

FRANCIS VINEETH VADAKETHALA CMI

Footprints of a Philosopher-Theologian Mystic



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Father Francis Vineeth: A Call to Integration



Father Francis Vineeth was my Guru, who guided me in the intellectual and spiritual quest in decisive ways and expanded my horizons intellectually and spiritually. During my initial philosophical studies at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram I attended his lectures, which ignited my interest in philosophy. I was fortunate to assist him as a student infirmarian while he was resting after an accident but took the time to write a book, titled *Foundations of World Vision*, and I witnessed the challenges and rewards of writing a book. Father Francis guided my research paper and initiated me to the ways of integrating the intellectual and the spiritual dimensions of our lives. As my spiritual director, he initiated me to forms of meditations that integrated the Indian and Carmelite traditions and, on one occasion, he gave me a mantra, “*tavaiva na mama*” (Thine alone, not mine).

Father Francis was following his own spiritual director, Servant of God Father Canisius, who lived his motto, “God’s Will, That alone and That in full, to the utmost!”

Father Vineeth integrated *jnana* and *bhakti yogas*, as he was driven by the ideal, knowing is becoming. He integrated his analytic and contemplative minds, and remained ever a seeker and lover of Being and Truth. With an excellent academic record, crowned with a PhD in Philosophy from Gregorian University, Rome, on Heidegger and a DPhil from Oxford University, UK, on the thoughts of Ramanuja and Paul Tillich, and a very active academic life at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, he moved to a life of solitude and simplicity, prayer and contemplation, to live at Vidyavanam, an ashram that he founded and nurtured. I often went there and enjoyed the nourishment that I received from Father Vineeth and the ashram environment. He was a devotee primarily of course of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also of Mother Mary, Little Flower, Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, and other saints. He



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was equally a dedicated devotee, a man of simple faith, and a guru who guided seekers to the realms of contemplative life.

As we enter into the beautiful chapel of Vidyavanam, conceived by Father Vineeth and designed by Father Joy Elamkunnappuzha CMI, our attention is drawn to the glass painting of a special type of tree, with roots in heaven and the branches oriented downwards, after a description in *Katha Upaniṣad* VI.1. Typical of Father Vineeth's style of integrating the Gospel in the Indian vocabulary, the tree represents Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who descended to the world, took the human nature and embraced the whole of history, human and cosmic (see Phil 2:5-11), which is symbolized as the downward extended stem and branches of a tree. The tree



is depicted in the Ashram Chapel as a combination of two trees, namely, neem and pipal, representing Jesus Christ who is fully human and fully divine, by the work of the Holy Spirit, who is depicted in the painting in the form of a descending dove. The chapel is a place of a human-divine encounter, to realise the divine in our humanity. To my mind, that was Father Francis Vineeth's quest, to be human and divine. May he enjoy the heavenly bliss and continue to inspire us, his students! Let me pray with Father Vineeth:

"Give me your power
To remain the same
In fame and blame,
To feel your loving touch
Which makes me steady and strong"
(Vineeth, *Prayer and Power*, 71).