aides to theologizing and realizing God within. While the emphasized reason and objectivity, the East emphasized faith and experience. We need both. (Vineeth 2004: 180)

*Om – Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!*

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## **Part V**

### **Dialogue and Discernment: Reason, Music, Scripture, and Philosophy**

#### **Panel Presentation: Reason Expressing Itself in Art and Music**



# Reason Expressing Itself in Art and Music: Biblical Perspectives

*Sr. Rachita FCC*

## **Abstract**

The study *“Reason Expressing Itself in Art and Music: Biblical Perspectives”* explores the deep relationship between divine inspiration and human creativity as depicted in the Scriptures. Beginning with the Creator God as the supreme artist, the paper examines how art and music emerge in the Bible as manifestations of divinely inspired reason. Biblical narratives reveal artistic and musical expressions not merely as human achievements but as sacred acts of worship and wisdom-guided participation in God’s creative order. Through the examples of craftsmen, musicians, poets, and prophets, creativity is shown as rationality illuminated by revelation. In continuity with this biblical vision, Fr. Francis Vineeth conceives art and music as languages of awakened reason. They are spaces where divine inspiration and human intellect meet, transforming artistic expression into contemplative revelation.

## **1. Introduction**

Every form of art, including those in the Bible, has the power to capture the imagination, make inroads into the heart, and turn the wheel of reason and behaviour. In this way, an effective artist can spark movements and even bring changes to the world. Interestingly, Sacred Scripture presents

art in two ways: firstly, it contains artistic works, and secondly, it refers to different kinds of arts. In fact, the Bible begins with the narration of an artist par excellence—the creator God. God’s creativity is very much evident in His creating, celebrating the creation, in self-evaluating, and finally communicating Himself through it (Bernard, sec. 7). So also, art and music in the Bible emerge as expressions of divinely inspired reason and revelation. Throughout Scripture, artistic and musical talents are portrayed as sacred gifts entrusted to human beings, enabling them to participate in God’s own creative act. Their creativity, guided by wisdom, understanding, and obedience, transforms human skill into a form of worship and witness. Hence, the biblical understanding of art and music calls for a harmonious union between divine inspiration and human intellect. In conformity with this view, Fr. Francis Vineeth, a great thinker and theologian, perceived art and music as the language of awakened reason. His reflections point us to the biblical conviction that reason attains its highest form when expressed as beauty inspired by the Spirit.

## **2. Biblical Understanding of Reason**

It is indeed surprising to note that there is no exact equivalent for the term ‘reason’ in biblical Hebrew or Greek. Therefore, rather than attempting a strict definition, it is more fitting to describe it through the lens of Scripture, examining the various words and contexts in which related ideas appear.<sup>1</sup> From ancient times, many have understood the ‘image of God’ in which human beings are created as referring primarily to their rational capacity. Yet, Scripture indicates that the ‘image of God’ involves far more than mere reasoning power (Hasel 179). David J. A. Clines beautifully narrates the implications of ‘being created in the image of God’ in two ways. Firstly, a human person is a ‘copy’ of God and therefore has high value in the sight of God; secondly,

one cannot stand independently from God as the original, even in one's knowledge and understanding (Clines 53). Created in the divine image, human beings share in God's rationality—a faculty that finds its origin and fulfillment in God Himself (Job 12:13; 32:8; Jas 3:17). Thus, in the biblical perspective, reason is not autonomous but relational; it participates in divine wisdom and is called to discern reality in the light of God's truth.

Furthermore, biblical reason is not confined to intellectual judgment alone. It engages the whole person—mind, heart, and will—aligning them with God's standards of justice and truth. Yet, human rationality remains context-bound and morally charged; it can serve faithfulness or fall into sin. Therefore, Scripture portrays reason far greater than a human faculty but as a gift to be purified, guided, and transformed by divine revelation.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. Biblical Perspectives on Creative Expressions**

Wojciech Pikor views creativity as “the ability to produce original and unusual ideas or to make something new or imaginative.” Thus, in secular terms, we say that a person is creative when he/she is imaginative, resourceful, and capable of creating something new and original. Commenting on the biblical perspectives of creativity, Garrett Green notes, “Scripture is the concrete exemplar in the life of the believing community, by which it is enabled to imagine God, and hence to imagine the world in its essential relation to God in novel expressions.” Interestingly, for the people of the Bible, creativity is associated with God's work of creation. In other words, every creation of a human person is in the image of the creation of God Himself (Pikor 461). According to the opinion of biblical scholars, the seventh-day rest of God in the creation narrative suggests that God's creativity will have its extension and continuation in the human person's creativity (Pikor 467). Berdyaev argued that

creativity is God's own claim on and call to human persons. God awaits humankind's creative act, which is the response to the creative act of God (Berdyaev 277). In the creative action of God, humanity is called to distinguish and order the world through one's creative words and deeds, fostering harmony among created beings and leading all creation to glorify the divine majesty revealed before them (Pikor 471). Thus, authentic human creativity becomes both a reflection and a participation in the divine artistry that sustains all life.

#### **4. Art and Music in the Bible**

As we have discussed above, the Bible views art and music not simply as human skills; rather, they are expressions of divinely gifted reason and inspiration. In the following section, we examine several significant forms of art and music noted in the Bible that point out the human response to God's creative act.

##### **4.1. Skilled Use of Musical Instruments**

Being the book of the beginnings, the author of Genesis carefully includes the narration of the beginning of the skilled use of musical instruments. Jubal is recognized as "the father of all those who play the lyre<sup>3</sup> and pipe<sup>4</sup>" (Gen 4:21), marking the culture of music as a thoughtful and meaningful profession from the earliest biblical times. He is said to be *תֹּבֵּל* (*tōpēś*)—who handles or holds the musical instruments. It would also imply "to be skilled in," and thus suggest specialization and professionalism (Sarna 37). Other musical instruments mentioned in the Bible that were used to express particular moods and convey distinct meanings include the tambourine,<sup>5</sup> cymbals,<sup>6</sup> trumpets,<sup>7</sup> harps,<sup>8</sup> reed pipes, and flutes.<sup>9</sup> Most fundamentally, in the pages of the Bible, their use by skilled persons indicates how musical tones produced from them aided the formulation and delivery of messages, conveyed emotions, asserted and

strengthened communal bonds, and established and intensified human-divine contact (Friedmann 2013). Furthermore, the artistic and rational engagement with musical instruments reveals humanity's participation in God's own creative act, highlighting music as a sacred expression of divine-human collaboration.

#### 4.2. Music and Poetry

Music is an important part of life for the biblical world. From joy and celebration to sadness and mourning, many deep emotional experiences have been expressed musically throughout the Bible. From Miriam's song in response to the Exodus (Ex 15:20–21) to the new song in the book of Revelation (Rev 15:3–4), music connects the people to God and to each other.<sup>10</sup> The Bible describes King David as a lover of music, and the Book of Psalms is attributed to him. One of the several defining characteristics of David is his skill as a musician and as a poet throughout the cycle of the stories of David in the Bible. The Hebrew text of 2 Sam 23:1 describes David as "the anointed one of the God of Jacob" מְשִׁיחַ אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב (*meshiach elohei ya'aqov*) and "sweet singer of the songs of Israel" וְנָעִים זִמְרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל (*u-ne'im zemirot yisra'el*). Luke Ferretter rightly observes that the substantive *ne'im* here, from the adjective *na'im*, meaning "pleasant, delightful, lovely," highlights that it is David's skill as a poet and musician, the beauty of his songs, the pleasure that they cause, that the text is associating with his role as God's anointed one (Ferretter 345). 1 Sam 16 narrates David as the court musician, and his depiction as an anointed artist reveals the enormous moral (it makes one better), spiritual (it brings one closer to God), and psychological (it makes one feel better) power hidden in it (Ferretter 347). It is all the more interesting to consider, in line with Paul Ricoeur, that both David's lament and his psalms in history are about deep and complex emotional experiences of lived realities, rather than the world accessible to empirical

observation and induction (Ricoeur 141). This, however, marks David the anointed one, musician and poet and his work as rational expressions and inspired.

During the reign of King David, Levitical musicians were chosen from the tribe of Levi, specifically assigned to the ministry of music in the worship of Yahweh. He organized them into families systematically and placed them into twenty-four rotating courses under the leadership of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (Baitner 231). They were assigned to lead the people in worship by singing praises to God, accompanied by instruments such as harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets (1 Chr 15:16). According to 1 Chr 15:22, Chenaniah was the first professional teacher of music in biblical history. The musicians were not only performers but ministers, serving full-time and devoted exclusively to musical worship, often described as prophesying with music (1 Chr 25:1). Luke Ferretter explains that the Chronicler describes the composers, singers, and musicians of the Temple as prophets, as in some way their work expresses the intentions, thoughts, or words of God (Ferretter 354). In other words, with the skill given to them by the Lord, they explore the reality of the life and world He has given them. As they do so, in works of art, this reality is revealed back to the men and women who hear, read, see, or experience these works through a complex mix of the senses and the intellect (Ferretter 355). And thus, the art of music in the Scripture continues to be dynamic in its cyclic move.

### **4.3. Fictional Stories**

In fact, the Bible is a collection of enormous forms of verbal expressions like parables, fables, and wisdom tales to engage the hearts of its readers, stir ethical reflection, and convey divine revelation that transcends historical form. It is important to note that the Bible itself contains narratives and stories that are not always strictly historical but are intended

to communicate moral or theological teachings through metaphor, allegory, and symbolism. Biblical writers communicated their messages using the medium they had at their disposal. Some of the messages were clothed in fictional materials as a medium (Antwi 14). Among them, parables and fables were a common and popular method of instruction and communication among the people of the East, who were more of people of imagination than people of logical faculty (Lockyer 9). Both the Old and New Testament writers employ such stories to communicate a specific message underlined in them. Clarence Edward Macartney finds a slight difference between the Old Testament stories<sup>11</sup> as messages for specific occasions and the New Testament parables<sup>12</sup> as timeless, having no particular relation to or connection with the occasion or condition of utterance (Macartney 9). In the New Testament, Jesus often spoke in parables to convey moral lessons about the Kingdom of God, sin, and redemption. The purpose of these parables was to stimulate reflection and encourage listeners to think beyond the surface meaning of the words. Jesus Himself indicated that His use of parables was intentional (Mt 13:10-17), designed to reveal truths to those with ears to hear, while concealing them from those who lacked spiritual discernment (Youvan 5). The purpose of these stories can be met when they are used by persons with clarified rationality, fully immersed in their culture. As skilled and influential sages and storytellers, they were inspired by God to shape the imagination of the people of their time, shift views, and change culture for generations to follow (Alvarez 34). The biblical authors and characters had their reasons and truths in action, leaving a lasting impact on the listeners and readers with an intelligible message.

