

Exploring the Depths of the Mystery of Christ:

The Life and Work of K. Subba Rao of Andhra Pradesh, South India,
with Special Reference to His Songs

by

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Preface

In late 1985 I started collecting books and talking with people about the history of the interaction between Christianity and Hinduism, with special interest in the border areas where the two faiths meet, and where some striking individuals have chosen to live. At some point I came across the name of Kalagara Subba Rao, perhaps through Kaj Baago's brief study. At a later time I photocopied the K. Subba Rao materials held in the library at the United Theological College library in Bangalore, which presumably had been placed there by Baago. (That material is now missing from the library.)

My intrigue with what I read about Subba Rao, a Hindu disciple of Jesus Christ who healed people in Christ's name, led to a rather blind visit to Vijayawada in October of 1994. With me were only an address from an old Subba Rao booklet and a Telugu friend who had other friends in Vijayawada. That proved enough, and with little problem I was among the followers of Subba Rao. What a pleasant surprise it was to find an ongoing movement, and what a warm welcome they gave me to their midst! From that time I determined that I needed to do more serious research and writing on the life and work of K. Subba Rao.

It is now 35 years since Kaj Baago wrote about his encounter with Subba Rao, and his interpretation of the man and his importance. Subba Rao is known among those who study deeply in the history of the Hindu-Christian interface, but no study has yet surpassed the very introductory work of Baago. There is a body of literature about Subba Rao, but little of it is scholarly and most of it has been popularly produced for local use and is unknown to the academic world.

This work is to begin filling the void in Subba Rao study, and particularly aims to let K. Subba Rao speak through the translation of his songs. I empathize with Subba Rao and his concerns, yet present a critical analysis of the man and his work also. But the data is here for other interpreters to more deeply agree with Subba Rao, or to criticize him in directions that I do not follow.

This study would not have been possible without assistance from many friends. Most important are my friends in the Subba Rao movement, and particularly Sri Kesava Rao

Chowdary, who warmly welcomed me when I appeared on his doorstep in 1994 and who hosted me on some later visits as well. Srimatti Nagendramma Kalagara, K. Subba Rao's widow, was patient with my many questions on various visits, asked through the pain of a translator. The sincere welcome from these leaders and many others at the various meetings of the Subba Rao *sampradaya* that I attended will always be warmly remembered.

On five visits to these friends I was accompanied by four different translators; Sri M. Bhaskara Reddy, Dr. P. Madhusudhan Rao, Dr. P. Solomon Raj, and Rev. James Elisha shared my enthusiasm in learning about Subba Rao and his work and contributed more than can be measured. Dr. Raj did the bulk of the translation work on the songs and was patient with my constantly arising lists of detailed questions. Rev. Elisha proved an able second source to double check the translations. To all of these friends I am grateful indeed.

It would not be appropriate even to attempt to thank all the authors whose books have influenced me and kept me enthused in the study of Hindu-Christian issues. Many shafts of light from many sources over many years guided me beyond traditional paradigms for understanding Hinduism. When I finally read Edward Said I understood that this was the source of so much I had found so helpful. In light of his death during the preparation of this dissertation (on September 25, 2003) it seems appropriate to move beyond academic recognition to an expression of personal gratitude for many stimulating insights that have significantly influenced my broad parameters of interpretation.

I am grateful to the University of South Africa for its program of non-resident study that enabled me to do this work while living in India. I have been ably guided by Dr. Michel Clasquin, and the academic setting of this study not only improved its quality but motivated me to finish this long-procrastinated project.

My thanks to all those mentioned above are deep and sincere, yet pale beside the debt I owe to my wife, who has supported all my peregrinations (both literal and mental) and who remains a wonderful source of the joy that makes life worth living.

Rick Hivner

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1. Approaching Indian Religio-Cultural Phenomena

In any sphere of study presuppositions should be recognized and even defined, and in no discipline is this more important than in Indological study. Much of the academic world is moving “beyond Orientalism”, to borrow the title of an important book by Fred Dallmayr (2001[1996]). Yet Orientalist perspectives are obvious in much of the public discourse raging in India today, whether the discussion is of Hindutva, Dalit concerns or globalization.

K. Subba Rao (1912-1981) lived before such issues became as dominant as they are today, and was an eminently practical person who did not hide his disdain for academic concerns. This does not mean that his presuppositions are unimportant, or that he was beyond the influence of the issues to be discussed in this chapter. Yet this chapter is much more about the writer and the reader than about the subject.

I am an American who has lived in and around India for the past 20 years. This places me in a historic succession with other Western residents of India, and for my work to have academic integrity I must define my place in the spectrum of ideas that have developed in centuries of Indological study. The reader is being introduced to K. Subba Rao, a fascinating figure who defies neat definitions and compartmentalization. He was a Hindu who considered Jesus Christ to be his divine guru, and he healed people in the name of Jesus. This clearly makes him a religious figure, yet he was cynical almost to an extreme degree about religion. How should the reader, whether Indian or international or non-resident Indian, approach the study of such a person?

Orientalism

It is the basic thesis of this chapter that a valid approach to Indian realities, which includes the life and work and writings of K. Subba Rao, must move beyond the Orientalist discourse that has dominated much of Indological writing for the past two centuries. It is necessary to define the Orientalist perspective so that its influence, still quite pervasive, can

be recognized and dealt with. Of course this perspective must be refuted, and lest a straw man be set up and destroyed it is wise to recognize the debates that rage over aspects of the Orientalist heritage. Yet a positive paradigm must also be defined, even if that is developed in the massive shadow of the Orientalist discourse.

When in the 1770s William Jones realized that Sanskrit and Greek were cognate languages he stumbled onto one of the monumental discoveries in the history of human thought. Perhaps it is too much to consider this the beginning of the Orientalist enterprise, but if not that it was at least a defining moment that set in motion a fascinating process of study and reflection that deeply influences perspectives and attitudes to the present time. In 1978 Edward Said dropped a bombshell on the academic world in his landmark study of Orientalism. So far from yet another romantic account of the Western discovery of the academic and cultural treasures of the East, Said rather indicted Orientalism, referring to “its failures, its lamentable jargon, its scarcely concealed racism, its paper-thin intellectual apparatus.” (1994[1978]:322)

Said’s study began a redefining of academic paradigms for study of the East, and though his work hardly makes mention of India it is definitive for Indological study. In the post-Said era (more commonly, and rightly, described as post-Orientalist) it makes more sense to start with Said’s critique of Orientalism than with the traditional Orientalist paradigm. Said will soon be left behind as his focus was on Arab rather than Indian issues, yet the influence of his ideas is such that it seems appropriate to begin briefly with his perspective.

Said offers three definitions of Orientalism, graded towards his particular approach. The most generic definition is that “anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient - and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism.” (1994:2) The second definition is considerably more narrow; “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’.” (1994:2) This definition is fundamental to understanding the perspective of this study, and will be developed further below. But Said’s real concern is with his third definition, that Orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” (1994:3)

Ronald B. Inden in *Imagining India* (1990) vigorously applies a Saidian critique to traditional Indological study. Inden carefully outlines the four main points developed by Orientalists that distinguish the Orient from the Occident (the second of Said's definitions). But he is also always careful to show how these differences were related to Western domination over India, thus affirming his agreement with the Said's central thesis as seen in his third definition.

Three of Inden's points relate to the study of K. Subba Rao; the fourth much less so. To define this study of Subba Rao in relation to Indological scholarship it will be very helpful to consider Inden's position carefully. Before considering his four specific points, his broad perspective should first be grasped. The fundamental error of the classical Orientalists was epistemological. They applied metaphors and methods from the physical sciences to the newly developing realms of the human sciences, and the results were disastrous.¹

The rationalism of the scientific method is a major problem in Orientalism. It leads to the position that "true knowledge merely represents or mirrors...the separate reality which the knower transcends." (Inden 2000[1990]:15) This clearly leads to a position where the knower is superior to the known; not generally a problematic position in the physical sciences, but a problem of vast proportions in the human sciences:

This epistemology has also tended to produce a hierarchic relationship between knower and known, which privileges the intellectual essences of the scientists and other experts and leaders who act on their expertise, while belittling the knowledges and capacities to act of the peoples who comprise the objects of their studies and actions. (Inden 2000:16)²

The scientific paradigm prodded the Indologist to examine the language, culture, customs and religion of a people, gather data and develop an understanding of the essence or essences that underlie the contingencies of the Orient. Inden makes it very clear that his fundamental purpose is to destroy this methodology: "The purpose of this book is to turn the study of India away from the search for essences to the exploration of these activities [cultural, political, religious, etc.] in their own right." (2000:21)³

The problem in all of this is that the Indian subject of study tends to be marginalized. Inden summarizes this problem:

My main argument, then, is that the agency of Indians, the capacity of Indians to make their world, has been displaced in those [Orientalist] knowledges on to other agents. The makers of these knowledges have, in the first instance, displaced the agency of Indians on to one or more “essences”, and in the second instance on to themselves. (2000:5)

The antidote, in Inden’s opinion, is to base Indological studies on “a theory of human agency.” (2000:2) The core position here is that “all agents are relatively complex and shifting” (2000:2), and the result will be that a “shift from a quest for essences to a focus on agency, the shift from the positing of a substantialized agent to the description of actual, transitory agents entails a heightened focus on the actions of those agents and the constitution of those agents themselves.” (2000:264) Further, in the area of epistemology it needs to be recognized that “the knower does not transcend the world that he or she takes as object; on the contrary, the reality in which the knower is situated transcends him or her.” (2000:34)

Caste

The four particular areas where Inden exposes Orientalist distortions of Indian realities are caste, Hinduism, the village, and divine kingship. Priority goes to caste, as Inden refers to scholars “imagining an India kept eternally ancient by various Essences attributed to it, most notable that of caste.” (2000:1) Caste is a subject of importance to a proper understanding of K. Subba Rao and his movement, and is exceedingly complex. Only the briefest summaries of Orientalist distortions of caste and (later) of Subba Rao’s relation to caste can be attempted here, but at least brief summaries are necessary to prevent distortion of the overall picture.

“The representations of India as a civilization dominated by caste are legion.” (Inden 2000:82). The complexity of caste is illustrated by the fact that this familiar English term translates two quite different Sanskrit terms, *varna* and *jāti*.⁴ There are only four *varnas*, which is a theoretical construct often far removed from the practical realities of life.⁵ *Jāti* is the more practical construct; it is functionally the endogamous group. There are numerous Brahmin *jātis*, and there is no authoritative number of all *jātis*.⁶

Inden presents two major Orientalist approaches to caste, largely dependent on whether *varna* or *jāti* is in view. Empiricists looked at *jāti* and saw something like tribalism, often mourning the lack of social cohesion that kept India from developing as a nation (Inden 2000:63-65). Idealists (or Romantics) looked at *varna* and saw an ideal social order. Thus the two were completely at odds, as well summarized by Inden:

The two ways of knowing about India, the empirical realist and the Romantic idealist, have not of course agreed on what caste is. The multiplicity of *jātis*, castes and subcastes which the former tried to entomb in the Census is ever at odds with the ideal, Brahmanical scheme of four *varnas* or classes which the latter have resurrected from ancient Indian texts. (2000:83)

But Inden points out that both have sought an explanation for human development and behavior that denigrates human agency:

Both of the views in Indology agree that there is a single, absolute reality and both displace human agency on to it....The empiricist has displaced it on to an external social structure or materially grounded human nature...while the idealist has displaced it on to an internal, spiritual nature.” (2000:73)

And both played nicely into the hands of imperialists who saw India as underdeveloped or fallen and in need of foreign intervention.

Inden is not primarily concerned to define his alternate perspective on caste, but he does make some pregnant comments. He suggests that

it was the collapse of Hindu kingship which led to the formation of “castes” in something resembling their modern form (albeit not as usually described). That is, the distinctive institution of Indian civilization does not appear until the thirteenth or fourteenth century, at the earliest; and castes are not the *cause* of the weakness and collapse of Hindu kingship, but the *effect* of it. (2000:82, italics original)⁷

Hinduism

Debate on the meaning of Hinduism continues to rage in the academic world.⁸ Inden leaves no one in doubt where he stands on the issue:

One name the men of letters gave to this religion was, appropriately enough, Brahmanism. More generally, they have designated the religion they have invented by the term (from the Persian, as one is always told) Hinduism. (2000:86)

So in Inden's view there is no indigenous religion of Hinduism, this is a construct foisted on India by motivated Orientalists. He details at some length the Orientalist critiques of this "religion"; fundamental was the interpretation of Hinduism as insufficiently rational and too dependent on imagination. (2000:104, 128)

Richard King (1999) presents a fuller critique of Orientalist constructs of Hinduism and of mysticism, starting with a full discussion of the Western (and Christian) bias loaded into the terms "religion" and "mysticism". When religion is defined primarily in terms of ideas drawn from texts, and mysticism (roughly parallel to Inden's discussions of "imagination") is contrasted with rational approaches to truth, a definite slant (a post-Enlightenment Christian slant) is introduced at the heart of religious studies.⁹

But King points out how "Orientalist discourses soon became appropriated by Indian intellectuals in the nineteenth century and applied in such a way as to undercut the colonialist agenda." (1999:86)¹⁰ From mysticism (and imagination) as inferior to Enlightenment reason a paradigm shift (powerfully influenced by Swami Vivekananda) occurs to mystical knowledge as superior to rational and scientific knowledge. Yet even within Orientalist-inspired Indian thought there are huge tensions and varying perspectives. King's comments at the close of his discussion of Hinduism must be quoted at length:

Through the colonially established apparatus of the political, economic and educational institutions of India, contemporary Indian self-awareness remains deeply influenced by Western presuppositions about the nature of Indian culture. The prime example of this is the development since the nineteenth century of an indigenous sense of Indian national identity and the construction of a single "world religion" called "Hinduism". This religion is now the cognitive site of a power struggle between internationally orientated movements (such as ISKCON and the Ramakrishna Mission) and contemporary Hindu nationalist movements (such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). The prize on offer is to be able to define the "soul" or "essence" of Hinduism. My thesis in this chapter has been that this "essence" did not exist (at least in the sense in which Western Orientalists and contemporary Hindu movements have tended to represent it) until it was invented in the nineteenth century. In so far as such conceptions of Indian culture and history prevail and the myth of "Hinduism" persists, contemporary Indian identities remain subject to the influence of a Westernizing and neo-colonial (as opposed to truly postcolonial) Orientalism. (1999:117)¹¹

This discussion is far from tangential to K. Subba Rao as he was powerfully influenced by the neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda. King's summation that "today what most Religious Education courses mean by 'Hinduism' is a colonially filtered and retrospective Vedanticization of Indian religion" resonates with the philosophical ruminations evident in the songs of K. Subba Rao that are the focus of this study. Interestingly, Subba Rao is noted for his critique of all religion, yet he continued to be identified as a Hindu until the end of his life. Thus this is a complex subject that needs to be carefully elaborated on later in this study. For now it must be noted that Subba Rao also must be recognized as a free agent, and while it is legitimate to trace influences on him from Orientalist and anti-Orientalist and other sources, this must not lead to a reductionistic effort to explain the man solely on the basis of historical and cultural factors.

Village India

Inden's third point of focus on Orientalist constructs of India deal with village India. Since urban India has manifestly undergone many changes over many centuries, it was especially village India that was seen as preserving the unchanging essence of Indian culture. Inden quotes Monier-Williams referring to how "the simple, self-contained Indian township has preserved its constitution intact, its customs, precedents, and peculiar institutions unchanged and unchangeable amid all other changes." (2000:134, from Monier-Williams 1891:455)

Inden's objections to this are consistent with his attack on Orientalism as a whole. First of all, there is a determinist presupposition running through such claims of an unchanging village culture, and so free agency is denied to the Indian villager who is entirely a product of his environment. Secondly these theories again evince an essentialism that likewise undermines individuality and historical agency.

K. Subba Rao was a product of village India who died in village India, so care will need to be taken that Orientalist perspectives on villages do not distort the interpretations of Subba Rao proposed in this study. The last of Inden's points does not in any way directly relate to the life and work of Subba Rao, but will still be briefly noted here.

Divine Kingship

“The Hindu ‘state’, government in the narrower sense of that term’s usage, constituted the last pillar of the Indological construct of an ancient India and the complement of village and caste, her exotic substitute for the development of a true ‘civil society’.” (Inden 2000:162) Especially in this area of the Hindu state Orientalist theories were used to justify colonial government. If kingship, even “Oriental despotism”, was an integral part of Indian civilization, a necessity to hold together disparate tendencies and forces, then “the polity that the British had erected in India was not only true to India’s history, but even an improvement on it.” (Inden 2000:185)

There is surely no room to doubt that Inden has made a great contribution to Indological scholarship by his clear analysis of the weaknesses and blunders of traditional Orientalist readings of Indian realities. All modern students of Indian phenomena must take care lest they reflect the distorted mindset or repeat the errors of the Orientalists. But some criticisms of Inden need to be noted before moving on from his presentation.

Criticism of Said/Inden

Thomas R. Trautmann (1997) is clearly appreciative of Said and Inden, and yet makes some important criticisms of their perspective. His most basic problem is with “the fuzziness of the Saidian formulation.” (1997:22) Orientalism is made by Said to denote something very different from what it had previously meant in Indological discourse. Trautmann proceeds to discuss Orientalism¹ and Orientalism². He proposes a definition of Orientalism¹ as “knowledge produced by Orientalists, scholars who know Asian languages” (23), which is what this term traditionally referred to. Orientalism² is then the broader meaning of “European representations of the Orient, whether by Orientalists or others.” (23)

But the critique must go further, as there were various opinions and serious disputes among Orientalists, and this is hardly noticed in the Said-Inden critique. And the broad sweep of condemnation surely sweeps away much that is good and helpful and even necessary.¹² As Trautmann summarizes,

Any view one holds or may construct about India is built and will continue to be built in part upon the work of Orientalists of the last two centuries, so that the continual reassessment of that body of work is something we cannot refuse. We cannot do without a critical and expert winnowing of that work. (1997: 25)

Peter Heehs (2003) develops this critique still further. He defines six styles of Orientalist discourse, three colonial and three post-colonial. Colonial Orientalist discourse could be patronizing, as in William Jones, or romantic, as in F. Schlegel, or nationalist, as in Swami Vivekananda and his *chela* (disciple) Sister Nivedita. One of Heehs' examples of critical post-colonial Orientalism is Trautmann, briefly mentioned above. He includes Inden in a category of reductive post-colonial Orientalism, and one of the striking points of his paper is that Said and Inden themselves cannot claim to have moved outside of Orientalist discourse. The final style is reactionary post-colonial Orientalism, exemplified in the new Hindu right already referred to at times above.

These critiques of Said and Inden do not fundamentally undermine their positions as outlined above, but rather are eminently useful in refining those broad critical perspectives. Further details in this refining process are beyond the scope of this current study, but all aspects of broad perspectives on cross-cultural studies cannot yet be considered to have been adequately outlined. Further definition of the broad perspective of this study of K. Subba Rao must now be defined.

Beyond Orientalism

Fred Dallmayr has wrestled with the legacy of Orientalism and how to move beyond the constrictions of the Orientalist perspective. In the paragraphs that follow his insights as published in two seminal works (1996, 1998) will be summarized in so far as they are deemed relevant to the current study of an Indian religious figure by an American student.

A Westerner approaching the study of the East needs to be aware of the legacy of the past. Dallmayr opens his 1996 book with a survey of the modes of cross-cultural encounter in the Western engagement with the world. Conquest was initially primary, followed by conversion; both are considered flawed by their "denial of meaningful human difference." (Dallmayr 2001[1996]:9) Assimilation or acculturation involves the adaptation of the cultural attitudes and practices of one group by another group. The common practice in

India where lower castes adopt the ways of higher castes, called Sanskritization, is an example of this mode of cultural encounter.

Partial assimilation or cultural borrowing is generally among peoples who are perceived to be of equal status. Dallmayr cites the translation of Indian Buddhist texts into Chinese as an example where both Buddhism and Chinese culture ended up borrowing and being changed by the other. (2001:21) But it is also possible for cultures to live side by side with minimal engagement. Conflict or class struggle is a further possibility. Dallmayr concludes his survey of modes of encounter with dialogical engagement (“where dialogical exchange respects otherness beyond assimilation” (2001:xi)), which he proceeds to define and commend through the remainder of his study.

Gadamer and Derrida are the guiding lights for Dallmayr in his analysis of dialogical cross-cultural encounter. Gadamer reflected and taught on the “porous relations” between a reader and a text and the self and another. (2001:40) This stance against affirming that a text can have a finally definitive interpretation, however, must not lead to a lazy relativism; as summarized by Dallmayr, Gadamer taught that “textual difficulties or recalcitrance cannot dispense from the rigors of the ‘hermeneutical circle’, the constant alternation between inquiry and textual response.” (2001:46)

Derrida was concerned with a post-metaphysical vision, especially wrestling on the role of Europe in the world and on the diversity of cultures within Europe. The two extremes to be avoided are a bland universalism and a bellicose ethnocentrism. This fits well the concerns of Gadamer, and Dallmayr summarizes the hope their positions instill:

In a world rent by the competing pulls of Western-style universalism and bellicose modes of ethnocentrism, their accent on interhuman and cross-cultural entwinement opens a hopeful vista for the future, one pointing beyond the (mutually enforcing) dystopias of global bureaucracy and of xenophobic fragmentation or exclusivism. (2001:59)

The imposing intellectual constructs of the Enlightenment (“Eurocentric arrogance” (Dallmayr 2001:12)) must be transcended for such an “interhuman entwinement” to develop where Westerners are involved. Summarizing J. L. Mehta’s position, Dallmayr affirms that

comparative philosophy has proceeded largely on the basis of an uncritical employment of metaphysical ideas, assumed to be “obviously and eternally valid” and hence indiscriminately applied to non-Western cultures and traditions (such as those of India). (2001:105)

But discussing the transcending of this Eurocentric arrogance is much easier than accomplishing it, and care must be taken that more is not lost than gained in a commendable effort to move beyond this perspective. Dallmayr wrestles with these realities in an extended essay on the noted Indologist William Halbfass. He shows how Halbfass wrestled with the tension involved in affirming “commitment to objective standards of precision and analysis” (2001:122) while recognizing that this rather assumes “the intellectual superiority of the neutral analyst over the array of cultural and historical contingencies.” (123) Halbfass did not solve this tension, and Dallmayr sees this as symptomatic of the “enormous task” of “genuine dialogical learning on the level of basic frameworks, beyond the limits of assimilation and exclusion.” (2001:134)

The enormity of the task is multiplied by the reality of Western hegemonic power in the world today. Worse still is the radical intolerance evident in the modern Western world-view. As well stated by Dallmayr, “being wedded to universalistic principles (of equal liberty), modern democracy cannot readily accommodate radical cultural diversity, just as little as modern science can integrate alchemy (or Christianity accept the pagan pantheon).” (2001:203) But a way ahead must be forged by the embracing of a “‘politics of difference’ focused on individual and cultural distinctiveness.” (2001:212-213)

Alternative Visions

In the introduction to his 1998 book Dallmayr affirms the continuity between this and his previous work. Again the focus will be on dialogical encounter in the context of hegemonic Western power, and how the “alternative visions” of the world can resist pressures that would subsume them or force them into reactionary myopia. An existential hermeneutics must come into living practice:

As formulated by a string of thinkers from Heidegger to Gadamer and beyond, existential hermeneutics is predicated on a dialogical interplay where the other’s revelatory power is released only through a questioning that necessarily proceeds

from the vantage of situated modes of self-understanding (what Gadamer calls “prejudgements”). (1998:7)

In the late 18th century J. G. Herder insightfully challenged Enlightenment assumptions. In Dallmayr’s words,

A critic of Cartesianism and its Enlightenment offshoots, Herder challenged the “foundational” status of the *cogito*, the centrality of subjectivity, and the subject-object relation, as linchpins of epistemological truth. A corollary of this critique was the resolute turn to language and speech, sometimes celebrated as a very recent achievement, and the discarding of anthropocentrism in favor of the contextualizing of human being in family, society and world. (1998:35)

But Herder’s voice was little heeded.

Liberation is discussed in detail, with an emphasis on how alternative contextual visions of what liberation entails are threatened by the hegemonic perspective of the Enlightenment. Mahatma Gandhi’s struggle with his tradition and the power of the Western agenda is one among a few case studies that are developed. Gandhi’s attitude in that he “welcomed the winds of all cultures to blow freely around his house, but refused ‘to be blown off my feet by any’” is especially commended. (Dallmayr 1998:211) Ashish Nandy struggles to develop a “critical traditionalism” in the tradition of Gandhi. (Dallmayr 1998:232)

But in the tension between modernization and traditional cultures too often the basic meaning of progress and development is assumed rather than discussed (and the assumptions of course are those of the powerful). This assumed model for development, in Dallmayr’s words

heralds an exodus from tradition – basically from historically grown culture. With its focus on individual autonomy, moreover, liberal Enlightenment thought has difficulty in reconciling individual rights with the notion of culture as a way of life shared by a larger group or community of people. In addition, individualism is coupled with a rationalizing bent. Despite its cosmopolitan aims, this model’s celebration of “universal” human rationality is couched unmistakably in the idiom of modern Western philosophy – a fact that is liable to arouse suspicion among non-Western societies wedded to different modes of reasoning or thinking. (1998:247)

To counter this hegemonic blindness, Dallmayr spells out three principles that must come to the fore in considerations of international development. First, “culture is important for

providing a frame of reference through which development of any kind can be discussed and formulated.” (1998:247) Second, “culture is important as an antidote to the ongoing process of global standardization and Westernization, a source of resistance for non-Western societies in the grip of Western hegemony.” (247) Third, due to the danger of reacting into blind traditionalism in the face of the Western onslaught, it is vital to remember “the notion of culture as cultivation, self-formation, and self-transformation.” (248)

Very similar issues are present when the discussion shifts from development to law and justice. As Dallmayr clearly points out, “in seeking to promote ‘universal’ standards, including the principle of universal rights, Western culture paradoxically tends to foster monolingual conformity that is at variance with rights (or rightness).” (1998:269) Western certainty of its position makes it blind to its own weaknesses: “The conceit of superiority, the complacent assumption of holding the key to justice and ethical truth, obstructs (or may obstruct) learning on the part of Western culture.” (Dallmayr 1998:268)

The magnitude of Western blindness compounds what is already a mammoth challenge for non-Western nations:

Faced with the realities of global hegemony, non-Western cultures have to engage in a complex double gesture, to affirm or defend cultural traditions and identities while simultaneously opening the latter up to critical scrutiny and revision (perhaps even of a radical kind). This double move has been at the heart of the more inspiring national liberation movements in our century that struggled valiantly against colonialism without retreating into a safely secluded or nostalgic counteridentity. Gandhi’s entire lifework can be understood along these lines. (Dallmayr 1998:270)

Spelling out in such compelling detail the problems involved in Western engagement with the non-Western world clearly compelled Dallmayr to interact with Samuel Huntington’s thesis that a clash of civilizations is impending. But Dallmayr sees Huntington’s thesis as itself too dominated by Western perspectives and agendas. (1998:288) Particularly Immanuel Wallerstein’s more nuanced understanding of the complexity of cultures and cultural interaction suggests that Huntington’s dichotomistic claim of inevitable clash is overstated. (Dallmayr 1998:289f)

Once again the challenge is to properly walk a middle road between capitulation and reactionary withdrawal:

If universalism were merely a cloak or a smokescreen for oppressive designs, “we would not be discussing it today.” As things stand, however, universalism is “a ‘gift’ of the powerful to the weak” that confronts the latter with “a double bind: to refuse the gift is to lose; to accept the gift is to lose.” The only plausible reaction of the weak (including minorities and Third World cultures) is “neither to refuse nor to accept, or both to refuse and to accept” – that is, to pursue a seemingly zigzag course that preserves cultural and group difference or distinctiveness while allowing it to grow and mature in a broader global context. (Dallmayr 1998:292, quoting from Wallerstein 1991:199, 217)

By following Dallmayr to the end of his reflections we have moved quite far beyond what is immediately relevant to the study of K. Subba Rao. But the broad perspective outlined for intercultural interaction and study is necessary for the development of a particular perspective toward the study of Subba Rao. A definition of the personal perspective which will guide the research that follows must now be stated.

The Perspective of this Study

Twenty years of residence in South Asia shows that I have long been involved in the dynamics of cross-cultural encounter. The study and reflection evidenced above have helped clarify many insights and experiences but have also uncovered depths of complexity to the cross-cultural encounter that were previously not recognized. I would dare to hope that in the study that follows, and in the path of my life remaining, I might be considered to be working according to the basic approach outlined by Fred Dallmayr.

Specifically, it is of the utmost importance that K. Subba Rao (through his writings) and his living disciples are listened to with the utmost care and respect. Any *a priori* privileging of the perspective of the researcher is anathema and can only skew the conclusions of the study. Yet there will indeed be a “porous” relationship (Gadamer’s phrase) between researcher and subject.

It is already more than a decade since I first encountered Subba Rao through a booklet about his life and work. I have certainly been changed by the encounter with this man’s writings

and interactions with his disciples. But I could not be counted among the disciples, and have always maintained a critical distance in evaluating what I have read and seen and heard. The perspective and opinion of the Subba Rao people about me and about this “critical distance” is at least as valuable as my perspective and opinion of him (and them); but I cannot provide that perspective, I can only present my own.

I am certainly in accord with Dallmayr (and Gadamer) in their suggestion that fruitful cross-cultural encounter is not from a supposed position of neutrality, much less from an eclectic (really superficial) suggestion that all opinions are equal, but from “the vantage of situated modes of self-understanding.” (Dallmayr 1998:7) At times in my encounter with the disciples of Subba Rao my “prejudgements” have been questioned, and I always shared very openly. The reader of this dissertation also has a right to know from what perspective this study is undertaken.

