

## C. T. VENUGOPAL

This booklet consists of fragments of the spiritual autobiography of C. T. Venugopal who touched the lives of countless people by his integrity and depth of Christian commitment. While it was still in the press, 'Uncle Venu', as he was known to many, passed away on 17th May 1972, a few days before completing his 65th year, at the Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore. He had been confined to bed for about three years by a cruel illness but his bed had become a centre of spiritual power.

Uncle Venu was born in a Hindu Brahmin home and remained a *brahmachari* throughout his life. He came to the knowledge of the love of Christ while he was a college student. He was baptised into the fellowship of the Church seven years later, some time after he had been selected for the Indian Railway Accounts Service. As a representative of this Service, he showed rare courage and resourcefulness at the time of the Partition of our sub-continent. He retired in May 1965 as Additional Member for Finance of the Railway Board. His witness to Jesus Christ obtained throughout within the context of his Hindu heritage and lay vocation.

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# WITNESS TO CHRIST

C. T. VENUGOPAL

PUBLISHED FOR

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**WITNESS TO CHRIST**

*(Within a Context of Hindu Heritage and Lay Vocation)*

# Witness to Christ

C. T. VENUGOPAL

*(As recorded by Rev. A. C. Oommen,  
Chaplain of the Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore)*

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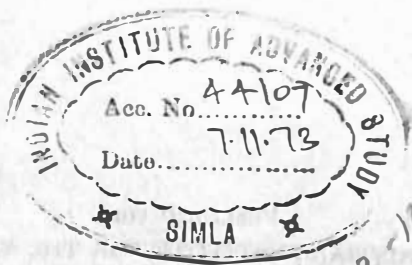


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## FOREWORD

Those who have had the privilege of knowing Mr. C. T. Venugopal have often wished that they might know more of the secret of his life, and they will be profoundly grateful for this book. Many more who have not known him will be moved to thank God and take courage by reading it. I am personally deeply grateful to the author both for the book itself and for the honour he has done me in asking me to write a foreword. I am quite unworthy to do so, but if by doing so I can lead a few more to read and ponder these pages I shall be thankful.

At any time and in any circumstances this testimony would be very precious. It is the story of a man who has found and been found by Christ, and who through him has been enabled to achieve great things in the world of public service and administration, to overcome formidable difficulties and dangers, and finally to meet with serenity and joy the experience of a very long, painful and apparently incurable illness. Any human being who knows something both of the greatness and of the frailty of human life would be inspired and strengthened by reading this record.

But at this particular time in the story of the Church in India, this testimony has a very special importance. Those who are concerned about the witness of the Church in India to Jesus Christ as Saviour are distressed by the fact that the Church so often seems to be a closed and introverted community, cut off from the life of the whole nation which it is called to be. Faithfulness to Christ has often in the past been interpreted as requiring a total separation from fellowship with non-Christians except at the level of purely secular affairs. Even in more recent times, when there has been an insistent call



for the Church to become a more open community, more fully involved in the life of the nation, this has often been understood to refer primarily to involvement in secular affairs. And it is obviously not difficult for Christians and Hindus to work together in secular matters. But what is exemplified here is something much more difficult and less common. Here is one who combines a deep personal fellowship with Jesus Christ and at the same time a deep fellowship with his Hindu family and friends *in the life of the spirit*. This seems to me to give this record a quite special importance. The only other record that I can immediately compare with it is that of C. F. Andrews, whose centenary we have recently celebrated.

No doubt there are questions to be asked about the way in which the personal experience of Jesus Christ is to be related to membership in the Church and to the difficult questions which are raised by the words 'evangelism and proselytism'. But this testimony of Mr. C. T. Venugopal, together with the most valuable supplemental note by his brother, is one that can help all of us who seek to confess the Christian Faith in India today to see the way forward. And, beyond this, it will help every sincere seeking soul to come nearer to the Lord.

*February 1972*

LESLIE NEWBIGIN  
*Bishop in Madras*

## APOLOGIA

When I retired from Indian Railway Service in May 1965, my erstwhile colleagues, both junior and senior, as well as other friends of all faiths and of no faith at all, urged me to give them a parting message. They said that the message might be in the nature of a testimony, concerning those compulsions from within which had shaped the outward aspects of my life with which they were more or less familiar. Because of many preoccupations, I put off this duty at the time I was based in the capital of Andhra Pradesh (my native state) and visiting Sat-tal Ashram. Meanwhile, in the second half of 1966, I was convicted of evading a promise I had made earlier to give some post-retirement years to honorary service in the Christian Medical College and Hospital at Vellore. This promise came to be fulfilled after a spinal operation I underwent at the Hospital to relieve me of a growing feebleness in my upper limbs. Some two and a half years after the operation, I was obliged to resign my honorary responsibilities with the College and Hospital, as I began to find that I could not walk and had to go about in a wheel-chair. Subsequent progressive enfeeblement of upper limbs as well as lower made me resolve not to put off any longer the writing out of my message for friends. But, seeing that the writing would be dominated by the inevitable 'I', I hesitated to take it up. It was then that I thought of the 'dialogue', or sharing of vital experience, that had been going on for months between myself and some dear local friends—members of the staff and the student body of the College and Hospital whom I had been meeting often, especially the Chaplain of the institution. I felt that this dialogue, suitably condensed, could convey my message better than

any sustained monologue claiming to be a spiritual autobiography. I explained this to the Chaplain and he readily took on himself the difficult task of recording a *résumé* of the dialogue, thereby doing me a signal kindness. It is this *résumé* that appears in the following pages, in a form which I hope will have some interest even for the casual reader. The *résumé* starts with the most significant aspect of my present life and takes the reader backward in time, but not in chronological sequence, to various other aspects. For convenience, it presents each aspect, to the extent possible, under a separate caption, such as '(my) illness' or '(my) diverse spiritual contacts'.

I take this opportunity to solicit the prayers of the many friends who have helped me on a pilgrimage that may be described in part in the words of Browning's *Paracelsus* :

I am a wanderer ; I remember well  
 One journey, how I feared the track was missed,  
 So long the city I desired to reach  
 Lay hid, when suddenly its spires afar  
 Flashed through the circling clouds ; you may conceive  
 My transport. Soon the vapours closed again,  
 But I had seen the city, and one such glance  
 No darkness could obscure. . . .