#### 4.4. Visual Arts

In the Old Testament, God's own creative acts in forming human beings are celebrated in terms of craftsmanship (Isa 64:8), and where the creative powers of human beings are described as operating under divine inspiration (Ex 25; 31:1–6), the people in question are artisans and decorative artists (Reddaway and Quash, sec. 1). The most extended discussion of human creativity is found in the accounts of the construction of the tabernacle. These accounts explicitly explain the artistic skill of the artisans who constructed the tabernacle. Bezalel,<sup>13</sup> the chief craftsman of the tabernacle, is empowered to accomplish every artistic work commanded by Yahweh because he has been filled with the רִיחַ אֱלֹהִים (*ruach Elohim*), the Spirit of God (Ferretter 340). Precisely, the Priestly writer notes that it is with the very divine spirit that was present at the creation of the universe (Gen 1:2), Bezalel is able to create works of art himself. The text joins wisdom חֵכְמָה (*hokmah*), understanding בִּינָה (*binah*), and knowledge דַּעַת (*da'at*)—the three qualities of reason—with artistic craftsmanship, revealing that art is rational participation in divine wisdom (Davidson 29).

Exodus 35:35 describes further that Bezalel and Oholiab are both filled with the skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan, which includes the ability to imagine and create well-designed works. The Priestly writer terms the creative work prescribed and done in making the tabernacle as מְלָאכָה (*mela'chah*)—"work," "occupation," or "craft" (Alter 305). Actually, the work done in the construction of the tabernacle includes work with wood, gold, silver, bronze, linen, yarn, goats' hair, leather, oil, spices, perfume, and precious stones. Remarkably, the writer accords equal value to all forms of human creativity that contribute to the beauty of the sanctuary. Ultimately, it is significant that God chooses

to dwell among His people in a place made beautiful through human artistry inspired by His own Spirit.

In response to Solomon's request, King Hiram of Tyre sent him a craftsman by the name of Hiram-Abi. It is possible to render his name in a slightly different way by translating it as "Hiram, my master craftsman."<sup>14</sup> The list of his job skills includes the same abilities that were seen in Bezalel, Oholiab, and the craftsmen who worked on the tabernacle at the time of Moses (Ex 28:6-8; 31:1-11; 36:8-38), connecting the continuity with the tabernacle to the Temple (Jonker 177). Hiram-Abi, just like his ancient predecessors, was a man who had received the gift of wisdom *אִישׁ יִרְעֵ בִינְיָהּ* *וְדָבָר* —"a man of great skill," and "a man of wisdom and knowing understanding." The piling on of synonyms makes it clear that this Hiram-Abi was the top man in his field (Wendland 37). Once again, narrating the qualities of reason together (wisdom, knowledge and understanding) in a person, the biblical author makes sure of the ability of Hiram-Abi as divinely inspired in his human skills.

Likewise, the art and architecture within the temple reflected divine order; the cherubim, lampstands, and carvings of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 6-7) indicate how aesthetic proportion harmonized with theological meaning (De Vaux 324-329). Each aspect of the temple had been constructed according to divine specifications, indicating that sacred art is reason illuminated by revelation, but never for its own sake, but as a visible theology (Von Rad 372-374). Indeed, they became the means by which revelation was channelled, helping to preserve Israel's collective memory and to sustain her identity as a people who "understand and praise" (2 Chr 30:22).

#### **4.5. Performance Arts**

In the pages of the Bible, more specifically in the prophetic writings, the readers come across words in performance. In other words, the word is dramatized in the body of the person, who is both its subject (speaker) and its object (victim). Yvonne Sherwood views this paradox as something unique to the performative art within the Bible.<sup>15</sup> Through such art forms of communication, biblical authors, including characters, emphasize that their words and deeds are attempts to give sense to the message which they have received from God, and wish to convey to their own particular audience. Though they seem to be unnatural and abnormal to the beholders, it is a reason that has surrendered to God and has allowed it to be sanctified by Him that governs the individual here (Sherwood 1.2). However, such symbolic acts in the Old Testament, prophetic or others, are quite varied and numerous. Moreover, symbolic acts of Jesus<sup>16</sup> could be seen as a relatively neutral sample of the traditions about His life (Wojciechowski). Unlike the symbolic acts in the Old Testament, Jesus in the New Testament performed symbolic acts from His own initiative, consciously and intentionally, indicative of His authority. Whatsoever, as long as their performances unite their intellect and divine inspiration, these biblical authors and characters involve themselves in the thoughtful participation in God's revelation and order.

#### **5. Biblical Ideals for Artists and Musicians**

From the above discussions we had on the various accounts of art and music in the Bible as means that play a vital role in the expression of one's reason that is in conformity with that of the creator God, an attempt is made here to draw a few biblical ideals that artists and musicians are invited to hold fast to.

1. Considering artistry with the sense of a vocation from God (Ex 31:2-5)
2. Being open to the Wisdom and Understanding from the divine (Ex 35:31-32; 1 Kgs 7:14)
3. Acquiring Skill and Craftsmanship through training (1 Chr 15:22; 2 Chr 34:12)
4. Having a pure motive to glorify God (Ps 24:3-4; Col 3:23).
5. Using them as a means of service (1 Sam 16:23)
6. Being obedient to divine promptings (Ex 36:1)
7. Understanding the needs of the time and knowing the audience (1 Chr 12:32)

## **6. Biblical Roots of Art and Music in the Thought of Fr. Vineeth**

In harmony with the biblical understanding of artists as participants in the divine artistry, Fr. Francis Vineeth insightfully articulates the artist as a *karmayogin*, who manifests divine creativity in the world. He views art as the discovery and revelation in view of the fact that the artist gives oneself selflessly to one's creation and expresses the invisible in visible words and forms (*Religion and Art* 128). Fr. Vineeth, by his often-repeated expression 'persons with awakened consciousness,' clarifies the implications of this concept as both rational and spiritual. The spiritual aspect of this awakened consciousness, according to him, finds its source of enlightenment in the Spirit, who imparts divine values. Consequently, such persons begin to speak a new language by forming words, sentences, and images that express the newly awakened awareness they possess (*Life and Language* 283). It is, in fact, a call to put new wine in new wineskins (Mt 9:17), and so also to have the new consciousness follow up with a new lifestyle of creative living. Fr. Vineeth's view of art and music placed equal emphasis on the Inspiration of the Spirit of God and human

participation in it. According to him, for an art to be truly worth admiring, it should proceed from the brain and blood of the artist (*In Search of an Indian Christian Art* 95). He, in his magnanimity, recognized a shared quality in both poets and artists as clear intuition or insight that compels them to give concrete expression to their inner experience (*In Search of an Indian Christian Art* 96). Thus, Fr. Vineeth considered art and music as sacred spaces where divine inspiration and human intuition meet. Interestingly, its dynamism is found in transforming creative expression into a contemplative act that reveals the presence of God in the beauty of human creativity.

## **7. Conclusion**

In sum, art in its various forms serves as a powerful instrument of human expression. It is also obvious that every form of art is neutral, and it is the message and intention hidden in it, that gives life and dynamism to it. In the Scripture, the artist's reason, skill, and imagination are purified by the Spirit to serve sacred purposes of revealing God's beauty, order, and truth. This understanding transforms both the artists and the beholder. Thus, the bible considers art and music within a covenantal relationship, where spirit-filled human creativity becomes an instrument that enlightens minds, elevates hearts, challenges disorders, and leads the community toward communion with God. In a similar spirit, Fr. Francis Vineeth foresaw human life as a creative journey with its ardent desire to find wholeness and integrity. He valued art and music as contemplative acts wherein reason, refined by divine inspiration, becomes a vehicle of revelation. For him, creative expression was not mere aesthetics but a sacred dialogue between God and the human soul, illuminating both the intellect and the heart with all their faculties.

## Notes

1. Hebrew and Greek expressions for the term for knowledge or reason include יָדַע (to know); γινώσκω (to know); יָדַע (to discern); οὐνεσις (insight); לֵב (heart – seat of insights); καρδία (heart). Having various terms and nuances themselves implies, then, biblical knowledge includes the whole person, including the actions and never just the mental capabilities. See Hasal (1993).
2. Hasel describes of a necessary transformation of the 'natural reason' through God's Word, where it is informed and formed by it. See Hasel (1993).
3. Playing a lyre was to communicate joy and mirth. Sellers also notes that David played the lyre before Saul, and it brought him healing and sooth. See Sellers (1941).
4. The Simplest form of flute, a wind instrument.
5. It was a joyful instrument. Most of its occurrences in OT are associated with merry-making or praise. Sellers (1941).
6. In the Holy Scriptures, the use of cymbals is solely confined to religious ceremonies and not as an accompaniment to dancing among the Jews. See Stainer (1914).
7. Trumpets were sounded to convey important signals – announcing war, proclaiming the coronation of kings, sounding alarms in times of danger, declaring the Jubilee year, and marking the celebrations of the New Moon and Full Moon. See Sellers (1941).
8. Skilled use of the harp among the Israelites conveyed a conduit of prophetic inspiration (2 Kings 3:15), a symbol of joyful worship (Ps 33:2; 92:3), and an instrument of heavenly worship (Rev 5:8; 14:2). See Stainer (1914).
9. They give voice to both jubilation and lamentation. See Stainer (1914).
10. The entire Book of Psalms, Song of Solomon, Sections of prophecies, and oracles are all constructed in the poetic form in the Bible.
11. The parable of the trees (Judg 9:7-20); The Parable of the Thistle and the Cedar (2 Kings 14:8-14); The Parable of the Lost Prisoner (1 Kings 20:35-43); The Parable of the Ewe Lamb (2 Sam 12:1-23); The Parable of the Woman of Tekoah (2 Sam

