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INDIAN FACE OF JESUS

Editorial

Jesus is often perceived as a foreigner to Asia. It is paradoxical that most Asians tend to regard Jesus born in Asian soil as a Westerner rather than an Asian. This observation of *Ecclesia in Asia* (20) is very true! In the context of the spread of the Hindutva - ideology this statement needs to be seriously looked into. Perhaps there is some justification for the above statement!

The language we use to speak of Christ is often quite unintelligible to our countrymen. Hence *Ecclesia in Asia* speaks of using images which would be intelligible to Asian minds and cultures, at the same time being faithful to the Sacred Scripture and Tradition. It cites the following images as more suited to the Asian minds: Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One and the Compassionate Friend of the Poor (EA 20).

The images used in the Bible for the Messiah - Christ - are all conditioned by the culture of the times and events of history. At a time when the great prophet Moses led the people to the freedom and gave the Law, they spoke of the one to come as a "prophet." Moses himself says that "God will raise up for you a prophet like me" (Dt. 18 : 15; cfr. Acts 2:22). When king David saved the Israelites from their enemies and established the kingdom he became the supreme figure. From the time on the one to come was seen as "Son of David". But when the Davidic dynasty was destroyed and intense humiliation and sufferings followed, the one to come was thought of as a "Suffering Servant", characterizing that particular period of history. In the century before the birth of Jesus when the people lost all hope of salvation through any human agent they began to think of a divine agent, in the form of a man, called the "Son of Man" as the only hope of their future. But at the time of Jesus the most suited title was that of the 'Messiah' who would fight against the Romans and liberate the people from the colonial rule.

Thus it is clear that all the important titles of Christ were conditioned by the Israelite's experiences and cultural factors. Hence it would only be logical to speak of Christ in Indian categories such as *Avatar*, *Guru*, *Bakata Maha yogi* etc., than as Son of David, Son of man, Messiah etc.

The present issue of Vaigarai contains four articles and all of them attempt to unveil the Asian or more precisely Indian face of Christ. Doctor Wilfred Felix writes on "Jesus-Interpretation in Asia". He says that if Jesus were born in India he would have been designated by the disciples as *Guru*, *Avatar* etc. According to him we need not be hesitant to use the categories and images of our culture to designate the mystery of Christ, even though none of these categories expresses fully the mystery of Christ. Dr. Alphonse speaks of "Jesus Christ as the Avatar". Both Christians and Hindus have been to ease with this expression and many have proposed it as the model best suited to present Christ in the Indian context. While recognizing its limitations, he proposes it because of its inescapable liberative dimension in the Indian context of massive poverty and systematic injustice.

Dr. Arul Pragasam speaks of another popular Indian image, namely *Guru*. He demonstrates that the title *Guru*, sometimes *Sadguru* (real guru) has been applied to Jesus by several Christian exponents and that it speaks much more to the Indian minds than the semitic expressions which we are used to. Finally Dr. Maria David in his article "An Indian Quest for a Relevant Christology" uses the Christological methodology employed by Sebastian Kappan, the well known Indian theologian and attempts to interpret Jesus from the socio - cultural challenges India faces today. He underlines the existential nature of Kappan's interpretation which stems from the experience of the complex Indian situation and the reluctance of Christianity to respond to it adequately.

It is my firm hope that this issue of Vaigarai will be an impetus to portray Jesus in Indian categories. This will certainly help our non-Christian friends understand Jesus in a better way. It will be a step forward in the attempt to present Jesus as a response to their quests and needs. Presenting Jesus in Indian categories and knowing better the rich spiritual traditions of our country will lead to mutual enrichment and collaboration. This in turn will make us aware that we are all in a common search and that we need each other in our common earthly pilgrimage.

Cruz. M. Hieronymus.