# I

## ILLNESS

**Question.**—*You have been ill for a long time. You were one who loved life and lived fully. The cruel limitations of your physical condition, the pain and the suffering in their wake, you have accepted bravely. What gives you the strength for this?*

**Answer.**—I must confess to an initial feeling of acute disappointment and inward rebellion which I tried to hide even from myself. This feeling changed to one of resignation to the inevitable. But, slowly and imperceptibly, it was brought home to me that resignation was not the right attitude to a new experience which had been given me by the Lord of Compassion, so that he could fulfil his mysterious purpose for me. In my gradual change of attitude, from resignation to glad acceptance, I was also helped by two doctor friends in attendance on me—Dr. Mary Verghese and Dr. Benjamin M. Pulimood. At the level of rational thinking, I began to count the many undeserved blessings showered on me throughout life and the many deep friendships over the years with people of all communities. I began to be specially grateful for the wealth of love and friendship surrounding me as a bed-patient in a life apparently of isolation. Medical students, young doctors and senior staff of the Christian Medical College and Hospital have kept coming to my bedside, and the new-found faith of some of them has meant much more to me than what I could give them in response to their questioning. In my bed of pain and suffering, and during the long night watches, Jesus has taught me to pray for the many friends

who have come into my life through the years. In this way he has given me his own peace and lulled me to sleep, making me realize, as never before, the deep meaning of the words of the Psalmist: 'So he giveth his beloved sleep'. In my waking hours too, I have been made to realize that pain and suffering are the fire with which God burns out all the dross in my life so as to make the image of Jesus Christ shine bright and clear in me.

I can recount with gratitude the numberless occasions on which young people came to see me, and gave me a sense of the real presence of Christ. One of these was a brilliant medical student from a Hindu home without a Christian background. He used to come and listen to my talks on St. John's Gospel and was the subject of my prayer for three years. But I did not feel impelled to speak to him directly about my Christian experience. Then, one quiet afternoon, he came alone to the Rehabilitation Institute where I was a patient, seeking to discover a purpose in his own personal life. He said he was tired of the game of knocking away academic prizes and was seeking for something in his own life with which he could comfort a suffering patient when he became a practising doctor. With great joy we then spent a considerable time together, talking about the deep things of life. He said he knew that I was sharing Christ with him without trying to make a proselyte of him. Since then my friendship with him has become very much closer and my meetings with him have almost always ended with his asking me to pray with him.

## II

### DIVERSE SPIRITUAL CONTACTS

**Question.**—*Recently you were staying for several months with your sister in her home. It is known that she and the rest of your family who are still counted Hindus feel that your acceptance of the Christian faith has not alienated you from them. What significance did your sharing of their heritage have for you as a Christian?*

**Answer.**—While staying with my sister, I met several of her friends, ladies of a good social background, who, with her, had found a new meaning in prayer meetings, bhajans and outgoing service of many kinds such as training young women for voluntary work in first-aid. They presented the very best in renascent Hinduism. Their readings included passages from the Bible and the lives of Christian saints, writings of early Church Fathers as well as the sayings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. A senior nun of the women's order of the Ramakrishna Mission (the Sarada Math) used to visit me regularly at least once a week, read to me from different holy scriptures and ask me about my own Christian experience. Even in her least word or gesture there was no undertone of argument and no suggestion, however slight, of one faith being set against another. This was quite in the spirit of our country's Constitution which encourages an active sharing of faiths—as distinguished from a mere co-existence of different faiths, each oblivious of the riches of the others. The easy tolerance or acquiescence which says that all religions are the same amounts very often to indifference. It was certainly not part of the attitude of Ramakrishna Paramahansa who had

a glowing vision of Christ. My own acceptance of my Indian heritage is again not merely a quiescent receiving. I recall a friend of my sister's, a Bengali lady, who used to come and sing to me lyrics composed in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore and Ramakrishna Paramahansa—lyrics full of meaning for me because of my familiarity with their language. This was indeed a ministry of love which made me realize vividly how deep-rooted was my Christian faith in my heritage from Tagore and the Paramahansa.

Over the years, my contacts with men and women, like the one last mentioned, have provided a rich background for my vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. I can never forget my meeting with a Hindu sanyasi, successor to the spiritual leadership of a large group in India, whose parting benediction was in the form of a prayer, at my request, that I might be a faithful disciple of Christ to the end. To this sanyasi I was taken by a nun of an austere order of the Greek Orthodox Church, Sister Gabriella, widely known in India as Sister Lila, who had been released by her convent to be of help to leprosy patients in India because of her training in physiotherapy. Another memorable meeting many years earlier, arranged by a Muslim colleague in the Railways, was with his spiritual preceptor who, I could at once see, was radiating a strange supernatural presence. In the light of Christ's revelation, I have discovered a deeper meaning not only in such contacts but in many non-Christian scriptures including the teachings of Guru Nanak.

Again and again, I have found out for myself what Christ meant when he said, 'I have come not to destroy but to fulfil'—not to destroy anything held sacred by mankind, but to fulfil the deepest human longings for a spiritually responsive universe, a universe at the heart of which is a God who desires human beings to freely choose him and his ways even when the ways are found to be hard. I am in a position to testify to such a fulfilment, having experienced it in my own life.

For me personally, Christ's revelation of God, as the loving Father who is involved in all my suffering, is the greatest anchor in life, and Christ's declaration, 'No man cometh to the Father but by me', is of the one way, shining most brightly, to God the Father or God in his one aspect vitally relevant to man.

The New Testament story of Cornelius, the Roman soldier who lived in communion with God, has a message which is often missed. St. Peter exclaimed, after hearing of Cornelius' experience: 'Now of a truth I know that God is not a respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him' —and yet went on to share his faith in Christ with the godly Roman who, for his part, accepted that faith without argument and without pitting against it his original spiritual experience. It is a pity that many so-called Christians forget this incident and either dogmatically assert the superiority of their faith, or else slip into the easy attitude that their only obligation is to show Christ in a life of rectitude and devotion to duty. This attitude is only partially defensible since many non-Christians excel the so-called Christians in their ethical standards of living. The essence of my Christian life is after all in the fragrance which goes out to others even when I do not mention Christ, emanating of a certainty from my inner life of prayer and obedience to Christ. This thought, from *Letters of a Modern Mystic* by Frank Laubach, I remembered with humility and thanksgiving when a young non-Christian doctor said to me recently: 'I come to you often because I sense a loving presence beside you,' asking me in effect to share Christ with him. I am not unaware of the unfortunate communal trouble erupting from time to time in different parts of India; but this is contrary to the spirit of the country's tradition of true tolerance. And so I make no apology for sharing Christ's love with other people and for reciprocally letting them share with me their own spiritual experience.