- 14:1–24); The Parable of the Vineyard (Isa 5:1–23); The Parable of the Faithless Wives (Ezek 23); The Parable of the Two Eagles and the Vine (Ezek 17); The Parable of the Ploughman (Isa 28:23–29).
12. The New Testament has the same focus on the figurative sayings and parabolic instructions as the parables. See Lockyer (1963).
  13. The name Bezalel suggests the meaning ‘in the shadow of God.’ See Johnstone (2014).
  14. John Arthur Thompson mentions that the name “Hiram-Abi” is related to “Hiram,” the builder of 1 Kgs 7:13, 40, 45; the additional *abi* here and in 4:16 could be part of his name or perhaps a title, to be translated as “my or his master craftsman.” It has even been proposed that the use of this longer name with the ending *ab* may be an additional effort to see a parallel between Hiram-Abi and Oholiab by giving the names the same ending. See Thompson (2001).
  15. Baking bread over dung, going naked and barefoot, marrying a prostitute, putting a yoke on his shoulders, or offering up parts of his own body as both material and stage for prophetic tropes (Jer 13; Hos 1–3; Ezek 4–5). See Sherwood (2006).
  16. Some of the symbolic acts of Jesus include: Eating with tax collectors (Mk 2:15–17; Lk 19:1–10); Washing the feet of the disciples (Jn 13:1–20); The triumphal procession towards Jerusalem (Mk 11:1–11); Cleansing the Temple (Mk 11:15–19); and Giving the Holy Spirit through a breath (Jn 20:22), etc.

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# Reason Expressing Itself in Art and Music: Rational Harmony to Emotional Resonance

*James Nathan*

## **Abstract**

By following the scientific foundations of musical composition from antiquity to the digital era, this article explores the connection between reason and emotion in art and music. Pythagorean unity, Aristotle's Theory of *Ethos*, and Thomas Aquinas's three-dimensional view of beauty, such as *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*, are examined as structures that combine rational arrangement with human reactions, starting with the classical understanding of harmony as a logical and cosmic order. The essay argues that the intellect's understanding of ordered form, rather than random emotions, is the source of musical beauty. This logical line is extended in the modern digital world by algorithmic editing and AI-generated composition, which use pattern analysis rather than human creation to produce emotional results. The paper concludes by stressing the importance of music as an intellectual and contemplative aid, demonstrating how its ordered structure promotes concentration, emotional control, and mindfulness. Thus, music continues to be a singular art form where instant sentiment is transformed into logical order.

**Keywords:** music and reason, harmony, Aristotle's *ethos*, Aquinas's order of beauty., AI composition, mindfulness

## **Introduction**

Since art and music are frequently connected to emotion, intuition, and inspiration, the notion that reason is crucial to these fields seems contradictory. However, the production and experience of music art are shaped by reason, which is defined by its formal order, logic, and organisation. Pitch relationships, rhythm, and harmonic progression are governed by patterns, ratios, and acoustic rules that form the foundation of musical theory. "Musical theory is grounded in patterns, ratios, and acoustic laws that govern pitch relationships, rhythm, and harmonic progression." (Deutsch, 2013, pp. 23-25). Listeners' perceptions of harmony and beauty are based on these mathematical systems.

The chordal design of a piece of music follows a regular, logical pattern that the listener's brain can comprehend rather than being random. Music is a unique form of art because it is founded on two completely distinct fundamental principles as the brainy side, which is the structure, and the emotional side, which is the feeling, along with the emotional connection between these two sides. A song is actually a very precise mathematical computation. It must adhere to arithmetic, that is, how beats separate time and science, which indicates the way various sound frequencies produce notes and harmonies. But as soon as those precise sounds are heard, the science experiment comes to an end. The body responds with strong emotions right away.

Neuroscience also demonstrates that as soon as the mind detects and anticipates structured sound patterns, musical enjoyment results. As soon as you hear those precise sounds, the science endeavour is over. The body responds with

strong emotions right away. The brain releases the pleasure chemical dopamine, which can make to feel happy, nostalgic, scared, or even make the pulse race. The warmest, most profound human experience is produced by the cold, rigid logic of music. "Notably, the anticipation of an abstract reward can result in dopamine release in an anatomical pathway distinct from that associated with the peak pleasure itself." (Salimpoor et al., 2011, p. 258).

In music, emotion arises from reason rather than being in opposition to it. The whole point of music is to provide an emotional link between the two domains of numbers or physics and feeling. The brain recognises complex, well-organised patterns in the beat, melody, and how stress develops and is released. It then transforms that order and logic into completely emotional feelings like joy or sorrow.

### **The Classical Foundations of Rational Harmony**

The idea that music is a rational discipline is deeply ingrained in ancient and medieval philosophical thought, rather than being a recent concept. Ancient Greek philosophers believed that cosmic balance (also known as *hamemonia Mundi*) was directly reflected in classical harmony. Unlike the chaotic environment of the great philosopher Plato, the universe was perceived as having order, rhythm, and regularity.

### **Pythagorean Ratio and Musical Order**

Pythagoras is credited with the first systematic explanation of musical logic. He found that harmonic intervals correlate to basic mathematical numbers, such as the reality that musical agreement results from a material and quantifiable link between the sounds they produce. Later Greek, medieval, and Renaissance ideas of harmony were influenced by Pythagoras's discoveries, which established music as a mathematical discipline. According to this

perspective, beauty and numerical proportion are inextricably linked.

### **Plato's Idea of Music's Connection with the Soul**

By uniting the metaphysical concepts of the soul with a musical framework, Plato extends the Pythagorean insight. He claims in the *Timaeus* that harmonic intervals were used in the construction of the world soul itself, creating a clear link between music, the universe, and human balance (Plato, *Timaeus* 35b-36d).

### **Aristotle's Doctrine of Ethos**

Aristotle extended this rational perspective through his doctrine of *Ethos*. In his work *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defined *ethos* (Greek for 'character') as one of the three primary modes of artistic persuasion, alongside *logos* (reason) and *pathos* (emotion). In the realm of music, Aristotle used the term '*ethos*' to refer to the ability of musical beats and patterns to entirely imitate, impact, and reshape a person's moral character (*ethos*). He mainly expressed this opinion in his book *Politics*, where he addressed the function of music in education. He maintained that music is an established framework of moral decision-making rather than a type of copying or imitation.

Aristotle deepened this rational approach through his Doctrine of Ethos, claiming that musical modes shape ethical dispositions and emotional states. Because music imitates moral character, its structure influences the soul, cultivating virtues such as courage, moderation, and gentleness (Bowman, W., 2010). "Rhythms and melody supply imitations of anger and gentleness, and also courage and temperance, and of all the qualities contrary to these, and of the other states of character..." (*Politics* VII, 1340a18-20).

Therefore, music was not just a pleasure; it was a powerful instrument for the moral growth and rational management

of the spirit, making it crucial for each political and educational endeavour. According to the philosopher Aristotle, music functions as a means for moral conduct and good government, along with being a kind of enjoyment. He insisted that the mathematical order found in music must have a direct impact on the order of a person and a city.

Marshall emphasises that Aristotle's aesthetics are part of his larger ethical and metaphysical framework, not just the *Poetics*. According to this viewpoint, the ethos concept demonstrates how music moulds character since its structure and order reflect the moral order of the soul. According to him, Aristotle believed that ethical formation and aesthetic form were closely related. (Marshall, J. S., 1953).

According to Aristotle, the government must carefully regulate music as a tool of statecraft to maintain an orderly and moral community. He believed that you are what you listen to, so he believed that the kind of music that was accepted was important. He believed that music would create good citizens, while music that caused uncontrolled passion or chaos had to be restricted (Aristotle, *Politics* VIII. 1340a-1342b). This reveals Aristotle's core insight that musical form has predictable psychological and moral effects because of its rational organisation. For this reason, Aristotle argued that music must be regulated in education and civic life.

### **Thomas Aquinas on Beauty, Intellect and Musical Order**

According to Thomas Aquinas, beauty is essentially an intellectual experience, a union of form and thinking, and goes well beyond sensory pleasure. According to him, music and art are wonderful since they exhibit comprehensible order, the very quality that enables the brain to recognise, enjoy, and rest in the shape of a thing, rather than just because they appeal to the senses. Although Saint Thomas

Aquinas did not write a treatise on the subject, two important passages in his writings highlight one of the core concepts of his aesthetic philosophy. When explaining the reason why the Son in the Holy Trinity is particularly appropriate for the name Beauty, Aquinas presents these prerequisites as “For three things are required for beauty (*ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur*), first, integrity or perfection (*integritas sive perfectio*), for those things which are broken are incomplete; second, due proportion or harmony (*debita proportio sive consonantia*); and third, clarity (*claritas*), whence things having bright colour are called beautiful.” (*Summa Theologiae*, I.39.8, Corpus). Aquinas also draws the same three qualities of beauty in his commentary on *Pseudo-Dionysius*, comparing divine causality to integrity, proportion and clarity (*Commentary on the Divine Names*, Chap. 4, Lect. 5).

*Integritas* means that the composition must be complete and lacking nothing essential to its form. According to Thomas Aquinas, the pleasure we derive from music isn't a random emotion but an intellectual reward for successfully solving a puzzle. A musical piece is considered beautiful only if it possesses completeness (*Integritas*), meaning it is a perfect, rational structure with all its intended parts intact.

The human mind works hard to identify and understand this comprehensive, logical pattern and logic; the ensuing happiness or pleasure is merely the instinctive, delightful feeling produced by the mind's accomplishment of this cognitive task. Essentially, the listening experience is preceded by the beautiful design of the music, and the sense of beauty is the reward for the mind's accomplishment in comprehending that logical shape. Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, I.39.8) asserts that when the intellect recognises order, beauty results in pleasure (Eco, U., 1986).

*Consonantia* means that it all must fit. This relates to the proper placement and proportion of the components; the design's compositional rationale corresponds to exact numerical harmony. Order and appropriateness are central to Aquinas' concept of *consonantia*. It implies that every component of the song, regardless of size, ought to be accurately connected to every other component. Everything needs to be harmonised and correctly proportioned for music to be lovely. The total beauty is destroyed if any section is out of scale.