I am an orthodox Protestant Christian, but I am a critical student of that tradition who sees much of Protestant orthodoxy to be culturally conditioned. This means that I identify closely with Subba Rao in his commitment to Jesus Christ as supreme guru. It also means that I advocate contextual Christian theologies, and I see the work of Subba Rao as falling within that ambit.

I am in creative tension with Subba Rao and his movement in two particular areas. I do not *a priori* discount the miraculous, but this does not play a large role within the Christian traditions that I identify with, yet it plays a very large role indeed in the Subba Rao movement. I am personally convinced of orthodox Christian creedal statements about God and Jesus Christ, yet Subba Rao cared little for such matters and spoke rather loosely at times.

Yet I approach this study convinced that even in some of his loose statements Subba Rao might be presenting a necessary corrective to Western Christian orthodoxy. And I sincerely hope that my dialogical encounter with this fascinating man will indeed prove transforming not only for me, but also for those who walk with me through the pages that follow into a creative encounter with a truly remarkable disciple of Jesus Christ.

2. Themes in Contemporary Hinduism

The complexity and diversity of Hinduism and of academic debates about Hinduism nearly paralyze the mind. This chapter cuts through at least some of the complications by defining a relatively narrow focus; it deals with contemporary Hinduism so need not probe historical complexities; it deals with themes, so need not attempt a comprehensive description; it is introductory to a discussion of the life and work of K. Subba Rao, a guru figure who was a severe critic of religion yet broadly stood within the Hindu tradition even while following Jesus Christ as his own guru, so seeks to keep a focus on what relates to the study of this important figure.

Yet it is impossible to ignore the broader debates about the nature of Hinduism. This is especially the case because of the complexity of Subba Rao's relationship to Hindu traditions. Subba Rao used terminology from philosophical Hindu traditions, yet his evolution into a popular guru-figure seems to place him more within the popular or "little traditions" of Hinduism. But in his teaching Subba Rao rejected religion and warned against it as a trap. This, along with his open profession of being a follower of Jesus Christ, raises questions as to whether he should be considered Hindu at all.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century there is a political battle in India for the right to define the meaning of Hindu identity, and this yet further complicates any effort towards developing a scholarly consensus. It seems best to just grant from the start that any conclusions drawn about Hinduism and about K. Subba Rao and his "Hindu" identity will fall somewhere on the scales of political correctness (or incorrectness) of the day. This reality cannot be ignored in the discussion which follows, but every effort will be made to keep it from intruding on the discussion.

Hindu "religion"

Whether Hinduism should be considered a religion is a fiercely debated subject. The concept that Hinduism is a religion developed from early Indological study and has passed into comparative religion textbooks and into the popular consciousness. But

it has become customary, in recent years, to begin any enquiry into Hinduism with a consideration of the issue of religious definition and, more specifically, an evaluation of the problem of how to adequately define Hinduism. (Bowen 1998:1)

Is Hinduism a religion? Many scholars are still willing to consider that it is, although few would defend the basis of earlier Orientalist definitions of the Hindu religion. Some, like Gavin Flood, accept that Hinduism today has become a religion but see this as a late development in Indian history:

It is important to bear in mind that the formation of Hinduism, as the world religion we know today, has only occurred since the nineteenth century, when the term was used by Hindu reformers and western Orientalists. However, its origins and the “streams” which feed into it are very ancient, extending back to the Indus valley civilization. I take the view that “Hinduism” is not purely the construction of western Orientalists attempting to make sense of the plurality of religious phenomena within the vast geographical area of south Asia, as some scholars have maintained, but that “Hinduism” is also a development of Hindu self-understanding; a transformation in the modern world of themes already present. I shall use the term “Hindu” to refer not only to the contemporary world religion, but, with the necessary qualifications, to the traditions which have led to its present formation. (Flood 1996:8)

This perspective is commendable in many ways, not least that it accommodates the popular understanding of Hinduism as a religion. But problems quickly develop when attempts are made to define just what this religion consists of. Any variety of philosophical or theological definition excludes people who clearly claim to be and are accepted as Hindu. Similarly regarding any historical or practical criteria.

Yet for some scholars, the impossibility of developing a consistent definition still does not mean that Hinduism should not be considered a religion. Paul Bowen is ready to accept the concept of a Hindu religion despite the frustrating untidiness of the construct:

Despite the fact that Hinduism may resist a comprehensive definition from the outside, the Hindu appropriation of the word has resulted in the creation and consolidation of a world religion from within. Hinduism is defined by the intersubjective consensus, the mutual acceptance and assent, despite differences, of its individual members. Unfortunately, this does not help the religionist approach Hinduism; the diversity remains. (1998:3)

This type of “definition” leaves one without any objective standard at all; the opinions and feelings of “individual members” alone determine what is Hinduism and who is Hindu. This is perhaps not ultimately objectionable despite its affront to the scientific temper of the West. It is simply a fact that Hindu opinions about whether an individual is still part of the fold or has crossed too many boundaries and is now outside the fold are more significant than scholarly opinions about such a matter. In this understanding, the disciple of Christ K. Subba Rao is Hindu if he himself says so and other Hindus agree with this designation.

But the question remains as to whether an entity described in such a way should be considered a religion. Voices from different directions are calling for a redefinition of terms that would make Hinduism something other than “a religion”. From a scholarly direction, many are now suggesting that Hinduism is better thought of as a family of religions. As Heinrich von Stietencron defines,

What we call “Hinduism” is a geographically defined group of distinct but related religions, that originated in the same region, developed under similar socio-economic and political conditions, incorporated largely the same traditions, influenced each other continuously, and jointly contributed to the Hindu culture. Therefore it is only by distinguishing the various Hindu religions from “Hinduism” that comparability with other historical religions can be ensured. (2001[1989]:46)

There is a degree of commendable clarity here, but some major problems remain. If Hinduism is a group of religions, how does one account for the Hindu atheist or agnostic? The advantage of this approach over that of holding Hinduism as “a religion” is that this gives proper scope for recognizing the reality of religions like Vaishnavism and Saivism and Advaita Vedanta, which should be seen as separate religious systems rather than as “sects” of Hinduism. But “Hinduism” itself remains very poorly defined in this reconstruction. The religious identity of K. Subba Rao is also an enigma in this understanding; which of the Hindu religions is he to be considered part of? Must we posit the existence of a Hindu Christ-religion?

Robert Frykenberg takes matters a step further still and suggests that “Hinduism” has no meaning at all unless it is considered coterminous with “Indian.” (2001:82) Particularly it is a term that is without *religious* meaning:

The point at issue, therefore, is whether there is any scientific or systematic way to determine who was or who is or who is not a Hindu. However much the Registrar General of the Census or however much contemporary politicians may insist upon lumping nearly 80 per cent of the peoples of India under this categorical designation, it is almost impossible to determine how many of peoples so categorized would identify themselves as “Hindus” and, moreover, what such a self-identity would mean as a religious, as distinct from a cultural or geographical or national or political context. Context, indeed, may be seen as making all the difference. (Frykenberg 2001:101)

It is fascinating indeed that this reconstruction of Hinduism closely parallels that of exactly the people Frykenberg is writing against. That is the new right wing or “Hindu fundamentalists” who are promoting the concept of Hindutva or “Hindu-ness”.¹ As Partha Chatterjee points out,

The notion of Hinduness...cannot be, and need not be, defined by any religious criteria at all. There are no specific beliefs or practices which characterize this “Hindu” and the many doctrinal or sectarian differences among Hindus are irrelevant to this concept. Indeed, even such anti-Vedic and anti-brahmanical religions as Buddhism and Jainism count here as “Hindu.” Similarly, people outside the brahmanical religion and outside caste society are also claimed as part of the Hindu *jāti*. Clearly excluded from this *jāti* are religions like Christianity and Islam. What then is the criterion for inclusion or exclusion? It is one of historical origin. Buddhism or Jainism are “Hindu” because they originated in India, out of debates and critiques that are internal to Hinduism. Islam or Christianity originated outside and are, therefore, foreign. (1995:126)

Chatterjee is also raising strong objections to this construct, although it is not so much the definition that is the problem as the political agenda related to this paradigm.² This non-religious understanding of Hinduism is also enshrined in Indian law, where there is a codified set of personal laws based on differing religious traditions.³ The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 is specifically applied beyond the normal boundaries of Hinduism:

This Act applies:

- a) to any person who is a Hindu by religion in any of its forms and developments, including a Vaishnava, a Lingayat, or a follower of the Brahmo, Prarthana and Arya Samaj;
- b) to any person who is a Jain, Buddhist or Sikh by religion;
- c) to any person who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion. (Staffner 1988:98)

There was some question about this applying of Hindu law beyond the boundaries of Hinduism, which brought forth this clarification:

In his speech before Parliament Shri Pataskar, Minister in the Ministry of Law, answered the people who took exception to the title of the Bill, “Hindu”. He did not pronounce on whether Jainism, Sikhism, etc. are religions different from Hinduism. He said that through the ancient practice of the Courts “Hindu” had become a recognized term for many groups of people governed by Hindu law, although these people differed in their forms of worship. He went on: “The word ‘Hindu’ does not denote any particular religion or any form of worship; nor does it denote any particular community; it applies to so many diverse people.” (Saldanha 1981:122-123, quoting from *Lok Sabha Debates* Part II, Vol. 5 of 1955, columns 8361-2. New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat.)

This last understanding of Hinduism in non-religious terms perhaps has most to commend it. Most problematic is that it goes against the grain of popular thinking and writing about the Hindu religion. In this paradigm it is not at all problematic to view K. Subba Rao as a Hindu disciple of Jesus Christ.⁴

In the end the actual differences in perspective of the various attempts at definition outlined above are really rather small. It is in terminologies and connotations that there are differences; all agree that Hinduism is complex and transcends traditional western understandings of “religion,” although of course all agree also that there is a great deal about Hinduism that is deeply religious indeed. The value of working through some of the details of such a debate lies in the clarity achieved towards transcending the erroneous Orientalist understanding of Hinduism as a religion. It also lays the foundation for considering K. Subba Rao a Hindu, seeing this as something more than just a religious designation.

Themes in Hinduism

It might be suggested that to this point this paper has not touched on the announced topic of themes in contemporary Hinduism. But the theme of Hinduism itself is of such importance in contemporary Hinduism, and in the study of K. Subba Rao, that it needs to have a significant place in a discussion of themes within Hinduism.

Literally hundreds of topics might be listed if an attempt at a comprehensive survey of themes in contemporary Hinduism was attempted. In his survey of themes in Hinduism and Christianity Roger Hooker (1989) focuses on seven themes, while Paul Bowen (1998) in his

discussion of themes and issues in Hinduism chooses ten. Interestingly, only three themes are commonly discussed in these two volumes (the three being myth (or myth and history), images (or picturing God) and woman (women in Hinduism)). This means there are fourteen themes just from these two volumes, neither of which claims to be comprehensive.

This paper will select themes that are important for the understanding and interpretation of K. Subba Rao, and so will skip some of the themes discussed by Hooker and Bowen and will introduce some themes that are omitted in their studies. Even though interaction with Subba Rao's teaching will not be introduced in the discussions below, the material is selected and arranged in such a way that its relevance for the study of Subba Rao will become apparent at a later point. There will be interaction with Christian understanding of the various themes, however, as this also is of importance in the study of Subba Rao. Eight themes have thus been chosen, and while some important aspects of Hinduism (such as sacred scriptures, rites of passage, and attitudes to women) are omitted, still a good overall picture of Hindu teachings and practices and diversities will be presented.

God

One is immediately faced with rather astonishing diversities within Hinduism when the concept of God is discussed. As Sharada Sugirtharajah explains,

The Hindu tradition is replete with a wide variety of images of the Divine. The Supreme is seen as a personal God, as a transcendent Being, as immanent within each person as *Antaryâmin* ("inner Controller"), and in all creation. Images of the Divine as lord, king, judge, master, father, mother, husband, friend, beloved, and as creator, preserver and destroyer of evil, find expression in scriptures, mythology, art, iconography, music, dance and worship. The Divine is also described in terms of its plethora of attributes, such as love, wisdom, knowledge, beauty, power, and also in abstract categories such as pure consciousness, pure Being. (1998:161)

There is a fundamental distinction between the theistic traditions of Hinduism and the monistic traditions.⁵ The most basic term stands in dynamic tension with the English term "God": "The Sanskrit term *brahman*, which is used for the Ultimate Reality, is seen as the one eternal, all-pervading and all-transcending principle of the universe and all creation." (Sugirtharajah 1998:161) Raimundo Panikkar objects to a "facile identification of Brahman with God" (1981:138), and after a learned discussion in which he also refers to the variety

of Hindu understandings of *brahman* concludes that “Brahman and God are, as it were, *materialiter* the same reality, but *formaliter* different. They point to the same supreme reality, but from two different points of view.” (1981:143)

The fundamental theological debate in Hinduism relates to the nature of *brahman* as *saguna* (with qualities) or *nirguna* (without qualities). A parallel debate develops in Christian theologizing about God in Sanskrit terms. Traditionally Christians have rejected the idea that God is without (*nir*) attributes (*guna*), as after all an enumeration and discussion of the attributes of God is one of the standard points of Christian theology. But the complexity of languages complicates the matter. To say that God is with (*sa*) qualities (*guna*) can very well mean, borrowing words that the Westminster Confession of Faith censures, that God is with “body, parts and passions”. This is not the place to develop, much less presume to solve, these problematic discussions in either Hindu or Christian traditions.

Hindus affirm many manifestations of God, and many Hindus freely accept that Jesus Christ is one such manifestation. He is even considered an *avatâra* by many, a concept mostly from Vaishnava traditions where it is affirmed that God descends to earth at various times in various forms.⁶ This too springs a debate in Christian circles, as to whether Jesus Christ should be considered an *avatâra*.⁷

A final point on the Hindu view of God must be that there are three great deities who dominate Hindu theology as well as practical devotion, being Vishnu, Shiva and the Goddess or Devi under various names.⁸ Each of these figures are what the Christian tradition would call monotheistic deities in some of the theologies and practices of Hinduism.⁹

Humanity and Salvation

The purpose of human life is well summarized in the *purushârthas*, or the four ends of human existence. *Kâma* or pleasure refers to both sensual and aesthetic enjoyment. As Rambachan notes, “the Hindu recognition of *kâma* as a valid human pursuit challenges the common characterization of this tradition as being life-negating and other-worldly.” (1998:12) *Artha*, the second of the four goals of life, is prosperity or success. The third goal

is one of the rich and complex categories of Hinduism, *dharma*. P. V. Kane begins his massive study of *The History of Dharmasastra* with this discussion:

Dharma is one of those Sanskrit words that defy all attempts at an exact rendering in English or any other tongue....The dictionaries set out various meanings of Dharma such as “ordinance, usage, duty, right, justice, morality, virtue, religion, good works, function or characteristic.” (Kane 1990[1968]:1)

After tracing historical developments of various usages of the term Kane presented his own definition as

the privileges, duties and obligations of a man, his standard of conduct as a member of the Aryan community, as a member of one of the castes, as a person in a particular stage of life. (1990[1968]:3)

Among other things this means, as pointed out by Rambachan, that *dharma*

establishes the boundaries for *kâma* and *artha*. The personal attainment of worldly success and enjoyment by inflicting pain and suffering on others, or by denying them the right freely to pursue these ends, is opposed to *dharma*. Dharma is the goal in Hinduism which presupposes the special human capacity for concern and responsiveness to the needs and interests of others. (1998:14)

The supreme goal of humanity, however, is *moksha* or salvation. This is pretty much agreed by all, but just what *moksha* is and just how it is attained are far from agreed. Closely related to this discussion is the issue of the nature of human being, and a quick summary of major opinions in that area prepares the way for a fuller discussion of salvation.

The deepest reality of human being is the *âtman*. This is often translated as soul or spirit or self, but this can be quite misleading. Rambachan points out that in the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara (788-820 C. E.) the *âtman* is “different from all psychophysical processes.” (1998:20) Dandekar makes a similar point, showing that “the essential or real self (*âtman*) is different from the empirical self (*jîva*).” (1996[1953]:117-118) But he clarifies that “this should not be misunderstood to mean that man possesses two selves. The real self is actually one, but under certain conditions it assumes an individuality characterized by a body, mind and intellect, and that empirical self is then mistaken for the real self.” (1996[1953]:121)¹⁰

The *âtman*, in this understanding of Sankara, is not different (*a-dvaita*) from *brahman*. *Moksha* (salvation or liberation) is understood to be the realization of this essential unity of *âtman* and *brahman* (this is salvation by the way of knowledge). As Rambachan points out, this salvation or liberation “is not the attainment of immortal existence in some other world. Being identical with the infinite self, it defies definition.” (1998:22)

But this is only one strand of Hindu teaching on this subject. Ramanuja (1017-1137 C. E.) contended with this position and taught that “there is a plurality of selves distinct from each other.” (Rambachan 1998:23) This difference is rooted in his different perception of *brahman*. *Brahman* in Ramanuja’s thought is *visista*, “internally diverse and complex” (Rambachan 1998:23) (thus his school of thought is Visistadvaita Vedanta). Ramanuja’s position is more properly a Vaishnavite theistic theology than a school of philosophy.¹¹ Correspondingly, his view of *moksha* entails the retention of human individuality in an afterlife, and the way of salvation is by the grace of God which is responded to by human *bhakti* (devotion).¹²

There are many other streams of thought within Hinduism with various shades of meaning and interpretation for *brahman*, *âtman*, *moksha*, etc., and it is not possible to continue outlining all these positions. Having touched what are arguably the most important classical schools of thought, it remains to comment on a major development in more recent times.

Anantanand Rambachan in his *The Limits of Scripture* (1994) presented a penetrating analysis of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), a towering figure in modern Hinduism whose influence must be noted as background to the study of K. Subba Rao. Rambachan is generally appreciative of Vivekananda and carefully traces the historical circumstances that led to what he considers to be erroneous constructs in Vivekananda’s thought. It is possible here to highlight only a few major points from this study, again those points that are important in the interpretation of Subba Rao.

As the title of Rambachan’s study indicates, the primary issue in his analysis of Vivekananda is the latter’s demotion of scriptural authority. Vivekananda, under the influence of his guru Ramakrishna Paramhansa, emphatically taught that scripture is a secondary source of information and direct religious experience (*anubhava*) must be primary. As Rambachan notes,

The possibility of a human knowledge of God or reality is a problem with which every major religious tradition wrestles, and the issue of whether the authority of scripture takes precedence over that of individual experience transcends religious boundaries. Vivekananda universalized his claims for *anubhava* and argued for it as the ground and source of all religious traditions. (1994:9)

A scriptural text is represented by him as second-hand religion. As a record of the experiences of others, it may stimulate our own desires, but, even as one person's eating is of little value to another, so too is the record of another person's experiences until we attain the same end. (1994:45)¹³

This position is suggested to be the position of Advaita Vedanta, but Rambachan indisputably points out how different Vivekananda's teaching is from that of Sankara, especially as Sankara never considered experience to be primary, but rather revelation as found in Vedic scripture is always primary. A fuller statement of Rambachan's concerns with Vivekananda's "reinterpretation" of Advaita will be quoted here in closing this section:

All the significant elements of this synthesis that have been uncritically incorporated into the contemporary formulation of Hinduism must be evaluated. These include arguments for the scientific character of Hinduism, the claim of many paths to the same goal, the nonessential character of doctrine, and the devaluation of reason. Vivekananda's reliance on *anubhava* as the authoritative source for the knowledge of *brahman* must, in particular, be critically evaluated. The significant divergences that have been established in this study between Vivekananda's interpretations and those of Sankara must be addressed by those who argue for a continuity between neo-Vedanta and its classical roots and who see no deviation between Vivekananda and Sankara. The task of such critical studies must not be limited to evaluation but must also undertake to place the contemporary Advaita tradition on secure epistemological and philosophical foundations. (1994:137)

Karma-punarjanma

The doctrine of *karma* is one of the distinctive ideas of Hinduism, and is closely related to the doctrine of reincarnation (*punarjanma*) which "all the traditions of Hinduism hold". (Rambachan 1998:15) *Karma* is deeds or works, but in the philosophical usage under discussion here it refers to more than simple acts but includes also "the subtle forces which are understood to be generated by all voluntary actions, and which are seen as capable of producing results in the future." (Rambachan 1998:17)

Karma theory suggests that there are definite results for all human actions, and the fruit of every deed will eventually be born. Hooker outlined the teaching in its more detailed form:

Karma is of three kinds: *sancita*, which has been acquired in previous births and which can be destroyed by knowledge (*jnâna*); *prârabda*, the fruits of which cannot be destroyed and must therefore be enjoyed if they are good, and suffered if they are bad; and *kriyamâna*, these are the deeds which I am actually doing now and whose fruit can be destroyed by offering them to God. (1989:99-100)

Unfulfilled *karma* is punished (or rewarded) both in the afterlife and then in rebirth. This is an area of supreme conflict between traditional Christian and Hindu teachings, although there have probably always been Christians on the fringe of orthodoxy who upheld reincarnation theories, as there are numerous cases of Hindus who deny the doctrine of rebirth.

Renunciation

Renunciation is a value highly esteemed in most Hindu traditions and is far from missing in traditional Christian teaching as well. Consumerism is threatening this ideal in the modern world, and it is an ideal that has always existed in tension with other ideals. As Hooker points out in introducing his fascinating and insightful treatment,

At the heart of the Hindu tradition there is to be found a tension which we can express like this: on the one hand society demands of a man that he should marry, beget sons, fulfil his role as a householder, and so play his allotted part in maintaining the social order. On the other hand his spirit demands that he renounce the social order altogether in order to fulfil his ultimate destiny. From this tension there arise different attitudes to society: according to the first view life in society is a network of obligations. Woman has an important place as daughter and as wife, both of whom need a man to protect them, or as mother, who is an object of reverence. According to the second view the social order and its demands are the great obstacle in the path of man's spiritual progress, and woman is the seductress, the embodiment of the sensual temptations which life in society represents. (1989:240)

Hooker is referring to the tension between the second and fourth stages of Hindu life, the householder and the *sannyasi*.¹⁴ Which of these should be considered central and most important is a long-standing debate. Flood shows how interdependent they are, yet also sides with renunciation as the more important:

In the householder/renouncer distinction, the renouncer is ultimately superior to the householder, because he is indifferent to the phenomenal universe and is fulfilling life's highest purpose, its transcendence. Yet the householder's world-affirmation through the system of the *samskaras* [sacraments] is the social foundation of this ideology which is its own negation: the "inner conflict" of the tradition which has produced such creative tension within Hinduism and throughout the history of South Asia. (1998:274)¹⁵

The tension between householder and renouncer seems to lie behind one of the most striking teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, *nishkâma karma* ("desireless work"). This is the principle of working without being concerned about any reward that might follow on good works. It is in effect a definite renunciation, not of works as such but of the fruit of good works.¹⁶

Worship

There is of course a great deal of variety in Hindu worship, as must be expected when there are varieties of theology/philosophy and varieties of gods. But there is also a surprising level of commonality, not least in the very centrality of the act of worship. As C. J. Fuller points out, "*Pujâ*, 'worship', is the core ritual of popular theistic Hinduism." (1992:57)¹⁷

Worship is central to temple rituals, yet as Anuradha Choudhury points out, "for the majority of Hindus, worship in temples is less important than their worship at home." (1998:220) Worship rituals range from the extremely ornate (which Choudhury has in mind when she states that "the procedure of a Hindu ritual act of worship, or *pujâ*, is so elaborate that the majority of Hindus do not know the significance of the minute details" (1998:217)) to the very simple.¹⁸

Generally in *pujâ* there is an image of a deity, usually an *ishtadevatâ* (personally chosen deity). Julius Lipner comments insightfully on the chosen image:

This is not arbitrary. Usually it is the divine form or person worshipped in the family for generations, or recommended by a guru or by a particularly significant event in one's life or by some conversion experience. It is the concrete form in which the Godhead established contact with the worshipper. As such, it is a sign of divine election rather than the reverse. (1999[1994]:282)

The following aspects of worship are usually involved. There are various preparations for worship: “bathing and fasting before and during worship, breaking fast only with *prasâd* (consecrated food), avoiding shoes (particularly leather ones), are just a few very commonly observed practices.” (Choudhury 1998:215) Colored powder is used to make some floor decorations and flowers and incense are around the image. A pot of brass or clay with water in it and mango leaves decorating it and a coconut in its mouth is present. Camphor, candles and/or oil lamps are burning. Offerings of fruit and/or grains and/or sweets are present before the image, to be distributed after the worship as the *prasâd* for the worshippers.¹⁹

There is generally the recitation of holy words, by a priest in a larger ceremony but in the home by the recitation of a chant or a reading from a book. There are *bhajans* (devotional songs) sung or played from a cassette or CD. The waving of a lamp (*ârati*) in a circular motion before the deity is a part of any serious *pujâ* ritual. Worshippers will wave their hands over the flame after the *ârati* and then touch their forehead.²⁰

The Guru

There is no more powerful symbol of Hinduism than the holy man, and perhaps nowhere is the dynamic diversity of Hinduism seen more clearly than in this concept. There are many definitions of a holy man, many terminologies used to refer to the holy man (guru, *sadhu*, *sannyasi*, *maharaj*, *acharya*, *pandit*, *pir*, *baba*, *sant*, etc.) and many disputes about who is truly a holy man; and of course there are many holy women as well. In popular parlance there is a great deal of overlap in the various concepts and terms, and at this point we are looking at popular rather than enscripdated or great tradition Hinduism.

Walker defines a guru as “a spiritual preceptor or cult leader.” (1983[1968]:419) The two elements of this definition seem to point to two different aspects of the development of the concept of a guru. B. B. Chaubey gives a good summary of the earlier meaning and the transition:

With the advent of Pauranika and Tantrika religions there came a fundamental change in the concept of Guruship. Now a Guru was not essentially a teacher-Guru, or a *purohit* [priest]-Guru, or an ascetic-Guru. A founder or inventor of a sect or creed began to be called Guru. Also their followers, who preached and propagated the essence and doctrines of their sects, were also called Gurus. (1976:15)

Lipner paints a rather idealistic portrait of the original guru-concept (1999[1994]:93-94) and laments that today there seems to be a serious decline:

Gradually, as the tradition developed, in the eyes of many service turned into servility, a servility expected and a servility willingly offered, so that today in Hinduism generally, it seems that it is unquestioning obedience to the guru that dominates the guru-disciple relationship. A sense of mutual responsibility seems to be lacking; responsibility on the guru's part to train the disciple in spiritual independence, and responsibility on the disciple's part to grow in this training. I believe the abrogation of responsibility in this way runs counter to the best traditions of the guru-disciple relationship. (1999[1994]:191)

L. S. S. O'Malley defines the concept of guru and popular practice:

The name means a venerable person, one who is a religious teacher or spiritual preceptor. It is applied to a man of any caste who is believed to be in peculiarly close communion with God and to hold the secret to divine mysteries, whether on account of saintliness of life or character, asceticism, or utterances regarded as inspired. Such a man is adopted as a Guru by seekers after truth, who become his disciples....The guru is, in short, a channel through which God communicates himself to man. He alone can guide his disciples on the path of spiritual progress to full knowledge of God and ultimate release from the chain of births and rebirths. (2000[1934]:196-197)²¹

It is popularly understood that "enlightenment is impossible without a guru (master)." (Gajendragadkar 1983[1956]:368) The proliferation of gurus is one of the defining marks of contemporary Hinduism.

Spirit Possession

With the discussion of gurus we moved away from classical Hinduism to its more popular expressions. But there are definite roots for the guru phenomena in classical Hinduism. With this final topic we move truly outside great tradition Hinduism. Belief in evil spirits is widespread in India, as is fear of possession by such spirits. As O'Malley suggests,

Throughout India there is a belief that those who have died violent or unnatural deaths, whether by murder, suicide, hanging or accident, become evil spirits, wandering about, malevolent in intent and act. (2000[1934]:157)

Henry Whitehead suggests a much broader fear of evil spirits in south Indian villages:

Every village in south India is believed by the people to be surrounded by evil spirits, who are always on the watch to inflict diseases and misfortunes of all kinds on the unhappy villagers. They lurk everywhere, on the tops of palmyra trees, in caves and rocks, in ravines and chasms. They fly about in the air, like birds of prey, ready to pounce down upon any unprotected victim, and the Indian villagers pass through life in constant dread of these invisible enemies. (1999[1921]:46)

John Stanley (1992) studied beliefs in spirit possession in Maharashtra and observed that a clear distinction is made between possession by a deity or saint and possession by a ghost or evil spirit. Stanley contrasted his findings with those of early ethnographic reports and noticed some striking changes, especially that “the many distinctions [formerly made] between different kinds of *bhuts* [evil spirits] are no longer made.” (1992:29) He still considers the prevalence of such beliefs to be “very high,” although it is much less in cities and larger towns. (1992:33)

Stanley identified three different types of healing centers for those possessed, and in interviews with those who had been delivered observed that

Some spirit victims seem to experience their cure (as they did their treatment) largely as a profane or secular experience. They were sick; they went to a healing center; now they are well. They are pleased; they return to their normal life. For many, however, the experience of “becoming right” results in a lasting bond of loyalty and devotion between the victim and his *baba* – loyalty and devotion that can only be understood in religious terms. (1992:56)

Abraham Ayrookuzhiel in his research in Chirrakal, a town of 30,000 people in Kerala, found a greater measure of decline in belief in evil spirits. Only 66 out of 165 people he interviewed believed in evil spirits. (1983:145)

J. M. Heredero in research among Christian villagers in Gujarat found belief in possession still a very strong aspect of popular religious belief and practice, among all religious communities. (2001:31-42)

This particular aspect of popular Hinduism has been isolated as it is a theme of relevance in the study of K. Subba Rao. The broader topic of the contrasts between what many may consider to be the more superstitious ways of folk Hinduism in comparison with the

philosophical speculations of what is sometimes called “higher” Hinduism, both of which contrast strikingly with the secularism which is taking hold especially among urban professionals, point to a continuing diversity of belief and practice under the umbrella of “Hinduism”.