### III

#### CONVERSION\*

**Question.**—*Can you give an account of your early background and the forces which tended to mould your life originally?*

**Answer.**—My father, after graduating in Philosophy, entered government service and retired as a Deputy Collector in the Old Madras Presidency. He was a Vaishnavite Brahmin who performed the rites and ceremonies enjoined on him, seemingly without any strong religious conviction. But I remember that, when I was invested with the sacred thread in my ninth year, he expressed a hope that I would grow up to be a true Vaishnavite Brahmin. To anticipate what was then the future, my father consistently refused to come and live with me for some five years after I became an open Christian. But to my joy he spent many months with me contentedly a few weeks before he passed away in 1939.

My language background was Telugu in which, even before the age of ten, I could recite with much feeling portions of the great Hindu epics. As some people have observed with truth, I have remained ignorant of much of Hindu thought, in particular, Advaita Vedanta. This was perhaps because of a strong feeling in those impressionable years that the *bhakti marga* followed by Telugu and Tamil saints was a sufficient inspiration for my life. My personal *bhakti*, inspired by these saints, expressed itself for a time in the *pooja* of the

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\* The reader's attention is invited to the distinction the author has in mind between 'conversion' and 'proselytization'. The distinction, in the author's own words, appears on page 17.

family deity, Lord Srinivasa. It was only when I entered on higher collegiate studies that I began to ask questions and entertain doubts. My daily *pooja* continued to be dear to me, but it left untouched questions about death and suffering, especially unmerited suffering. I felt somehow that the conception of God's love by itself did not answer these questions and yet I was afraid to let go my faith in the personal God of my forefathers for fear that I would land in a vacuum. From the point of view of personal or material needs, my position was satisfactory; a bright academic career was unfolding itself, the family circumstances were favourable in every way, and I had a home to protect me from the evils of gregariousness in a boys' hostel. Precisely this could have proved dangerous for my deeper life, by encouraging me to settle down to a state of complete self-satisfaction. However, as I attained adolescence, I began to sense ugly and fearful tendencies within myself and to experience an inner conflict for which I had no solution either moral or religious.

It was in this perplexed state of mind that I went with my elder brother Rajagopal (whose note appears at the end) to a public meeting addressed by Dr. E. Stanley Jones, in August 1926. I went immediately after my evening *pooja*, and was soon gripped by what the speaker was saying. The subject was the Cross of Jesus Christ as the supreme revelation of the heart of the universe. I sat up as I began to see that here was an answer to some of my questions. Verily God limited himself by giving man free-will; he took a risk, so to speak, conceding the possibility of free-will wrongly exercised and of the inevitable burden mankind would have to bear as a result. But he did not remain a spectator, but became himself the greatest burden-bearer in his incarnation of suffering love as Jesus Christ. Something, which goes very much deeper, I had glimpsed then, and over the years I have come to realize more fully. It is that in Christ's life, death and resurrection,

and finally in his continuing presence through the Holy Spirit, there is hope for me in my direst need and there is power given to me to triumph over the cruellest forms of disease and death, whether of the flesh or of the spirit.

## IV

### FAMILY AND LIFE AFTER CONVERSION

**Question.**—*What were the forces and influences that helped you to proclaim your loyalty to Christ through baptism? In other words, what made you take a step usually very difficult for anyone belonging to a Hindu Brahmin family? What do you feel is the role of baptism (a) in your own life (b) in the life of the Christian Church in India?*

**Answer.**—Soon after my early confrontation with Jesus Christ, I began to read the New Testament in a copy which was available in my home. My mother first, and others later, noticed my new interest and the change in me for the better, following the discontinuance of my daily *pooja*. Then came violent opposition from her and her old aunt who had been living with us, because they feared my new faith would cut me off from the family, despite my assurance that it would mean no immediate outward change.

In this predicament, God sent two friends to help and guide me—the late Reverend Doctors L. P. Larsen and A. G. Hogg. They said that I was not ready for formally joining the Christian Church, until I had given my parents and immediate relatives a reasonable opportunity to realize that my new faith would not separate me from my family and its traditions. They also impressed on me the need to prove, by my life and conduct, that my new experience was essentially an inward revolution not to be identified with just the outward forms of an alien religion. Their advice meant for me an interval of seven years between my first confrontation with Jesus Christ and my decision to join the Christian Church. But this interval proved

to be a very valuable period of waiting, during which Dr. Larsen, even after he had returned to Denmark on the termination of his work in India, kept reminding me that my Christian faith should not only strengthen my ties with close Brahmin relatives but also assimilate all the best in the heritage I shared with them.

It was during this period of waiting that I graduated from Madras Presidency College (1928) and accepted a lecturership in a Hindu College away from home. I was very happy as a teacher, seeing no inconsistency between living openly as a Christian but adhering to Brahminical ways in so far as they left my faith untouched. My happiness was partly because I enjoyed contact with students who were then almost my own age. I was inclined to continue as a teacher, but, when I came home for the summer vacation, my elder brother made me realize the importance of letting myself be guided by God in the choice of a career without altogether ignoring my father's wishes. By then my mother's earlier fears, about my being immediately snatched away from family and community, had been somewhat allayed; and my father, who, for one reason or another, had refrained from putting to me questions about my religious convictions, came to the conclusion, after considerable hesitation, that the Financial Civil Service would offer a suitable career for me, since possibly the Indian Civil Service under foreign domination would not be quite to my liking. I shared his hesitation but not his reason for it. His reason was that, selection to the Financial Service being through an all-India competitive examination, I would not enter the Service unless I passed the examination among the first few of the pick of the country's competing youth. My reason for hesitation was that the Financial Service would consign me to a dull impersonal life. But, strangely enough, when I prayed for guidance, it came to me clearly that I should sit for the Financial Service examination. About the same-

time some Christian friends, who had been praying for me, wrote confirming the guidance I had received. Finally, with my elder brother's whole-hearted approval too, I appeared for the examination and secured the third rank among all the examinees. Thereupon, in April 1930, I was selected for the Indian Railway Accounts Service and posted to Calcutta as an Accounts Officer in the then Eastern Bengal Railway. Before this uprooting from my native environment, I had been enabled to establish, not only a relationship of enduring goodwill and affection with my elder brother's wife, but also a contact with my future brother-in-law (then a fellow officer in the Indian Audit and Accounts Service) which was to grow, with the passing of the years, into a relationship with many common interests and mutual ties.