He believed that all in music had to be harmoniously balanced and in perfect balance for it to be genuinely beautiful. Both the small, straightforward components and the large, intricate parts are covered in detail. *Consonantia*, to put it briefly, indicates that the entire song is a rational system with no parts that are out of place. The flawless, well-organised interaction between each element is what gives it its beauty. *Claritas* says the composition's pattern must be evident, allowing the mind to quickly recognise its ordered logic. The last section of *Beauty Claritas* describes how listening to music makes us feel. *Claritas* is that fleeting, brilliant time when the mind can perceive the song's perfect and profoundly logical design. A person does not suddenly experience delight or satisfaction in appearance. Rather, it is an additional reward that the mind bestows upon itself for correctly understanding and interpreting the intricate, structured musical knowledge.

Aquinas's theory is intriguingly reflected in modern cognitive studies that the brain produces pleasant feelings when it recognises patterns, eases tension, or anticipates the arrangement of music. Aquinas foresees this by defining beauty as the cognitive power's appropriate pleasure (ST I-II, q.31, a.4). Therefore, beauty is a form of epistemic delight that the mind bestows upon itself upon effective

comprehension. Therefore, beauty is an act of knowing from which emotion arises rather than an emotion first. When someone finds music beautiful, it's the joy of the mind recognising perfect order; it's the intellectual 'aha!' moment made audible. Aquinas, therefore, links emotional pleasure to rational comprehension, echoing modern cognitive theories of musical expectation. (Levitin, 2006).

### **Beauty as a Mode of Knowing for Thomas Aquinas**

For Aquinas, beauty is closely connected to knowledge because "*the beautiful is that which pleases upon being seen*" (*Summa Theologiae* I, q.5, a.4 ad. 1). In this context, seen mostly alludes to cerebral awareness rather than just physical eyesight. When music's logical structure becomes apparent to the listener's brain, rather than just stimulating the senses, it turns beautiful. This supports the notion that beauty acts as a conduit between the mind and the senses. According to Aquinas's theory, musical beauty is the intellect's recognition of ontological order rather than a matter of personal taste. This also holds for moral virtue, art, and architecture, all of which are attractive insofar as they exhibit brightness, scale, and purity.

### **Musical Order as Participation in Divine Reason**

The notion that order, tranquillity, and balance represent the rational organisation of the universe is passed down to Aquinas from Plato, Saint Augustine, and Pseudo-Dionysius. In addition to being visually beautiful, a musical composition that exhibits appropriate consonance and proportion contributes to heavenly intelligibility. In this way, music is a miniature representation of the divine *Logos*, the unchanging ratio that underlies all. In his commentary on the *Divine Names*, Thomas Aquinas says that God is the primary source of order and clarity, which is where beauty originates (In *De Divinis Nominibus*, c. 4, lect. 5). Thus, when the intellect

perceives beauty in music, it is ultimately responding to something.

### **Combining the Sensible with the Intellectual to Create Artistic Beauty**

Thomas Aquinas views beauty as an entire experience rather than discounting the importance of the senses. While the mind identifies the form inside that material, the senses provide ordered material noises, colours, and shapes. Since music is logical number theory and ratio viewed through sound is an ideal example of this combination. This duality, logical presentation, and intellectual clarity show why music can be both fundamentally reasonable and deeply affecting. Every exquisite piece of art, whether it be a sculpture or a tune, is an expression of *claritas*, a form that shines by matter and allows the mind to perceive significance through our senses.

*Integritas*, *Consonantia*, and *Claritas*, Aquinas's description of beauty, demonstrate that experiencing beauty is essentially an intellectual task. As with other forms of art, beauty in music emerges when the mind perceives perfect proportion, complete form, and the brilliance of order. In addition to experiencing musical unity, the listener engages in the inner reasoning that Aquinas considers as having its roots in the divine, with this balance of form and comprehension.

### **Music in Digital Culture**

The traditional association of musical beauty and ratio has been significantly changed in the age of technology. Reason still shapes musical enjoyment, as algorithmic playlists show. In order to mould audience emotional states, radio stations employ artificial intelligence algorithms that curate listening habits based on rhythm, timbre, key, and numerical resemblance (Morris, J. W., & Powers, D., 2015).

Nowadays, algorithmically selected and produced music reflects what Aquinas believed to be the rational foundation of harmony, proportion, beauty, and intelligibility. Reason's role is no longer confined to the human mind; it is now incorporated into computing systems that arrange sound in accordance with mathematical and technological principles. (Pasquinelli, M, & Jaton, F, 2022).

By drawing disposition, personality, and behaviour choices from information patterns, algorithmic playlists, which are now a major feature of services like Spotify and YouTube Music, impact a listener's musical experience (Eriksson, M et al., 2019). By constantly modifying choices to match situational or emotional characteristics, these systems design a person's *ethos*. These algorithms manipulate structural musical elements to create emotional experiences, even if they lack consciousness or real impact. Which are recognised for their ability to convey emotion through music (Juslin, P. N., & Sloboda, J. A., 2013, p. 591). This demonstrates a contemporary expansion of the traditional idea that reason, which was before thought of as the ability of humans to create ordered beauty, is now operationalised through technology. Once the domain of the composer's mind, the logical architecture of music composition is now outsourced to robots that can mimic emotional resonance and stylistic coherence.

### **Mind as Designer in the AI Artist**

AI-generated music highlights the connection between emotional reaction and logic. AI systems' songwriting process is essentially logical, that is, from massive datasets of previously composed music, the computer learns numerical connections, organisational norms, and stylistic tendencies (Briot, J.-P et al., 2019). Markov chains and deep learning architectures are examples of tools that use scientifically optimised assumptions to forecast the next note, chord, or

rhythm occurrence. Although these systems lack feel, they consistently produce compositions that evoke strong emotions in human ears.

The phenomenon highlights a key finding that perceived patterns of older people are closely linked to our emotional connection with music. Aquinas's criteria for beauty, clarity (*claritas*), due balance (*consonantia*), and wholeness (*integritas*) are frequently met by AI-generated compositions. This is not since the computer comprehends these qualities, but rather because these patterns are ingrained in the musical language it has learnt. The duality is enlightening that songs generated solely by intellectual, non-emotional techniques may nonetheless provoke deep human feeling. The rationale is that human musical perception is essentially pattern-seeking; the pleasure we feel originates from the awareness of arrangement, anticipation, and resolution. AI piece so turns into a profound meditation on what makes music beautiful. It proves that emotional intention is not always the source of emotional impact in music. Rather, emotion arises from the mathematical arrangement of sound, indicating that the long-standing connection across proportion and feeling is still relevant in the era of digital media.

AI-generated music demonstrates that solely rational, rule-based procedures may produce emotional reactions. Algorithms produce music that fits structural demands and elicits emotion without lacking thinking or feeling by analysing vast datasets and following mathematical structures. This demonstrates that a large percentage of our musical enjoyment is determined by the structured patterns and balances found in the music alone, rather than by human beings.

## **Effective Application: Using Music to Advocate Mindfulness**

When it comes to practical usage, music shows itself to be a potent instrument for developing awareness. Because the mind usually gravitates toward intrusive ideas, fears, and digital noise, practising mindfulness, which is defined as continually paying attention to the now with openness and acceptance, can be challenging. By providing the mind with a complicated yet predictable object of focus, music helps to alleviate this challenge. A musical composition develops through rhythmic repetitions and rationally patterned systems. Harmonic patterns and rhythmic lines that gradually direct attention over time. By acting as an anchor, this ordered flow keeps the mind from straying into disorganised or uncontrollable thought processes.

In its own right, deep listening turns into a meditative activity. It entails paying attention to subtle differences in tone, phrasing, quiet, and shape while listening with purpose (Oliveros, P., 2005). Such a hearing adds an artistic element that enhances the contemplative experience while reflecting standard practices of meditation based on breathing or sensory awareness. The structured flow of music opens up emotional space for introspection and serenity while also stabilising the listener's focus. In this way, the chaotic internal environment of the preoccupied mind is countered by musical structure.

Moreover, music is really a predictive exercise based on patterns. According to neuroscience, the brain uses programmed numerical understanding of rhythm, melody, and harmony to continuously forecast upcoming sounds (Huron, D., 2006). The brain generates dopamine, which results in feelings of pleasure, contentment, and mental clarity whenever musical happenings follow these

projections or differ in significant, aesthetically attractive ways (Salimpoor et al., 2011).

Therefore, when a piece of music concludes, the experience of its correctness is based on neurobiological reward systems rather than being entirely personal. The ability of music to elicit powerful emotional reactions is likewise explained by this predictive process. Neural pathways linked to anxiety and alertness may be triggered by an abrupt dissonance or unexpected sound rupture (Koelsch, S., 2014). In this sense, music simulates emotional tension in a safe way, allowing listeners to feel dread, excitement, or pleasure without being in danger. As a result, music serves as an emotional outlet where individuals can experience, manage, and heal emotional states in a controlled, creative setting. Cognitive psychology research also shows that while chaotic or unstructured situations reduce focus, reliable patterned stimuli increase it. Music maintains attention better than silence or unpredictability because it finds an equilibrium between predictability and originality. Because of this, practising musical mindfulness is beneficial for developing inner peace and mental discipline. These characteristics collectively demonstrate how musical mindfulness promotes spiritual, emotional, and cognitive well-being in distinctively integrated ways. In addition to mirroring inner experience, music serves as an organised means of achieving peace and awareness.

### **Music as a Meditative Practice in a Chaotic World**

Music is a spiritual or subjective experience. Its melody scale, harmonic consonance, rhythmic order, and structure all support the human mind's natural desire for unity. Music is a quiet haven in a digital age characterised by fragmentation, distraction, and sensory overload. Musical form naturally educates the mind in mental firmness since it forces the listener to follow emerging patterns. By promoting

emotional control and rooted awareness, its internal logic mitigates the cognitive impacts of contemporary division. The capacity to consistently return to a reliable focus of concentration despite internal disturbance is referred to in psychological studies as attentional anchoring (Lutz, A., et al., 2008). Music provides a perceptual context where tension and fulfilment, expectation and unexpectedness coexist in harmonic interaction, fulfilling this grounding role with remarkable ease. This illustrates the harmony people strive for in their spiritual and personal lives.