Conclusion

Dynamic diversity and change will no doubt continue to mark Hinduism in the years to come. Globalization, and especially the changing face of the very influential Hinduism of the Indian diaspora around the world, will certainly impact what Hinduism will look like in the decades to come. The rise of new influential gurus will also influence the direction of this dynamic tradition. Tracing traditional and developing themes in Hinduism in various relations and contexts will thus be an important aspect of religious studies for a long time to come.

3. Contemporary Theological Trends in Indian Christianity

This chapter will outline developments in Indian Christian thought and action that especially relate to its Indian context. The Indian church very much bears the mark of its association with international Christianity, and most theological trends present in the world church are vitally present in the Indian church as well. To completely neglect these would give a distorted picture of what is happening in Indian Christianity, but they will be noted in only a cursory way.

This discussion of trends in Indian Christianity is intimately related with the study of K. Subba Rao, so topics will be discussed in light of their relevance to Subba Rao (even when this is not explicitly stated). Subba Rao is well known in Indian theological circles for his position of opposing baptism and church membership while still professing discipleship to Jesus. This and related topics will thus be discussed at greater length than other trends that might well be more prominent on the Indian theological scene today.

The Nature of the Church

Perhaps no question is more complex or practical for Christianity than the question of the nature of the church. The church has been planted in India from abroad, and bears the marks of that origin.¹ The church is a small minority in a massive nation, so issues of identity are deeply felt.

Traditional institutional Christianity in India has been deeply influenced by the ecumenical movement, and has recorded some landmark achievements in this area. The Church of South India (established in 1947 from Anglican, Methodist, and United Church of South India (an earlier union of Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches) denominations) and the Church of North India (established in 1970 from Anglican, United Church of North India (an earlier union of Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches), Baptist, Church of the Brethren, Disciples of Christ, and some Methodist denominations) were born after decades of complex negotiations.²

But critics pointed out that this was not really about an Indian church; this was a western theological concern being implemented on Indian soil. Among the more bitter critics was the Rethinking Group of Madras, whose study of *Rethinking Christianity in India* (1938) included these biting comments about the south Indian church union scheme:

It appears to a convert indescribably funny that anybody should entertain the idea that by knocking together the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, Swedish and Lutheran and American churches, an Indian Church would be produced. But for the fact that the religious man rarely has any sense of humour, the scheme would never have survived the mirth it provokes. It is a capital joke. (Chenchiah 1938:188)

Such a comment cannot be dismissed, especially in light of a bishop of the Church of South India, Sundar Clarke, three decades later writing a book on *Let the Indian Church be Indian*. Note especially this comment by Bishop Clarke: “I have to mention with some regret that the Indian Church is moving at snail’s pace in its Indianness.” (1985:vi)

It continues to be a serious problem that the church in India tends to be viewed in the light of the church internationally, rather than being viewed in light of Indian situations. Donald McGavran (1897-1991) called for a whole new perception of the church, viewing it from the perspective of Indian social and ethnic realities. He outlines nine types of churches; the ninth, more theory than reality, is what he is clearly advocating, which is indigenous churches where people remain integrated in their social structure. He sees the Subba Rao movement potentially developing into just the type of church that he advocates. (McGavran 1979:220-221)³

There have been similar calls from within India since many decades. Manilal C. Parekh (1885-1967) must be mentioned as one who saw with clarity the problems of ignoring social realities in the spread of Christianity. M. M. Thomas points out that Parekh is “right in pointing out that the ‘so-called Indian Christian Churches’ form a community among other Indian communities and ‘not a Church’ transcending them.” (Thomas 1969:258-259)

Parekh was never part of the mainstreams of Indian Christianity, and in his later years became a bitter critic.⁴ His perspective anticipates by a few decades the work of McGavran, who seems to have been similarly disregarded. The fundamental problem in Parekh’s

perspective is clear from his striking analysis of the failure of the Brahma (or Brahmo) Samaj:

The Brahma Samaj which started its life as a religious movement has ended in becoming a secularized community; almost a caste in as much as the chief binding force between the members thereof is interdining and intermarriage. It forms a kind of backwater of religious and communal life separated largely by its own sense of self-satisfied superiority from the main currents of national life which flow past it with a power and rapidity which it can neither appreciate nor even understand. (1929:280)⁵

That the church took on the nature of a separate sociological community, separated from the mainstreams of Indian life, was especially detrimental when it came to dealing with high caste Hindus. It was widely recognized that the unstated requirement of “communal engraftment” into the Christian community (and thus rejection of the Hindu community) was often a major stumbling block to Hindus interested in the way of Christ, as noted in these comments in *Asramas Past and Present*:

We may look to asramas for the solution of the vexed question of conversion. The non-Christian who is attracted by Jesus and not by the Church, who is prepared to be loyal to Him, but has no desire to affiliate himself with the Church by outward conformity - such an one is naturally a wanderer, who like the patriarchs having left behind his old country and seeking another in the asrama, will surely find the hospitality he is in need of, for in the asrama there will be no insistence on the acceptance of baptism, creeds, and communal engraftment, following on repudiation of the past. If non-Christians could only know that such a centre is available to them, a real home, they would gladly resort to it without fear or favour. (Chenchiah, Chakkarai and Sudarisanam 1941:293)

That the Christian ashrams did not develop into the kind of haven for Hindus hopefully anticipated here is beyond the points this paper is discussing and does not affect the point being made. McGavran defines this problem in this way: “to become a Christian means to ‘leave our people and join another caste’.” (1979:112-113) So McGavran supports caste-based people movements to Christ where the question of social dislocation on confessing Christ does not arise and so the main issue is religious (1979:113).⁶

McGavran also shows, however, how the stagnation of his ideal type of church leads to just the type of problem that needs to be avoided:

When a people movement stops growing, is arrested and sealed off to families who marry largely within their own congregations, and develops quite separate from the idolaters, then evangelistic potential rapidly declines. The myriad latent connections that bound Christians and non-Christians together are broken. Normal occasions for the flow of faith are greatly reduced. Each group really thinks of the other as a different caste....Because it is solidly of one people, it does not attract converts of other castes. It has ceased to burn with zeal to have its own non-Christian relatives become Christian and cares even less about its neighbors of other castes. (1979:114-115)

The reality of the church as an isolated community (or as isolated communities) among other communities is documented in studies conducted under the auspices of the International Missionary Council in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Analysing the church in Delhi, James P. Alter and Herbert Jai Singh noted that

The Church in Delhi came to birth through a process of radical separation from traditional Indian society. Individual converts were driven from their homes and communities and groups of Chamar converts were compelled to break their old *baradari* ties. This separation had a profound effect on the attitudes of Indian Christians. They now thought of themselves as a distinct *qaum* (people), sharply distinguished by religion from the Hindu and Muslim *quams*. In their enforced isolation from much of Indian life they turned naturally to the missionaries for leadership and assistance. Many adopted Western forms of dress and behaviour, acquired English or biblical names and in general regarded themselves as having a distinct culture. This isolation also helped to produce an attitude of exclusiveness. Inquirers and new converts were looked upon with some suspicion as representing a potential threat to established practices and as competitors for the educational and economic advantages secured by second- and third-generation Christians.

In developing these attitudes and practices, the Church reflected the environment in which it lived. Indian society was composed of several distinct *quams*, each with its own religion and culture and each carefully guarding its own social and economic privileges. By acquiring the characteristics of a *qaum* the Church was in one important respect becoming thoroughly indigenous. This was probably inevitable and no doubt gave the Christian minority an inner cohesion and strength it would not otherwise have had. But it also meant, again in keeping with the genius of Indian society, that the Church was being effectively contained in isolation. It was free to develop its own inner life in accordance with its beliefs and values, but it could not with impunity offer its faith or open its doors to those outside. (Alter 1961:47-48)

The identical problem was identified in a similar study of the church in Punjab by Ernest Y. Campbell, who describes very much the kind of situation that McGavran refers to as an “arrested” people movement:

As a result of the mass movement the Indian Christian Community is predominantly of one-caste background. As has been mentioned this community must still operate – whether it wishes to or not – as a caste. All but a few young people must find their marriage partners within the community....It is still true and will continue to be so for some time that the convert must be assimilated not only into the spiritual fellowship of Christians but into the intimacy of their homes and family relationships. The convert still must find a new home – he is rarely accepted in his old. A man in India without a community is only a part-man, and the problem of assimilating those with completely different sub-cultural backgrounds and attitudes is a very real one for the already precarious Christian minority. Somehow the church must find a way to open its life to those who have denied their own world and accepted Christ. The defensive exclusiveness of the Christian community is one of its serious problems. (Campbell 1961:5-6)

It should be pointed out that Campbell has not taken a major conceptual step that is evident in McGavran's work. Campbell wants to see a mono-ethnic church open its doors to people of other communities who must leave their communities to join the church; McGavran advocates that such people should not leave their communities to join a new community, but must rather seek to develop churches within their own community. But in understanding the nature of the existing church they are one.⁷

This understanding of the church and the problems that flow from this situation was recognized and discussed at a major consultation of the National Christian Council of India on the Mission of the Church in Contemporary India held at Nasrapur in March of 1966.

The Nasrapur Report contains this striking paragraph:

The conversion of a man or a group to Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a new creation and not merely an extension of the boundaries of the existing Church. The new converts should, therefore, be recognisable as the first fruit for Christ of the society to which they belong, bringing their specific gifts into the fellowship. This means that the Church must not seek to impose its whole traditional style of life upon the new convert. We have to confess that because this has often been done in the past, baptism has been made to appear as an act by which a person repudiates his ancient cultural heritage and accepts an alien culture. So long as this is so we cannot judge those who while confessing faith in Jesus, are unwilling to be baptised. As we have said in another paper we regard it as urgent that the Church should take much more seriously the whole culture of India, which must provide the forms in which India's offering of herself to Christ is to be made. With the emergence of an urban, secular culture the identification of baptism with a cultural transition is being progressively weakened and we rejoice in this fact. In the perspective of the Bible, conversion is "turning from idols to serve a living and true God" and not moving from one culture to another, or from one community to another community as it is understood in the communal sense in India today. (Lyon and Manuel 1968:220)⁸

Despite the clarity of perception and statement evident in this report, one searches in vain for any sign of change in the years and decades which followed. M. M. Thomas (1916-1996) raised the issue in numerous forums, but with precious little result. His small book entitled *Salvation and Humanisation* concludes with this paragraph:

In this connection it is necessary for us in India to consider whether the pattern of the Christian religious community obtaining here is of any value at all for the new shape of the Church. I have already indicated elsewhere that it has little value. For two reasons. First, it is in some sense an attempt to take control of the total life of Christians in the same way as Christendom did, that is, by controlling their lives through institutional authority. This will become more and more impossible with secularization, with Christians finding their various social needs and urges met by a plurality of secular groupings. Second, because it isolates the Church from other religious communities by communalism, i.e. by making the Christian community one self-regarding religious community among many such religious communities; and it is hard if not impossible to distinguish between the Church which is the open servant of all men and the communally-oriented Christian community, conscious of its minority status. We have to find a more proper form for the Church in India than the very unsatisfactory form of an Indian religious community. The goal should be its capacity to witness to Christ as Saviour, Servant and Perfector of all men not merely as isolated individuals, but as persons in and with their various secular and religious group-ties and longing for fuller life and expressing it in categories of thought and life characteristic of the different groupings. We need a new pattern of combining Christian self-identity and secular solidarity with all men. (Thomas 1971:60)

In discussions on this topic with Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, Thomas developed his thoughts further:

...the religious communalism of Christianity was forced upon it by the religious communalism of Hinduism. But this does not justify it. The need is to see how we can break the pattern without conforming to it. And K. M. Panikkar in his *Hinduism at the Cross-Roads* has made the valid point that by becoming separate religious communities Islam and Christianity have ceased to be a force of regeneration within Hinduism. Therefore, I advocate that the Fellowship of Christian Faith stay within the Hindu religious community, to transform its religious and social patterns in the light of Christ and thus to make Indian society (which is largely Hindu and may remain so in many of its cultural aspects) a common framework for all religions to become truly religious without being communal. (Thomas 1977:134)⁹

Thomas spoke again on the same subject in a post-Ayodhya seminar sponsored by the Christian Conference of Asia in 1994: “from the Christian side, the thinking has gone on the line that the Christian church as a fellowship of faith in Christ should cease to be a religious community in the common communal sense.” (1995:105) But it is hard to conceive of such

an idea becoming widely accepted in highly communal and institutionalized traditional Christian circles in India; and if accepted in theory it would still be a very difficult transition, perhaps not even possible.

Baptism

The issue of baptism raised in the Nasrapur Report is a sub-issue closely related to the question of the nature of the church. The issues involved were discussed and debated at two seminars in the late 1970s at the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College in Madras. The first seminar in August of 1976 looked at “Baptism in the Socio-Political Context of India”; the second in September of 1977 considered “The Relationship of the Church to Non-Baptized Believers in Christ.” (Hoefler 1979:xii) Hindu and Muslim participants and unbaptized believers shared at the gatherings, but again little of substance seems to have resulted.

Herbert E. Hoefler, who organized those seminars, pursued his own interest in these topics and developed a major research project related to non-baptized believers in Christ, the results of which were published in *Churchless Christianity*. (1991) An informal survey of non-baptized believers in Christ was followed by a formal survey in Madras. After relating the results of his research Hoefler theologizes at length on the meaning and implications of the fact that many lovers of Christ stay away from organized Christianity. Among his insights:

The first discernment we must come to is that the problem we are faced with in regard to these non-baptized believers in Christ is a sociological one rather than a theological one....If baptism and the church were carried out in practice as our theology conceives them, there would be no problem and there would be no non-baptised believers. It is clear, furthermore, that the communalised nature of the church exists quite apart from baptism. Even among the non-sacramental churches where baptism is considered unnecessary (as among the Salvation Army) or merely symbolic (as among the Baptists) the church is just as exclusively communal as among those churches who emphasize the necessity of baptism....Therefore the primary questions raised for us by the phenomenon of non-baptised believers in Christ around us are not about their authenticity but about ours. (1991:149-150)¹⁰

This study, like the Nasrapur Report and the writings of M. M. Thomas, seems to have made little impact on Christianity in India, but it is the theological issue that most cries out for attention when the life and work of K. Subba Rao are considered.

Issues Related to the Dalits

Neglect of the issues raised above is not by any means entirely due to indifference or paralysis. Rather, there are other pressing issues crying out for attention, and many of these relate to Dalit concerns. The majority of Christians in India are from Dalit backgrounds; once called “untouchables,” or “harijans” (children of God) by Gandhi, Dalit (meaning “oppressed”) has become the acceptable term for the most deprived of Indian society.

McGavran points out how most of the people movements that he commends have developed from among these people. (1979:98) James Massey suggests that “among the Indian Christians, more than 75% are Dalits.” (2001:220) The dynamism of church growth in India continues to be among these people and the tribals.¹¹ As noted in a recent compilation (Hedlund 2000) on indigenous Christian movements, “Indigenous Independent Church Movements represent a vigorous and rapidly expanding section of Christianity in India today.” (2000:ix) This study lacks any coherent framework, however; it does not note the careful work of Donald McGavran in analyzing churches in India. One is left to discern from the overall contents that it is mostly about Pentecostal movements among Dalits.¹²

The issue of mass Dalit conversions to Christianity has again come to the fore, which needs to be considered separately from the people movement phenomena that McGavran discusses. This was a subject of great interest in the 1930s to 1950s when B. R. Ambedkar, a noted national leader from the Mala (Dalit) caste announced that he would renounce Hinduism in favor of another religion.¹³

Bishop J. W. Pickett of the Methodist Church in South Asia shared how Ambedkar asked for secret baptism, and why Pickett refused to cooperate:

We quickly became good friends. He borrowed literally hundreds of my books and distributed them freely among his colleagues. After two years, he asked me to baptize him secretly. We prayed together frequently. I could not agree to baptize him while he would continue to be known in the country as a Hindu, although an unhappy one. He tried to persuade me to meet the expense of training ten thousand young men and women every year so that they could be pastors to his followers. He believed he should select the candidates and that I should baptize them on his recommendation. He was not willing that he or his disciples be subject to Church

discipline. A few of my friends begged me to baptize him and the thousands that he believed he could lead to Christ. I have never believed that I should have yielded to his requests or that he could have brought so many who would want to join the Church, or would be qualified after one year of training to be ministers. (Pickett 1980:32-33)

Pickett also met with leaders of the Dalits of Uttar Pradesh (then the United Provinces) and had high hopes for developments in that direction. Arthur McPhee describes a meeting in November of 1935 between Pickett and six others:

The six men included the president, general secretary, and four more members of the executive committee of the United Provinces Depressed Classes Association. They met for two hours – described by Pickett to Hodge as, “in some ways the richest two hours of my life,” and to Diffendorfer as “the best two hours of my life.” (2001:431)

But this was false encouragement, as little ever developed in the north. The conversion movement to Buddhism catalyzed by Ambedkar hardly moved beyond his own caste.

Conversion

This issue is alive again as a new leader has arisen whom some compare to Ambedkar, and some Christians have been courting him quite openly. Vishal Mangalwadi has even compared Ram Raj (now Udit Raj after his conversion to Buddhism) with Constantine:

It is not surprising that many Indian Christians cannot make sense of Mr. Ram Raj, a Deputy Commissioner of Income Tax in New Delhi, who is planning to lead a million Dalits (“oppressed”) to abandon Hinduism and become Buddhists. If you meet Ram Raj in person you might be tempted to ask, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Some Christians are suspecting, if not rejecting, Ram Raj. However, I believe historians may judge him to be India’s Constantine. (2001:20)

The immediate issue under discussion in the article just quoted was a 2001 rally supposed to number a million Dalits where 20 thousand to 200 thousand would become Christians and many more would become Buddhists. (“He is asking - and in fact, challenging - Christians to baptize at least 20,000, if not 200,000 Hindus in his rally. His crowd of one million Neo-Buddhists, he says, will stand there to defend the Christians’ right to liberate those most oppressed by the Hindu society.” (Mangalwadi 2001:20)) The rally fizzled out but the

ferment stirred continues and conversion issues will continue to be controversial in Indian society and so also in Indian theology.

M. M. Thomas shared a perspective on mass conversion that does not seem to have been noticed in recent Christian discussions of this topic. Reflecting on the Constituent Assembly that produced the Indian Constitution, and on the controversial clause allowing the propagation of Christianity in India, he wrote:

It [the decision to allow propagation] was a sort of covenant between Christians and the nation on the part of Christians that they will not use their numerical strength for the purpose of their communal interest in politics and that the state would not restrict evangelistic freedom and the growth of the Christian fellowship through inter-religious conversion undertaken through genuine conviction. (Thomas 1995:103)

Whether Christian moves to foment and support mass conversions of Dalits amount to a violation of this “sort of covenant”, and whether such a violation would justify the removal of the right of propagation by Hindu lawmakers, are complex and important questions.¹⁴

Dalit Theology

But it must be noted that all Christians are certainly not in agreement with the conversionist agendas of some. K. Wilson suggests that religions cannot solve the problems of the Dalit:

Today, Dalit Christians live in a) a multi-religious and multi-caste society, b) a secular state and c) a dispossessed condition. In a situation like this the question arises as to what posture should they adopt to achieve their economic and human redemption. Should they choose a religious way, or a caste struggle or a political direction? Can they achieve total emancipation through what they call the only true religious way or by changing religions from time to time or by resorting to a course of action which transcends religion? Some do advocate that they can achieve human liberation only through faith. More than three hundred years of Indian Church history proves beyond any shadow of doubt that one cannot improve economic conditions by mere faith. Nor is change of religion a permanent solution. Dalits in India changed over to several religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and even Sikhism. But yet their human standing is still questioned. Change of religion can at best alleviate some grievances temporarily and may be able to remove only the symptoms of the disease and certainly not the cause. (Wilson n.d.:162)¹⁵

This Dalit Theology is very much attuned to liberation theologies in other parts of the world. There are Dalit theologians who defend conversion (as there are Dalit activists who see conversion as the way to liberation (see Rajshekar 2003)) but the majority of Dalit theologians is critical of conversion theology and advocate liberation theology. Sebastian Kappen is a prime example:

The Christian involved in transformative action is, therefore, better attuned than the worshipping Christian to perceive the truth that Jesus did not die but was murdered by those intent on maintaining the *status quo* in Palestine. It was a perverse theology that converted that murder into death, and the death into a ritual, and the ritual into a stepping stone to a resurrection, itself ritualized. It begot a Christianity which, for all practical purposes, eliminated the cross and the crucified, a Christianity suited to the affluent West that has “risen and ascended” to the heavens of conspicuous consumption. (1993:30-31)

These points barely introduce the issues and debates about and within Dalit theology, which is by far the dominant issue on the current Indian theological agenda (with its related points of conversion, etc.).¹⁶ The varieties of Dalit theology often define themselves against an older stream of Indian Christian theology that related more to classical Hindu contexts, as seen in this comment by James Massey: “The roots of Indian Christian theology lie in the experiences of mostly upper caste/class Christian converts of this century and the last.” (1993:153)¹⁷

Indian Theology in Relation to Classical Traditions

It is certainly true that until the rise of Dalit theology Indian theology primarily referred to theologizing in the light of classical Hindu traditions. But there was/is still huge diversity even within Indian theology from this perspective.

In a helpful survey paper J. Russell Chandran (1993) notes three of the best known Indian theologians and points out the differences in their fundamental approaches. Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907) suggested that the clearest expression of biblical truth would come when theology was based on the philosophical insights and foundation of the Advaitic philosopher Sankara. (Chandran 1993:7-8)¹⁸

A. J. Appasamy (1891-1975) agreed that Indian Christian theology needs to relate to Indian philosophical traditions, but unlike Upadhyaya he related to the Visistadvaita philosophy of Ramanuja, one of the leading schools of theistic Hinduism. (Chandran 1993:9)

P. Chenchiah (1886-1959) did not relate his theological thought to either of these important strands of Indian philosophy, but rather related to some of the gurus of modern India, particularly Aurobindo and Master CVV. (Chandran 1993:9-10)¹⁹

Many who have theologized in relation to classical Hindu traditions have moved to a pluralistic understanding of religious truth. A division of positions into exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism has become quite common.²⁰ Exclusivism is the traditional Christian position that revelation and truth and salvation are only present in Jesus Christ or the Bible or Christianity. Some who hold to this position, to avoid being associated with those who hold and propagate such beliefs in offensive ways, would rather refer to this as a position with a normative Christology. Inclusivism sees the centrality of Jesus Christ but in various ways accommodates other religious traditions. Pluralism goes further and affirms the full validity of various religious positions, suggesting that claims of the centrality of Jesus Christ are “mixed up with ideological assumptions backed by economic affluence and political power.” (S. J. Samartha, quoted from Ramachandra 1996:4)

The discussions of these issues will no doubt go on for a long time to come, and there are many shades of opinion within the various perspectives. Due to its importance in the study of K. Subba Rao, one particular stream needs to be isolated and discussed before closing this survey of trends in Indian Christian theology.

Advaitic Theology

It has already been noted that Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya considered the Advaitic theology of Sankara as the most appropriate foundation for developing an Indian Christian theology. There is in fact a stream of thinkers who agree with this assertion, and K. P. Aleaz has produced a book on *Christian Thought through Advaita Vedanta*. (1996)

Aleaz divides his discussion into three parts, the first being seven Christian thinkers who accept the philosophical framework of Advaita Vedanta (“the reception model”). Included here are Brahmabandhav and Subba Rao. A second group of seven thinkers make some adjustments to the basic premises of Advaita, but still largely work within that framework (“the reinterpretation model”). Finally he notes only two theologians who interact with but reject Advaita (“the rejection model”).

There are many problems with this outline, not least being the great measure of diversity among those who are considered within the reception model, most of whom to some extent are reinterpreting Advaita as well.²¹ The problems in Aleaz’ discussion of Subba Rao will need to be noted at another place in this study.

But this does illustrate the diversity and complexity of theologizing in Indian contexts, and future trends no doubt are towards greater diversity rather than any uniformity or unanimity. Subba Rao is rightly listed among those who adopt, at least to some extent, the framework of Advaita Vedanta, but a careful study of his terms in the context of his life and work needs to inform any conclusions about his role as an Advaitic theologian.

4. The Life and Work of K. Subba Rao

The life and ministry of Kalagara Subba Rao (1912-1981) comprise one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of Christianity in India. Subba Rao was not a Christian, yet was a devotee of Jesus Christ who pointed others to like faith in and identification with Christ. This dissertation is primarily an evaluation of the songs of Subba Rao, but those songs can only properly be understood in the context of his life and work.

Sources for the study of Subba Rao are few, and are not particularly reliable. C. D. Airan, a Christian from Hyderabad, has provided the most material. Airan was not a scholar and does not inspire great confidence. Kaj Baago, the missionary and historian, and A. F. Thyagaraju, then principal of Noble College in Machilipatnam, wrote brief records. All of these men clearly indicate that they visited Subba Rao only briefly to gain their information. Airan became a devotee and an apologist for Subba Rao and his ministry. Subba Rao's own writings are few but, obviously, important. More recently, many works on Indian theology make some reference to Subba Rao, but only K. P. Aleaz has attempted anything resembling a serious analysis of the man and his work. The interpretative frameworks these writers bring to Subba Rao will be considered later after surveying the facts of his life and outlining his basic teaching.

I have made a number of visits over the past decade to Vijayawada (in Andhra Pradesh state of South India) and the nearby village of Munipalle, and was hospitably welcomed among the *chelas* (disciples) of Subba Rao. In October of 1994 I first met Sri Kesava Rao Chowdary, de facto successor of K. Subba Rao, and Srimatti Nagendramma Kalagara, K. Subba Rao's widow. On Christmas Eve and Christmas day of 1998 I was again in Vijayawada for the main annual gathering of the disciples of Christ in the Subba Rao *sampradaya*. I returned again on Sunday Dec. 23, 2001, remaining through the Christmas Eve program of that year, and revisited Munipalle for an extended interview with Srimatti Nagendramma on Aug. 27, 2003. Most recently I was again in Munipalle on Oct. 7, 2003. On all these occasions I sought relevant literature and interviews with key figures, and on the last three visits I recorded my interviews with Srimatti Nagendramma and other followers of K. Subba Rao.

Early Life

Kalagara Subba Rao was born into a Kamma ("clean" caste) agricultural family in the Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh around the year 1912. (Baago 1968:3) His actual birthplace, where he also spent his early years, was his maternal uncle's home in Gosala in Krishna district. (Airan 1965:21) His education was sporadic due to habits of skipping school in favor of sport and mischief making. From an early age Subba Rao rebelled against the Hindu religion. (Baago 1968:3)

Some of Subba Rao's early mischief was related to his rejection of religion. He stole from temples to buy cigarettes and kicked idols to see if it was true that doing so made one blind. At sixteen years of age he was sent to Calcutta and passed his matriculation there. His bad habits caused him to fail his intermediate examination in Rajahmundry, but back in Calcutta he passed that and earned a B. A. with first class honors in the City College in 1930. (Airan 1965:22)

Baago gives the information that from 1930 to 1935 Subba Rao wandered aimlessly like a vagabond. (1968:3) Airan says that while studying all the parental property was lost and that the death of a beloved sister affected him. Airan tells that in the midst of mourning his sister Subba Rao asked himself why people mourn when they also will soon die. (Airan 1965:22-23) In 1935 he completed his B. T. degree and got a teaching job in Krishna District. (Airan 1965:23)

Subba Rao married Srimatti Nagendramma in 1937 (Airan 1965:23); they had no children. In 1939 he wrote a Telugu booklet on international conditions and was later appointed a lecturer and publicity writer of the National War Front.¹ In this regard he was awarded the title Rao Saheb. He was an atheist, opposed to religion and especially to sadhus and priests. He was living a reckless life, and his impertinent ways ruined his health.² According to both Airan and Baago, Rao Saheb Subba Rao had a nervous breakdown, and prospects for a full recovery were not good. (Airan 1965:23-24; Baago 1968:4) He retired to Munipalle, expecting never to fully recover.³

In light of the great events soon to transform Subba Rao's life, it is important to narrate an event in his wife's life before this failure of his health and relocation to Munipalle. Srimatti Nagendramma twice recounted this story during my interviews with her (Dec. 24, 2001, and Aug. 27, 2003), although the exact dating of it is imprecise. She had been stricken and was nearly an invalid following on from seeing a cadaver while visiting a nearby village.⁴ Various local remedies failed to restore her health, so she turned to the noted Pentecostal Christian healer Lam Jeevaratnam in Gudiwada.⁵ After some visits over a few weeks she was gradually delivered. Subba Rao did not oppose her going there for help, and finally went along himself when he saw that his wife had been delivered. But he was unmoved theologically, as Jesus was a god for the untouchables and he was not interested in the religion Jeevaratnam proclaimed.

Vision of Christ

In broken health, having retired to Munipalle, the decisive event in Subba Rao's life occurred. In 1942 he had a vision of Christ. According to Airan he saw a dazzling light and heard a voice. (Airan 1965:24)⁶ In light of the contact with Jeevaratnam noted above, it seems odd that Baago wrote that "He (KSR) recalls no particular experience which might have prepared the vision." (1968:4) Baago also reports that "He himself told me that all he knew was that Christianity was another religion with another god. The dress, language and manners of the missionaries and 'padres' seemed ridiculous to him." (Baago 1968:4) It would seem that either in his conscious mind and in his later memory Subba Rao saw no preparation for the vision, or for reasons not too difficult to discern he chose to discount his earlier contact with the important Christian figure Jeevaratnam.