My posting to Calcutta was followed by a posting to Lahore and then by a re-posting to Calcutta. Of this period of some three years, I can only say that it witnessed my drifting away spiritually, and labouring under a sense of shame to profess in my circle *any* faith, let alone the Christian faith. My return to Calcutta, under challenging circumstances, brought me to a fresh confrontation with Jesus Christ through various friends who had been caught up in the Christian revival following the Oxford Group Movement, amongst them the then Metropolitan Bishop Foss Westcott, a close friend of Gandhiji, Bishop H. Pakenham-Walsh, and Lewis Subramaniam, then an officer in Central Government Service. Life began anew for me with putting certain things right even at the cost of being laughed at, and I had a fresh realization of what my sins cost God and of his forgiveness through the Cross of Christ.

Bishop Pakenham-Walsh was the one who arranged for my baptism in August 1933, after I had been led to decide finally to confess Christ in public. My baptism, he said, was to be by immersion in the tank of the Bishop's College (Bible Seminary) in Calcutta. He added that it was open to

the Church of India to adopt either of the two alternative methods of baptism, immersion in water and the sprinkling of water; but he had deliberately chosen the first alternative because quite a few Christian denominations felt that this was the only proper mode of baptism, and he did not want that, in later years, my baptism should become a subject of controversy. I now see how very wise he was, as I find myself acceptable to all Christian denominations and even to the so-called splinter groups outside any organized church, although my own membership is now in the Church of South India and, before its formation, with the Anglican Communion. The Bishop symbolically foreshadowed all this by inviting to my baptism leaders of every Christian denomination in Calcutta, including those of the Pentecostal Church, the Church of Scotland and the Salvation Army, and allowing them to participate in the ceremony by prayer or by exhortation. The Bishop took the view that I was being admitted into the indivisible Christian Church, both visible and invisible, not merely into one section of the visible Church—a view which, I am afraid, met with some criticism. The commission given to me at my baptism by Dr. Urquhart of the Church of Scotland Mission was that, as a leader and a servant in the Christian Church, I should bring in the vast treasure of wisdom and spirituality conserved in the traditions of India and Hinduism. I have sought to be faithful to this commission with the strength of purpose which God alone can give.

Becoming an open Christian gave me the advantage of being the same inside and outside, and of a position in which I could be judged, apart from any hereditary religious label, by both Christians and non-Christians. I am not to be understood as laying down here a universal rule for affirming loyalty to Christ. There is, for instance, Sri Kalagara Subba Rao who, though technically a Hindu, has declared himself a devotee of Christ and has been used by Christ even in the healing of

physical infirmities. While I enjoy spiritual fellowship with people like Sri Subba Rao on the one hand, I can, on the other hand, recall many close associations with Roman Catholics, both in prayer and in working together. One of these Roman Catholics, for whose fellowship I shall always be grateful, is a Benedictine monk whose spiritual pilgrimage has led him to live in the Himalayas.

I must mention here two world-renowned personalities who have brought the light of Christ's love into some of the darkest corners of life—Group Captain Leonard Cheshire and Mother Teresa. My meetings with them, though brief, have affected me profoundly. Group Captain Cheshire I met first at the Delhi Home for Incurables which bears his name, and again after his moving address at the Church Hall of the Delhi Roman Catholic Cathedral. Mother Teresa I met at her Delhi Home for Handicapped Children when I went there to leave with her a young unmarried expectant mother. I cannot forget the effulgence which Mother Teresa brought to the room where we met and the warmth of her welcome to the expectant mother, conveyed in words to the effect: 'I do not know what your religious or denominational affiliations are. But go to the chapel here and meet One who is waiting for you and for everyone'.

My account of Christian friends who have influenced me will be incomplete unless I mention two whose fellowship I enjoyed for many years—the late Sadhu Mathai of Manganam Ashram (in Kerala), a scholar in comparative religion, who lived a life of utter austerity and renunciation, and the late Miss Amy Carmichael who has told in her *Gold Cord* the story of how she and her well-knit team, drawn from many countries, rescued hundreds of Indian children from the life of degradation which would otherwise have been their lot. Miss Carmichael was confined to bed for nearly twenty years before she



passed away, but found peace in the divine will, 'good and acceptable and perfect, for loss or for gain'.

In short, my contacts, brief or extended, with men and women indisputably Christian by any standard, make me diffident about predicting in what ways Christ's redeeming love will reach the millions in India and in what manner or form the Christian Church in India is likely to grow. All that I can say with assurance is that the basic Christian experience is essentially an inward awakening which does not recognize the barriers created by caste and community.

## V

### OFFICIAL CAREER

**Question.**—*Can you explain in what ways you found your faith relevant and meaningful in your career as a public servant? Did your career give you opportunities to widen contacts which you consider to be worth while?*

**Answer.**—I started my official career with the belief that a Christian in a profession should let his rectitude, integrity and devotion to duty speak for themselves without his having to explain his faith. I now see that this belief, to say the least, fails to do justice to the many non-Christians, in different professions, who excel the average Christian in the virtues mentioned. On the other hand, I saw too that a merely vocal faith can surely never carry conviction. All this was brought home to me by a senior railway official, a British friend by name Walter Biscoe, who had lived a conventionally good life as a Christian till he was forty, and then, with his wife, had a deeply challenging encounter with Christ. This was, for him and his wife, *an experience of true conversion, or of compulsive progress upward in spiritual life.* Here I must make it plain that *conversion in this sense is not, as is commonly supposed, compulsory proselytization which is, so to speak, a movement horizontally from one religious label to another.* My British friend, who had experienced genuine conversion, made me see clearly what giving my whole official career to God would mean. First, it would mean making my standard of living simple and unostentatious, even (if need be) to the extent of not conforming to the standard of my official circle. Secondly, it would mean my official colleagues at all levels being let in on

what I stood for. Thirdly, it would mean conducting all official affairs according to the demands of Christ, regardless of the price to be paid for it. My friend also explained to me how I could declare my faith without beating a drum. I could, for instance, call a group of my colleagues and under-officers, not necessarily all Christians, and tell them that I wanted to be a faithful follower of Christ, quite willing to be corrected by them whenever I ceased to be one. I found it salutary to thus expose myself to the candid criticism of my staff—which was often both humiliating and uplifting, but always helped me to keep in sight the goal of my endeavours. The first two implications of a God-oriented life, pointed out by my friend, required no explanation. The third, however, seemed at the time far-fetched, and it was only many years later that I came to understand its full import.