### **Music Is the Tool for Contemplating Nature**

By connecting with natural rhythms, the beating of the heart, sensory rhythms, and breathing sequences, music cultivates a meditative sense of human nature. According to philosophers like Schopenhauer, music is a clear representation of the fundamental nature of life on earth (Schopenhauer, A., 1969). According to modern eco-phenomenology, listening habits also improve our awareness of the natural world, increasing our reaction to ecological interconnections and sound. Listeners may feel that they are an integral component of a greater rhythmic order that is linked to the environment by music. Reflecting on human existence is also aided by music. Since music is simultaneously deeply individual as well as globally expressive, it provides a place to reflect on human existence. Its capacity to convey emotion without language specificity enables listeners to reflect on common human experiences, such as joy, sadness, longing, and finitude. According to Scruton, music allows people to reflect on their own inner lives by giving form to usually abstract aspects of human life (Scruton, R., 2011).

## **The Universe, Music, and the Experience of Infinity**

According to Pythagoras, the melody of the world to contemporary research linking musical experiences to amazing experiences, which are marked by self-transcendence, decreased concentration on oneself, and increased realisation of the immense scope of creation, music has been closely linked to the foundations of the cosmos throughout the history of thought. In this way, music becomes a reflective window into cosmic order, inspiring listeners to sense the universe's unity, scope, and wonder. Music reflects human morals because it changes throughout time and disappears as soon as it is heard. It has a contemplative power because of its fleeting nature, which captures the beauty and frailty of temporal existence. According to scholars studying music and mourning, musical rituals frequently assist people in processing the truth of death by providing loss and connection with emotional expression (Kivy, P., 2001).

Music has long been recognised as a contemplative tool in faith communities. Devotional singing, chant, and hymns calm cognitive rhythms, expose the heart to the divine, and coordinate collective emotion. In certain forms, such as Gregorian chant, Sufi meditation, Hindu songs, or Buddhist mantra chanting, music serves as a conduit between spiritual truth and human awareness, providing an ordered pathway to transcendental experience, prayer, and peacefulness.

Therefore, music is a way of reflection rather than just a passive sensory experience. By engaging the person listening in meaningful, patterned sound, it reorganises awareness. By doing this, it offers an immersive space where listeners can contemplate nature, mankind, cosmic mystery, existence, morality, and the sacred, as well as an example of solid order within a chaotic universe. By balancing reason and emotion and bringing the listener back to oneself with clarity,

coherence, and meditative awareness, music transforms into a spiritual supporter.

### **Conclusion**

It becomes clear that music is a singularly unifying human phenomenon in which emotional experience and rational thought are inseparable. The history of human thought continuously confirms that intelligible order is necessary for musical beauty, from the Pythagoreans' ratios of numbers to Thomas Aquinas's description of aesthetics as integrity, arrangement, and clarity. By demonstrating how the mind reacts to structured sound through recognition, prediction, and the neurobiological reward of coherence, modern cognitive science supports this traditional understanding. The persisting connection between reason and affect is demonstrated by the fact that the mental effect of contemporary media and AI-generated music still stems from structural organisation instead of personal purpose.

Thus, music serves as a tool for gaining knowledge, contemplation, and emotional control as well as for its aesthetic appeal. In a world defined by fragmented and sensual exuberance, its structured emergence offers a steady foundation that facilitates contemplation, mental clarity, and interior calm practices. At the same time, through providing expression to feelings and experiences that are beyond words, music provides a means of contemplating human existence, the natural world, and the sublime. When combined, these viewpoints show that music can be both incredibly spiritual and extremely rational. It balances sense and structure, order and emotions, and intellect and passion. Therefore, in both natural and digital civilisations, music continues to be a vital tool for fostering moral, meditative, along cognitive well-being.

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# Reason Expressing Itself in Art and Music: A Hegelian Perspective

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## **Abstract**

Art and music constitute a central position in Hegel's idea of Absolute Mind. They are one of the modes through which the Absolute manifests itself, where a profound form of truth as reason is revealed. For Hegel, reason (Vernunft) is not an abstract faculty confined to logical thought but the dynamic and self-developing principle of reality itself. Absolute Spirit realizes itself in art and music as sensuous embodiments of reason's self-expression. In art, reason manifests itself in perceptible forms uniting the spiritual and the sensual. Art is a mode in which Spirit comes to know itself by objectifying its inner rational essence in the phenomenal realm.

Hegel identifies three stages of art namely: Symbolic, Classical and Romantic Art. Symbolic art, characterized by ancient Eastern art, the spiritual content struggles to find adequate expression in the sensual form. The classical art, manifested in Greek art, attains a perfect harmony between form (sensual expression) and content (pure reason), realizing the ideal of beauty. The romantic art, which appears in Christianity, turns inward to emphasize subjectivity and spiritual depth, thereby surpassing the limitations of sensuous representation. Thus, for Hegel, art echoes the process of continuous unfolding of pure reason in history.

In Hegel's system, if art gives reason a spatial and material form, music operates in the dimension of temporality and inwardness. For him, music manifests the subjective notion of spirit. It reveals the inherent dialectical unity between reason and emotional feeling in conformity with harmony, rhythm and form. For Hegel, human emotion is not irrationality but the self-articulation of Spirit. He conceives music as the romantic art, where spirit turns inward, highlighting subjectivity and the infinite depth of self-consciousness.

Reason's manifestation in art and music is, thus, essential to spirit's self-knowledge. In the aesthetic realm, reason sensuously intuits itself before achieving symbolic and conceptual clarity in religion and philosophy respectively. In melody, form and expression, music discloses the rationality that is immanent in emotion and time. It is the immediate self-expression of the Idea. For Hegel, art and music are the sensual revelation of reason, in its development towards absolute self-knowledge. Thus, beauty, though sensual, is reason made phenomenal.

### **Introduction: Hegel's System**

For Hegel, art and music are the effective means of bringing to human consciousness and expressing the truth of divine Reason. Reason<sup>1</sup>, in Hegel's view, is purely contextual. He does not understand concepts like, Reason, Idea or Absolute Spirit, with which he equates God or Divine, as

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to make clear a point regarding Hegel's system. The key word for Hegel is the German word "*Geist*," translated either as Mind or Spirit. In Hegel, *Geist* also stands for the terms like, Reason, Absolute, Spirit, Mind, Idea, Freedom, God, World, Universal and Thought. They all refer to one reality, and are not different or contradictory in themselves. They are not externally brought to experience, but emerge from experience. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, 7-8.

metaphysical or abstraction, but concrete entities. According to him, "we are no longer dealing with the ... abstract, simple logical Idea, but with the most concrete"<sup>2</sup> realities. Spirit, God or Absolute Truth are not otherworldly or mystical entities, but are purely the outcome of human consciousness actualized in history. In Hegel's view, "the god [absolute] who impels to self-knowledge is none other than the absolute law of mind itself" (*Philosophy of Mind*, §377 Zusatz).<sup>3</sup> Such concepts, rather for Hegel, are perfect expressions of Universality or complete and all-encompassing Whole; universal revealed as being one with senses and feelings in unity with concrete sensuous appearance.<sup>4</sup> In other words, what is spiritual, for Hegel, is the 'unity of entirety'.

Unity is one of the salient features of Hegel's philosophy. If at all one could express the entire system of Hegel in a single word, the term could be none other than "Unity." The ideal of unity is the very nature of reason and philosophy, in his view, should look for a kind of unity and wholeness in reason.<sup>5</sup> Philosophy of Hegel, then, by its very nature, is a philosophy of unity. It is very well clear from his bold and infamous statement in the preface to his major work called *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, according to which: "What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational,"<sup>6</sup> which explicates Hegel's conception of art. His position concerning art is vivid in this dictum and his comprehension of art has its base in his logic.<sup>7</sup> He grasps art in the context of his ultimate concept of *Absolute Spirit*. Art constitutes, indeed, a

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<sup>2</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Matarrese, *Starting with Hegel*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> James, *Art, Myth and Society in Hegel's Aesthetics*, 31.

central position in Hegel's exposition of Absolute Spirit<sup>8</sup>. It is one and the first among three modes in which the Absolute manifests itself; the other two being religion and philosophy. In Hegel's view, art is not a subject matter of aesthetic beauty alone. Much more than that, Hegel visualizes art as an expression of the rational and wholistic truth, which he understands as the Absolute spirit.

Reason, in Hegel's view, is not theoretical, but practical by its very nature.<sup>9</sup> It is completely *real* and actual. It is not a static or inert faculty expressed in human consciousness. Rather, reason, being initially in its *impure* (*Begriff*) form and being rooted in ordinary human experiences and arising out of the life of people,<sup>10</sup> by virtue of its very nature of infinity and boundlessness, strives to go beyond the determinate and finite phenomenal world. Thus, human beings, as the expression of reason, is instinctively urged to move beyond the finite and sensual world. It is a natural human drive to give shape to what is internal and inward and to become conscious of the same.<sup>11</sup> And art enhances such human motive. Art, exactly, is one of the mediums in which the spirit or the absolute, which is rational, is manifested in the apparent realities. Thus, artistic beauty, for Hegel, grasps the essential nature of the inner spirit or mind and expresses the same in sensual form.

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<sup>8</sup> Spirit, here, should not be equated with a transcendental reality, totally disconnected from the world. Rather it could also be read as 'Mind', which Hegel uses interchangeably.

<sup>9</sup> Acton, "George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel," *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3, 439.

<sup>10</sup> Rockmore, "Hegel," *A Companion to the Philosophers*, 282.

<sup>11</sup> James, *Art, Myth and Society in Hegel's Aesthetics*, 20.