Subba Rao's health was restored but the full implications of his life-changing vision only gradually emerged. He did not want to speak about Christ or his vision. Caste pride was a problem, Christ being seen as God of the untouchables. But also Subba Rao was known to believe that God and *bhakti* are only for superstitious fools; how could he now suggest otherwise? Subba Rao continued his smoking and drinking and gambling habits, but testified that there was now no pleasure in his previous life style. (Airan 1965:27) At some point he resumed (if indeed he ever formally left) his teaching position and eventually (after

many years and apparently a number of transfers) became headmaster of the high school in Pamarru in Krishna District. (Thyagaraju 1971:9)

In the end Subba Rao was forced into his open confession of Christ.⁷ To his own surprise he realized that he had acquired healing powers. When he invoked the name of Jesus healings occurred. A vision that his wife had also influenced him, as she fell unconscious and began reciting from the Bible, which she had never read (Airan 1965:26f; Baago 1968:5). Subba Rao finally acknowledged that there was power in the name of Christ and began to minister to those who sought help.

Relating to the Christian Church

The chronology of these events is not at all clear. How long the silent period lasted, when the open healing ministry developed, and how and when Christian contacts began cannot be stated with certainty. But clearly a man healing in the name of Jesus would get the attention of Christians, if he did not himself seek out Christian contacts. Baago writes that after the vision Subba Rao often went to the churches, but found in them "merely a senseless ceremonial." (1968:8) Christians quite naturally expected this devotee of Christ to be baptized. With how much (or little) tact and wisdom this topic was discussed cannot be known, but this proved a major point of contention between Subba Rao and Christians for the rest of his life.⁸

Subba Rao would not be baptized, and he regularly and vehemently taught that baptism is just one more senseless ceremony.⁹ Not surprisingly, this brought a harsh reaction from many Christians. It is certainly not too much to say that Subba Rao was "persecuted" by Christians for some time, although how commonly and how widely he was accused of being an anti-Christ cannot be known.¹⁰

Baago relates that "All this made Subba Rao extremely antagonistic towards the Church and he now began to attack it openly." (1968:9) Strikingly, the published writings of Subba Rao are almost entirely these attacks on the church. His two books are *Retreat, Padri!*, an attack on baptism and on Christianity as a religion, and *Gurudev! Where Can I Get So Many Millstones*. This latter is a striking short piece written in direct address to Christ, appealing

against Subba Rao's mistreatment from and the false teachings of Christian leaders, and wondering where enough millstones can be found for these leaders who clearly (to Subba Rao) qualify for the curse of Matthew 18:6.

A. F. Thyagaraju seems to have grasped the attitude of Christians which Subba Rao quite rightly reacted against:

When Christians first hear of Subba Rao they approach him very hopefully and joyfully. They say to themselves that here is a worthy prize, a feather in their cap, a trophy in their collection, a great name to be added to their nominal role. (1971:7)

Since Subba Rao's attacks on Christians and the church appear rather prominently in his songs, this point will be discussed further in chapters five and six. It should be noted here, though, that even the friends of Subba Rao have little good to say about these critical publications. The best that can be said is that they are of a "rather rough type", using Baago's words. (1968:9) R. C. Das is less tactful but more to the point when he says "Bro. Rao's remarks are too sweeping...abusive and derisive. Ordinary decency would refrain from using such language." (Richard 1995:158)¹¹ Three letters that Subba Rao wrote to C. D. Airan are the only positive teaching that was published. (Rao 1965)¹²

"Christians think that they have nothing to learn from me, but everything to teach me", lamented Subba Rao. (Airan 1965:89) In time the antagonism between Subba Rao and the church eased, Baago referring to the state of affairs in 1967 as resembling "an undeclared cease-fire." (1968:10) At least some Christians became ardent supporters of Subba Rao, not least C. D. Airan himself. The Rev. G. Devasahayam, then president of the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church, even wrote a highly appreciative foreword for Airan's semi-biographical study of Subba Rao. (Airan 1965:20-21) At least occasionally Subba Rao preached in churches.¹³ By 1972, in the foreword to the second edition of *Retreat, Padri!*, Subba Rao could write that

The first edition was couched in language commensurate with the unrelenting attitude of the Christian religionists and padres towards me, and my own antipathy for them and their ill-conceived religious routine and belief of years long past. Strong words were needed then, to express my uncompromising feelings in the early days of my ministry for my Gurudev, Jesus Christ. The feelings are still inherent in me, but my voice has been mellowed by the open mind of my listeners....I now find a rational change in the attitude of Christian people and padres towards me and the

bhaktas outside the church....There is much room for mutual respect and good understanding in the points of view that lead to the Gurudev. (Rao 1972: 5-6)¹⁴

Public Ministry

Already by 1958 Subba Rao was conducting healing meetings in Hyderabad (his style of ministry will be discussed below). (Rao 1958:ii, v) When he retired from his teaching service he became free to travel more widely for such ministry.¹⁵ By 1963 regular meetings were being held in Vijayawada (at a devotee's home) on Sundays, with meetings in Munipalle on Saturdays (previously Munipalle meetings were held on Sundays). The extent of Subba Rao's ministry is hard to determine, but he told Kaj Baago that in the previous ten years he had had contact with 2 to 3 lakhs (hundred thousands) of people. Baago seemed to consider this a valid estimate. (1968:11) Subba Rao also made two trips abroad, the Germany and Austria in 1970 or 1971, and to the United States some years later.¹⁶

Subba Rao remained a faithful devotee and servant of Christ within the Hindu community until his death on May 9, 1981. Disagreements with Christians were never fully resolved. A small memorial shrine was built behind the prayer hall in Munipalle and flowers are placed there daily on Subba Rao's grave. Statues and pictures of Subba Rao are present but there is not the slightest hint of any worship being offered towards him.

There remain numerous devotees of Christ who were influenced by Subba Rao. It is claimed that about 20 groups are meeting in various places, mostly in Andhra Pradesh. On the anniversary of Subba Rao's death there is a gathering in Munipalle, and at Christmas a sizable function is held in Vijayawada, where some disciples led by Mr. V. Kesava Rao Chowdary have organized a legally registered society and built a prayer hall.

These disciples of Christ, following Subba Rao, hold as a fundamental tenet of faith that caste is inconsequential. But the practical fact of the matter is that this ongoing Subba Rao *sampradaya* is very strongly a Kamma caste movement. The Subba Rao *sampradaya* is not an endogamous group, as marriages are arranged (generally on caste lines) outside the fellowship.¹⁷ People are still turning to Jesus Christ through the ongoing ministry of the disciples of Subba Rao, but clearly the dynamic force of the movement could not survive Subba Rao's demise.

There are three quite distinct aspects of the ministry of K. Subba Rao, and each needs to be considered carefully. The primary work which gained him fame was his healing ministry, but along with this there developed a *bhakti* movement based largely on the singing of songs written by Subba Rao himself. Finally, in the songs and in discourses Subba Rao outlined a rudimentary philosophy that continues to be highly esteemed among his followers.¹⁸

Healing

It was healing that first brought Subba Rao to public attention. This is what drew his disciples and seems to be what held them as well. It is striking indeed that in the songs which are the focus of this study there is no mention of healing, but in fact quite the opposite. The disdain for the body often seen in the songs will be discussed later, and will need to be interpreted in light of this emphasis on bodily healing that marks Subba Rao's public ministry.

Healing power was considered clear and irrefutable evidence that Christ was present with and in Subba Rao. (Baago 1968:8) Baago and Airan describe the healing meetings of Subba Rao, and a similar pattern continues in meetings today. A hall named Prabhuniketan had been constructed next to Subba Rao's house in Munipalle for holding the meetings.¹⁹ Initially there was a time of singing, Subba Rao himself leading the singing of his own compositions while playing the tambura.²⁰ At least occasionally there were New Testament readings (never Old Testament) between the songs.²¹ Baago saw a man randomly open a New Testament and read what he saw, followed by general discussion of the meaning of the passage (Baago 1976:11). There was and is no preaching as such, at least according to traditional Christian understanding.²²

The second part of the meeting began and ended with the singing of a "Holy, Holy, Holy" chorus which is popular among the Christians of Andhra Pradesh (Baago 1976:12).²³ Those who desired prayer were especially directed to focus on a cross with a painted figure of Jesus on it. This was on an altar decorated with garlands and flowers, with incense burning. As Subba Rao laid hands on peoples' foreheads and invoked the name of Jesus, many

collapsed in a faint.²⁴ Often they were revived by Subba Rao sprinkling some water over them. Both Baago and Airan experienced people fainting with their own involvement when following instructions from Subba Rao in this setting.²⁵

All of the sick who came to Subba Rao were not healed, but many were. The testimonies of Baago and of a medical doctor named Harding, among others, seem to put the veracity of the healings beyond dispute.²⁶ Baago suggests a psychological explanation for many of the healings, pointing out that in most cases the diseases "definitely fall within the category of the so-called psychosomatic diseases or purely mental disorders" (1968:7). Some healings were gradual rather than sudden. Subba Rao cast out evil spirits and was best known for healing those bitten by cobras. His wife also had healing powers and he claimed to not undertake exorcisms without her presence.²⁷

Little information is available about the larger meetings held in other cities and towns. Baago records that these meetings generally lasted 4 or 5 days and large crowds at times came. (1968:11) He also reports an incident where Subba Rao once slipped away secretly in the middle of the night from an overwhelming audience in Hyderabad after many hours of ministry. (1968:8)

A considerable network of people clearly appreciated Subba Rao and his ministry and the Lord Christ whom he served. There was no organizational aspect to this network, however. Subba Rao gave pictures of Christ and incense and water or oil which he had blessed to people who came to him, it seems as a regular procedure. (Airan 1963a:9f) This seems the only approach in the direction of building an ongoing relationship. The lack of any organization clearly appealed to a number of those who appreciated Subba Rao.²⁸ There are also testimonies to the lack of monetary motives in Subba Rao, who would accept no gifts from those he helped, and to the lack of pretension and ostentation.²⁹

Paranormal Experiences

There are also quite a number of testimonies to paranormal experiences that did not involve actual healing. Airan experienced healing, but also this other type experience. He wrote,

Mr. Subba Rao took me inside and made me stand a few paces away from the altar. On his suggestion I looked at the face of Christ on the Cross, then shut my eyes and kept whispering "Jesus". Mr. Subba Rao stood aside. I then perceived an outline of Christ in extreme brilliancy, or effulgence, and a strange feeling crept over me. Against my will I felt myself moving forward and I was about to fall; somebody held me. Opening my eyes I found Mr. Subba Rao holding me from falling on the altar. (1963a: 8)³⁰

Similar experiences are referred to by others. Dr. Raja Savarirayan of the Christukula Ashram in Tirupattur wrote, "I experienced a power of an unexplicable (*sic*) nature as he blessed me before the cross and the cross appeared to me as a vision." (Collections n.d.(b):9, a longer version of Airan 1965:138) Another wrote that

I saw some kind of fire. I could not comprehend what it was all (*sic*). It was something beyond the realm of my normal intellect or experience. That night I saw figures of the cross moving all around me. I realised that there was much that I did not know. (Chowdary 1962:46)

The ministry of Subba Rao was based on such manifestations of power and not on teaching and preaching. As already noted, there is no reference to healing in the songs, nor do these other paranormal phenomena appear (excepting the song about his initial vision of Christ). But the songs and the healing are explicitly Christocentric, so it is no surprise that the work of Subba Rao led to the development of a Christ-*bhakti sampradaya*, the movement that continues on two decades after the death of Subba Rao.

Christ *bhakti*

The followers of Subba Rao talk about *bhakti* to Christ, and no one present at their meetings can miss their obvious devotion to the person of Christ, so reference to a Christ-*bhakti sampradaya* originating from Subba Rao would seem a non-problematic description. Subba Rao himself pointed people to the Christ of the cross and burned incense and offered flowers before a large crucifix. Yet it must be noted that he did not actually *teach* a Christ *bhakti*; if anything, he denied in words what he built up in practice. In his teaching he seemed to consistently relegate the worship of Christ to the emptiness of religion; our only duty is the imitation of Christ.

These incongruous disparities related to healing and *bhakti* will be reflected on below as the teaching in the songs of Subba Rao is discussed. For now, it will be concluded that the work of Subba Rao clearly stands in line with the folk or popular religious traditions of India. Subba Rao was a guru figure, and is still today referred to as “guruji” by his followers.³¹

An exact definition of Subba Rao’s place in folk religious traditions is a contentious subject. It is certainly possible to consider him in the tradition of folk religion of the Christian variety. He is, after all, directly related in a sense with Jeevaratnam, and folk Christian traditions are very strong in central Andhra Pradesh. But there are strong discontinuities with Christian folk traditions, most clearly to be seen in the discussion of Subba Rao’s teaching which follows. Since Subba Rao himself rejected the Christian religion and his followers are professedly not Christians, it seems best to accept Subba Rao as a Hindu folk religionist. But such labels are of less interest and importance than understanding and drawing lessons from Subba Rao’s life and teaching.

5. The Songs of Subba Rao

K. Subba Rao wrote 34 songs that remain central to the life of his followers. A few booklets of his teachings have been published at times, but none are in print at the current time and always the songs were the primary vehicle by which he taught.

Many hermeneutical questions arise when reading through the songs of Subba Rao.¹ There seem to be numerous internal tensions in the message conveyed. There are also clear tensions between the teachings of the songs and the practices of his life and ministry. The hermeneutical approach adopted here seeks to be holistic, refusing to favor one strand of teaching or practice to the neglect of others. This involves the accepting of paradox and perhaps even contradiction at points.

There are numerous ways that a study of the songs could be attempted. A full commentary is beyond the scope of this dissertation. A summary of major themes might also become quite extensive, and runs the danger of imposing a system where none seems to exist. The approach to be taken here is a detailed analysis of a single song. It is the first of the songs that Subba Rao wrote and stands first in the book of his songs. In this first song all the main themes of the songs appear, and many references to other songs and his other writings will be included in the detailed analysis of this one song.

Since the context of the song is clear from the first stanza, the detailed exposition will begin without any further background discussion.

**1. In the middle of the night you wake me up from deep sleep
And show me your way; who are you?
What makes you seek this utter sinner (*papi*)?
Also, how did you open the fast closed door?**

The reference to the vision of Christ that changed Subba Rao's life is apparent. At this point in the song Christ is not mentioned, but in the context in which the songs are sung there would be no missing the fact that this is a vision of Christ.

It could hardly be over-emphasized that Christ-centeredness is the major theme of the songs and life and work of K. Subba Rao.² In a letter of March 5, 1965, to C. D. Airan Subba Rao wrote that

The very name of JESUS inspires me. The moment I hear that name, the moment I see Jesus on the cross, I am overwhelmed with something I can't describe. I can no more live without this good friend and perfect guru of mine, without this grand minister that the world ever saw (*sic*). He is everything to me. I need nothing more....He is quite sufficient for me. Most wonderful man that died so that I too can learn how to die and live. I am mad in love for Him. My madness for Him won't allow anything else into my head. For Him I live, and for Him I die. That is my religion – That is my baptism – That is my philosophy – That is my heaven – That is my everything. I need nothing more. (Airan 1965:99)

The appearance of Christ is clearly supernatural, as indicated by reference to a “fast closed door.” In the context of the full body of the songs this is a rather unusual reference. Christ as a transcendent being is often assumed through the songs, but there is a stronger and explicit emphasis on Christ as immanent, and particularly immanent in human beings. This topic will be discussed further below, particularly in discussing stanza six.

Subba Rao acknowledges himself as a sinner. There is little in this first stanza to suggest what Subba Rao would mean by this self-designation, so this point will be picked up in considering stanza three below.

Christ has come to show “the way.” This introduces another of the central themes of the songs of Subba Rao. As already suggested, the songs contain many references to Christ as immanent as well as indications of the transcendence of Christ, and so an effort to develop the Christology of Subba Rao needs to be undertaken. But Subba Rao was neither a theologian nor a philosopher, and throughout the songs there is a practical emphasis on following the way of Christ.³

**2. You call me by name as though you know me;
Do you know me? Have you seen me before?
Tell me if you and I were one sometime long ago -
Now my heart (*hridaya*) is overwhelmed with your presence.**

Whether the reference to Christ calling Subba Rao by name should be taken literally is open to question. It is certainly not unreasonable to interpret this as a poetic device rather than a

statement of history. But Airan suggests that his visionary experience included seeing a light and hearing his name: "...one night he beheld a dazzling light in his closed room, and heard a voice calling out his name." (Airan 1965: 24) So perhaps a literal interpretation is to be preferred.

This is an overwhelming and confusing experience, and in expressing his perplexity there is the first hint of the Advaitic flavor that runs throughout these songs. Subba Rao wonders if once long ago he might have been in some way one with this speaker appearing in his vision. Since this is little more than a hint at an Advaitic idea this topic will be developed below. There is room to question if there might be an allusion to *punarjanma*, rebirth in various bodies, here also. There is conflicting testimony regarding Subba Rao's stance on this matter.⁴

3. Do you know that I am an utter sinner (*parama papi*) and stained (*kalusham*)?

**Maybe I knew you or maybe I did not know;
I don't know when I forgot and fell into the trap of *maya*;
I am enjoying worship (*koluva*) of the body (*kayam*) without knowing the
eternal truth (*nitya satya*).**

Subba Rao here makes a still stronger statement about his sinfulness and also indicates some of the areas where that sinfulness is seen. Two of the prominent themes of his songs are introduced here, and both relate more to an Advaitic worldview than to traditional Christian thought. Ignorance resulting in the trap of *maya* and slavery to the body are the points made here.

Maya is not a major theme in the songs of Subba Rao, although it does appear in a few other places.⁵ Ignorance, however, is certainly a major theme and is often pointed to as the source of problems.⁶ Often the ignorance is specifically related to centering on the body, another major theme running through many of the songs. Nearly every stanza of song 20 touches on ignorance and it is mostly related to a focus on the body. Song 22 is similar, although here it could be said that the body is secondary and the focus of the problem lies in hatred and passion.

It is tempting to interpret Subba Rao as holding a consistently Advaitic viewpoint on sin, but the data does not seem to support this even though this is indeed a major emphasis.

Another significant strand of teaching that militates against such an interpretation is the continual emphasis on inner cleansing, which is hinted at here in stanza three of this first song in the reference to the stain of sin. As song two stanza three says,

Outward cleansing is useless;
Only inner purity will give me heaven, he said.⁷

Similarly, the emphasis in song 29 stanza seven, where there is much more resonance still with traditional Christian thought in the emphasis on a change of nature:

Of all the ablutions, you say
Your way of ablution only gives heaven (*paramu*).
Why these foolish ablutions?
Only change of nature (*buddhi*) is cleansing (*shuddhi*).

A similar concern is suggested in a negative way in song three, where no solution is presented but the inadequacy of knowledge alone is clearly indicated in stanzas seven and eight:

All the eternal truth that you have shown me I know, Lord Jesus;
I know, but the muddle-headedness does not go away.

The path you have walked, I know it helps me to reach the goal;
I came to know but I cannot move my feet to go.

This emphasis on the need for an inner transformation resonates with the teaching of Jesus that you need to change the tree to get a different kind of fruit from a tree (Mt. 12:33).⁸ But despite all that Subba Rao says about sin and cleansing it is striking indeed to note the total omission of another major strand of biblical teaching, which is forgiveness. Subba Rao refers to Christ seeking forgiveness for those who killed him in song seven stanza six, but never refers to Christ forgiving his disciples.⁹

It looks very possible that this neglect of teaching on forgiveness of sin is an over-reaction against the “cheap grace” teachings that Subba Rao associates with religion and religious ritual. Clearly, a particular focus of his opposition to religious activity was that it was an excuse for not obeying the radical teachings of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ This line of thought is also important when considering the extremely high standard that Subba Rao set for discipleship

to Jesus, and the problems that follow from setting such a standard. His objections against cheap grace, salvation by baptism and religious activity as an excuse for not walking in the way of Christ are surely justified, and his call to radical obedience is certainly welcome; but commendation must be qualified if in fact this is an over-emphasis which leads to other problems (such as neglect of teaching on forgiveness). This theme will be picked up again at a later point; for now it is enough to say that the emphasis on inner cleansing and inner change are hardly in line with an Advaitic interpretative framework.

A final point against interpreting Subba Rao as holding a consistently Advaitic framework on sin is a point already mentioned, that following the way of Christ is essential. As song 29 stanza seven says,

Only to live in the way of the guru,
And to live for others,
That will take you heaven (*paramanagara*).
Religion (*matham*) and cleansings will not take you there.

Subba Rao draws creatively from both biblical and Hindu traditions in defining his life-changing encounter with Christ, and this dynamic eclecticism is a major mark of all his teaching.

**4. To look at you keenly and recognize you -
I forgot how to penetrate into the utter brightness.
My eyes forgot the skill to look through the light.
To learn this skill I did not get time in this deceptive (*maya*) life (*janma*).**

There is clear suggestion here of the glory of Christ, which is specifically referred to in song 25 stanza nine. Song 16 is clearly a song of praise to Christ, and particularly celebrates his incarnation in stanza two:

We give vain names to the nameless and formless light of love;
You came down and gave us the good name of Christ and the good form of the cross.
You came in love and left the heavenly abode (*paramu*)
To come to the earth (*bhuvi*);
Therefore, Gurudev, we salute you.

This traditional Christian theology and worship of Christ is central to every service of the

Subba Rao *sampradaya*, as they sing the traditional Christian “Holy, Holy, Holy” song.¹¹
Devotion to Christ is central not only in such songs but in burning incense and offering flowers before the crucifix.¹²

It is at this point that striking tensions exist between the songs and the practice of Subba Rao. A major theme of the poems seems to be a total rejection of the worship of Christ. The *bhakti* that is so in evidence in practice is denied in song, as in song 28 stanza 3:

In my madness of devotion (*bhakti*) I worshiped (*bhajana*) you and thought the
worship of your feet (*padapuja*)
Was real love (*prema*); I vexed you, I wept, and I made you weep.
I worship (*bhajana*) you no longer, but live like you and follow you.

There are a number of strands to this rejection of the worship of Christ. One aspect of it is seen here, in the contrast between worship of Christ and living like Christ lived. Song 16 stanza six contrasts Christ with other gurus; others ask for worship at their feet, but Christ washes his disciples’ feet and teaches them about service. It does not seem difficult to reconcile this teaching with the practice of devotion to Christ; by reading these statements as hyperbole it is possible to see that the worship of Christ is acceptable (even necessary) as long as that is not an excuse for failing to obey his teaching.¹³

But there are also philosophical reasons given for why Christ should not be worshipped. This is clearly expressed in song 23 stanzas thirteen through seventeen:

I am no more in the illusion of “I” and “mine.”
Without me where are you, my Jesus?
Now I understand the mystery and the concealment (*maya* and *marma*), my beloved;
Then why the foolishness of worshipping (*koluvu*) you?

I forgot myself and I created you (in my place);
The forgetful has gone, my Jesus,
Truth (*telivi*) has dawned, my beloved;
I know now that I am the supreme soul (*paramatma*).

It is I who was born, and I who make things exist;
I have to worship (*puja*) myself, my Jesus;
That is the essence of your teaching, my beloved;
That is the sum total of your life.

I saw you and forgot myself;
In me I saw you, and I become both here and hereafter, my Jesus;
There is no more the bondage of sin (*papa*) and virtue (*punya*), my beloved.
There is no more bondage to the law (*dharmasastra*).

You became me and I became you;
How can I worship (*puja*) you any more, my Jesus?
How can you worship (*puja*) me, my beloved?
How can separation be between you and me any more.

This Advaitic strand of teaching in Subba Rao's thought creates the greatest interpretative challenge. This will be discussed more fully in considering stanzas five and six below, so the comments here are only to outline the broader perspective within which these comments must be interpreted. This theoretical rejection of the worship of Christ has to be considered in light of the practice of devotion, and particularly of *puja* (worship with flowers and incense and song), in Subba Rao's own life and in his ongoing *sampradaya*.

In the stanzas just quoted Subba Rao makes a radical association of himself with Christ, claiming even to be himself the supreme spirit and the creator of all things. Yet in practice the Subba Rao *sampradaya* offers worship to Christ without any indication of a similar honoring of Subba Rao. Still, due to this teaching in the songs, after establishing a friendly relationship with one of the esteemed elders of the Subba Rao *sampradaya*, with trepidation I asked about Subba Rao himself being a Christ figure. Sri N. Subba Rao was clearly offended by the impertinence of my question, and responded by merely strongly affirming "we know the difference of our Subba Raoji and Christ."¹⁴

**5. As I gather my heart (*manas*), and breaking all the fetters,
I keenly look at you. I feel somehow
That I have seen you sometime before as if in a dream;
Waking up from sleep I realized that it is you.**

Subba Rao and his followers have a strong sense of the majesty of Christ and place a strong emphasis on what is called in Christian theology the omnipresence of Christ. Stanza five of this powerful song shows how a person who turns to Christ feels like he or she is coming home. It is a new experience and yet it is the only real experience; surely this experience cannot be fully new, but must have always been there even if not clearly recognized.

Other comments related to this omnipresence of Christ can be seen in song 19 stanza four

and song 14 stanza five, where we are admonished to see Christ in other people and serve him by serving them. Song 21 in stanza 2 goes further still in referring to the image of Christ being present in all the forms of this world. In direct address to Christ in stanza five of song 25 Subba Rao says “You showed yourself to me clearly in every living being.”

In Western theology the immanence of Christ (which is how Western theology must speak of these statements from Subba Rao) has been tragically neglected. In recent decades, at least partially due to the dialogue that developed with Hinduism, there has been an attempt to redress this neglect with focus on “the cosmic Christ.” That Christ indwells and upholds all things is a clear teaching of the New Testament, as in Col. 1:16-17. While any separation between the historical Christ and the cosmic Christ will lead to confusion and error, a one-sided emphasis on the historical Christ to the neglect of biblical teaching on Christ as a cosmic person is equally problematic.

Subba Rao thus offers a fresh challenge to Western theology with his “cosmic Christology,” which perhaps can be described as an “Advaitic Christology.” This topic will be discussed more fully in the succeeding paragraphs in relation to the sixth stanza.

**6. As I looked at you I forgot myself,
And having forgotten self I remember to look at you.
The ignorance (*agnana*) of "I" and "mine" is no longer present;
I am freed (*mukti*) from my fetters (*bandham*) and now I can freely walk in
your steps.**

Subba Rao makes numerous daring statements about Christ and about human experience in Christ. The statements of this stanza again reflect an eclectic drawing from biblical and Advaitic traditions, and only begin to point towards the more extreme statements that appear in other songs. The suggestion here that people need to be freed from bondage resonates with biblical teaching. That self-centeredness needs to be transcended is also a fully biblical thought, but it seems that here Subba Rao means a transcending of the very concept of self. This seems to reflect an Advaitic rather than biblical perspective, yet it cannot be claimed that this is without any biblical precedent. The apostle Paul has union with Christ in a central place in his theology, and in Gal. 2:20 goes so far as to say that he no longer lives but rather Christ is living within him.¹⁵

A major theme of the Subba Rao songs is the divinity (or potential divinity; there is tension here) of human beings. Song 18 in stanza ten gives an exhortation to “forget the teaching that man and God differ.” This teaching is usually in a dualistic context where the body is denigrated but God is affirmed as the reality within the body. For example, song 19 stanza 3 says

To get rid of the illusion (*bhrama*) that my body is me is enough;
To see myself as God (*deva*) in the body (*tanu*) is good.¹⁷

At times it is specifically Christ who is seen as residing in all persons.¹⁶ More often there is an association of Christ with the individual, as in song 21 which has this refrain:

I forgot that you are but me, O Christ my *sadguru*,
And I left the eternal truth (*nitya satya*).¹⁸

But there is a tension in this song as stanza three refers to a painful separation from Christ and a searching after him. Perhaps this tension could be relieved by making a distinction between various types of union with Christ; metaphysical, moral, personal, etc. But this is not a distinction that is found in Subba Rao’s own teaching, so this line of thought will not be developed here.

There is further tension in that some songs clearly refer to individuals becoming God rather than being divine, as in song 31 stanza four. On this line note also song 29 stanza eighteen:

With a religious baptism (*baptism*)
You became a Christian;
Live like Jesus and thus
You become Christ; don’t you know this?¹⁹

Having recognized that there are tensions within the songs in this area of the unity of the individual with God or Christ, the lengths and depths to which Subba Rao was willing to go in making this identification need to be emphasized. Song 20 in stanza thirteen reads like one of the *mahavakyas* of the Advaitic tradition: “Your spirit (*atma*) is the eternal spirit (*paramatma*).”²⁰ Song 23 stanza fourteen is similar: “I know now that I am the supreme spirit (*paramatma*).” This song goes on to affirm in stanza eighteen in direct address to Jesus Christ that “you, me and the eternal spirit (*paramatma*) are one.”

It is in the last song where this emphasis is most striking. The refrain makes the point plainly: “My brother Jesus kindly taught me that I am all.” In the first stanza there is further claim for eternal existence. In the third stanza the status of creator of all is claimed, along with omnipresence and the profound Vedantic being-consciousness-bliss (*sacchidananda*). Yet even here this cannot be considered a pure and fully consistent embracing of an Advaitic framework. Note especially the closing line that following Christ is salvation.

Such statements and claims are jarring to the ears of a Western Christian. Yet it is very possible that here also Subba Rao is offering an important corrective to Western theology. The New Testament clearly affirms that those who are in Christ become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). This is not the place to attempt an explanation of that truth, neither is this a suggestion that Subba Rao’s statements are justifiable; rather this is a warning against too simplistically dismissing what is unfamiliar and exotic.