The scene of my official activities shifted from Calcutta to Rangoon when Burma was separated in April 1937. I was then sent to Rangoon by the Government of India to train newly recruited Burmese officials. And, at Rangoon, I was brought into touch with a very vital spiritual group centred round Bishop George West in whose house I met Christians of every denomination including Roman Catholics, both Burmese and Karen. Among them were the late Daw Nyien Thaw and the present Archbishop Francis Ahmya. I met also, to my amazement, Buddhist monks, monks from the Ramakrishna Mission and representatives of many other groups. One of my preconceived notions, that Buddhists had no belief in a personal God, was shattered. I came to realize that Christ was not the monopoly of Christians and that he could speak through an inward stillness to any one aspiring for the highest. And I saw the full meaning of St. John's witness to the 'true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world'. I saw too the Oxford Group Movement beginning to broaden out to what is now the Moral Re-Armament (M.R.A.) movement

As Christ himself has said, 'If any man will do his (God's) will he shall know of the doctrine', and many indeed have experienced, in all its fulness, the presence of his Spirit by starting with an act of obedience to the inner voice. To put it differently, in words which are not mine, God is not a point of view but a point of contact. This, in short, is the message of M.R.A., which surely cannot be discredited on the score that, like every other movement with any organization, it has its shortcomings. I am certain that everyone who has come to owe allegiance to Christ and Christ alone, whether through any movement, or through none, will see that the M.R.A. in India, now operating with its headquarters at Panchgani, holds the promise of a genuine spiritual revival.

In Rangoon, I came to see that everything a man has—his home, family, profession, money or other assets—could be used to get people to respond to God's love revealed in Christ. I was happy that, during all the three years I was in Rangoon, I could meet almost daily groups of Burmese, Karens, Indians, British and Americans, of every level of society and every level of attainment, who spoke with one voice of the 'conversion' that had revolutionized their lives. A simple villager mentioned how, after conversion following many years of a nominally Christian life, he had restored to a neighbour cattle which he had been regularly stealing from him, because (he said) it was more important for him to save his soul than to save his face. A junior British officer mentioned how, after conversion, he had to write to his boss and confess to his having used certain government equipment for personal ends. He got from the boss a letter of appreciation which, however, contained a note of warning in view of the matter having gone to a higher authority. For the young Britisher and the Burman villager alike, it did not matter who knew what about themselves as long as they had been forgiven and started on a new way by Christ himself.

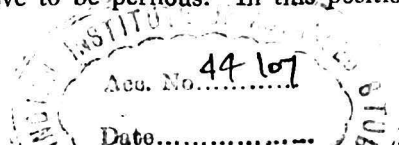
Incidents of a somewhat different kind are the following. A young Hindu Marine Cadet, who had been in fellowship with a Calcutta group to which I belonged, felt lonely and sad when the group became scattered. He was led to join a particular steamship company and, rather surprisingly, was posted to a steamer plying between Calcutta and Rangoon. He was not slow in coming to our Rangoon group to offer thanksgiving to God. Again, to his surprise, after my transfer to Bombay on the completion of my deputation with the Government of Burma, he was also transferred, to a ship that touched Bombay often and thus enabled him to be regularly in my home and in fellowship with the vital Christian group that met there. I see the hand of God guiding this old friend not only then but in all his subsequent career and even after his retirement recently from a responsible position. My years in Bombay, which were the years of World War II, witnessed more incidents of the same kind. Young Britishers, most of them university men who had been summoned for national service, were given my address in Bombay to enable them to get some sort of initial 'orientation'. They shared the feelings of nationalist India that the country should not have been dragged into a war not of its seeking. But they had also hopes that they could in some way serve India and their own land by being messengers of goodwill and instruments of mutual understanding between the two lands. Indeed, I have not seen many Christian missionaries equal in zeal and earnestness to these young Britishers, most of whom, alas, were killed in the Eastern theatre of the War. But the hopes of these young people were not in vain, as anyone can see from the influence they left behind. A Hindu Marine lad without religious leanings was changed beyond recognition by meeting a young British officer of the Merchant Navy in my home, a meeting which took place when I was away. The Hindu Mariner is now holding a responsible position and his influence

for good is widespread. I remember too a frustrated young Hindu graduate who joined the army in the ranks and, after coming under the influence of a British Captain, was completely transformed; he is now doing a useful job as a civilian in a government office. These are only three out of many instances of 'conversion' without 'proselytization'.

My stay in Bombay was interrupted by some special assignments on which I was sent, involving the take-over of certain company-managed Railways. Later, during the difficult months of 1943, I was posted to war-torn Assam and it fell to my lot to boost the morale of my staff while enemy bombs were falling around.

I was re-posted to Bombay towards the end of the War, which was followed, not long after, by the fateful events leading up to the Partition of our sub-continent. During this period, I was transferred at very short notice to a post in which I became responsible for certain financial and allied matters arising as a result of the Partition. I can never forget either the sad incidents I witnessed on both sides of the new border of our country or the very many touching episodes in which people on one side, at great risk to themselves, helped people on the other side. During this period again, I had the inestimable privilege of meeting Gandhiji accompanied by two medical missionaries, the late Doctors S. Jesudason and E. Forrester-Paton. It was only a few days before the Father of the Nation was assassinated that we met him and he joined us in recounting many stories of goodwill between the peoples on the two sides of the border. His parting words are still ringing in my ears: 'The answer to all this is redemption through sacrifice as Christ achieved it.'