## Beauty of Nature and Artistic Beauty

Generally, we recognize beauty in nature. Natural realities such as sky, rivers, flowers, animals and human beings, in some way, reveal beauty. But Hegel's question was that how far such kinds of natural beauty could be associated with the artistic beauty. It is true that there is beauty in nature. However, Hegel has certain reservations regarding beauty as such, whether it is natural or artistic beauty. For him, art becomes a subject matter of philosophy only when its content is accessible not only to senses, but also to reason, for he conceives 'beauty' from his understanding of concept of spirit.<sup>12</sup> Basically, for Hegel, beauty does not reside in objects of nature itself, but it belongs to a higher faculty.

Taking insights from Kant, Hegel makes a well-defined distinction between beauty and sublimity. For him, beauty is something higher than sublimity. According to Kant, sublimity (*die Erhbenheit*) is the attempt of the idea of reason (*Vernunftidee*) to present itself in material objects; though such an attempt is not complete, but only partial. In such an attempt, sublimity, for Kant, is all about the feeling that an external object arouses in the inner consciousness of the subject. In other words, it is not the object itself, but the mental attitude of the individual subject that judges the object to be sublime or not. In contrary to this view, Hegel understands sublimity as the manner in which the infinite reason is portrayed in the sensual object. However, infinitude, as a sheer expression of indeterminacy, is utterly incommensurate in relation to anything that is natural (*sinnliche Gestalt*). In sublimity, the Idea fails to achieve enough expression in the sensuous medium and thus remains inexpressive. Whereas, in what is beautiful, the

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<sup>12</sup> Jaeschke, "Absolute Spirit: Art, Religion and Philosophy," *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel*, 179-80.

absolute Idea is sufficiently embodied in the sensual form.<sup>13</sup> Eventually, in Hegel's sense, sublimity of nature is inferior to artistic beauty.

Ultimately, for Hegel, beauty is merely a question of the extent to which the *infinite* can be adequately presented in the sensory form and not the impressions formed in the feeling subject by the sensory forms in which the infinite is presented.<sup>14</sup> At the same time the beauty in nature cannot be denied. Of course, *nature*, being the first sensuous form in which the Idea or the Reason manifests itself, reveals beauty. In fact, for Hegel, it is essential for the concept of beauty that its objects should be sensuous. It must be an actual, concrete thing accessible to the senses and must not be an abstract reality. At the same time, it is equally true that a mere sensual object, completely disconnected from the ideal, cannot display beauty. Only when the Idea manifests itself exorbitantly in sensuous things, the mind recognizes the idea as beautiful.<sup>15</sup> However, in the externality of nature the Idea is so sunk and practically veiled. Reason, as Idea is almost invisible in nature. In other words, nature is just the negation or the otherness of Reason. As a result, nature exhibits the least beauty and is only sublime. The beauty of nature, therefore, is fundamentally defective due to its limitedness.

Nevertheless, there is a gradation of beauty in nature. In the raw nature, owing to its lack of freedom and infinitude, reason is manifested the least and it reveals only minimum beauty. Subsequent to that, in material or inorganic things, where parts are mechanically united, enjoying little more freedom, beauty achieves next level. It is only in the organic

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<sup>13</sup> Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 457.

<sup>14</sup> James, *Art, Myth and Society in Hegel's Aesthetics*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 443.

nature or life, beauty makes the most of it.<sup>16</sup> For such reason, art could not be a complete imitation or a product of nature, lest art would remain merely at the level of mundane nature. However, Hegel claims that “artistic beauty is higher than the beauty of nature. ... Beauty that resides in art is superior to the beauty of nature.”<sup>17</sup> As for him, art is not out of nature, but is produced out of spirit<sup>18</sup>. Because beauty, for Hegel, does not lie in the harmonious ordering of shapes or particular arrangement of colours or sequence of tones, but it is the perfect union of spirit and matter. What is beautiful is the shape that the spirit brings forth. Thus, art, for Hegel, is the self-consciousness of the spirit in the form of intuition.

### Art as the Unity of Spirit and Embodiment

For Hegel, the unity of rational and sensual is something natural and inevitable. Reason, first of all, is not a conceptual definition. It is not merely an abstract faculty that is concerned only with gaining conceptual knowledge, rather it is absolutely real. Of course, for Hegel, reason evolves from nature and is a product of history.<sup>19</sup> However, it does not mean that reason and nature enjoy same status. Though they are related and identical to each other, reason is ranked higher in status than nature. While nature expresses itself as a *particular* reality, reason is grasped as a *Universal* faculty, which is the whole of all particulars.<sup>20</sup> Hegel argues that the contradiction between what is rational (mind) and what is sensual (body) is mere appearance. This is purely due to the undeveloped and incomplete understanding in which the

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<sup>16</sup> Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 444-45.

<sup>17</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 311.

<sup>18</sup> Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 451.

<sup>19</sup> Limnatis, *German Idealism and the Problem of Knowledge: Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel*, 181.

<sup>20</sup> Burbidge, *Hegel's Systematic Contingency*, 7.

apparent oppositions were designed.<sup>21</sup> We always make a distinction between finite and infinite; between conditioned and unconditioned and understand thinking as finite and conditioned. Human thought cannot have access to the world of unconditioned and infinite. However, Hegel does not think that way. For him, thought is not conditioned, but has freedom as its very nature. Hegel understands that human thought or thinking, being a finite activity, can have access to infinitude and is capable of grasping the infinite.<sup>22</sup> For, in his view, finite and infinite are not divergent realities, but the latter is just a progression of the former. Hence, for Hegel, there is always a “reconciliation of the reason that is conscious of itself with the reason that *is*, or actuality” (*The Encyclopaedia of Logic*, §6).<sup>23</sup> In depth, one could always recognize the inherent relationship between reason and human sensuality. Ultimately, for Hegel, there is no definite opposition between reason and senses.

Art, in Hegel’s understanding, perfectly reflects this unity between what is rational and what is sensual. Art, according to him, is a product of human thought and activity, embodied in sensual forms. Art is essentially an organism,<sup>24</sup> where the parts of the whole are perfectly united and interpenetrates each other. The unity that art exhibits is not external, but internal to the sensual objects. Hegel recommends art as a “mediator between reason and sensuousness, between inclination and duty, as the reconciler of all these elements constantly warring with one another.”<sup>25</sup> As a medium that unites what is spiritual and what is sensual, it reveals a profound form of truth in a rational

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<sup>21</sup> Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 314.

<sup>22</sup> James, *Art, Myth and Society in Hegel’s Aesthetics*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 444.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 312-13.

process. It is a deepest nature of inherent unity between *content* and *form*.

Art itself begins when the Idea, being itself indeterminate and obscure, is transformed into the very content of the artistic forms.<sup>26</sup> The content of art is reason or spirit and the form of art is external sensuality. Thus, the true content of art is the absolute spirit<sup>27</sup> and its form being the phenomenal realm. In art, both these contradictory realities come together as a united whole. In art, reason manifests itself in the perceptible forms, for only in its body can mind sufficiently appear in a sensuous manner. However, it is hard to digest the unity between two completely contradictory realities, which is an ongoing debate in the field of philosophy. Traditional philosophy finds it hard to imagine the 'oneness' of mind and body. It is important, however, to note that it is typical of Hegel that he refuses to perceive the content of art as abstraction. He considers it as a concrete reality. At the same time, he does not mean that the 'concrete' nature of the content is as same as the concreteness of sensuous objects as opposed to everything spiritual and intellectual. However, the concrete nature residing in both the content and that which represents the content is the point in which both can fit together.<sup>28</sup> Since both the content and the representation of the content share a common quality - which is 'concreteness' - these two apparently contradictory realities come together in union.

In fact, art is one of the modes in which Spirit comes to know itself by objectifying its inner rational essence in the phenomenal realm. Reason realizes itself and is actualized only in the objective reality. Initially, reason manifests itself

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<sup>26</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 320.

<sup>27</sup> James, *Art, Myth and Society in Hegel's Aesthetics*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 316-17.

under the guise of immediacy, that is, under the guise of external sense-objects where the objective reality is the only precedence. Gradually, according to the grade of art form, the reason or the absolute begin to appear in the sensual objects. In the lowest art form, the harmony between the rational content and its representation is imperfect and in the highest form the harmony is perfect. In other words, the highest art form is the one where the spiritual content attains a sensuous form that suits its essence.<sup>29</sup> Only in such state of perfect harmony, utmost beauty is revealed. For beauty, for Hegel, is nothing but the Absolute or the Idea, shining through the veils of sense-world.<sup>30</sup> It is well explicit in the words of Hegel saying, the artistic forms, "in order to express the Idea, that the figure shows it and it alone: - the shape or form of *Beauty* (*Philosophy of Mind*, §556)."<sup>31</sup> Thus, in the ideal artistic work, the natural sensory form formed in the subjective mind is only a *sign* of the idea. It expresses only the Idea, and not the physical shape. The perfect match between the Idea and the form gives rise to beauty. In other words, it is the very task of art to represent a spiritual idea to direct contemplation not in the form of thought, but in sensuous form. It is the very vocation of art to expose the divine reason, bringing it to consciousness. The worth of such representation lies in the unity of its spiritual content and the sensuous embodiment.<sup>32</sup> Art is an organizing principle that unifies the diverse sensory elements into a coherent whole with thought. Precisely, art is infinite presenting itself in the finite; universal embodied in the particular; completeness manifesting itself in the partial or incomplete.

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<sup>29</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 320.

<sup>30</sup> Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 443.

<sup>31</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, 293.

<sup>32</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 318.

## Phases of Spirit's Manifestation in Art

On the one hand, Spirit or the Absolute, in virtue of its very nature is universal, infinite, indeterminate, boundless and absolutely free. On the other hand, sense-world lacks such essential qualities adequately. However, Absolute, in a rational process, has a tendency to realize itself, to objectify itself in its otherness. It attempts to present itself as the idea of reason through sensuous objects. Thus, artistic creation begins to attain beauty only when it participates in the essence of spiritual realm. But the perfect union between content (absolute) and form (sensual) are not achieved always.<sup>33</sup> Such participation never happens at once. Initial art form is a mere search for plasticity than a capacity of true representation. Depending upon the extent to which the spiritual content realizes itself in the sensual object, Hegel recognizes three different phases or types of art forms and they are: *Symbolic art*, *Classical art* and *Romantic art*. Corresponding to each art forms, he identifies specific mode of particular arts. For him, symbolic art is exemplified in the *Architecture*, classical art in *Sculpture* and romantic art is typified in three different particular arts namely: *Painting*, *Music* and *Poetry* in order.