In concluding the discussion of the Advaitic element in this first song the exposition of stanza six has run to considerable length. Yet there is yet another point in stanza six that calls for careful analysis, and perhaps this is the most crucial point for a proper interpretation of K. Subba Rao. This sixth stanza closes with Subba Rao’s rather astonishing claim that as a result of his visionary confrontation with Christ he was now free from fetters and able to follow freely in the way of Christ.

This is not a singular claim, as the preceding discussion on becoming God or Christ is also suggestive in this direction. Song 33 is an extended claim to having received wondrous blessings from Christ the guru; stanza five says “with the compassion of my guru today I received eternal life” and stanza ten closes the song with the claim that “I myself have become Christ.” It was pointed out in discussing the first stanza that the imitation of Christ or the practical duty to obey Christ and follow his way is a central focus throughout the teachings of Subba Rao. Song 19 is all about this, as indicated in the refrain: “To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.” Each of the nine stanzas relate to this theme, and the ninth goes so far as to say “like you, if I become cross-Christ, it is good.”

One is tempted to dismiss the exhortation to imitate Christ even to the point of the cross as hyperbole, but this is also an emphasis in the prose writings of Subba Rao: “*Live like him*

Die like Him. That is the essence of all philosophies.” (Baago 1968:32; emphasis in the original, which is a Subba Rao letter to Airan.)

Renunciation is often highlighted as the key to following Christ and achieving salvation, as in song 14 stanza eleven: “Come as ones who renounce everything; that is the qualification to become a disciple.”²¹ He wrote to Airan that “You should and must renounce the world in word, thought and deed.” (Rao 1965:5) Baago found the emphasis on renunciation rather extreme, and questioned Subba Rao as to how it was possible to live in the world in complete renunciation. Subba Rao’s response was that “we may not be able to follow Christ, but that does not give us the right to alter his teaching.” (1968:23) To Airan he gave this exhortation: “for Truth’s sake, don’t cover up your inability to live like that, by some pretence called religion, worship, prayer, etc.” (Rao 1965:13) This seems a strange way to avoid a rather serious problem.

There is a striking song that profoundly suggests that Subba Rao struggled with this failure to attain all that he claimed in some of his high statements. Each of the 11 stanzas of song 25 begins with the wonder of the knowledge or deliverance that Christ brings, but ends with a failure to reach the standard. The refrain enigmatically refers all of this *karma*, and suggests that recognizing this is a key to full understanding

It seems clear that C. D. Airan also probed Subba Rao in this fascinating area of his life and teaching. Airan records this discussion with Subba Rao:

Even today, he says, he is not sure that he has conquered himself and achieved salvation. But he is positive that Christ’s Presence within him has finally and completely reconciled him to God. His conquest is absolute. God’s Kingdom within him is consolidated, he assured me. (1965:28)

This is a deeply biblical perspective, that salvation in one sense has been attained and yet in other ways is still not attained. Yet this perspective is never spelled out by Subba Rao and much of his teaching seems to reject this in the demand for total obedience and in the promise of present fulfillment of all that Christ promised.

- 7. Are you surely not Brother Christ
Whom once the cruel religious crooks fastened to the cross and killed?
Therefore I see now bleeding wounds in your feet and your hands
And your head is covered with flowing blood.**

Finally in this seventh stanza it is pointed out that this is a vision of Jesus Christ. The focus of the vision seems to be on Christ on the cross, and the blood that flowed from his wounds. This is the only reference to blood in the songs, but many of the crucifixes in use in the Subba Rao *sampradaya*, including the one that Subba Rao himself had used, are painted and there is certainly a noticeable emphasis on blood.

The cross is central to the devotion of the *bhaktas* of Christ in the Subba Rao *sampradaya*. Song 31 is all about the cross, and shows how love and salvation and peace are seen and experienced in the cross of Christ. Some of Subba Rao's teaching on the cross resonates with traditional Christian emphases, as this line in song two stanza four:

Only the divine sacrifice (*yagya*) made on the cross
Is the way (*marga*) and the truth (*satya*) leading to eternal life (*nitya jivan*).

But in traditional Christian thought the cross is the place of forgiveness, and it has already been noted that this is not part of Subba Rao's teaching. Rather his emphasis is on the cross as an example of the conquest of self and living for others. As Subba Rao asks,

Don't you know that whosoever sacrifices his body and all his concerns for the sake of his soul shall be the brother of Christ – the child of God, and it is just to preach this practically on the cross that He came down to this world? (Rao 1972:36)

This is again the theme of living in radical obedience and following in the way of Christ.

- 8. I heard that you are a god (*deva*) of a particular religion (*matham*);
I saw many churches they have built for you.
I heard that many worship (*koluva*) you there,
But not receiving their worship you come here to me at my house.**

Subba Rao refers here to the still common Hindu perception that Jesus Christ is a god who is relevant only for the followers of the Christian religion. As such there is no reason for Hindus or peoples of other faiths to pay any serious attention to him. Subba Rao profoundly suggests that in coming to him in a vision Christ had clearly rejected the way of the

Christian religion and the worship of the Christian churches.

There is a strong anti-Christian theme running throughout the songs of Subba Rao. Most striking in this regard is song 29, directly addressed to Christians as the refrain indicates:

O Christian, rise and come forward to us the outsiders;
Show the essence of Christ by your life.

There are 23 stanzas all directed at various problems that Subba Rao has with Christians and Christianity and the church. Song 30 is also noteworthy as here Subba Rao speaks as a Christian making excuses and offering justifications for the silliness and failure of Christianity. It includes a specific reference to Pentecostal Christianity in the sixth stanza, where the cynical tone of the whole is well illustrated:

Sometimes I cried and made mad utterings and called them tongues.
I cried loudly and said that “the Spirit has come!”
And ruined the slumber of all those around.

Songs six, nine and ten are also against Christianity and the church; song eleven is also, but in a different way that will be discussed below under stanza 10. In terms of sheer volume it might be suggested that the dominant theme of the songs of Subba Rao is this mocking of Christianity.

9. Those who killed you in the name of religion (*matham*):
Are those very people changing you into a religious (*mathamu*) commodity?
Since you cannot tolerate those who put you up for sale
In the market called religion (*matham*), you came to me, to abide with me, a
guileless (*pathitha*) atheist (*nastika*).

Subba Rao often makes broad attacks on religion as a whole, although in specific references it is usually clear that he is attacking Christianity.²² Most of his attacks against Christianity can easily be applied over to abuses in popular Hindu (and other) religious practice as well, and twice he quite specifically refers to Hindu issues. In song 12 stanza three he comments on futility in seeking to follow the Hindu scriptures:

Even in contact with the Shastras and Vedas I found it difficult to progress;
Like a deceived insect I wandered the world and wept.

In song 21 stanza nine the objection is to the ways of popular Hinduism:

I had approached many great gurus, O Christ my *sadguru*,
And I heard all mystic mantras.
By visiting the masters and learning all mysteries
My head became numb, but I gained nothing.²³

A major focus of the attack on religion in general and on Christianity in particular is against religious rituals.²⁴ This introduces another of the striking paradoxes of Subba Rao's life and thought, since he clearly initiated a ritualism of his own that is still faithfully followed by his disciples.

Another striking paradox lies in the attacks on prayer. Subba Rao clearly prayed to Christ and yet one of his published letters is entitled "Don't Pray" (1965) and in the songs there are often rebukes addressed at the practice of prayer. In some cases, as in song 24 stanza four, it seems clear that he is dealing with an abuse:

Your earthly nature
You attributed to him;
And then begging from him,
You thought was devotion.

But in his letter to Airan there are many superlatives and the condemnation of prayer seems to go beyond just selfish and ritualistic prayer. "Ceremonies are useless. They are harmful. They mislead. Prayer and worship are the worst forms of ceremonial." (Rao 1965:9) Subba Rao offers this definition of what he considers to be valid prayer: "Prayer is practical living like Christ." (Rao 1965:10; as originally published the entire statement is in italics.) This is again the great theme of following the way of Christ, but there is massive tension between such an emphasis on this point while in fact praying for the healing of thousands of individuals. Perhaps this is again hyperbole, but perhaps also a reaction that has gone a bit too far into over-emphasis.

Of all the rituals the one most attacked is baptism. This is clear at a number of points in the songs, like here in stanza three of song nine:

They buzz about like a swarm of biting flies;
"Baptism! Baptism!" is their cry.

Song 29 stanza fifteen makes a point that comes in the prose writings as well:

If mere water gives salvation
It is waste of the life which our guru lived.
We could dip in all sorts of water tanks
At a message even by a crow from heaven.²⁵

Subba Rao definitely see corruption in the whole development and propagation of the Christian religion, and warns Christian ministers with the words of Jesus that it would be better to be drowned in the sea with a millstone around your neck than to cause one of the little ones of Christ to stumble.²⁶

**10. How did you break the brazen walls of religion's (*matham*) fort?
Didn't the watching "belly-servers" detect you?
What troubles you must have taken walking a forbidden path,
Because your feet are swollen, and to see them my heart (*gunde*) breaks.**

Subba Rao suggests here that Christ is imprisoned in religion, a very insightful analogy. He questions how Christ managed to break out to come to him. This theme appears a number of other times in the songs, particularly song 11 which is all about the jail of religion. The ninth stanza, in the final exhortation of the song, says:

Release from fetters the divine guru who is in prison;
And follow his footsteps without ceasing.

Presumably the way to release Christ from the jail of religion is by abandoning religion yourself and following in his footsteps. There is a yet more bold suggestion in this area in song 34, where Subba Rao pretty much claims that it is his special calling to free Jesus from the jail of religion. The fifth stanza contains this line:

I am freed from chains and I can free the guru from chains.

The sixth and final stanza then reads

To break down the guard and to ruin the castle of religion,
To release Jesus who is imprisoned in it,
I brought him out by hand and showed him to all;
So come, brothers, following (him) is salvation.

Subba Rao is deeply grieved, as this tenth stanza indicates, at seeing Christ so bound up in religion. And Christ himself is suffering as he tries to escape from religion. The virulent attacks that Subba Rao launched at Christianity in these songs and in some of his prose writings seem unwise and unjustifiable to many, but he defended the necessity of these attacks; as he wrote to Baago, “How can I tolerate falsehood about my Guru?” (Baago 1968:10)

**11. Do not weep and let your tears flow in torrents,
Do not despair that you have no shelter.
It is only a body (*kayam*) you need to complete the work you have started;
Here is my body (*kayam*), truly for you; it is not mine but yours to abide in.**

The completing of the work or the sufferings of Jesus is a theme that appears a few times in the songs.²⁷ Subba Rao surrenders his body to Christ so that Christ would continue to work through him. One might expect such a sentiment to lead to an esteem for the body, but as noted above this is not part of the theology of Subba Rao even though in his practice as a healer he does care about the body.

More striking still is the fact that this is the only place in the songs where there is a clear indication of such surrender to Christ.²⁸ A strong case could be made that Subba Rao was one of the most effective evangelists of the twentieth century among *savarna* Hindus, and yet a specifically evangelistic call to surrender to Christ is almost entirely lacking in his ministry. Song five stanza 13 carries a hint of this:

Stay on for a moment, do not depart from me.
I want to wash your lotus feet with my flowing tears,
I want to prostrate before you
And lay down as a sacrifice my valuable life.

Songs 8, 13, 14 and 18 can be considered primarily evangelistic songs, with a strong appeal to follow Christ. But the specific exhortation to surrender to Christ as is evident in this last stanza of song one is not present. This perhaps makes the appeal of Subba Rao all the more powerful. His whole life and thought is Christo-centric, and he does not need propagandistic appeals to bring Christ to the notice of people.

Subba Rao has nothing to do with conversion; so much so that he does not even need to repudiate it. Changing of names and culture is mocked at various points in the songs, and this is what conversion means in India today.²⁹ Yet in the spiritual understanding of conversion as it has been experienced and discussed by Christians through the ages, this song recounts a truly remarkable conversion experience. History will need to judge, but it is a supposition of this dissertation that this song, as it becomes more widely known, will take its place as a record of one of the most remarkable conversion stories in the history of the gospel of Christ.

6. Reflections on the Life and Thought of K. Subba Rao

Before attempting some concluding thoughts or interpretations of Subba Rao it will be instructive to briefly summarize the interpretations of four previous writers. All of these have been referred to before, but now the focus will be on their interpretative framework. Two of these celebrated what was distinctive in Subba Rao, and particularly focus on the Advaitic strands in his teaching. Two others are very deeply Christian in their outlook and terminology.

Baago

Kaj Baago's work has been most responsible for making Subba Rao known in the Christian world, due to Baago's prominent place in a leading Indian seminary.¹ He gives a very useful survey of Subba Rao's thought, centering on his rejection of religion. He insightfully points out the vast difference between the neo-Hindu claim that all religions lead to God and Subba Rao's rejection of all religions. (1968:16f)

Baago also points out that Subba Rao did not consider Christ one among many *avatâras*. (1968:17) A persuasive outline of Subba Rao's soteriology is presented; salvation is realization, "firstly in a realization that this world is *maya*, illusion; which does not mean that the world does not exist, but that it has no eternity and therefore no absolute reality." (Baago 1968:18) Secondly (in Baago's exposition), comes the realization of Advaita or non-dualism; "there is no subject and object, I and you, man and God; but that all is one." (Baago 1968:18) This kind of realization frees one from desires and from ourselves. This realization comes through both the teaching and the example of Christ.

Baago goes on to rightly emphasize Subba Rao's teaching on following Christ. Following Christ in contrast to praying to Christ is discussed, and Baago sees a false antithesis here as Subba Rao also clearly prays to Christ. The tension here is dismissed by suggesting that Subba Rao "is not contradicting himself. He wants Christians to realize that they have made prayer into an end in itself, whereas it should only be a means to become one with Christ."

(Baago 1968:21) Following Christ is helpfully analyzed as both renunciation and living for others.

Baago's problem with the various extreme statements Subba Rao makes about renunciation has already been noted. Subba Rao refused to attempt an explanation for how one can live in the world in total renunciation, so Baago provided his own explanation from the *nishkama karma* teaching of the Bhagavad Gita. (1968:23) He can quote a Subba Rao song on detachment which fits that teaching of the Gita perfectly; but surely it is very instructive indeed to note that this impressive solution to a tension in Subba Rao's thought and life is not offered by Subba Rao himself, but only by Baago.²

Baago helpfully defines another creative tension in Subba Rao's thought: "living for others' is at the same time a means to obtain realization (because we thereby gradually break down our selves) and a result of that realization, in which our selves disappear." (1968:24) The end of all is union with Christ, and Baago highlights the fact that there is no teaching on heaven and hell or second coming or judgment. (1968:25) This is perhaps a bit overstated, but it is true that this is not emphasized.³

Baago concludes that Subba Rao's teaching on Christ is very similar to Vivekananda's, and that is certainly true. But Subba Rao of course goes far beyond Vivekananda in his embracing of Christ as the only true guru, as Baago also points out. Baago suggests that in his emphasis on salvation as union with God and Christ and all humanity, as against Western Christian emphasis on immortality for the individual personality, Subba Rao is closer to the New Testament than Western Christianity is. But Baago is deeply troubled by the world-negating emphasis that runs through Subba Rao's thought. In the end he suggests that "the future of the Movement around Subba Rao depends a great deal on its ability to relate itself to India's national and social struggle." (1968:28)

Airan

The atmosphere of the writings of C. D. Airan is strikingly different from that of those who focus on the Advaitic strands in Subba Rao's teaching. In an account of Subba Rao's meetings in a church near Hyderabad Airan's account even has Subba Rao referring to Acts

4:12 by saying that “there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved.”
(Airen 1963:7)

Airan wrote his first account of Subba Rao after a visit to Munipalle in 1963. His larger account appeared some time later. He does not hide his aim in writing: “My only hope is that there would be a gracious impartial understanding between Mr. Subba Rao and the Christians.” (1965:19) So throughout his writing there is a Christian slant, as in this introductory interpretation:

When he [Subba Rao] refers to “Christianity” he really means “an institution of traditions”; by the word “Christians” he means “traditionists and nominal Churchmen”; by the label “Church” he means “a building used for propagating religious rivalries” – and not a fellowship of the devotees of Jesus Christ. (1965:10)

It would be hard to defend an accusation that Airan distorted, either intentionally or inadvertently, the teaching of Subba Rao. He outlines most of the Advaitic points and clearly was responsible for publishing letters that Subba Rao sent to him where that element is prominent. But Airan thinks and writes from a deeply Christian perspective, and it is from his pen that we get these words attributed to Subba Rao:

Lord Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of the heavenly Father and the only Saviour of all mankind....He was crucified and buried; but He resurrected and appeared alive. He is alive today and appears to those who seek Him with a pure heart and surrender themselves to Him. (Airan 1965:40-41)

Nobody can help believing from the ideal life, character and teachings of Jesus Christ, as depicted in the synoptic gospels, that He was not only the Son of God, but also the divine incarnation and manifestation of that supreme Deity who is the Lord of the universe and God of all nations. This is a fact, not mere surmise. (Airan 1965:41)

This is not the language of the songs of Subba Rao, but it certainly fits with the “Holy Holy Holy” song that was regularly sung. Note also Baago's comment that “Although he does not explicitly reject the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Christ, he detests the way in which the Church has made Jesus a God of worship.” (1968:17)

Thyagaraju

Prof. A. F. Thyagaraju, principle of Noble College in Machilipatnam, also presented a picture of Subba Rao from a deeply Christian perspective. He introduced his study with these lines: “It is very difficult for one man to understand another perfectly. My mind is so different from Sri Kalagara Subba Rao’s, that I feel thoroughly incompetent to comprehend him.” (1971:3) He then states his aim: “If my little book helps the reader to grasp his teaching more clearly, and incidentally helps to remove any misunderstandings that might exist, I shall be happy.” (1971:3)

After introducing Subba Rao and his contacts with him, Thyagaraju first addresses Christian criticisms of Subba Rao. His rejection of sacraments, the “Christian” label, Christianity and the church are all discussed. He puts an interesting slant on Subba Rao’s emphasis on “becoming Christ”: “Where the Christian would say ‘become like Christ,’ the Hindu would say ‘become Christ.’ Both mean the same; the difference is linguistic rather than philosophical.” (1971:13)

Thyagaraju then briefly notes some Hindu criticisms of Subba Rao. The exclusive focus on Christ is primary, but Subba Rao was uncompromising on this point.⁴ Thyagaraju also then suggests that the Hindu teaching on *maya* was a major problem as Subba Rao was a healer and *maya* theory undermines that work which Christ gave him to do. (1971:16) At this point Thyagaraju and Baago are quite opposite each other; but Thyagaraju has a closing qualification where he explains that “Subba Rao accepts the basic tenets of Hinduism in a modified form.” (1971:17)

Thyagaraju then gives a very brief four point summary of Subba Rao’s positive teaching, which is to forget what religion has taught, come to Christ, live like him and die like him, and become Christ. In the end his booklet has a sensitive evangelistic appeal. A year later Thyagaraju edited Subba Rao’s *Retreat, Padri!* and wrote a brief introduction. His introduction mostly explains baptism and religion and why Subba Rao rejects them. His basic perspective is clear in these comments: “I feel that Subba Rao’s emphasis is in the right place....We ‘Christians’ are living in a fool’s paradise if we imagine that the ‘Christian

Church' will ever become, in its present shape and with current methods, a vital force in India." (Rao 1972:12, 13)

Aleaz

A fourth interpreter to note briefly is K. P. Aleaz. Aleaz did not know Subba Rao and seems to have had no first hand acquaintance with the Subba Rao *sampradaya*. He states his purpose clearly: "this chapter is an attempt to reconstruct (*sic*) the theology of Subba Rao from his writings which are brief, fragmentary and poetic in character." (1996:45) His general interpretation of Subba Rao is also clearly stated: "even though it is not explicitly stated by Subba Rao, it is crystal clear that he has taken the Advaita Vedanta as the basis to explain his experience of Jesus and everything related to Him." (1996:47)

Aleaz thus presents a consistent system in Subba Rao's thought, at the cost of completely ignoring other strands of his teaching and also his work as a healer and as a founder of a Christ *bhakti sampradaya*. Aleaz himself is uncomfortable with the anti-body dualism which is so prominent in aspects of Subba Rao's thought, and suggests that

Perhaps Subba Rao's thought may have to be remolded from within the framework of authentic Sankarite thought in which case the *gnana* of the Self which we attain through self-sacrifice would be not so much the elimination of matter and body as the affirmation of the Self at each level and layer of them; as the affirmation of their essence as Self. (Aleaz 1996:56)

It is hard to resist concluding that these interpreters saw too much of what they were looking for when they studied Subba Rao. The danger of erring in this way is magnified by the presence of quite widely varying emphases in the life and thought of Subba Rao. The concluding analysis that follows seeks to keep a holistic picture which refuses to lean in any one particular direction. Some criticisms of Subba Rao will focus on his own internal tensions rather than imposing an outside agenda.

Contextualization

The first point to highlight in analyzing K. Subba Rao, and all the interpreters above are in agreement in this area, is that Subba Rao developed a truly contextual ministry. In a country

where the name of Christ is inevitably linked with foreign ways (to the dismay and disgust of Hindus) it is refreshing indeed to come across a servant of Christ who functioned acceptably within Hindu society.⁵

Many Christians struggled and even stumbled due to their inability to fit Subba Rao into any existing Christian framework. He was not a preacher or pastor, and not really an evangelist either. He had a prophetic role in his rebukes, but kept up a primary identity with the Hindu world that was inexplicable to many. But the fact that Subba Rao appeared more Hindu than Christian is a positive rather than negative point.⁶ He is in the tradition of the apostle Paul, who appeared more Gentile than Jewish (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23). In fact, in the complexity of communal religiosity in India it is this issue of basic identity that is definitive for contextualization or inculturation. However much the existing churches or their representatives adopt Hindu terms and forms, they cannot be truly contextual as long as they are understood to be outside the Hindu community and inside the Christian community.

Subba Rao carried out in practice what has been an interesting theoretical discussion in Indian Christian circles, especially at the Nasrapur Consultation in 1966. He completely rejected the pattern of the church as a separate sociological community, and demonstrated that new patterns of “church” are indeed viable.⁷ The central issue here is his rejection of sociological conversion:

We cannot comprehend why these false “Ambassadors” who are fully attached to the world, should insist on a ceremonial bath and the removal of *bottu* and *juttu* (mark on the forehead and growth of long hair) as the only way to salvation for us to follow as your disciples. We cannot understand how a change of our ancestral names can entitle us to heaven. How can these obstruct us in our passage to heaven? (Rao n.d.:4)

This is nothing unique, as it is merely what the Nasrapur Consultation had defined. But in Subba Rao it is practical reality and not mere theory. Subba Rao's successful rejection of the church as a separate sociological community which insists that minor cultural practices be adopted as a badge of membership, in favor of integration with existing society and maintenance of cultural identity and practices, is his most striking contribution to Indian theological and missiological debate. It is especially noteworthy that he remained very much a Kamma caste leader and drew his strongest following from that group, yet without any trace of caste-exclusiveness.

Healing

The key to Subba Rao's success in developing a viable alternate mode of discipleship to Christ lay undoubtedly in his healing ministry. This is not to denigrate the songs, which are clearly an important aspect of his contextual ministry. But it was healing that drew people, even if they were held by devotion to Christ in the atmosphere of *bhakti* at the healing meetings.

An analysis of Subba Rao's work as a healer, and drawing lessons from this, is complicated indeed. Clearly this focus resonates deeply, as not only Subba Rao but numerous other Pentecostal Christian healers have drawn significant followings based largely on physical healing ministries.⁸ All who are concerned for the spread of the gospel of Christ in India need to wrestle with this obvious fact.

Yet Subba Rao himself seemed ambivalent in this area; why the denigration of the body in his songs, when in the meetings where these songs were sung the second half (or more than half) was focused on bodily healing? The tirades against ritual are no doubt apt, but there was a ritual to the healing meeting that continues in practice to this day. Much of Subba Rao's teaching calls for a rejection of popular religiosity, yet he personally advocated the use of holy water and was involved in casting out demons.⁹ Perhaps in the long run the only way to reform popular religion and lead people beyond a focus on bodily concerns is by accommodation in exactly these areas.

Hindu Terminology

A full analysis of Subba Rao's theological contribution is far beyond what can be attempted here, but his pioneering use of Hindu terminologies and paradigms is striking and must receive some attention. To be balanced on this point it is necessary to take seriously Subba Rao's own cautions that he was not a philosopher or theologian. He was very much an existential thinker who reacted to the situations he faced, as will be noted further below.

At the very least Subba Rao must be commended for embracing the rich terminologies of classical Hinduism for expressing his faith and devotion to Christ. He was deeply impacted by a Hindu worldview, and so often spoke of Christ in ways that resonate deeply with Hindus. Note for example this summary of Christ's teaching:

The fundamental principles of Christ's teaching were purity, charity, self-denial, control of passions, renunciation, non attachment to wealth and earthly goods, faith, forgiveness, love for enemies and the realization of unity of the soul with the Creator. (Airan 1965:43)

This impressive summary is hard to fault in any way and resonates deeply with the Hindu mind. Subba Rao's emphasis on the indwelling Christ especially calls for commendation. A neglected point in much western theology, it must be central in Hindu contexts.

However, problems also abound in this area. Subba Rao rarely defines his terms, leaving his interpreters to wonder or guess at just what shades of meaning he is implying.¹⁰ Even on so fundamental an issue as Christ's immanent presence in all of creation, and his special presence in those who surrender to him, there is no definition and really not even a recognition in Subba Rao's work.¹¹ Likewise, the commendable use of terms like *maya*, *gnana* and *agnana*, *karma*, etc., must be qualified due to the lack of clear definition that so easily can lead to confusion or misunderstanding.

This lack of definition makes it difficult to commend Subba Rao as an Advaitic theologian.¹² Surely a better paradigm is to consider him a *bhakta* of Christ who explored the depths of the riches of Christ within his own context. Subba Rao gave few (if any) theological definitions, but probed various aspects of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8) in striking and profound ways. The numerous internal tensions in his thought are enough to show that sifting and further shaping are needed.

Yet this point raises important questions about just what contextual theology is, and just how it might be legitimately developed. The occasional writings of the apostle Paul have been the richest source of Christian theologizing down the ages, despite his offering few clear definitions and no systematic treatise comparable to developments in the later Christian centuries. Numerous early church fathers who contributed to the development of Christian orthodoxy were outside the standards later defined as orthodox.¹³

Perhaps contextual theologies can and will only develop after Subba Rao and others like him have probed and explored and experimented. Theology from theological colleges is often removed from life, so it can hardly be contextual. It is surely time to move definitively beyond the classical development of theology as a rationalistic enterprise.¹⁴ With such qualifications and insights, Subba Rao can certainly be affirmed as a pioneering theologian. A key question would be whether his disciples enshrine his words or creatively develop and refine and deepen his insights. Presently, the former course seems to be prevailing.

No Clear Foundation

Three areas of particular weakness in Subba Rao's life and thought should also be probed. The first is his lack of any clear theoretical foundation for his thought. Despite K. P. Aleaz's assertion that Subba Rao adopted an Advaitic framework, too often his terminologies and uses depart from that system.¹⁵ It would seem that Subba Rao's experiences (pre-visionary, the vision of Christ, and post surrender to Christ) too far determined his theological development. His practical disregard for the Bible, virulent opposition to what he knew of the church, and encouraging of paranormal experiences can all be traced to his own experiences and were not subject to any objective standard of judgment. More seriously, the lack of a foundation for his thinking allowed him to speak and think in rather contradictory ways depending on which world view (Advaitic or biblical) he took his terms from.

Esteeming of experience above scripture is of course a mark of the neo-Advaitic position developed by Vivekananda, as pointed out in chapter two in discussing Hindu perspectives on humanity and salvation. Subba Rao clearly shared this low view of scripture, as is evident at a number of points in his songs.¹⁶ Also clearly, even if only implicitly, he rejected the Bible as an authority for his thinking. He sought to defend this by a bungled reference to the Bible itself in song six stanza three:

The Book is a dense jungle;
What do you seek in there?
It is nothing but a fence to guard the earth-stained sinner.
The heavenly guru himself told that the letter kills;
Why don't you leave that deadening load and go forward?

"The letter kills" seems a reference to Paul's words in 2 Cor. 3:6, "The letter kills but the Spirit gives life". The heavenly guru (Christ) said nothing that clearly resembles this, although a number of times he said things that are nearly the opposite of the interpretation Subba Rao gives (cf. Jn. 6:63)!

This is not the only such confused reference to the Bible in Subba Rao's writings, and the magnitude of his errors is compounded by an astounding claim:

He himself does not need daily spiritual refreshment from the Scriptures, he believes, as its substance flows freely out of his mind whenever needed, though he may not be able to quote the chapter and verse. But his followers are different and he advises them to read the life of Christ and learn from the gospels. (Airan 1965:83)¹⁷

A good idea of what Subba Rao means by this is gathered from a reference in song seven stanza eight to love and sacrifice being the essence of the scriptures. In song 31 stanza one he suggests that the essence of all scriptures is seen in the cross. This rather simplistic reductionism has popular appeal but really amounts to not taking the teachings of various scriptures seriously enough. Subba Rao's own exclusive use of the New Testament speaks eloquently about his true view of the Old Testament. It is not only in broad statements, but also in details that Subba Rao's use of the Bible is suspect at best. In a letter to Airan he claimed that "when He [Christ] said: 'woman, sin no more', the woman could no longer sin." (Rao 1965: 6)¹⁸ These comments all reveal a rather loose approach to the Bible.