For myself, the position I occupied during the Partition was instrumental in making me realize what seemed to be far-fetched when Walter Biscoe first said that an official life directed by God may prove to be perilous. In this position,



I had in charge records which alone could authorize certain payments on the other side of our border, such as retirement benefits for the aged, compensation to widows left destitute, contractors' dues, etc. There were similar records on the other side badly wanted on our side; and I knew it would be cruel to delay some of the payments on either side. But there was no communication or transport between the two sides except that offered by military trucks and refugee trains. I decided to follow the guidance I received in prayer, which was that I should take and hand over to the other side the records that were urgently needed there. And so, in spite of the fears of my staff that I might get nothing in return, I made the somewhat uncertain journey to the other side, carrying a bundle of records and accompanied by an Anglo-Indian assistant. To my great surprise, in spite of the confusion that prevailed on the other side, as on ours, we were told to stay overnight and offered facilities to collect as many records as we wanted. God rewarded my obedience and my staff were thrilled with the response to my initial gesture of goodwill. I made such trips across the border from time to time and always met with understanding and hospitality on the other side. With the passing of the years, problems of the kind faced by me have become much bigger than can be solved by individual efforts of goodwill. But I am certain that godly leaders of all sections on both sides feel convinced that such individual efforts, repeated at the highest level, could cumulatively yield a solution to our growing problems. However this may be, my involvement in the problems brought about by the Partition was a very humbling and moving experience which taught me that God works through men who obey his will.

After a spell of leave I was posted to a Railway where the situation was tough following the withdrawal of a strike notice by the Railway Trade Unions all over the country. I found

that, though the staff attended office, no work was turned out and many of them spent the time in moving round the office campus shouting slogans and staging demonstrations. I knew that, humanly speaking, I was facing a situation in which I was helpless and any conciliatory effort on my part might worsen the situation if it be read as a sign of weakening on the side of the administration. I fell back on prayer as my only help and, following the guidance I received, I persuaded the Inspector General of Police to release a few of the young staff who had been taken into custody on charges of subversive activities. Humanly speaking again, I did not expect that this simple action would restore the confidence of the staff in the administration. But there was an immediate lull in hostilities, surely the result of my following God's guidance without counting the cost. My next guidance was to move freely and frequently amongst the staff scattered over different buildings and, following this guidance, I saw that they were convinced my intention was to be a friend and not an invigilator. I also invited any of the staff who wished to see me to come freely to my office or to my home on the office campus. All this helped me to get to know hundreds of the staff in a personal way, and very soon normalcy was restored and the staff of my department began to work with such vigour that, by the end of the financial year, they cleared the arrears of work they themselves had created. Here again I do not claim that simple measures, like those I was led to take, would be effective in all similar situations. But I feel that such measures could be ameliorative in a small way and I testify to the need for letting ourselves be led by God even if we believe our results are going to be unspectacular.

The following years saw me back in one of the Railways with headquarters at Bombay, and later, in a Railway in another part of the country where things were difficult in some ways. I was the second in command of the latter Railway



and once, when the General Manager of the Railway was away, I had to go to an important outstation where an extremely difficult situation had arisen, following the assault of a senior officer in his own office by some of his staff led by an outside leader. On my arrival after prayer, I felt that I should not stay in the railway colony but at the railway station. This I believe convinced the staff that I had not come to mete out punishments or to take sides, even though the senior officers were upset that I had not accepted their invitation to live in their midst. My guidance was to take no action but wait on God and be prepared to follow the way he would show me. To my surprise, the staff members involved in the assault and the outside leader came to see me at the railway station on successive nights and I think the Spirit of God convinced them that their action, however justifiable by the harshness of the officer assaulted, was an act of flagrant indiscipline. I was amazed when the rebellious part of the staff agreed, and the outside leader had no option but to go with them, to sign a letter of unqualified apology which I dictated and which I told them would be read out to the staff of all branches the following morning. I feel it was purely God's doing that the leader, who wanted to evade this embarrassing situation by flying to another station, changed his mind and arrived to endorse the letter of apology which the staff had already signed. Later, I spoke to the officer who had been assaulted and he admitted that he had been very harsh to his staff. Later still, he, for his part, called some of the staff and apologized to them for his lack of consideration. Finally, it was agreed that there should be no punishment other than the transfer of three or four of the staff known to have acted more violently than the rest. The senior officials were afraid that my lenience would pave the way for further indiscipline. But the events of the following months and years showed their fears to be unfounded. As a matter of fact, not only was discipline

restored in a large measure but the outside leader lost his influence. I had not known this until one of the senior officers, a devout Hindu, mentioned it at a farewell party arranged for me on the eve of my retirement. And significantly he added that, while resenting my leniency, he saw also that I had acted as a messenger of Christ.

The last ten years of my service were spent at Railway Headquarters in Delhi. My contact with Trade Unions in different Railways gave me an advantage in assisting the Chairman of the Railway Board, who also held the staff portfolio; in his dealings with Unions at the national level. He almost invariably acted on my advice and gave me unstinted support in all matters. Many difficult issues were settled amicably; and I had also the privilege, during these years, of having some part in the processing of various staff welfare measures and schemes for the expansion or improvement of Indian Railways. All this helped me to see how the finance officer's role need not be negative and impersonal but may be directed positively to beneficent ends, with the guidance of God, the sympathy and support of senior officials and the sincere co-operation of junior colleagues.

The last assignment given to me before I retired was to sort out the relative seniority positions, for the purpose of promotions, among three categories of staff recruited in three entirely different ways. This matter had been hanging fire for over ten years because of a natural desire on the part of every one to make the number of hard cases in each category as small as possible. Strictly speaking, this was a staff matter which did not come within my purview. However, I agreed to take up the matter and the heavy task it involved, despite many preoccupations. It was only the grace of God that gave me the physical strength and mental alacrity needed to interview individually some 250 persons and take into account the point of view of every one of them. I took the

whole matter to God in prayer and the answer came clear. I wrote out and got printed a memorandum with a seniority list and circulated it to the staff after approval by the Chairman of the Railway Board. This list has stood the test of time and settled a controversial issue as well as it ever could be. I count it a great privilege that, in this regard, I was an instrument of God in solving a vexed question in a manner acceptable to most of the concerned staff.