***Symbolic Art:*** In the symbolic art, the material side predominates over the spiritual side. In symbolic art form, the sensual object still remains foreign to the Idea and “the spiritual Idea has not yet found its adequate form and struggles to find it (*Philosophy of Mind*, §561)”.<sup>34</sup> It is only the beginning of artistic creation. At this phase of art, though the matter remains unchanged qualitatively, the idea distorts and disfigures the quantitative nature of the material objects into grotesque shapes to raise the natural phenomena to the

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<sup>33</sup> Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 452.

<sup>34</sup> Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, 295.

spiritual level.<sup>35</sup> However, the Idea, being foreign to the object, its meaning is attached to the object. Nevertheless, in this form of art, the spirit completely fails to shine through matter and remains only at the level of sublimity. Hence, according to Hegel, the symbolic art is only sublime and not beautiful. The particular art corresponding to symbolic art is the architecture. It is matter in its immediate externality where the spiritual content is internal in contrast to the external form. Symbolic art is demonstrated in Egyptian and Hindu cultures.

*Classical Art:* In the classical art, the perfect union of spirit and matter is achieved and both are in perfect harmony. Its peculiarity consists in that its content itself is a *concrete* spiritual Idea, while in the symbolic art, it is *abstract*. For Hegel, only spiritual is truly classical. Hence, in this art form, the idea clothes itself in the *human* form, allegedly spiritual. For if the conformity of meaning and expression of artistic work is to be complete, the Idea must be perfectly capable of being expressed in pure rationality, and hence, in the form of human body. For, in Hegel's perception, art is the self-satisfaction of the absolute in the sensuality, which is only actualized in the aesthetic satisfaction of human person.<sup>36</sup> The subjective mind alone is the perfect and concrete spiritual ideal of the World-Spirit. For reason is accessible to human intellect alone.<sup>37</sup> The result is that Spirit is characterized as a particular form of mind, that is, human mind, and not simply as eternal. For the human body in classical art is not mere physical existence, but clothed with absolute mind and divested of all defects of pure sensuality. The particular art corresponding to classical art is sculpture,

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<sup>35</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 321.

<sup>36</sup> Seth, "Hegel: An Exposition and Criticism," *Mind*, 527.

<sup>37</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 324.

which is perfectly characterized in the sculptures of Greek tradition.

**Romantic Art:** In the romantic art, the spirit predominates over matter. Since no sensuous shape is adequate for the spirit, it destroys the unity with its sensuous form, and goes back, though on a higher level, to the difference and opposition of the two, which symbolic art left unreconciled. The essence of romantic art consists in the free, concrete and the spiritual nature of artistic objects itself. Here, the inner, rather than the outer reality is highlighted.<sup>38</sup> It is a movement from the objective world to the subjective mind; from the *spatial* realm to the *temporal* realm. The spirit passes out beyond the material form. Thus, romantic art, in a way, transcends the limits of art altogether to the next level of spirit's manifestation. It takes subjectivity for its principle, rejecting the objective reality, at the same time absorbing the contents of objectivity. Spirit becomes empty universality once again and develops an inner conflict. For this reason, this art form tends to depict conflict, action and movement, which are expressed as the particular arts of painting, music and poetry. Surprisingly, Hegel shrinks the characteristics of romantic art specifically to the Christian arts alone, which exposes his blatant adherence to Christianity. Ultimately, the symbolic art is not yet beautiful, but only sublime. The classical art is beautiful, and hence harmonious. The romantic art is no longer beautiful in the narrow sense.<sup>39</sup> The romantic art is almost a phase of transition from artistic expression of reason through intuition to religion where spirit is manifested in a higher level through representation.

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<sup>38</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 327.

<sup>39</sup> Jaeschke, "Absolute Spirit: Art, Religion and Philosophy," *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel*, 182.

## Music: The Romantic Art

The romantic art expresses itself in painting, music and poetry and among them, this particular section makes a precise description of music alone. Music is the second form of the romantic art, after painting, in which reason realizes itself on still a higher level. If the previous art forms give reason a spatial and material form, music operates in the dimension of temporality and inwardness.<sup>40</sup> It is the subjective notion of spirit. It reveals the inherent dialectical unity between reason and arbitrary feelings of human subject in conformity with harmony, rhythm and form. Musical rhythm brings out the rationality that is immanent in emotion and time. It is the immediate self-expression of Idea. In music, spirit turns inward toward subjectivity and infinite depth of self-consciousness.

For Hegel, human emotion is not irrationality, but self-articulation of Idea in human subject.<sup>41</sup> Idea [not the true idea (*Idee*), but the primitive idea (*Begriff*)] or reason is implicit in the human emotion.<sup>42</sup> Music, though still sensuous, manifests the subjectivity of the spirit by negating space, and existing only in time.<sup>43</sup> In music, the spirit withdraws itself from the external and sensuous reality, taking subjectivity as its very principle. On the one hand, it is directed towards interiority dispelling objectivity. On the other hand, it tends more freely towards the peculiar and capricious features of particular individuals. Thus, it transforms the spacious aspect of sensuous reality (represented by painting) into a single dimension, that is, into ideality (represented by poetry). Thus, it transforms itself into a concrete and active

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<sup>40</sup> James, *Art, Myth and Society in Hegel's Aesthetics*, 44-45.

<sup>41</sup> Hegel, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Kedney, *Hegel's Aesthetics: A Critical Exposition*, 21.

<sup>43</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 334.

process. This emerging ideality of what is sensual no longer appears under the spatial form, but as temporal ideality, as sound.<sup>44</sup> The abstract visibility of ideal sensuality is transformed into audibility. Since art is to be infinite and free, the sound in music exempts the ideal from its absorption in matter. As a result, musical tone has no permanence, eventually it is deprived of objectivity. Therefore, externality disappears in music. Naturally, it penetrates into the inner and is one with its subjectivity.<sup>45</sup> The order residing in musical notes introduce unity into differences of sound. For that reason, it is the most emotional of arts. And once again for Hegel, human emotion is not irrationality but the self-articulation of Spirit in man.

### **Art as Expression of the 'Whole'**

For Hegel, the Absolute or Mind is communitarian in nature. According to him, nature gives us our bodies and the society gives us the furniture of our minds.<sup>46</sup> An individual mind is not separate entity, completely isolated from the social reality. Rather, any subjective mind is just a by-product of the society and is inherently linked to it. Even God or the Absolute, in his view, is the power of people's collective forces.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Spirit or Truth, in Hegel's term, is not a transcendental reality beyond the sense-world; rather it is an expression of 'totality of reality'. Even his fundamental concept called "*Geist*," which is the Absolute, "is 'constituted' in actuality by human beings engaging in the social, political and cultural practices of their community."<sup>48</sup> Hegel himself is quoted saying that, "the community itself is the existing

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<sup>44</sup> Hegel, *Hegel Collections*, 334.

<sup>45</sup> Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 475.

<sup>46</sup> Harris, *Hegel's Ladder: The Pilgrimage of Reason*, 562.

<sup>47</sup> Ilyenkov, *Intelligent Materialism: Essays on Hegel and Dialectics*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation*, 45.

spirit, the spirit in its existence, God existing as community.”<sup>49</sup> In line with that, for Hegel, the Idea or the content of art is the representation of this ‘totality’. Any artistic production, in his view, “has validity only as an undivided unity.”<sup>50</sup> It is the representation of the ‘wholeness’ of reality, the truth of Being.<sup>51</sup> Hegel does not understand art as an analysis of the aesthetic experience of an individual human subject, but instead involves understanding art in its wider social context. Artistic work itself is an attempt to express the collective Idea by creating works of beauty. It is a sensuous apprehension of our grasp of the normative ‘whole’ in play in our lives and thoughts.<sup>52</sup> Though any particular art is a work of an individual artist, it is not purely a product of an individual. Rather, it is a product of the collective consciousness of a whole people. It is the intuition of a nation, of its own historical essence presented in an objective manner. The spiritual content of art may consist in the collective conception that is prevalent among people of any age.<sup>53</sup> For an individual himself is a make of the society he belongs to. For an individual’s thoughts and actions are constantly being influenced – whether the individual is conscious of it or not – by the religious ideas and ethical norms governing the society. For every individual is a living embodiment of his society.<sup>54</sup> Ultimately, any form of art and music is a profound expression of the collective mind or the wholistic spirit of the community of people. Thus, the very nature and task of art and music is to integrate and gather individual minds as universal Mind.

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<sup>49</sup> Adams, *Eclipse of Grace: Divine and Human Action in Hegel*, 207.

<sup>50</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, 40.

<sup>51</sup> James, *Art, Myth and Society in Hegel’s Aesthetics*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism*, 296.

<sup>53</sup> Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 451.

<sup>54</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, 194.

### **Art: Relevance of Hegel**

Hegel's philosophy, basically, is a response to the social and historical events as a whole and his ideas could be comprehended only with their social and historical embodiment. He was very much disturbed by the conflicting state of affairs of German state and modernity of his time and his main concern was to actualize solidarity among people.<sup>55</sup> Division, in Hegel's view, is core of the issue to be addressed. At the same time, it is also a necessary stage in a dialectical process, but only as a moment of realization. It should, in turn, lead us to awareness of the need for unity. Hegel realizes an analogy between the divisive mentality of the Jews and the German situation and seeks to bring reconciliation in Germany as Jesus sought to reconcile Jews. He considered divisiveness to be a form of madness.<sup>56</sup> And the fundamental challenge, for him, was to establish the ideal of unity of life in face of the growing divisions of the modern society. And he understood it as the very task of philosophy. In fact, for Hegel, the need of philosophy itself arose from division,<sup>57</sup> and it should address the issue adequately.

As we saw earlier, for Hegel, understands the absolute or reason as an ideal of the whole or totality or unity. For Hegel, understanding and Reason are two different levels of consciousness. According to him, understanding distorts or divides the reality while reason always comes to comprehend unity in difference. For him, the division or separation between spiritual and the sensual is only an activity of thought in the form of understanding.<sup>58</sup> Hegel approves Kant's position saying that understanding is finite

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<sup>55</sup> Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 313.