With the Bible not guiding (and at times not even informing) his thought Subba Rao wandered into some statements that are well beyond the parameters of traditional Western theology. Exhortations to worship our own spirit (song 20 stanza 13, song 23 stanza 15) are a clear example. Again at this point the teaching must be held in balance with practice, and there is nothing in practice in the Subba Rao *sampradaya* that reflects this teaching. I have already presented some measure of defense of Subba Rao in his teachings that challenge the parameters of Western theology, but it does seem there is room to criticize also.¹⁹ Subba Rao's basic refusal even to make an effort at clear and consistent thought and teaching is perhaps the underlying, deeper problem in this area.

Over Reaction

The issue of foundations for his thought must count as the most significant weakness in Subba Rao.²⁰ Second to this is his tendency to over react. Reactionary thinking will rarely be balanced and objective, and Subba Rao often seemed to be wildly reactionary. His criticism of baptism, for example, shows no balanced understanding and no effort to comprehend other viewpoints. His reaction against the church was similarly based on very limited exposure and experience, as pointed out by Airan:

His hostility towards certain formalities of church worship is based on the relatively sub-standard form of rural Christian witness and influence that have come under his notice most of his life in some Andhra districts. He make no claim, however, of having witnessed the brighter side of church worship elsewhere in India. (1965:13)²¹

He had a decided tendency to take a neglected truth and emphasize it to the point of making his point also into a falsehood. Some examples of this have already been pointed out in discussing song one, such as his reaction against “cheap grace”.

A further example is the emphasis on renunciation. Christ's teaching and life certainly involve renunciation, and this is a neglected truth in need of emphasis in this materialistic age. But Subba Rao often speaks of Christ in terms more suited to John the Baptist, ignoring the fact that Jesus was criticized for attending parties while John wandered the wilderness (cf. Mt. 11:18-19; etc.). Similarly, Subba Rao takes his anti-body rhetoric, itself at least somewhat defensible, to extremes. He calls the body "a leather puppet of pus and blood" (song 20 stanza four and song 27 stanza seven).²² Further, setting a high standard for discipleship to Christ is commendable, but refusing to recognize and account for the continued sins and weaknesses in a disciple (including himself) is intellectually and pastorally inept.

It seems clear that teaching based on reactions caused Subba Rao to expend too much energy on "Christian" matters. Ignoring the church would have been preferable to attacking it. It is possible that this was suggested to Subba Rao by Baago, who wrote that

Subba Rao still feels that he has to attack the Church because it does not preach the true Word of Christ. “How can I tolerate falsehood about my Guru?” he wrote in a letter to me recently. (Baago 1968:19)

Subba Rao's reaction against organized religion resulted in his own refusal to develop any organizational aspect to his movement. While there is a commendable side to this, there is also a problematic aspect. The Biblical picture of a shepherd caring for his sheep must not be ignored, and inevitably Subba Rao must have left some lambs defenseless against the wolves of temptation and false teaching due to his failure to develop supportive communities of disciples.

Subba Rao Himself

A final broad area that is problematic relates to Subba Rao's understanding of his own role. At times he seems to give himself a unique role, which is surely problematic but does not seem his true position. He does affirm a special role for himself, but who will debate that he was special figure? Was he a Christ? This is clearly a problematic distinction, even if the designation is opened up (potentially at least) to all others also. He was not a philosopher or theologian, yet taught using a great deal of philosophical terminology. He was not involved with any community of fellow believers, or with any group that could help guide his thought and teaching.

This isolation of Subba Rao from any community that might have assisted him in his ministry and teaching is perhaps the primary reason that other problems were unchecked and unresolved. The fault here, however, does not lie with Subba Rao himself. The obvious warmth with which he welcomed Baago, Airan, Thyagaraju, B. V. Subbamma and many other Christians, explodes any suggestion that he was exclusive or caste-ist in his approach to people and particularly to Christians. Rather the problem here lies with the church and Christians in India, who as whole were and are out of touch with Hindu contexts. If Subba Rao sought some small group that he could meaningfully relate to (he did go to church for some time), he found none.

Arguably, there was a significant role for Subba Rao to play in a larger community where people with other gifts analyzed ideas and practices and defined issues clearly. In mutual

submission with such a group Subba Rao could have contributed magnificently, both to the developing of the theology of the community and in drawing in new adherents. But such a community did not exist. Subba Rao was not the man to build it, so had to manage as best he could. Perhaps even such a community would not have shielded him from over reaction and error, but the fact that this possibility did not even exist must make our criticisms of Subba Rao more charitable than they might otherwise be. In the final analysis the more significant weaknesses seem to lie with Christianity in India rather than with K. Subba Rao.

Subba Rao is one of a number of striking individuals who called for and worked toward a truly Indian, even Hindu, expression of discipleship to Jesus Christ. The very existence of such people should be evidence enough of the need in this area. Those who desire to live and work in this direction can learn much from the problems and pitfalls, the successes and insights, evident in Subba Rao's life and ministry. As other communities of disciples of Christ develop within Hindu contexts they will no doubt look back on K. Subba Rao as one of the greatest of the forerunners to their own movements.

Appendix One: A Translation of the Songs of K. Subba Rao

Two previous collections of translations of the songs of Subba Rao have been made. (Airan (ed): 1964 and *Translation*) Both were partial and one does not seem to be extant. The one that is extant has been carefully compared with the original, and was clearly a loose translation that took many liberties with the text.

The translation that follows seeks to be true to the original, and sacrifices style in favor of such faithfulness. The basic translation work was done by Dr. P. Solomon Raj of Vijayawada. I thoroughly reviewed that work with assistance from Rev. James Elisha of Guntur. These religio-philosophical compositions draw on a wide range of terminologies, many of them derived from Sanskrit. In this translation the Telugu root word is indicated in brackets where an important religious or philosophical term is used; in some cases the original term (such as guru, *karma*, *dharma*, *maya*) is merely transliterated into the English text. Diacritical marks are not employed since most of the terms are easily recognized; guru is not even italicized but is treated as an English term.

Although the constant noting of original roots breaks the flow of the songs, it gives a feel for the way Subba Rao adopted and altered his terms. Care has been taken to use the exact designations for Christ that are in the original, an area where the previous translation particularly took many liberties. This translation prefers to err by breaking the text with too many indications of root words rather than leaving the reader to wonder what an original Telugu term may have been.

Subba Rao's songs are not stylish poetry; they are rather folk songs in an oral narrative style without any careful structure. (In a few cases where there is some noteworthy structure this is indicated by a footnote.) There is a rhythm to the songs, as would be expected, but this is violated regularly in order to convey the intended message. There is a great deal of alliteration running throughout; at points this is indicated in footnotes or by indicating the original terms, but there is no effort to translate the numerous alliterations that are the strongest poetic mark in these songs. At times it seems that the meaning is unclear due to the strong tendency to alliteration, and at times the philosophical references are also unclear.

No effort has been made to impose a clear meaning where the translators found ambiguity.

Song No. 1

1. In the middle of the night you wake me up from deep sleep
And show me your way; who are you?
What makes you seek this utter sinner (*papi*)?
Also, how did you open the fast closed door?
2. You call me by name as though you know me;
Do you know me? Have you seen me before?
Tell me if you and I were one sometime long ago -
Now my heart (*hridaya*) is overwhelmed with your presence.
3. Do you know that I am an utter sinner (*parama papi*) and stained (*kalusham*)?
Maybe I knew you or maybe I did not know;
I don't know when I forgot and fell into the trap of *maya*;
I am enjoying worship (*koluva*) of the body (*kayam*) without knowing the eternal truth (*nitya satya*).
4. To look at you keenly and recognize you -
I forgot how to penetrate into the utter brightness.
My eyes forgot the skill to look through the light.
To learn this skill I did not get time in this deceptive (*maya*) life (*janma*).
5. As I gather my heart (*manas*), and breaking all the fetters,
I keenly look at you. I feel somehow
That I have seen you sometime before as if in a dream;
Waking up from sleep I realized that it is you.
6. As I looked at you I forgot myself,
And having forgotten self I remember to look at you.
The ignorance (*ajnana*) of "I" and "mine" is no longer present;
I am freed (*mukti*) from my fetters (*bandham*) and now I can freely walk in your steps.
7. Are you surely not Brother Christ
Whom once the cruel religious (*mathamu*) crooks fastened to the cross and killed?
Therefore I see now bleeding wounds in your feet and your hands
And your head is covered with flowing blood.
8. I heard that you are a god (*deva*) of a particular religion (*matham*);
I saw many churches they have built for you.
I heard that many worship (*koluva*) you there,
But not receiving their worship you come here to me at my house.
9. Those who killed you in the name of religion (*matham*):
Are those very people changing you into a religious (*mathamu*) commodity?
Since you cannot tolerate those who put you up for sale
In the market called religion (*matham*), you came to me, to abide with me, a guileless (*pathitha*) atheist (*nastika*).

10. How did you break the brazen walls of religion's (*matham*) fort?
Didn't the watching "belly-servers"(1) detect you?
What troubles you must have taken walking an improper path,
Because your feet are swollen, and to see them my heart (*gunde*) breaks.
11. Do not weep and let your tears flow in torrents,
Do not despair that you have no shelter.
It is only a body (*kayam*) you need to complete the work you have started;
Here is my body (*kayam*), truly for you; it is not mine but yours to abide in.

Notes to song one

1. Subba Rao frequently refers to Christian ministers as servants of the belly, a phrase from the apostle Paul in Rom. 16:18.

Song No. 2(1)

Refrain:

My heavenly guru (*paramu guru*) called me to follow,
And having called he asked me to become a loving sage (*prema yogi*).

1. Wife and children are a three fold fetter;(2)
He called me to come, having conquered desire (*kama*) and anger (*krodhe*).
2. He asked me to renounce all cares;
That only he said his discipleship (*sishyatva*) would be.
3. Outward cleansing (*shuddhi*) is useless;
Only inner purity (*shuddhi*) will give me heaven (*paramu*), he said.
4. Only the divine sacrifice (*yajna*) made on the cross
Is the way (*marga*) and the truth (*satya*) leading to eternal life (*nitya jivan*).
5. There is no use for shadows on the curtain,
But he called me to seek the truth (*satya*) that is hidden behind the curtain.
6. Destroying ignorance (*ajnana*) is true knowledge (*sujnana*);
And that cannot be done by rituals (*karmakanda*), he said.
7. Leave the illusion (*bhrama*) of looking for heaven (*paramu*) elsewhere;
Leaving that illusion (*bhrama*), see heaven (*paramu*) within yourself.
8. My body (*deha*) is the temple of God (*devalaya*),
And to destroy (*nashambu*) the temple (*alaya*) is my own destruction (*nashambu*).
9. Reject all old thoughts (*purva vasana*), he said,
And do not be attached to religion (*matham*) and such things.

10. There are many traps (*bonu*) of religion (*matham*), he said,
And one should discern (*parisilinchī*) and transcend (*dhati*) them to reach him.

Notes to song two

1. This song has a clear structure in the words “he said” appearing at the end of every line; the difficulty of translating this in a natural way caused us to maintain this structure in only a few of the lines.
2. For a *sannyasi*, the three fetters to renounce are wife, children and wealth.

Song No. 3

Refrain:

What do you want me to do, Lord (*prabhu*), where do I go without your help?

1. The goal is far away and my feet are caught up
In the mire of sin (*papa*) and I cannot move.
2. I long (*korke*) to see you to the joy of my eyes,
But there are layers of desire (*kama*) over my eyes and I cannot see.
3. I want to walk ahead in the path of detachment (*sangarahita*),
But cultural norms (*samskara*) hold me back and I cannot go.
4. I like to go and sit in quiet places,
But lovely voices enter my ears.
5. Somehow I wanted to take courage and proceed
But the demon (*pisachi*) of religion (*matham*) blocks the way and pesters me.
6. Even when I want to move ahead, my natural desires (*vasana*) linger with me;
Please take me away and carry me far from these natural desires (*vasana*).
7. All the eternal truth (*nitya satya*) that you have shown me I know, Lord Jesus;
I know, but the muddle-headedness does not go away.
8. The path you have walked, I know it helps me to reach the goal;
I came to know but I cannot move my feet to go.
9. I heard your loving (*prema*) call and saw the great (*goppa*) sacrifice (*bali*);
But the slowness of my heart (*atma*)(1) completely confused me.
10. Do not forget the fact that you are the divine guru (*divya guru*)
Who dispels the darkness and stops the encroaching shadows.

Notes to song three

1. *Nihalathwa* is a difficult word of uncertain meaning.

Song No. 4

Refrain:

In the path of life darkness in spreading;
O heavenly guru (*paramu guru*), Jesus, come and show the way.

1. My feet stumble and I feel increasingly tired;
Even if I pierce my eye(1) I cannot see the way.
2. While I was yet a sinner (*papi*) you called me with love (*prema*);
Can you not help me to transcend the darkness and reach the end?
3. The demon (*pisachi*) of lust (*kama*) tries to devour me
And the servants of their bellies are not able to help me.
4. All the nests I had built for myself have long been blown away;
They tease me and raise impediments.
5. The demon (*pisachi*) of religion (*matham*) is out to swallow me;
I have not yet crossed the ocean of *samsara*(2).
6. The influence (*vasana*) of the scriptures (*shastra*) is disturbing me;
But the desires (*vasana*) of the body (*deha*) are consuming me.
7. As I look back I see that every one disappeared;
All that I have gathered has vanished without a trace.
8. I look in all directions (*diku*) but I do not find a refuge (*diku*);
I realize that I cannot be my own protector (*diku*).
9. Who is this terrible image (*drishyam*) which I see,
The hook that grabs a water bucket, looking at me with a frown?(3)

Notes to song four

1. A Telugu idiom.
2. *Samsara* is earthly life or the world or mundane existence.
3. A rather odd idiom referring to hooks used in village India to retrieve buckets from a well.

Song No. 5

Refrain:

O Jesus! I cannot take one more step;
Guru Christ, I cannot live for another moment.

1. Looking at the mirages I thought it was water,
And with great hope (*asha*) I searched here and there.
But I found no water and my life became spent up;
Yet to turn around and go I forgot the way.

2. I gathered myself under the shade of a tree.
Looking at the beauty of nature,
I was entertaining empty dreams,
But the very tree itself devoured me suddenly.
3. I saw the early moonlight and gilded smiles
And danced in ecstasy, forgetting myself;
The guilt disappeared and the smiles melted away;
I became mad and lost the way.
4. The glimmering of the waves moved me,
I thought that my dreams would come true.
The waves died away and the dreams disappeared;
I got ruined between the dreams and the waves.
5. I was involved in physical exercises above the earth(1);
I have built and adored many castles in the air.
Can a stone become a gem even if one worships (*koluva*) it with devotion (*bhakti*)?
My life itself became null and void.
6. I blindly thought that this tinsel body (*deha*) is God (*deva*) himself,
And with great devotion (*bhakti*) I performed worship (*padapuja*). (2)
However much I did this, it was all for nothing;
If I cling to earthly (*matti*) feet (*pada*), what do they become but dust (*matti*)?
7. If I appear along with the mirage,
It is a hell (*naraka*) with me until my pot is filled. (3)
I can neither remain, nor can I search ahead;
All that I trusted has proven illusory (*bhrama*).
8. I dreamed to become a flower in your garland
And to become a sweet note in your song.
Of your lotus feet I wish to be a petal.
These are all dreams, yet my life itself became null and void.
9. They threw me aside from your lotus feet,
They broke all the strings of my heart (*hridaya*);
They commanded me not to weep;
The world (*loka*) does not know my bitter agony.
10. Life which is broken still should lack nothing!
Pierced eyes of the heart (*gunde*) should see nothing!
Inner tears should not burst out!
My life itself became mesmerized by this world (*loka*).

11. I am expected not to weep or sigh in agony;
I am not allowed even to curve my lip in pain.
Those focused (*tapana*) on love (*prema*) can be terrible (*ghora*) sinners (*papi*) in this world (*loka*),
Even nectar (*amrit*) can become poison (*vish*); this is the way of cruel fate (*karma*).
12. Just once more in mercy (*karuna*) look at me;
Cast out the darkness with a smile.
You who promised to be with us to the ends of time,
Why do you not lead me in your mercy (*karuna*)?
13. Stay on for a moment, do not depart from me.
I want to wash your lotus feet with my flowing tears,
I want to prostrate before you
And lay down as a sacrifice (*bali*) my valuable (*viluva*) life (*prani*).

Notes to song five

1. “Leave the earth and do exercises” is a Telugu saying which means attempting the impossible.
2. *Padapuja* is literally worship of the feet, a standard Hindu form indicating how lowly the worshipper is before the Lord.
3. Filling a pot from a mirage is a common Telugu expression.

Song No. 6

Refrain:

O, wandering traveler, Jesus has shown you the way.

1. Even piercing your eye you cannot find the way
In this wilderness of religion (*matham*).
Even if you search in all directions you cannot find the straight way.
However long you search for it, you will not find a trace of the way.
Only one showed the way; here is the way, come back.
2. Unless you deny yourself, unless you ignore the earthly (*matti*) body (*deha*);
Unless the light (*gyoti*) of love (*prema*) is glowing,
However much you exercise and strain, however many immersions you go through,
There is no heaven (*paramu*) which the padre(1) proclaims.
Look inwards and you will see the heaven (*paramu*) which Jesus has shown.
3. The Book (*grantham*) is a dense jungle;
What do you seek in there?
It is nothing but a fence to guard the earth-stained (*matti antina*) sinner (*papi*).
The heavenly guru (*paramu guru*) himself told that the letter kills;
Why don't you leave that deadening load and go forward?

4. There is no use to waste time with empty philosophy (*vedanta*) and debate.
Forget the dust and forget self;
Forget all that belongs to the earth (*matti*).
Leave the church and leave debate(2); know that God (*deva*) is but love (*prema*);
Go this straight way; go straight ahead in it.
5. Leave religion (*matham*), leave words (*mata*); leave the waste of iota and dot;
Forget the madness of tickets (to heaven);
Forget the mad dance of priestly robes;
Forget also the crooked way which the belly-servers prescribe;
Here is the way of love (*prema*) and sacrifice (*tyaga*); go fast in it.

Notes to song six

1. Father; Christian pastor or priest.
2. There is a pun here as the Telugu word for debate is *charcha*, and *church* is also used in the Telugu as a loan word from English.

Song No. 7

Refrain:

Seek today the *sadguru*(1);
Without the guru we cannot recognize (*guruthu*) the way.

1. Seek today the *sadguru*;
Without the guru we cannot recognize (*guruthu*) the way.
The one who knows the way and the one who walked the way,
The one who scattered darkness from the way,
The one who revealed the end of the way, even Christ the son of Mary,
Seek today the *sadguru*;
Without the guru we cannot recognize (*guruthu*) the way.
2. Do not say “tomorrow”;
Remember that today's and
Tomorrows are not in our hands.
In a single blinking of the eyelid everything disappears.
Sri Jesus Christ the guru, who asked us to follow him today and not look back,
Seek today the *sadguru*;
Without the guru we cannot recognize (*guruthu*) the way.
3. Come and know that the body (*tanuvu*) is the temple (*gudi*),
And know that you yourself
Who are in the body (*tanuvu*) have God-hood (*daivamu*).
Come to know that the body (*tanuvu*) is not you,
Christ who said that for one who considers his body (*tanuvu*) as a temple (*gudi*), Christ
the God-hood (*daivamu*) within that body (*tanuvu*),
Seek today the *sadguru*;
Without the guru we cannot recognize (*guruthu*) the way.

4. Come and leave the “I” and “mine” concept;
The “I” and “mine” cut off and hang you.
He who fights and conquers the six enemies(2),
He who pulverizes the “I” and “mine” feeling,
To Christ who shows the fetterless path,
Seek today the *sadguru*;
Without the guru we cannot recognize (*guruthu*) the way.
5. Come, crossing the religion (*matham*) jungles;
If you get involved in the jungles of religion (*matham*) you cannot find the way.
Follow Christ, who crossed the jungles of religion (*matham*)
And who over-ruled all ritualism (*karmakanda*).
Christ who lived only for others,
Seek today the *sadguru*;
Without the guru we cannot recognize (*guruthu*) the way.
6. Come with a feeling of equality (one-ness feeling; *samabhava*);
Only a feeling of equality (*samabhava*) keeps you on the way of truth (*satyapada*).
Christ who said all men and women are brothers and sisters,
And who saw a mother in the woman of Samaria,
Christ who pleaded for those enemies who wanted to kill him,
Seek today the *sadguru*;
Without the guru we cannot recognize (*guruthu*) the way.
7. Leave the false gurus(3)
And come join the true guru and follow him.
The false gurus will give you only outward cleansing (*shuddhi*),
And outward cleansing (*shuddhi*) does not give you heaven (*paramu*).
O blind man, internal cleansing (*loshuddhi*) is the total cleansing (*anthashuddhi*),
Seek today the *sadguru*;
Without the guru we cannot recognize (*guruthu*) the way.
8. Having known the essence (*saram*) of the scriptures (*shastra*), come;
Know that sacrificial love (*prema tyaga*) is the essence (*saram*) of the scriptures (*shastra*).
The one who knew the essence (*saram*) of the scriptures (*shastra*) and who followed the way of sacrificial love (*prema tyaga*),
The one who has left the feeling of differences (*bedhabhava*) and hatred (*dvesha*),
The God (*parameshu*) who dwells in the cave of the heart (*hridaya*),
Seek today the *sadguru*;
Without the guru we cannot recognize (*guruthu*) the way.

Notes to song seven

1. The true guru.
2. The six enemies refers to the six passions (*anshadgunas*) of the body; *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *mada* (lust), *matsara* (envy), *lobha* (greed), and *ahamkara* (egotism).
3. *Badha* (trouble) guru is a false guru and *bodha* (teaching) guru is the true guru; this is a well-known pun in Telugu.

Song No. 8(1)

Refrain:

A boat with its anchor down, how does it move forward even if the oars are moving?
It is only a tiresome toil, but nothing else; you gain nothing.

1. Before the anchor is lifted see that the darkness does not swallow it.
What does it profit to close the hole after the fox has run away?
2. Your boat is cast in the middle of the ocean,
However much you cry there is none to help you.
3. See over the horizon there is gathering darkness, O brother;
Behold the terrible storm comes quickly around.
4. In the swirling water your boat capsizes;
The endless oceans you cannot fathom.
5. Cut the anchor rope with the sword of renunciation (*nisvrhathva*),
Then the boat without fetters can proceed freely forward.
6. Wisdom (*jnana*) in place of ignorance (*ajnana*) and light in place of darkness
Are like raising up the anchor. This is the key (*mula*) *mantra* (secret) not to be forgotten.
7. Only when you raise up the anchor of religion (*matham*) the boat can move forward;
Say “Heavenly Guru (*paramu guru*)! Hail (*jai*) to Lord Jesus (*prabhu Yesu*)!” and push
the boat forward.

Notes to song eight

1. This song has rhyme in the refrain and at the end of lines in each of the stanzas, mostly developed from pronoun suffixes.

Song No. 9(1)

Refrain:

Lord (*prabhu*) have you not heard this strange teaching?
Have you not seen these belly-serving servants?

1. All that you have said and all that you have done
They broke and pulverized, they strangely changed it;
Painted it with color and changed its appearance,
And they called it religion (*matham*) and misnamed it as mission (*mishanu*).
Take this religion (*matham*), they said, and you will go to heaven (*paramu*); otherwise
you go to hell (*naraka*), they said.
O God (*deva*), if water can give us this gift (*varam*) why did you have to come?

2. Forgetting the spirit (*dehi*) they held onto the body (*deha*) and got caught in lustful (*kama*) ways;
They clip the sacred tuft of hair (*juttu*), wipe off our forehead marks (*bottu*), and change our clothes (*kattu*),
They immerse us in water, wipe away our old names and compose new names.
That, they say, is the way to salvation (*mukti*).
O God (*deva*), if a pig is immersed in the holy river (*Ganga*)
Does it become an elephant king?
3. Yonder is heaven (*paramu*) and there is a train to take you there;
We have the tickets for you to buy, otherwise you go to a terrible (*ghora*) hell (*naraka*);
So proclaim (the preachers); they go from street to street and wear deceptive garbs;
They swarm about like a group of biting flies;
“Baptism! Baptism!” is their cry.
But God (*deva*), why did you say that heaven (*paramu*) is within us?
4. They pulverize the sacrifice of love (*prema tyaga*);
They change the sacrifice (*yajna*) you have shown;
They change our looks and our conversation for new disguises,
Increase rituals (*karmakanda*) and make many genuflections.
But they cannot forget the “I” in them, they are careful with iota and dot;
O God (*deva*), are we to swallow everything and spare these jots and tittles?
5. They talk much and say you left heaven (*dhivi*) and came to earth for us;
They tell us that you renounced (*tyaga*) everything and for us made the sacrifice (*yajna*) on the cross.
They speak many things and create for us many circuitous paths
And ask us to be immersed (*munaga*) like you once were.
They say without that there is only hell (*naraka*);
O God (*deva*), have you not already done the water cleansing (*nilashuddhi*) for us?

Song No. 10(1)

1. O, brother, who says that we go to heaven (*moksha rajya*) if we wipe off the marks on our forehead (*bottu*)?
Do you think all the animals will go to heaven (*paramu*) because they do not have any *bottu*(2)?
2. If immersion in water puts you on the divine path (*divya padam*),
Why should Jesus have come to us when there is already much water with us?
3. If your name is changed does your nature (*uru*, lit. villlage) also change?
If you give the name of tiger to a dog, does the dog become a tiger?
4. If kneelings, physical exercises and tricks (*gharadi*) can give you salvation (*mukti*), my brother,
Does the goat also receive salvation (*mukti*) because it kneels down to eat the grass?

5. If it is the jail of religion (*matham*) which takes us to heaven (*sadgathi*; literally, the good state),
Are those Jewish people who killed Jesus in the name of religion (*matham*) virtuous (*punya*)?
6. If external (*deha*) cleanliness (*shuddhi*) is the final goal (*dikku*)
Can outward bandages heal a broken leg?
7. If you cannot conquer yourself, where is salvation (*moksha*), brother?
If you can conquer yourself, why do we need so much religiousness (*mathamulu*, lit. so many religions)?
8. Ablutions (*shuddhi*) are of many kinds, but which is the true cleansing (*shuddhi*), brother?
If there is a true (*satya*) (cleansing), how can there still be so many sins (*papa*)?
9. Different kinds of missions have given different kinds of religion (*matham*).
Among all these missions which one is the best?
10. Why talk of sending us to a heaven (*paramu*) which is somewhere else?
But has not Guru Christ told us that heaven (*paramu*) is in the body (*deha*)?
11. You cannot conquer yourself, O brother, so how can you help me conquer?
Is it not strange that the blind want to show the way to the blind?
12. Has not Christ told us, O brother, that all those who follow
The footsteps of the guru, such ones can reach the good estate (*sadgathi*)?
13. Do you think that glass (rosary) beads are the cure that leads to heaven (*paramu*), O brother?
Has not the guru told us that the father does not consider outward appearances?
14. Tell me, O brother, what religion (*matham*) the heavenly guru (*paramu guru*) needed?
And if the heavenly guru (*paramu guru*) did not have a religion (*matham*), why do the foolish disciples need it?
15. There is no use for empty words, O brother;
You just go steadfastly the way Jesus has gone.
16. All the servitude to the law (*dharmashastra*) belongs to a man of works (*karma jeevi*);
But, O brother, you leave that mystery (*marma*) and go the way of Christ.

Notes to song ten

1. The first stanza serves as a refrain, repeated after the fourth, seventh, tenth, thirteenth and sixteenth stanzas.
2. *Bottu* is used here as an inclusive word for what are sometimes called caste marks but include the cosmetic red dot that indicates that a woman is married. Missionaries thought that converts should not wear *bottu*, and the attitude continues among many Indian Christians.

Song No. 11

Refrain:

It is the jail of religion (*matham*), O brother; it is the great prison called religion (*matham*).

1. In that prison Jesus was long ago confined;
Within himself he is weeping;
He calls you with his loving (*prema*) hand outstretched;
Come running to set him free.
Behold the jail; O brother, look at that great prison!
2. Jesus who broke the fetters of religion (*mathabandham*),
Having left behind bodily worship (*deha puja*) yet sustained the spirit (*dehi*)
And showed the way of the true life (*satya jivan*);
He, the sage of love (*prema yogi*), him they imprisoned.
Behold the jail; O brother, look at that great prison!
3. Having cancelled the old sacrifices (*patha bali*) which cannot give heaven (*paramu*),
Having crossed all the barriers of outward (*bahya*) purification (*shuddhi*),
He carried us over the boundaries of slavery to the body (*deha*),
There is our guru who showed the way;
Behold the jail; O brother, look at that great prison!
4. Many belly-servants who show the bait called heaven (*paramu*)
Have thrown people into the pit of religion (*matham*).
And they pestered them, have drawn their sap out;
Jesus, who rejected these belly-servants, is there in the prison;
Behold the jail; O brother, look at that great prison!
5. These with colored robes and gilded chalices,
With sweet honeyed words and moralistic poses,
Throw you into the pit of religion (*matham*) in the name of Christ.
And then you will miss both heaven (*paramu*) and earth (*iha*).
Behold the jail; O brother, look at that great prison!
6. The sons of the scribes turned the Father's teaching
Into a cheap trade
And they tortured the sons of God (*paramu puthulu*).
In their custody the heavenly Jesus (*paramesu*) is imprisoned;
Behold the jail; O brother, look at that great prison!
7. Satan (*satan*), who long ago fled from our guru's might,
Is now lying in wait in the veil of water;(1)
And if you forget the way to the guru
Satan will catch you and bind you and dip you into bondage.
Behold the jail; O brother, look at that great prison!