## VI

### CHURCH AFFILIATION

**Question.**—*How has your formally joining the Christian Church helped you to relate yourself to its activities?*

**Answer.**—I must confess that, after the conversion that shook me up, my experience in the local organized Church was somewhat disappointing. The ministers and the members of the Church were not slow to welcome me and befriend me wherever I went, but I saw that most of them expected of me only formal attendance at Church services, payment of Church dues and a readiness to preach in the Church on occasion. I was invited to the homes of fellow Church members but these visits proved to be largely social. I could not generally turn the congregation to the challenges of the Christian life much as I tried to do so. There were of course individual Christians by whom I was led to see that my privilege as a member of the Christian Church was truly in being a part not only of the local organization but of a vast body of men and women, both in the visible and in the invisible Church everywhere, including many outside the formal Christian Church. For historical reasons no doubt, the Christian Church in India has generally become a separate community and caste. It fails to be a vital group fellowship such as we see in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. I served on pastorate committees, diocesan councils and other Church bodies, but soon realized that I was not called to such type of work alone. More and more I began to see that my place was with groups of people praying together for God's light and constantly on the watch for awakening a response to Christ's love. Prayer meetings of the Church

were mostly formal functions that did not correlate one's inward experience of Christ with all the outward aspects of life—one's home, profession and every available asset or opportunity. I found that many of my fellow Christians were complacent about their obligations and hardly faced any challenge from outside their group.

Here and there I found a few lay Christians who were different ; and two of them, in particular, I remember with gratitude—Lewis Subramaniam and Walter Biscoe. They were constantly sharing their defeats and their triumphs and were even bold enough to think of concerted action for preparing increasingly many to receive Christ's redemptive love. Had I not met such vital Christians, I would never have been faced with the deep challenges relating to sex and money. Through such Christians I came to see that inner purity is not just an outwardly blameless sex life. I realized that, when our Lord spoke of the pure in heart as being able to see God, he meant just this : we shall see God and his goodness in other people in proportion to the inner purity we ourselves seek. I was also challenged to see that the demand for a tithe (1/10th) of my resources is the minimum required of me by God whose call is really to place all my resources at his disposal, trusting him to meet every essential need of mine. I shall not recount the many instances where I was led to invest whatever money I had in people's lives, in educating youth and in helping them to be placed suitably in life—instances where I was recompensed to the precise extent I had spent on such purposes and never too late. On one occasion, a young British officer in the armed forces on the far Eastern front, during World War II, sent me a cheque which took nearly a month to reach me. He wrote a covering letter apologizing for sending me money when (as he thought) I had no financial needs and explaining that it had come to him in prayer to send this particular amount to be used according to my discretion. It

was an identical amount I had given away the previous day for a need pointed out by God and so he had indeed planned to recompense me a month ahead! Many incidents of this kind, in my own life, have helped me to see the literal truth in St. Paul's assertion: 'My God shall supply all your need'. I am convinced that life in the Christian Church is truly a supernatural life where one constantly sees Christ's Spirit at work in bringing people to a realization of God's loving care in all matters. I have got over my initial feeling of disappointment with the organized Church and now see that my part in the local Church, wherever I am, is to serve God faithfully in the particular context of the life around. As some one has aptly said, surrender is giving as much of myself as I see today to as much of Jesus Christ as I see today—obviously a continuous and unending process.

In fact, I had some of my most memorable Christian experiences when I attended conferences of the Oxford Group for Moral Re-Armament, twice in Switzerland. In a large building which had been donated to the Group, some fifteen hundred people met—fifteen hundred not of the same people but of people who kept coming and going over a period of three or four months. Not a single paid servant was employed, all work such as cooking, serving, organizing a meeting, etc., being shared by the people present. No demands were ever made on the people and they gave money freely as they felt led to. I witnessed most remarkable instances of lives being changed during these conferences. An American Air Force lad, who had come to the gathering mistaking it for a large picnic, very soon realized his error and was beginning to pack up to go when I asked him to stay on for a few more days just to see what was actually happening around. Out of respect for my age he stayed and, to my surprise, he stayed for quite a number of days until other young men, aflame for God, succeeded by prayer and friendship, to help him to the dyna-

mic experience of Christ which they themselves had. This large gathering of men and women, many of them young, was kept sanctified in the true sense by vigilant leaders who saw to it that any one with mixed motives was persuaded to depart quietly. It was amazing to many non-Christians that no one indulged in vain talk or gossip, that every contact was useful and effective to the last degree. Years later, the American Air Force lad I mentioned wrote to thank me for opening to him a door which had made all the difference to his life, by leading him at last to realize that life in Christ is indeed a life of perpetual thrill and adventure.

To conclude, I see the Church not only as consisting of some possibly hapless local bodies but as embracing that wide community of all the saints who have gone before, as a veritably paramount order, both visible and invisible, where my part is not to cavil but to respond, readily and in the concrete, to the call of the most High.

## SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE

C. T. RAJAGOPAL

In this note I touch mainly on a single aspect of my brother's testimony—his conviction that he belongs to 'a vast body of men and women, both in the visible and in the invisible Church everywhere, including many outside the formal Christian Church'. For many indeed this will recall the words of Jesus in St. John's Gospel which may be amplified here crudely but relevantly: the home of the Church Invisible is not in any earthly community but in that vast expanse of Spirit where the wind of Heaven bloweth as it listeth. To continue in the same vein, the Church Invisible has many windows which afford many different views of the eternal pilgrim pursuing his ageless quest over a far-flung territory. From one window my brother beheld the bhakti mār̥ga of the Viśiṣṭādvaitin lying close to the way of the Christian pilgrim, and from another he saw the quaint tracts of the Zen Buddhist shining with an unearthly glow. I am recalling here actual episodes which stand out in my association with my brother, extending over some four and a half decades since his conversion, in the course of which I have always found him quick to seize the deeper apprehensions of Reality in non-Christian thought and experience.

Soon after my brother surrendered himself to Christ, I remember our attending together a series of talks, very near our Triplicane home, by a powerful popular preacher of Vaiṣṇavism, known to us in those days as 'Banaras' Krishnama-charya. My brother, in the light of his experience of Christ's redemptive love, was visibly impressed by the preacher's rendering of Viśiṣṭādvaita: And this was the first of many



occasions on which he found his receptivity to non-Christian religious insights heightened after his conversion.