<sup>56</sup> Plant, *Hegel: An Introduction*, 70.

<sup>57</sup> Beiser, *Hegel*, 47.

<sup>58</sup> Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, 74.

and conditioned or divided while reason is infinite and unconditioned or united (*The Encyclopaedia of Logic*, §45 *Addition*).<sup>59</sup> Reason, unlike understanding, reveals the imperceptible links behind apparent oppositions. Eventually, to be at the level of understanding is to be divisive while to be rational is to be united; to be sensual is to be divisive while to be spiritual is to be united. According to Hegel, art and music, as embodiments of reason, are the perfect expressions of such unity. Art and music are the effective mediums that could achieve unity of life, by facilitating the perceiver to overcome the divisive mentality within. For the very nature of art is unity; unity of apparently contradictory realities – division and unity. Art, as a medium that unifies the sensual, characterized by division and rational, characterized by unity, enables the latter to sublimate the former.

### **Conclusion**

Our post-modern world is a world of ‘individualism’. We are living in an age that promotes a kind of individualistic attitude among people. In such a peculiar situation, literally no one seems to realize the need to restore unity and oneness within humanity. The human beings of present day are deprived of unity: unity with ourselves, unity with others and unity with nature.<sup>60</sup> Specifically, to reinstate this lost ‘oneness’ within humanity and with nature is the ultimate project of Hegel’s philosophy, especially his conception and expression of art and music. It has become a fashion among us to project the arbitrary, capricious and egoistic personalities of individuals. Goodness is seen as the success of the individual rather than the well-being of the society. In this particular context, Hegelian conception of art and music

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<sup>59</sup> Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> Beiser, *Hegel*, 1.

holds a profound and insightful message for us. Hegel's perspective of art insists that our inter-personal relationships should not be dealt from the standpoint of our individual or private ideals of 'sensual form', rather from the standpoint of communitarian or spiritual ideals of 'rational content'.<sup>61</sup> He stresses the 'need' and 'reality' of unity and oneness. He suggests a spiritual unity to the world that is sensually divided by various factors like religion, race, caste and so on. Thus, for Hegel, art echoes the spirit of unity in reason, and is essential to man's self-realization and to be aware of reality.

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<sup>61</sup> Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation*, 72-73.

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## **Concluding Message**

### **Mysticism as a Path to Integration or Unity**

*Rev. Dr. Raphy Manjaly  
Archbishop of Agra*

President and faculty of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, organizers of this national conference and participants, Reverend Fathers, Sisters, and resource personnel, esteemed guests, I consider it a great privilege to be associated with this national conference on Fr. Vineeth, such a great personality who has made a huge contribution to the fields of spirituality, science, art, and possibly also inter-religious dialogue and harmony.

I have met Fr. Francis Vineeth a couple of times. I have heard about him, but I have not had any long conversation with him, nor have I read his works, except for one small booklet—if I remember rightly, something on contemplation—which he gifted to me. That is the only work I have browsed through. Therefore, I will not be speaking about him or his work as such, because there are more competent and qualified people who have made good preparations and who will enlighten you with their erudite presentations.

For this short keynote on the concluding day of the National Seminar, since your theme is integration, I thought of sharing with you some random thoughts on mysticism as a path to integration or unity. I will speak for a few minutes, and then the floor can be opened for interactions.

“We are more connected than ever, yet we are increasingly divided.”

– Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (281)

Dear brothers and sisters, we stand today in a world that bleeds. Children are washed ashore by merciless seas. Mothers cradle lifeless infants as the world scrolls past yet another tragedy. The haunting image of a small boy’s body on the seashore—like the one that moved the conscience of the world and captured the attention of Pope Francis—remains vivid.

You may remember that in 2015, a Syrian boy, along with his family, planned to migrate to Europe from Turkey. Their small dinghy capsized. Two children died—the youngest, just three years old. This tragedy moved the conscience of the world and deeply touched Pope Francis, who made reference to it.

Bombs still fall upon cities that once echoed with children’s laughter. Floods sweep away entire villages. The earth trembles, and so does the human heart. These are not isolated events, but mirrors of our collective loss of unity, integration, and peace. From Gaza to Ukraine, from the flooded plains of Uttarakhand to the earthquake-torn regions of Turkey and Syria, creation itself groans, as written in Romans 8:22.

Millions migrate not by choice, but due to despairing circumstances. We are witnessing the greatest displacement of people in history. The world is no longer the same. Peace,

unity, human dignity, and brotherhood—everything is now under question.

In the face of such fragmentation, division, and strife, amid all the noise, the Spirit whispers: “Come back to the center. Come back to Me.” This, dear friends, is the invitation of mysticism—the path that leads to peace, integration, and unity. It offers not an escape, but a healing gaze: the eyes of Christ that see beyond boundaries and divisions, uniting what violence has divided and reconciling humanity with itself, with God, and with creation.

Mysticism is not an escape from the world; it is the deepest way of entering into it and engaging with it. As Evelyn Underhill says, “Mysticism is the art of union with reality” — Reality with a capital R. Meister Eckhart calls it “the breaking through of the created into the uncreated.” In other words, to be a mystic is to see all things in God and God in all things, as St. Ignatius of Loyola would say.

It is to look at the world not through fear, but through love; not through ideology, but through incarnation. Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'* (233), says: “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face.” This is where peace begins—in contemplation.

The mystic does not flee from the world; he or she transforms it by learning to see it as God sees it.

### **Christian Mysticism: A Call to Communion with All**

Mysticism, dear friends, is born from the mystery of the Trinity—an eternal communion of love, a divine dance called *perichoresis* (from the Greek, meaning mutual indwelling). Each Person gives and receives without confusion or separation. Each exists through the other and for the other.

This is the original rhythm of reality, the pulse of divine relationship.

Pope Francis reminds us that the divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. This means that the very structure of the universe mirrors the life of the Trinity. The same relational rhythm that flows between the Father, Son, and Spirit flows through all creation—through atoms and galaxies, human communities and ecosystems.

We are created in the image of the Trinity—absolute communion. Therefore, we are fundamentally relational beings. We do not exist in isolation. As we beautifully sing, “No man is an island.”

Our destiny, identity, and fulfillment are discovered in relationships—not merely by having relationships, but by *being* in relationships. From the moment of conception, our lives are sustained by others. We breathe because of the ecosystem, learn because of culture, and love because we are loved.

Martin Buber rightly said, “I become I, through Thou.” We become truly ourselves only in relation to the other. Therefore, mysticism is a call to communion and participation—however imperfectly—in the divine *perichoresis* with God, with one another, and with all creation.

The mystic restores broken relationships and becomes a living icon of divine unity in a divided world. Every act of love, forgiveness, and service becomes a faint yet real echo of the eternal circulation of love within God. When humanity learns again to dwell within one another—as the Trinity dwells within itself—with respect, mercy, and self-giving, creation will breathe again, and peace will reign. The perichoretic God invites the whole cosmos into an eternal dance of love—a communion without domination, a unity

without uniformity, where everything lives in and for the other.

Through the Incarnation, this Trinitarian life embraces the entire cosmos. The Word who was with God in the beginning entered creation, sanctifying all that exists. Therefore, it is true to say that after the Incarnation, the universe is no longer the same. Every atom is touched by divinity; everything becomes a divine milieu. Thus, the divine *perichoresis* extends into the created world in Christ. God and creation are united without confusion. The divine dance now includes humanity and matter.

To realize this truth is to see creation not as a resource to be exploited, but as a sacrament of communion. Every river, bird, and human being participates, in its own way, in that divine circle of love. To wound creation is to disturb this harmony; to care for it is to live in tune with the rhythm of divine *perichoresis*.

### **Christ: The Mystic with Open Eyes**

Jesus himself is our model of mysticism—the mystic with open eyes. In *Laudato Si'* (98), Pope Francis says that Jesus lived in full harmony with creation. He worked with His hands, touched the leper, admired the lilies, blessed the poor, and wept with the sorrowful.

He is not a detached mystic lost in ecstasy, but the Word made flesh, immersed in the suffering and beauty of the world. When we look at the crucified Christ, we see the world's pain reflected in His wounds—the refugees, the starving, the forgotten. Yet in those wounds, we also see resurrection.

True mysticism always blossoms into compassion in action. As Pope Francis says in *Fratelli Tutti* (285), mysticism in the Christian sense is not a flight from the world, but the

mystery of encountering God in everyone—and, we may add, in everything.

A mystic cannot ignore the cry of the poor or the cry of the earth. He or she becomes the voice of the voiceless, the bridge between enemies, the reconciler and peacemaker who sees beyond ideologies.

### **Mysticism and Ecology**

The ecological crisis is, at its heart, a crisis of mysticism—we have lost the contemplative gaze. The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one. Scripture reminds us that every creature bears the *vestigia Trinitatis*, the footprints of the Trinity. To exploit creation is to disfigure the face of God in it. When rivers overflow, forests burn, and cities drown, it is not nature's rebellion; it is creation weeping for the wounds inflicted by human greed. Mysticism calls us to listen to that groaning, to hear the divine whisper in the wind, to touch the sacred in the soil, and to see the Creator in the creature. This is spirituality. Pope Francis insists that ecological conversion leads to peace with God and peace with creation.

### **Conclusion**

My dear friends, the world is tired of words; it longs for witnesses—those who see as God sees. Mysticism offers that vision. It heals divisions, reconciles enemies, and embraces the world as one family. As our Indian wisdom says, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

Let me conclude with a short prayer of Pope Francis:

“Triune God, wondrous community of infinite love, teach us to contemplate You in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of You. May we learn this mysticism—to see as You see, to love as You love.” May this contemplation heal the earth, reconcile nations, and make our Church a beacon of unity and peace.

Mysticism, in short, is a path to integration, unity, and peace. Ultimately, it is about relationships—right relationship with God, with one another, with creation, and with one's own inner self. When the heart is filled with love, compassion, mercy, and goodwill, these virtues overflow into society in ever-widening circles. So let us nurture the right seeds in our hearts, that the harvest may be one of peace, service, and unity. God bless you.

## Contributors

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