8. If you fall in that prison you cannot go forward any more;
Many devotees (*bhakta*) fell into this pit;
They are lying helplessly and perishing.
Do eat the bait, but leave the hook.
Behold the jail; O brother, look at that great prison!
9. Shatter at once the demonic powers (*rakshasa shaktula*)
Which killed many children of God (*puthrulu*),
Release from fetters (*bandhavimukti*) the divine guru (*gurudeva*) who is in prison;
And follow his footsteps without ceasing.
Behold the jail; O brother, look at that great prison!

Notes to song eleven

1. A reference to baptism.

Song No. 12

Refrain:

How can I forget you, O guru, *sadguru*.
How can I depart from you, O guru, *sadguru*(1).

1. In the depths of darkness without finding a way or a path to take,
As I was decaying and perishing, you have brought me to the shore.
With affection (*makkuva*) you showed me a clear way, O compassionate (*daya*) one;
O God (*parameshu*), how can I forget you?
2. I fell in the way of sin (*papa*), got into snares and greatly tired;
I was looking in all directions, a miserable one.
You embraced me in love (*prema*), caressed me and satisfied me.
O image of love (*pranaya swarup*), you who expect no reward; how can I forget you?
3. Even in contact with the Shastras and Vedas I found it difficult to progress;
Like a deceived insect I wandered the world (*jagat*) and wept;
O merciful (*karuna*) one, my *gurudev*, the essence (*saram*) of the knowledge (*vidyana*) of
the Shastras and Vedas, the divine sacrifice (*divya yajna*);
The way of progress you have gone and have shown on the cross; how can I forget you?
4. In this empty (*sunya*) outward (*bahya*) world (*samsara*) I became blind with passion
(*kama*),
Looking day and night restlessly for happiness (*ananda*);
And with empty hope (*branthi*) as I struggled you have turned my look inwards;(2)
You, the messenger of peace (*shanti dotha*), my true guru (*sadguru*) Christ; how can I
forget you?

5. The physical body (*deha*) is nothing but a part of the visible world (*jagat*);
I thought that such a body is the ultimate (*paramadham*) and I polished it carefully.
With the rays of the moon of your love (*prema*) you cast out the darkness (*tamas*) of my heart (*hridaya*)
And you showed me the naked image (*rupa*) of the eternal (*nitya*) and the temporal (*anitya*), O image of mercy (*karuna murti*); how can I forget you?
6. As the deadly flames of worldly pleasures (*iha sukha*) spin around and surround me
I was scorched like an insect.
You came and brought me out; you caressed me and satisfied me with life.
O friend of sinners (*papi priya*) and my heavenly guru (*parama guru*), how can I forget you?
7. With the burden I inherited on me, and driven in endless thirst,
I was struggling to find the end of the way and there was no way to get rid of the burden.
As I was walking as a wanderer in the desert, you lifted my burden and showed your way.
You who are called the way (*marga*), the truth (*satya*) and the life (*jivan*); how can I forget you?
8. I was impressed with the glittering on the curtain and was taking dips in the ocean of desire (*moha*);
And I danced on the stage of illusion (*bhrama*), having become as a mad man.
Exposing religiosity (*mamethi*), reaching me with the dance of love (*prema*) and songs of love (*prema*),
You immersed me in the ocean of bliss (*ananda*); you, the magician (*garadiwadu*), how can I forget you?

Notes to song twelve

1. *Sadguru* comes from “sat” (true, real) guru.
2. Literally, “you internalized my consciousness (*cit*),” a rather vague philosophical expression.

Song No. 13

1. Go, proceed with brother Jesus, calling victory.
Come to join the kingdom of love (*premaraja*).
Take up the sword of love (*prema*), chase away the deadly enemy,
To taste blissful peace (*shanti*) and joy (*sukham*),
All of you: Go, proceed with Jesus.
2. Leave behind the belly -servants;
They resort to all sorts of grub(1);
They hunt Jesus, the image of truth (*satyarupa*)
And turn and kill the cross that gives witness to religion (*matham*).
Go, proceed with Jesus.

3. Look at the sacrifice (*yajna*) of the cross and walk on;
Only that heavenly sacrifice (*divya yajna*) will take you to the heavenly home (*muktidama*).
If the spirit (*dehi*) is clean (*shuddha*), then the body (*deha*) is also clean (*shuddha*).
To renounce (*vidichi*) this world (*ihamu*) gives heaven (*paramu*) and this is the essence (*saram*) of the divine guru's (*paramu guru*) teaching.
Go, proceed with Jesus.
4. Depart from the place of worship (*alayam*),
You will not see the sage of love (*prema yogi*) there.
The God (*deva*) who created heaven (*minnu*) and earth (*mannu*),
Who made you and me and all creation, will never dwell in there.
Go, proceed with Jesus.
5. Go, leaving the reading of Shastras;
With wisdom (*jnana*) live a life which is the essence (*saram*) of heavenly scriptures (*parashastra*).
Those who listen to the law (*dharmashastra*) are not in the way of God (*deva*).
Like the Pharisee and the publican, it is publican who inherited heaven (*paramu*).
Go, proceed with Jesus.
6. Become disciples of Christ;
At once leave the terrible slavery (*ghora dasya*) of religion (*matham*);
Desert the mess that is religion (*matham*), which tortured the sons of God (*parama putrulu*);
But come now to share in what remains of the sufferings of the divine guru (*paramu guru*);
Go, proceed with Jesus.
7. Cast out the merchants who sell doves,
Set the house of God (*devagriham*) in order and subdue the noise.
To assist Christ is nothing but to become a doer of good works (*karma yogi*).
If one does not lift up his cross and follow, he does not belong to the company of his disciples.
Go, proceed with Jesus.

Notes to song thirteen

1. This is a rather abusive expression: "They grab any kind of stuff to fill their belly."

Song No. 14

Refrain:

Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.

1. Only that heavenly guru's (*paramu guru*) path takes you there;
Everything else is deceit and empty gimmicks
Of the belly-servants.
Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.

2. Leave the dungeons of religion (*matham*) and forget all the rituals (*karmakanda*) in your mind (*mathi*);
He who is in the body (*tanuvu*) - only he is God (*deva*).
Worship (*koluva*) him who abides in the body (*tanuvu*).
Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.
3. Listen! Bodily (*deha*) cleansing (*shuddhi*) does not give heaven (*paramu*);
Observe the cleansing of the spirit (*dehi*).
Jesus has shown on the cross that the body (*tanuvu*) is for the soul (*atma*) and not the soul (*atma*) for the body (*tanuvu*).
Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.
4. Cast out hatred (*dvesha*) in the heart (*hridaya*), forget love (*prema*) by word only;
Christ told us that we should love (*prema*) with our deeds (*kriya*)
And not just with empty words (*mayamata*).
Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.
5. Live for your fellow men, consider them as God (*deva*);
To worship (*puja*) your fellowmen is to worship (*puja*) God (*parameshu*).
This is what Jesus the guru showed us.
Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.
6. Read the story of the merchant of Jericho; consider the priest (*guru*) and the Samaritan.
Better atheism (*nastikatva*) than the madness of religion (*matham*).
This is the counsel, so go in that way.
Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.
7. Do not come as beggars, live as true children;
At the door of the guru
The slavery of begging will not gain you heaven (*paramu*).
Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.
8. Get free from the madness of religion (*matham*) and baptism; turn willingly to love (*prema*).
Desire (*kama*) is hell (*naraka*) and only love (*prema*) is heaven (*swarga*).
Go therefore in the way of the guru, the way of love (*prema*).
Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.
9. Forget sinking in the pit of religion (*matham*); lift the basket of baptism down.
Cast aside the false appearances of hypocritical and long prayers (*stotra*)
And move forward as saints full of good deeds (*karma yogis*).
Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.
10. How can one be a servant (*dasa*) to riches and the cross? Stop adoring (*bhajana*) wife and offspring.
The one who worships (*koluva*) riches is not in Christ the guru;
And do not teach lessons to the guru(1).
Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.

11. Come as ones who renounce (*tyaga*) everything; that is the qualification to become a disciple.

With outward appearances and empty words you cannot follow him;

Leave the outward looks and come.

Come, oh come in haste, to walk in the path of Guru Christ Jesus.

Notes to song fourteen

1. This is a Telugu idiom; “to put caste marks on the face of the teacher”, meaning do not try to teach morals to the guru.

Song No. 15

Refrain:

Is this life, O Lord (*prabhu*)?

Is dying and living between death and life, life?

1. Between light and darkness my mind (*manas*) is exhausted.
I cannot dream of a path to follow;
An abyss behind and a chasm before.
Is it life to be crushed between the pit and the well?
2. “I” and “mine” are crushing me;
Fate (*karma*) bound my feet and does not allow me to move.
How do you call me to come to sainthood (to be a *karma yogi*)?
Is this the meaning of life, to vacillate between fate (*karma*) and mystery (*marma*)?
3. Leaving *sadharma* (good dharma) and getting attached other *dharma*(1),
Haven’t you seen, Gurudev, the flames that it can cause?
Joining my mind (*manas*) with your mind (*manas*) which is shining with spotless light,
Help me transcend both *dharma* and *adharma*.
4. Goodness and goodnesses beyond goodness are irritating me.
Keep me in your path
Which is beyond all goodness,
And lead me on.
5. My nature (*gunas*) is pulling me strongly
And my life is twisted and bruised.
I cannot take one step more;
Alas, how can I find the destination (*gamyā*)?

6. I became lonely and I suffered many calamities.
I became my own enemy.
My life became broken and my mind (*manas*) became disturbed.
O blessed son, Lord (*sri*) Jesus, have mercy (*karuna*) on me and lead me on.

Notes to song fifteen

1. *Dharma* is duty or way of life, also righteousness and law; a rich term with abundant shades of meaning that in the modern world is also accepted as the nearest Sanskrit equivalent to “religion.” *Adharma* in the closing line of this stanza is non-*dharma* or anti-*dharma*.

Song No. 16(1)

Refrain:

Gurudev, we salute you. O Christ Jesus, we salute you.(2)

1. You who taught us the essence (*saram*) of the scriptures (*grantha*) and became man (*nara*) to show the way;

You broke the fetters of religion (*matham*), and left loved ones;
You showed love (*prema*) and self-sacrifice (*tyaga*) on the cross as the way;
And you called us to follow;
Therefore, Gurudev, we salute you.

2. We fool around giving vain names to the light of love (*prema*) which has no name (*nama*) or form (*rupa*).

You came down and gave us the name of Christ and the good form (*sadrupa*) of the cross.

You came in love (*prema*) and left heaven (*paramu*)
To come to the earth (*bhuvu*);
Therefore, Gurudev, we salute you.

3. (Some gurus) showed the way of salvation (*mukti*) in sweet words,
Some sat closing their noses(3) for salvation (*mukti*);
Some have shown the way to salvation (*mukti*) with cunning words;
But you have shown the way of salvation (*mukti*) by walking before us,
Therefore, Gurudev, we salute you.

4. (Some gods) punish sinners (*papa-jivulu*)
But save (*rakshana*) the virtuous (*punya-jivulu*);
But you have gathered the sinners (*papi*), changed them and loved (*prema*) them;
You gave your life for sinners (*papi*);
Therefore, Gurudev, we salute you.

5. We considered the outward forms (*rupa*)
And we fell in the abyss of sin (*papa*);
But you dispelled the distinction of looks and color
And showed the true form (*satya rupa*) in all forms (*rupa*);
Therefore, Gurudev, we salute you.

6. Many gurus called themselves divine (*daiva*)
And asked for our devotion (*bhakti*) at their feet;
But you taught us the gift of service (*sevadhana*),
Doing it yourself by washing our feet;
Therefore, Gurudev, we salute you.
7. Outward ablutions (*shuddhi*) do not give heaven (*paramu*),
Great laws (*dharmashastras*) do not take us to the shore;
Conquering desire and anger (*kama-krodha*) is heaven (*paramu*);
You taught this mystery (*marma*) and showed us to live this way;
Therefore, Gurudev, we salute you.
8. We wandered around seeking God (*deva*) and laboured;
You taught us that we ourselves are great gods (*meti deva*)
If we depart from attachment (*mamatha*);
And this you have shown to us and taught us in your cross.
Therefore, Gurudev, we salute you.

Notes to song sixteen

1. In most of the lines of this song the first and second phrases rhyme.
2. An Urdu word for praise is used here.
3. A reference to the controlled breathing of yogic practices.

Song No. 17(1)

Refrain:

O woman, it is certain that the nest will leave you, and misery reaches you.
As the nest leaves you, sadness certainly comes.

1. Along with the nest all that you
Saved shall surely join the dust;
O woman, it is certain that the nest shall leave you.
2. That which has a beginning shall surely have an end;
Your nest which had a beginning shall surely have its end.
O woman, it is certain that the nest shall leave you.
3. It is wise to think that you yourself are a nest,
While sleeping for awhile in your nest.
O woman, it is certain that the nest shall leave you.
4. All that you think is yours in the nest is nothing but clay;
The eggs you saved also shall perish;
O woman, it is certain that the nest shall leave you.

5. As you go around to gather to save in your nest -
The nest shall go and its remembrance shall vanish.
O woman, it is certain that the nest shall leave you.
6. The appearance of the nest is an illusion (*midhya*);
The moment your perspective changes the nest will disappear.
O woman, it is certain that the nest shall leave you.
7. To think that you are the nest is sure to get you to hell (*naraka*);
Beloved (*sakhiya*), to think that you are different from the nest, that is eternal life (*nitya jivan*);
O woman, it is certain that the nest shall leave you.
8. Beloved (*sakhiya*), such is the life of the guru who has shown by his example
That the nest is the temple (*alayam*) and you are the God (*deva*) in that temple (*gudi*);
O woman, it is certain that the nest shall leave you.
9. Christ declared that it is the greater heaven (*meti paramu*)
If you stay in the nest without attachment (*antaka*, lit. touch).
O woman, it is certain that the nest shall leave you.

Note to song seventeen

1. This song is a *tattvam*, a Telugu poem where the future is forecast.

Song No. 18

Refrain:

The boat is going! Beloved ones (*priyulara*), get into the boat and sail.

1. Know that you need to cross the river, and get into the boat.
Do not cling onto the boat and forget to reach the shore.
Do not be under the illusion (*bhrama*)
That you are the boat.
Such illusion (*brahma*) might make you a victim of the boat.
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.
2. The boat is to carry you, to bring you to the shore.
Beware that you don't bear the boat instead.
To try carrying the boat
(Instead of sailing in the boat)
Is sure to lead you to death.
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.
3. You should not forget where you intend to travel
But remember where you want to go.
Don't forget out of attachment (*mamata*) to the boat, where you want to go.
In the middle of the river, the boat may sink in a whirlpool,
And take you to the depths of the river.
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.

4. There are innumerable boats waiting here.
You may enter the one you want.
Where you want to go, to which village,
Take all these things into account,
Then get into the boat.
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.
5. Don't fool around in the boat.
Empty your mind (*manas*) and get into the boat.
Take the essence (*saram*) and then throw out the scriptures (*shastras*).
And make your boat light,
Then the boat will not sink.
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.
6. As you sit in the boat do not become forgetful,
And never cultivate desires (*mamata*) for the boat lest
You fail to reach the shore
And become the proverbial
Fool who belongs neither here nor there.
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.
7. Behold, there are boats waiting for you.
The boatmen are inviting you.
Know the village that you want to reach.
When you pick the right boat
It will go straight there.
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.
8. Look, the boat that takes you to the divine city (*divya puri*)
Where the bodily sacrifice (*deha yajna*) was done.(1)
Watch your destination (*gamyā*) and leave all desires (*kama*);
Come only if you can come with sacrificial love (*prema tyaga*),
Leaving father and mother and forgetting wife and children;
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.
9. Here is the boat to the city of fame (*kirti puri*), to this place of earthly values (*lokanithi*);
Teaching to honor parents
And to be faithful to one wife;
Come only if you are ready
To keep your mind in chastity and hate strange women.
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.
10. Here is a boat to the city of
Brotherly feeling (*saubhāthra*) among all humankind (*sarva manava koti*);
Come only if you can
Forget all caste and racial differences(2) and learn the way of virtue (*nirṭhi*).
Forget the teaching that man (*jīva*) and God (*deva*) differ.
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.

11. Look there, the boat is going
To the city of non-violence (*ahimsa*).
Only if you learn to see all creatures as one
And kill the inner enemies and take up the vocation of renunciation (*sannyasa*),
Only then come into this boat.
The boat is going! Beloved ones, get into the boat and sail.

Notes to song eighteen

1. A reference to Christ's sacrifice on the cross.
2. The single term *jati* is here expanded to indicate both caste and race.

Song No. 19

Refrain:

To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.

1. If I become like you eternal life (*nitya jiva*) is mine
And there is no need any further for religion (*matham*) and ablutions (*shuddhi*).
To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.
2. To live not for myself is enough;
Like you to live for others, that is good.
To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.
3. To get rid of the illusion (*bhrama*) that my body (*tanuvu*) is me is enough;
To see myself as God (*deva*) in the body (*tanuvu*) is good.
To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.
4. To cease thinking in terms of others and me, it is enough.
To see you in others and worship (*bhajana*) is good.
To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.
5. To love (*prema*) others like myself is enough,
And to sacrifice (*bali*) my life for others is good.
To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.
6. Like you, if I conquer myself it is enough.
And when I see myself to know that I am seeing you is good.
To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.
7. To forget that I am a male and a husband is enough.
To know that I am God (*deva*) like you is good.
To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.
8. Not to die for myself is enough.
To die for others and become the supreme spirit (*paramatma*) is good.
To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.

9. To deny myself like you denied yourself is enough.
Like you to become Christ of the cross(1) is good.
To live like you is enough, O Jesus; to become like you is good.

Notes to song nineteen

1. Literally, "like you, if I become cross-Christ, it is good".

Song No. 20

Refrain:

Know yourself, my dear;
Conquer yourself like Guru Jesus.

1. Know yourself, my dear;
Conquer yourself like Guru Jesus.
The Guru Jesus long ago taught you
How to know and to conquer yourself
And if you leave what our elder brother taught,
Whatever you do is vain (*sunna*).
2. Leave your tendency to discriminate (*bedhabhava*), my dear;
Otherwise you will not understand the grand path.
Only when you stop thinking along the lines of mine and yours,
Then the feeling of discrimination will disappear.
Understand that everything is one
And then your desires (*korika*) disappear wonderfully.
3. Why do you cling to your body (*deha*), my dear;
This earthly body (*deha*) is all pus and blood.
Why do you hold onto this clay doll
And get deceived (*bhrama*)?
When dust joins dust(1)
In truth, only sadness (*dukha*) remains.
4. All this body (*kayam*) is, my dear, is a
Leather puppet with pus and blood.
It is a clay den full of bones.
However many coatings and however much gilt
And the many flattering names,
All these go to dust.
5. Why the deception of looks, my dear?
With the intoxication of those illusions (*bhrama*) you cannot see the hidden truth (*satya*).
Do not be deceived (*bhrama*)
Looking at the glitterings of the dusty body (*deha*);
Don't presume there is body only, but
Aim at God (*deva*) who is behind the clay.

6. You are really not bound to me, my dear,
You are God (*deva*) yourself.
You forget the creator
And worship the creation.
Take the trouble to throw away blindness (*maya*)
And go forward, leaving behind all thirst.
7. Who is your master (husband), my dear?
This earthly feeling of discrimination is your master.
Because of the deeds (*karma*) of long ago
We could not get to total fulfillment (*purna siddhi*)
And we are imagining (*bhrama*)
That you are wife and I am husband.
8. The idea of husband-wife, my dear, is a doll's play
And a botheration of leather puppets.
In this big drama stage,
For a little while we have false joy,
And having acted this silly play
We perish and die.
9. All the world (*loka*) is a void (*sunya*), my dear,
There is nothing which does not perish.
In many kinds of play
We get involved for a little while;
In the mad affection of husband-wife play;
And we disappear without a trace.
10. Where is your house and where is your abode, my dear?
See all this as a myth (*kala*).
On your long pilgrimage you rested for awhile here,
Got confused in your thinking (*buddhi*),
And considered all this as yours.
And that is to you as bondage in chains.
11. There is nothing which is yours, my dear;
Even the body (*deha*) so tenderly nurtured is not yours.
Your body (*deha*) also will leave you,
What you call yours will disappear.
And why for all of this
Do you take all this useless trouble?
12. Why the dance of ritual (*karmakanda*), my dear;
Give your ear to understand the mystery (*marma*);
In the madness (*bhrama*) of this crazy (*pichchi*) world (*loka*)
You forgot the way by which you came (into this world).
These vain searches though mad rituals (*picchikarma*)
Will never show you the way.

13. Know the difference between the body (*deha*) and spirit (*atma*), my dear,
If not, you will not receive peace (*shanti*) and well-being (*saukhya*).
Without knowing the distinction between spirit (*atma*) and body (*deha*)
You cannot know the essence (*tattva*) of the eternal spirit (*paramatma*);
Your spirit (*atma*) is the eternal spirit (*paramatma*).
So proceed, worshiping (*puja*) your spirit (*atma*).
14. If you discern (*bhavinchi*) truly, there are no enemies to you, my dear;
You are your own enemy;
There are six foes within yourself(2)
And they show all others as your foes.
If you conquer the enemies in you
All your enemies you will see as God (*deva*).

Notes to song twenty

1. There is a single Telugu term that can mean dust or clay; for the sake of idiomatic English we interchange the translation according to the context in this song.
2. The *anshadgunas*, or the six passions of the body, are *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *mada* (lust), *matsara* (envy), *lobha* (greed), and *ahamkara* (egotism).

Song No. 21(1)

Refrain:

I forgot that you are but me, O Christ my *sadguru*,
And I left the eternal truth (*nitya satya*).

1. I forgot that you are but me, O Christ my *sadguru*,
And I left the eternal truth (*nitya satya*).
Forgetting that you are but me, and deserting the eternal truth (*nitya satya*)
I embraced all that is wrong and I fell down.
2. I hunted after images (*rupa*), O Christ my *sadguru*,
And I committed many sins (*papa*).
In the illusion (*bhrama*) of the images (*rupa*), committing many errors (*papa*),
I failed to see your image (*rupa*) in all these many images (*rupa*).
3. I dried up in separation from you, O Christ my *sadguru*,
And I suffered immensely in pains.
Dried up in separation and suffering in pains,
At the end I want to see you and am searching for you.
4. I mistook my body (*tanuvu*) for myself, O Christ my *sadguru*,
And I painted the body (*tanuvu*) itself.
Thinking that the body (*tanuvu*) is me,
And rejoicing in self-painting it, I did not see you, who are in the body (*tanuvu*).

5. I searched in all temples (*gudi*), O Christ my *sadguru*;
Having searched in all temples (*gudi*)
And finding you not in temples (*gudi*)
I went around temples (*gudi*) and I became a blind ox.(2)
6. I tried to find you in religion (*matham*), O Christ my *sadguru*,
And I made religious gymnastics.
Trying to find you in religion (*matham*)
And making many religious exercises I could not find direction and became confused.
7. In taking dips in water I thought it was milk, O Christ my *sadguru* ,
And I tried to cleanse myself part by part.
Whatever cleansing I made with water or milk,
It is only cleansing the body (*vallu*) but no other gain.
8. Fastings many I made, O Christ my *sadguru* ,
And made many prayers (*japa*)
And did much penance (*tapa*).
But there was no result except the weakening of my body (life; *upiri* , lit. breath).
9. I had approached many great gurus (*gurubandalu*), O Christ my *sadguru* ,
And I heard all mystic mantras.
By visiting the masters and learning all mysteries (*marma*)
My head (*thala*) became numb, but I gained nothing.
10. I left my hearth and home, O Christ my *sadguru* ;
I roamed around here and there.
With tired limbs from such roaming I returned home and
The house became a place of worship (*alayam*) and in my wife I found you.
11. I saw that you are in me, O Christ my *sadguru* ,
And in you I really am.
In me, you are; in you, I am.
You, I, and the whole universe (*jagam*) are one.

Notes to song twenty-one

1. The second line of every stanza has a similar start, providing structure to the song.
2. A blind ox eating its way across a field is a proverb in Telugu meaning an undiscerning person acting foolishly.

Song No. 22

1. Where there is passion (*raga*), there truly
Hatred (*dvesha*) is - know this, O my soul. (1)
And do believe that passion (*raga*) is the
Other form of hatred (*dvesha*), O my soul.

2. Both passion (*raga*) and hatred (*dvesha*)
Lead to destruction, O my soul.
Heaven (*paramu*) is a city where these two cannot enter.
And know this truly, O my soul.
3. You love (*prema*) well
All forms of hatred (*dvesha*), O my soul;
The kingdom of God (*daivarajya*) is yours
If you leave this love (*prema*), O my soul.
4. Only passion (*raga*) gives
A gem-like glow to a stone, O my soul.
And you are the sole source for passion (*raga*) and hatred (*dvesha*);
Know this truly, O my soul.
5. Hatred (*dvesha*) and passion (*raga*) belong to the earth,
And they are not yours, O my soul.
And your crime is to imagine (*bhrama*) that passion (*raga*) is love (*prema*).
Know this truly, O my soul.
6. Attachment (*bandham*) to outward (*bahya*) and worldly (*loka*) forms (*rupa*)
Is nothing but slavery (*dasya*), O my soul.
And you are the root (*mulam*) of the forms (*rupa*);
So enter inside, O my soul.
7. If you are not there,
Then attachment to heaven (*mokshabandham*) is not there, O my soul.
If you are not there, eternal life (*nitya jiva*) is
Everlasting joy (*nitya anand*), O my soul.(2)
8. Showing you and me (body) as different,
That is making me thirst (for this world), O my soul.
Only in changing of perspective (*chupu*) and looking
With Guru Jesus, then salvation (*moksha*) is mine, O my soul.

Notes to song twenty-two

1. Mind (*manas*) would be the more literal translation of this refrain.
2. The meaning of this stanza is complex.

Song No. 23(1)

1. I made a list of all my wants
And I read it to you to answer, my Jesus;
I had gone through rain and sun, my beloved (*priyu*),
I thought it was eternal adoration (*nitya sankirta*).

2. I built a temple (*gudi*) to petition you and beg;
But you went away to seek the former saints(2), my Jesus.
With hungry eyes I waited for you, my beloved (*priyu*);
But I was left to go around the temple (*gudi*) weeping.
3. You have thrown me away as I was at your feet.
Now I know the full secret (*marma*), my Jesus;
Is there good and bad when one is in the madness (*pichchi*) of love (*prema*), my beloved?
Who can cross over destiny (*karma*)?
4. Desiring (*korika*) for me to become you, because I failed to meet you,
I imagined (*bhrama*) that this was the penance of love (*prema tapa*), my Jesus.
I fell into the abyss of sin (*papa kopum*), my beloved;
And that is the end of the one who is consumed with desire (*kama*).
5. I know I deserted your peace (*shanti*).
Yet I thought this the divine love (*divya prema*); lingering burdens of the previous life (*janma*) persisted, my Jesus.
By the power of *karma* [acts of the former life], my beloved,
Knowledge (*telivi*) became dust.
6. Make me to love (*prema*) you;
In the exercise (*sadhana*) of worship (*puja*) life became upside down, my Jesus;
Selfishness (*swadha*; self love) lifted its head and laughed in mocking, my beloved.
It taught me that only to love (*prema*) is salvation (*moksha*).
7. I shall no more ask you
To blame(3) yourself; but I shall blame myself, my Jesus.
There is no more sadness (*dukha*) to me, my beloved,
But peace (*shanti*) and well-being (*saukhya*) are now my share.
8. Your love (*prema*), your self-giving (*tyaga*),
Your elegance (*thivi*) - they woke me up from my sleep, my Jesus;
They drove away the darkness from my heart (*hridaya*), my beloved;
They showed me the eternal spirit (*paramatma*) in me.
9. Forgetting to worship (*puja*) you, yet crying out for worship (*puja*),
This I joyfully considered the search for salvation (*mukti sadhana*), my Jesus.
But now I see the image of truth (*satyarupa*), my beloved;
I shall live for you and become a sacrifice (*bali*).
10. You should become mine and get merged in me;
That unquenched thirst is no longer there, my Jesus.
The endless sorrow (*badha*) has ended, my beloved;
I abide with a spotless (*nirmala*) spirit (*atma*).
11. I become yours, a part of yourself;
That peace (*shanti*) I have come to know, my Jesus;
Complete eternal life (*nitya jivam*) is mine, my beloved;
And name (*nama*) and form (*rupa*) have left me.

12. I shall discard my natural (*prakriti*) name (*nama*) and form (*rupa*)
To become merged with you, my Jesus;
And your love (*prema*) shines radiantly, my beloved;
We shall become one and rule the creation (*shrishti*).
13. I am no more in the futility of differentiating "I" and "mine".
Without me where are you, my Jesus?
Now I understand the secret mystery (*mayamarma*), my beloved;
Then why the foolishness of worshipping (*koluva*) you?
14. I forgot myself and I created you (in my place);
The forgetfulness has gone and knowledge (*telivi*) has dawned, my Jesus,
I have seen myself in you, my beloved;
I know now that I am the supreme spirit (*paramatma*).
15. I have begotten and I am begotten;
I have to worship (*puja*) myself, my Jesus;
That is the total sum of your teaching, my beloved;
That is the essence (*saram*) of the meaning of your life.
16. I saw you and forgot myself;
In me I saw you, and I become both earth (*iha*) and heaven (*paramu*), my Jesus;
There is no more the bondage (*bandham*) of sin (*papa*) and virtue (*punya*), my beloved.
There is no more slavery (*dasya*) to the law (*dharmasastra*).
17. You became me and I became you;
How can I worship (*puja*) you any more, my Jesus?
How can you worship (*puja*) me, my beloved?
How can separation be between you and me any more?
18. My will is gone, it got destroyed;
Only your will should lead me from now on, my Jesus;
My worries have left me, my beloved;
You, me and the eternal spirit (*paramatma*) are one.