A slight incident of rather different import and recent date remains imprinted on my mind—my brother's enthusiastic reception of a story I had occasion to relate to him<sup>1</sup> from Zen literature. The story is about a teacher of great renown who was to have preached in a Zen monastery, to listen to whom a vast crowd had been collecting throughout the night. When at last the teacher arrived in the early morning, a blackbird began to sing from a bush outside, and he immediately stepped down, saying 'The sermon has been preached'. Perhaps we shall miss the point of the story unless we regard the blackbird's song as a sharp reminder of the Creator who 'vanished', so to say (in G. K. Chesterton's expressive paradox), becoming too stupendous for common perception in filling his creation everywhere with life. Anyway, I was quite unprepared for the exclamation 'Beautiful!' with which my brother greeted this story, because I knew that he was then enduring what to me appeared to be unimaginable physical agony.

My brother's conviction about the Church Invisible (with which this note starts) acquires a deep significance when we remember a fairly well-known Jewish French mystic of our own day—Simone Weil, sister of Professor André Weil who is one of the great contemporary figures in the world of mathematics. Intellectual and agnostic as she had been, she was suddenly and incredibly taken hold of by God. But she refused to be baptized, under a conviction that her special vocation

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<sup>1</sup> As far as I remember, the occasion was the receipt of a circular letter from my brother's close friends, Mary and Murray Rogers, who had responded to a call to transfer their services as Vānaprasthaśramites from Kareli (Uttar Pradesh, India) to Jerusalem. There is mention, in this letter, of a journey by Murray Rogers in the course of which he, as a novice in a Zen Buddhist temple, profited by a sharing of real experience with the men there.

was to serve Christ as the Truth, at the point where Christianity meets 'everything that is not Christianity', as she herself has said in her *Waiting for God*<sup>2</sup>. For this service she was peculiarly fitted because she combined in her brief life an incandescent Christ-centred mysticism and forms of exacting identification with the oppressed and the down-trodden. Surely she belongs to that vast body of children of the Church Invisible outside any formal Christian Church.

Among such children of the Church Invisible is to be included also Protap Chander Mozoomdar, noted missionary of the Brahma Samaj at the turn of the century. In his book *The Oriental Christ*,<sup>3</sup> Mozoomdar testifies to Jesus being suddenly and mysteriously revealed to him, in an hour of trial and anguish, as 'a reality whereon he might lean'. And he speaks too of many 'outside the fold of Christianity' to whom he is spiritually linked in a new fold. Not the least significant part of his testimony is his conviction that the transforming power of Jesus will not cease to operate when this life ends because 'the goal as well as the prize is elsewhere'.

It is appropriate to make a reference here to some Christian contacts which have enriched my brother's life and of which he seems to feel that there are inadequate or only indirect acknowledgements in his testimony. For instance, the Sevaks of Christukula Ashram at Tirupattur (Tamil Nadu) are among his fellow pilgrims on the Christian way who have been a source of constant strength to him. The Sevaks are Christian men who have renounced the world and dedicated themselves to celibacy and medical or other service. They are a fraternity started by two medical men who were friends of

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<sup>2</sup> English translation, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1951.

<sup>3</sup> Navavidhan Publications, Calcutta, 1933. My brother and I owe our introduction to Mozoomdar to the late Dr. L. P. Larsen who held in high esteem Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of Brahma Samaj in its original form of Brahma Subha.

Mahatma Gandhi and C. F. Andrews—the late Doctors S. Jesudason and E. Forrester-Paton mentioned in Section V.

Another fellow-pilgrim to whom my brother has been greatly indebted is Dom Henri Le Saux, known to many as Swami Abhishiktananda, whose whole life is, as it were, one impressive pleading for ‘a kind of osmosis in the souls (of children of the Indian Church) between the Hindu experience of the depths of the Self and the Christian experience of the depths of the Heart of Christ’<sup>4</sup>. He is the Benedictine monk referred to by my brother in Section IV.

A Burmese Christian lady, the late Daw Nyien Thaw, mentioned only in passing in Section V, seems to have often been in my brother’s thoughts during his illness. She was the Principal of a girls’ college in Burma before my brother knew her; and Mahatma Gandhi once thought it fit to invite her for service in India. She spent her last years at the Moral Re-Armament centre in Panchgani near Poona, and died of cancer, rejoicing exceedingly, from the time the disease was first diagnosed, that she was ‘due for promotion’ to the Great Beyond. Evidently my brother regards her as one, like himself, specially admitted by suffering to a fellowship which death will deepen but never destroy.

Many in my brother’s circle who share his Christian faith may not be aware of his keen sensitivity to unusual expressions of that faith like Albert Schweitzer’s.<sup>5</sup> Not long ago, when he became aware of his growing inability for sustained reading, he asked me to write down for him the passage which brings

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<sup>4</sup> Interested readers may refer to his *Hindu-Christian Meeting-Point Within the Cave of the Heart* (translated from its French original), Institute of Indian Culture, Bombay, and Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, 1969.

<sup>5</sup> I believe my brother rightly understood that Schweitzer’s expression of Christian faith is ‘unusual’ when taken along with his general philosophical background as outlined in his *Christianity and the Religions of the World*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1923.

to a conclusion Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, so that he could, whenever necessary, refresh his memory of it. I quote the passage here as it provides a fitting conclusion to my brother's own Christian testimony :

He (Jesus) comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those who knew him not. He speaks to us the same words : ' Follow thou me ! ' and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfil for our time. He commands, and to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who he is.

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*Postscript to Supplemental Note by C. T. Rajagopal* : From an essentially Christian standpoint, my brother's conviction about non-Christians in the Church Invisible or ' with Christ ' is not strange at all, especially when we remember Sadhu Sundar Singh's meetings with some of them as recounted in *With and Without Christ* (Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1969). Also, from a standpoint like that of Paramahansa Yogananda, there must be profound significance in the plea for a Hindu-Christian meeting-point ' within the cave of the heart '. In his *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Reprint by Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1963), Yogananda mentions such meeting-points in his own life—for instance, his vision of Jesus Christ when he was reverently labouring to expound part of the New Testament (pp. 501-2) and a vision he had (pp. 364-5), when he was passionately seeking God's guidance before leaving for the U.S.A., of his *Paramaguru* Babaji who is said to be ' ever in communion with Christ ' (p. 315). Readers, who are acquainted with modern studies of the human personality in depth, are free to regard these visions as ' extra-sensory perceptions ' in response to needs rooted in the very depths of the soul.

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