Notes to song twenty-three

1. The structure of repeating "my Jesus" at the end of the second line of every stanza, and "my beloved" at the end of the third line, is maintained in the translation.
2. This expression, *puruva punyulu*, literally means "former worthy ones."
3. The word (*nirasinchu*) used here is to blame or to protest or to become weak.

Song No. 24

Refrain:

Do you know, O beloved dweller in the temple (*gudi*),
That you are not the temple (*gudi*)?
Do you know that you are but God (*deva*)?

1. To know this,
It is heaven (*moksha*) indeed;
Not to know it is bondage (*bandha*);
And the way to know is renunciation (*tapas*).
2. You fell and got lost,
Thinking that you are the temple (*gudi*);
If you recognize it,
You yourself are again God (*deva*).
3. You had a fall and
You made a God (*deva*) for yourself;
But you thought by mistake
That he made you.
4. Your earthly nature (*mathi guna*)
You attributed to him;
And then begging from him,
You thought was devotion (*bhakti*).
5. If you realize (the truth),
Your earthly nature (*deha vasana*) will leave you;
Turn around,
Discipline your mind (*manas*), and you will know (*telivi*).
6. Why do you pine for
The snares of the earthen body (*deha*)?
Consider clay as clay
And all of salvation (*mukti*) is yours.
7. How long will you continue
To call your weeping a prayer (*japa*)?
Why all the ablutions (*shuddhi*)
After living without wisdom (*buddhi*)?
8. O lady, who is a husband to you?
Who are the offspring and who are your support?
This is all illusion (*bhrama*);
Don't you know this, my lady?
9. Dismantle the temple (*gudi*),
And like Jesus, the guru,
Look inside the temple (*gudi*),
And you will see God (*deva*).

Song No. 25

Refrain:

What is this but fate (*karma*), O brother, my Jesus;
Now I know the whole mystery (*marma*).

1. Long ago I saw you and forgot myself;
I took the way that you
Showed and you yourself walked;
With single mindedness, not looking back -
Almost at the end as I reach the goal (*gamyā*)
I desired to look back, and
What is this but fate (*karma*)?
2. Long ago, as you showed me
The flesh and clay under
The glittering tinsel,
You made me to hate (*dvesha*) them;
And having walked so far in the way you have shown,
Now to turn like a dog to its vomit,
What is this but fate (*karma*)?
3. Long ago as I was sinking
In the dark abyss of sin (*papa*),
In mercy (*karuna*) your loving (*prema*) hand
Gently led me to the shore
And put me on the heavenly (*parama*) way (*bata*);
Now to run back again into that abyss,
What is it but fate (*karma*)?
4. Long ago you destroyed my idea of different forms (*rupa*)
And showed me your form (*rupa*) in every form (*rupa*);
You taught me your love (*prema*) which does not know attachment (*mamata*);
As I neared achieving the sacrifice (*yajna*)
Of love (*prema*) and self-denial (*tyaga*)
Again I missed your image (*rupa*) in the illusion (*branthi*) of images (*rupa*),
What is it but fate (*karma*)?
5. Long ago you taught me to love (*prema*) those who hate (*dvesha*) me
And to bless those who abuse me;
You showed yourself to me
Clearly in every living being (*jivī*);
You led me in the path of universal (*vishva*) human (*manava*) love (*prema*);
Now as I reach towards the end, I think again that I cannot reach it,
What is it but fate (*karma*)?
6. Long ago when I did not know the way and the path,
You broke the deep darkness of desire and anger (*kama-krodha*) with your loving
(*prema*) light;
You gave me your hand,

Brought me on the way of wisdom (*jnana*);
But to suddenly leave your
Hand and fall into darkness again,
What is it but fate (*karma*)?

7. Long ago your love (*prema*) killed my selfishness;
You taught me to know that I am spirit (*dehi*),
And to leave the bodily (*deha*) concept;
To see you in others and worship (*bhajana*) and serve (*seva*) others;
As I almost reached perfection (*siddhi*),
To see my nature (*buddhi*) turn back,
What is it but fate (*karma*)?
8. Long ago you helped me to forget myself,
And you showed yourself in me
And showed me that the one who lives
In this body (*kayam*) distanced from desire (*kama*) is not me, but you;
In your service, laboring where there is always some lack,
I fell mercilessly at the twinkling of an eye;
What is it but fate (*karma*)?
9. Long ago you showed me your glory (*teja*) all around;
You changed me into a love-mendicant (*prema tapasi*),
And all illusions (*bhrama*) left me.
Leaving the bodily (*deha*) concept and seeing the spirit (*dehi*) within,
Leaving pretence (*mayamarma*) and negating the body (*kayam*),
But now to miss the mark and get lost,
What is it but fate (*karma*)?
10. Long ago I heard your call and left all that I had,
I made my life as a sacrifice (*yajna*) to you.
Finally, a desire (*vasana*) is born,
The illusion (*bhrama*) of the body (*tanuvu*), so that
Like Peter I say I do not know Jesus, never I knew him;
Leaving you, I fall;
What is it but fate (*karma*)?
11. Long ago you met your foe, Saul, on the way;
You pitied him, blessed him and taught him the divine truth (*parama tattvam*);
But he, being not able to
Cure his own weakness(2),
He gave his hair in the temple (*gudi*);
For me to fall into the vanity (*sunya*) of that kind ignorance (*ajnana*),
What is it but fate (*karma*)?

Notes to song twenty-five

1. Literally “belly problem”, meaning spiritual weakness that caused him to submit to a temple ritual.

Song No. 26

Refrain:

Have you left me,
My dearest Jesus,
Have you forgotten me?

1. If you forget and leave me
There is no other shelter for me;
All of them left me and went their way;
There is no way, I am confused, and I do not see.
2. Without touching my body (*tanuvu*) they deserted me;
They worship (*koluva*) familial affections (*mamakara*) as God (*deva*)
And went each one his way, I do not know where.
As an object of worship (*koluva*) now I do not have even a particle of dust.
3. I am walking this path knowingly;
To fall into the abyss at the end is sure, I know;
How else does nature (*buddhi*) go, except by the way of fate (*karma*)?
Correct my destiny(1) lest I fall into the pit.
4. Before this life reaches the source of waters,
As all the hot winds of this world (*ila*) join together to
Dry up the name and form (*namarupa*),
Will you, beloved friend (*priyasakha*), shed a tear?
5. The darkness surrounded me and stopped me on my way;
My life became heavy with the load of sin (*papa*);
I walked a long while and I cannot walk any longer;
I do not know if I can reach the end or if I will falter in the middle of the path.
6. I know well that this path is not your path;
Knowing this, I stubbornly took this path, O friend;
When I reach the end and know my mistake
And come back to you, will you then forget me?
7. When I am beaten around like a dry leaf in the whirlwind,
Cast out somewhere; if I come back seeking you
Would you cast me out as a spent up creature
Or would you recall and welcome me into your heart (*madhi*)?
8. I missed the path because of my evil fate (*karma*);
After roaming around if I return,
Looking at my spent up body (*deha*) and heavy heart (*hridaya*)
Would you not recognize me and speak to me?

9. All the worthy ones surround you and worship (*bhajana*) you in
Great devotion (*parama bhakti*); would you turn to me and
Have a word with me?
Or with a mind (*mathi*) without mercy (*karuna*) would you reject me?

Notes to song twenty-six

1. The term used here is “writing”, referring to the immutable writing on the forehead, which is destiny or fate.

Song No. 27

Refrain:

Good-bye and let me go,
O my partner lady;
The Lord of my life (*praneshu*) has come,
Even Christ has called me.

1. As I heard his call my whole being melted;
My heart (*gunde*) began to beat, thumping;
I become forgetful of myself and my feet trembled;
Before my eyes all my sins (*papa*) appear as a heap.
2. With the coming of my Lord (*vibhu*, husband) the darkness which covered me has melted away.
O my lady, there is no place to hide anymore;
The four corners of the earth became bright
And my life became perfectly clear.
3. O my lady, the voice of the Lord (*nath*) who is calling me
Is echoing all around; my soul (*jiva*) which was in deep
Slumber woke up suddenly;
I cannot stop here for a moment to serve you.
4. O, my beloved (*priya*) is coming this way;
He will clearly see my life;
How can I see now the face of my beloved (*priya*), which is bewitchingly beautiful
(*divya sundara mohana*)?
Oh, I shall stop as I cannot do anything more.
5. What shall I do when the Lord (*vibhu*, husband) stands
Facing me with selfless love (*prema*)?
How can I behold his face without shame?
What is the way for me, a cruel hard-hearted sinner (*papi*)?
6. From the embrace of the beloved (*priya*) and the ecstasy of love (*prema*)
I slowly slipped away, and came this way.
In my foolishness I tried to find joy (*ananda*) in the body (*deha*) of dirt;
I prostrated at earthly feet as my refuge.

7. When ignorance (*maya*) embraced me, attachment (*mamata*) was born in me.
I forgot the difference between the eternal (*nitya*) and transitory (*anitya*).
Not knowing that this body is a leather puppet of pus and blood,
I worshipped this clay doll as if it were the final state (*paramagathi*).
8. I foolishly clung to clay which never knows love (*prema*), having deceived the self-less (*swardham*) Lord (*vibhu*, husband);
Not knowing that it is deception, he must have pined and wept for me.
He became lean and weak;
I cannot look at him anymore.
9. Instead of looking at my beloved living in you,
I looked at you and I forgot myself.
I forgot that the body (*deha*) is a temple (*devalayam*) and that he only lives there.
I forgot all that he taught and fell as a ruined sinner (*papi*).
10. Alas, my life which is a wave (*ala*) became a dream (*kala*);
A long time ago I deserted my beloved (*priya*) and forgot him.
This evil (*dushkruta*) I committed, thinking that it is good (*sukruta*).
I had done what was prepared for me by the father.
11. Probably he thought that I shall return to him,
And he had not come searching for me all these days.
Knowing that I was imprisoned in illusion (*maya*), and not being able to bear any longer,
And finding it difficult to bear the separation (*viyogam*), he compassionately (*karuna*)
came to me, searching for me.
12. If I tarry he comes here quickly and he looks at me straight,
To my utter shame (*sighu*). Do not be angry (*kinuka*) that I am a betrayer (*drohi*) and a
sinner (*papi*);
Do not regret, O friend, forgive (*kshama*) me and send me;
I bow down with pure (*shuddhi*) intention (*chitta*).

Song No. 28

Refrain:

Break the door and come out quickly,
O my beloved (*priya*) in the temple (*gudi*);
Receive the worship (*puja*)
Which I offer to you now.

1. Behold, I bring to you my life heavy with the loads of sin (*papa*).
I bring in a bundle the dreams which I dreamt.
I brought these to offer at your feet;
I stayed here a long while; I waited for you to come;
Do you not have mercy (*jali*) and concern? O my Lord (*atmesha*; lit. Lord of my spirit),
why don't you see my desolate life?
How long will I stand weeping at the door of your temple (*gudi*)?

2. I brought here woes which have no end and some meaningless pains;
Shiverings without cause, some problems chewing my heart (*gunde*), and a stinking old life I brought.
I want to throw them on your feet and worship (*bhajana*) you.
I do not find the way or the goal, O my beloved (*pranesh*).
You are my help and refuge; with all these loads I roamed
And brought them to your presence.
3. In my madness of devotion (*bhakti*) I worshiped (*bhajana*) you and thought the worship of your feet (*padapuja*)
Was real love (*prema*); I vexed you, I wept, and I made you weep.
I worship (*bhajana*) you no longer, but live like you and follow you.
Do not reject me as a sinner (*papi*), O Christ Jesus;
Do not forget that you are a lover of sinners (*papipriya*).
There are no more fears or frets; do not look back or forth.
4. Whatever I see I imagine to be you; in whatever direction I look it is you, O image of love (*premamurti*);
At the movement of an ant I am startled that it is you.
At my own heartbeat I was concerned; I laughed much at myself;
Creation itself mocked at me. O personification of selflessness (*tyaga murti*), come quickly;
Lord of my heart (*hridaya adinatha*), why delay to rescue me? I cried and cried and got tired;
How long can I cry anymore?
5. Now I forget the ways of my old life; I left the whole world (*vishva*),
Knowing that only you are all around. Beaten with whirlwinds,
My restless life in full I brought to lay at your feet;
Take me and caress me and fulfill my thirst, O image of love (*premamurti*).
Would you show your kindness (*daya*) and change me?
Would you pour life (*jiva*) again
Into this broken and despairing life?
6. For my own ambitions and wants I cried a long while;
I shall not bother you any longer with pretensions.
I shall not be a beggar any more in the name of prayer (*prarthana*).
I shall no longer trouble you even after knowing what you said and what you did.
I shall hereafter only live like you; if I delay it will be daybreak, O longing of my spirit (*atmasha*).
Come and see this one who makes loving sacrifice (*prematapasa*); come, before this prepared heart (*hridaya*) becomes a waste.

Song No. 29

Refrain:

O Christian (*kristhava*), rise and come forward to us the outsiders(1);
Show the essence (*tattva*) of Christ by your life.

1. How long do you talk aloud,
Telling your teaching in the church?(2)
Know that all the discourses in the church
Will not take you to heaven (*paramu*).
2. All the arguments saying
That your mission is good and the other's mission is not good,
However long you argue like this
It is utterly useless.
3. Of all the ablutions (*shuddhi*), you say
Your way of ablution only gives heaven (*paramu*).
Why these foolish ablutions?
Only change of nature (*buddhi*) is cleansing (*shuddhi*).
4. To deny yourself and
To follow our elder brother
Is the best way.
Until you deny your self there is no use of all other things.
5. You followed the forbidden way,
Forgetting and not recognizing;
Come back to follow the path of love (*prema*)
That our guru had trod.
6. Why do you call loudly without limit?
Do you think that God (*deva*) is deaf?
Has the guru asked you to worship (*koluva*),
Or did he ask you to live like he lived?
7. Only to live in the way of the guru,
And to live for others,
That will take you heaven (*paramanagara*).
Religious (*matham*) cleansings (*shuddhi*) will not take you there.
8. You did not know that
The body (*deha*) is the temple (*alayam*).
You did not see the guru in the body (*deha*).
All the variety of religions (*matham*) and rituals (*karmakanda*) cannot show the
destination (*gathi*).
9. To leave God (*deva*) and grab the temple (*gudi*);
To leave the spirit (*dehi*) and grab the body (*deha*);
To leave the Lord (*prabhu*) and follow religion (*matham*);
Know that these are all useless.

10. Why deceive others, telling that heaven (*paramu*) is elsewhere?
Live like the guru
Who declared that heaven (*paramu*) is in you,
And show that to others.
11. If you live your life for others
Then heaven (*paramu*) will be yours, as it is the guru's.
Only that is the way the guru left for us;
There is no other way, however much you search.
12. Why roam around the corners
And utter those empty cries?
Only to glorify (*mahima*) the heavenly father (*parama thandri*)
Should be your goal, so show this in your life.
13. If you live an unworthy life,
It is a shame to our elder brother.
Do not take the name of Christ anymore and
It will be a blessing to you like the reward of countless pilgrimages.(3)
14. Do not think that God (*deva*)
Does not know the way you live.
This waiting on his part
Is only until the time of harvest.
15. If mere water gives salvation (*moksha*)
It is waste of the life which our guru lived.
We could dip in all sorts of water tanks
At a message even by a crow from heaven.
16. They want you to discard bangles or forehead marks and pendant
Because all these things came later in your life.
But is a woman born with a husband?
Is not your sari also something you got later on?
17. I do not understand the confusion
Of the variety of cleansing (*shuddhi*) missions.
If one can live the life the guru lived,
Is any other gesture needed?
18. With a religious baptism (*baptism*)
You became a Christian;
Live like Jesus and thus
You become Christ; don't you know this?
19. There are many varieties of bodily cleansing (*deha shuddhi*)
But they cannot cleanse the spirit (*atma shuddhi*).
If you can have cleansing of the spirit without bodily cleansing,
Still there can be heaven (*paramu*).

20. To become united with the guru
There is no other way but to live like him.
If you do not live the life which the guru lived,
Loud praises (*stuṭi*) are but a cry in the wilderness.
21. You taught us to bless those who abuse us;
Having said this,
For whom did you make
Those big bombs?(4)
22. When I lived like Christ
(Christian) elders called me antichrist.
Only among Christians there are antichrists,
But among the outsiders (heathen) are real Christs.
23. Do you cause hurdles to the
Little ones who are accepted by our brother?
Do you not remember the remedy
Of the millstone and the sea that Jesus taught?

Notes to song twenty-nine

1. He satirically takes from the mouth of Christians their traditional word *anyulu*, which means heathen.
2. There is a pun here on “church” (transliterated) and “charcha” which means discussion.
3. The expression used here is the reward which one gets from a hundred thousand baths in a holy river.
4. The reference is not clear; perhaps to the militarism of “Christian” nations?

Song No. 30

Refrain:

O Jesus, I cannot win (the race) like you won;
I cannot walk like you walked.
To win like you had won, to walk like you walked,
And to thus enter heaven (city of *mukti*) is certainly something I cannot do.

1. To see you in others and to worship (*bhajana*), to sacrifice (*bali*) my life for them, I cannot do.
But I twisted your teaching (*tattva*),
And thinking that religion (*matham*) and baptism (*baptism*) will save me,
I teach that; like one makes a monkey a god.
But Jesus, I cannot win (the race) like you won;
I cannot walk like you walked.

2. You passed beyond (the limits of) religion (*matham*)
But I stuffed you again into religion (*matham*).
I built many temples (*gudi*) and towers (*gopuram*) for you; I put you in there and locked the door.
I declared that my religion (*matham*) is greater than all, and fought many religious wars(1) for fame.
But Jesus, I cannot win (the race) like you won;
I cannot walk like you walked.
3. Many D.D degrees I gathered as ornaments,
But your teachings I treated like a despised tail;
I cooked up doctrines and dogmas and go everywhere
To immerse the poor people in water.
But Jesus, I cannot win (the race) like you won;
I cannot walk like you walked.
4. I have exchanged old missions with new missions,
And claimed that my mission is greater than all missions.
I beat the drum of those who give me money
And endlessly go around in long gowns. All you said, I go on reading.
But Jesus, I cannot win (the race) like you won;
I cannot walk like you walked.
5. I made many immersions in ponds and tanks
And changed Narasayya into Simeon.
With wife and children and all the followers
We made petition and praises but it made no difference.
But Jesus, I cannot win (the race) like you won;
I cannot walk like you walked.
6. Kneelings and adoration I did;
Sometimes I cried and made mad utterings and called them tongues.
I cried loudly and said that “the Spirit has come!”
And ruined the slumber of all those around.
But Jesus, I cannot win (the race) like you won;
I cannot walk like you walked.
7. I go to church early and give great lectures;
I discuss on which day is the Sabbath;
I read the holy book carefully and filter out the mosquito
And devour the camel and call myself a good Christian.
But Jesus, I cannot win (the race) like you won;
I cannot walk like you walked.
8. I forgot house and residence and children and kith and kin.
I tell others to become perfect like the heavenly father (*paramajanaka*)
And ask them to love (*prema*) their neighbors as themselves.
I declare change of heart (*hridaya*) and renunciation of love (*prematyaga*), but I myself fail in all these.
O Jesus, I cannot win (the race) like you won;
I cannot walk like you walked.

9. To attain perfection and to get to heaven (*paramu*) you taught the way
And you walked the way; but we dismissed it in a few words
And made it a religion (*matham*). All that we can do is for us
And all that we cannot do is for the angels (*devadutha*).
O Jesus, I cannot win (the race) like you won;
I cannot walk like you walked.

Notes to song thirty

1. The word is literally “crusade”.

Song No. 31(1)

1. This is the essence (*saram*) of all scriptures (*shastras*);
Look at the cross, O sister.
This is the form (*rupa*) that love (*prema*) that has taken;
Look at the cross, O brother.
2. Earth (*ihamu*) and heaven (*paramu*)
Have joined here, O sister.
Where the image (*rupa*) of the way of salvation (*mukti*) was crucified,
Look at the cross, O brother
3. This is the measuring rod
To God’s love (*deva prema*); know this, O sister.
There is no other form (*rupa*)
Greater than this; know it, O brother.
4. This is the form (*rupa*) created by
The Father and Son, O sister.
How else can man (*nara*)
Become God (*deva*), O brother.
5. The wall of separation between
Father and Son is a false image, O sister.
This is the way the Son
Becomes Father, O brother.
6. This is the glorious form (*mahita*) which
Can dispel all illusion (*maya*), O sister.
This is the sacrifice (*yajna*) which can
Give us salvation (*mukti*), and there is nothing greater, O brother.
7. This is the image (*rupa*) which can
Wipe off “me” and “my” thought, O sister.
And this is the fullest image (*purnarupa*)
Which exceeds all images (*rupa*), O brother.

8. If you keep in your heart (*mathi*) the image (*rupa*) of the cross
There are no problems for us, O sister.
To look at the image (*rupa*) of the
Cross will give peace (*shanti*), O brother.

Note to song thirty-one

1. There is poetic parallelism here, with the first couplet of every stanza addressing sisters and the second addressing brothers. The first stanza is also sung as a refrain after every other stanza.

Song No. 32

Refrain:

My lord (*vibhu*, husband) has not left me;
O mad people, why do you mock at me?
My lord (*prabhu*) has not forgotten me.

1. Long ago at some time I gathered and kept fate (*karma*)
That has misled me into narrow paths.
I roamed around and wound all over and missed my path,
Why do you mock at me as an abject sinner (*paramapapi*) who cannot find the way?
2. Looking at the outward gloss and glitter
And caught up in the images (*rupa*) of the mirage (*maya*) world (*loka*)
I ran hither and thither and got lost.
Why do you call me a deserted bird?
3. I found a false direction and searched for it.
I was wounded with deadly bruises,
I was discarded and weak.
Why do you mock at me, looking with ridicule?
4. I have considered falsehood (*kalla*) as truth (*nijamu*)
And all my desires and expectations came to nothing,
And there is nothing in this world (*ila*) that can be called mine.
Why do you mock with teasing smiles?
5. Just because I left the soul (*thana*) and worshipped (*bhajana*) the body (*thanuvu*)
Right in public in an empty and ignorant state;
Just because of cruel deeds (*karma*) I have done
Why do you mock at me saying that I do not have heaven (*paramu*)?
6. Those who adored me
Deserted me one by one;
As the cruel men went away,
Why should I become upset, dancing in anger?

7. As my abode which I built with gilt and glitter
On stinking dirt was blown off with the wind,
And saying that I became mad,
Why do you laugh at me, people?
8. Because I did not die in the pit of religion (*matham*)
And I did not carry the load of baptism,
Because I did not try the impossible(1),
Why do you laugh at me, people?
9. Because I did not make endless kneelings and bowings
And did not start begging in the prison of the church (*churchjail*);
Because I did not learn to cry and speak in tongues,
Why do you sigh, saying I am an atheist (*nastika*), O people?
10. My Lord (*vibhu*, husband) has not left me;
O mad people, why do you laugh at me?
My Lord (*prabhu*) has not forgotten me;
My Jesus has not left me; my Christ has not forgotten me.

Notes to song thirty-two

1. Literally, “leave the earth and do exercises”, a Telugu saying which means attempting the impossible.

Song No. 33

Refrain:

Behold, it is dawn and because of my guru’s compassion (*daya*) my dreams have vanished.

1. I looked at all the world (*loka*)
But I did not look at what is in me;
External appearances I kept in my heart (*mathi*)
And suffered in sadness.
Then I saw your image (*rupa*),
And with the compassion (*daya*) of the guru,
All illusion (*bhrama*) melted away.
2. Falling in the net of my past desires (*vasanas*)
I did not know the secrets (*marma*) of deeds (*karma*)
And I foolishly adored (*koluva*) the temple (*gudi*).
But I did not find any satisfaction.
Then I saw today the truth (*satya*) that destroyed the temple (*gudi*);
With the compassion (*daya*) of my guru
I found today the essence (*tattva*) of human nature (*naija*).

3. The illusion (*branthi*) of “they” and “me”
Increased the feeling (*bhava*) of difference (*bhedham*).
Thinking that all others are enemies,
I tried to destroy them.
Then it happened that I saw God (*deva*) in the others,
With the compassion (*daya*) of my guru;
My eyes have seen the divine light (*parama teja*).
4. A little bit of a lump of clay,
I picked and called it mine;
I smashed it on the earth because it did not respond
To my insistent worship (*koluva*).
Then God (*deva*) appeared in the clay idol (*bomma*)
By the compassion (*daya*) of my guru.
In a moment the world (*loka*) has changed.
5. Not knowing the mystery (*tattva*) of life
I worshipped (*koluva*) the tinsel body (*tanuvu*)
As I was worrying and burning inside
Because there was no usefulness.
Today I found eternal truth (*nitya satya*),
And with the compassion (*daya*) of my guru
Today I received eternal life (*nitya jiva*).
6. When the mind (*manas*) embraced the body (*deha*)
All affections (*mamata*) surrounded me.
As I was weeping without direction
In the utter darkness, then
The mind (*manas*) got separated from the body (*deha*)
With the compassion (*daya*) of my guru,
And all affections (*mamata*) disappeared.
7. As I fell into the illusion (*maya*) of many directions
And was tired seeking the way,
And as I suffered
The endless deathly agony (*marana vedana*),
Then I heard the divine voice (*divya vaku*)
By the compassion (*daya*) of my guru;
Today I have seen the divine image (*divya rupa*).
8. As I was searching around for the light (*velugu*)
With my eyes darkened by illusion (*maya*);
And as meaningless dreams
Came to my mind (*manas*),
Loudly the day broke
With the compassion (*daya*) of my guru
And my dreams vanished.

9. As the light of the divine image (*parama rupa*) appeared to me
My green eyes became clear.[1]
I became serene and enlightened
And “me” and “mine” disappeared.
The darkness of life fled away
With the compassion (*daya*) of my guru
And mercy (*jali*) and love (*prema*) came flowing in.
10. The mistaken view of friends and enemies,
The dividing view of you and me,
The illusion (*bhranthi*) of earth (*ihamu*) and heaven (*paramu*),
Quickly vanished in illusion (*maya*).
I learned that only Jesus is the guru,
With the compassion (*daya*) of my guru,
And I myself have become Christ.

Notes to song 33

1. In Telugu idiom green eyes are jaundiced eyes, representing ignorance and misunderstanding.

Song No. 34

Refrain:

My brother Jesus kindly taught me that I am all (*sarvam*).

1. I already existed and I shall exist in the future;
I am the shore-less divine form (*parama rupa*).
By the force of fate (*karma*) I am imprisoned in this temple;
I shall worship (*puja*) myself and I need nothing more.
2. In temples (*gudi*), in caves (*guha*) and in horrible (*ghora*) paths (*ghahanamu*)
All those low (*badaghu*) gods (*devas*) are my image (*rupa*)
And crooked reflection, they say.
But I myself rule these worlds (*jagat*) with love (*prema*).
3. I am the creator and also I am the creation;
I am the male form (*purusha rupa*) and I am the female form (*polathi rupa*);
I am omnipresent and I am being, consciousness and bliss (*sacchidananda*);
I am eternal life (*nitya jiva*) without birth or death.
4. I am bound in the embrace of wife and sons, also in utter enemies;
I am bound in the dust and the gold.
I am the sustainer and I am the sustained;
I am the measurer and I am the one who is measured.

5. In the blind and the lame I am being oppressed.
In the belly fires of the hungry I am being consumed.
I am the one who weeps and I am the cause of weeping;
I am freed from chains and I can free the guru from chains.
6. To break down the guard and to ruin the castle of religion (*matham*),
To release Jesus who is imprisoned in it,
I brought him out by hand and showed him to all;
So come, brothers, following (him) is salvation (*mukti*).

Appendix to the Songs

The current song book of the Subba Rao *sampradaya* contains two extra songs that were not written by Subba Rao but which are widely used by Christians in Andhra Pradesh. The second is constantly sung at transition points of meetings of the Subba Rao *sanga*, and was in use during Subba Rao's lifetime. There is also a supplemental book of Christian songs, yet the two songs below are printed along with Subba Rao's own compositions. Thus these two are translated here.

First extra song

Refrain:

Lord, your cross has become my refuge and I find heavenly strength only in your cross.

1. In the words which Jesus uttered hanging on the cross I drink the matchless nectar of love.
2. The more I look at the cross the more my stony heart breaks, melts, and flows like water.
3. As I dig deep into the message of the cross your matchless mercy can wash all my filth.
4. Having searched many paths and having found no fruit now I stand before the cross.
5. I take refuge in you, my Lord, I approach your presence; I am a great transgressor.

Second extra song

Refrain:

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord
Can the angels declare you?
Holy, Holy, Holy Lord.

1. Holy Father, divine image, shining with matchless strength and wisdom and virtue.
2. Holy Son, incarnate ocean of love, saving men.
3. Holy Spirit, giving gifts, give to the devotees heavenly bliss and love.
4. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God, three in one, to Thee forever belongs the great glory.

Appendix Two: A Thematic Index to the Songs of K. Subba Rao

This index has been prepared so that major themes in the songs of K. Subba Rao can be easily identified and particular topics can be studied with reference to many different songs. In some cases, every use of a particular word is noted, but more often it is the general theme that is identified in various stanzas of the songs. The references given are to the song and stanza number; note that R indicates the refrain of a song.

Advaitic theme s

- 1: 2, 3, 6
- 2: full song
- 6: 2
- 7: 3
- 15: 3
- 16: 5, 8
- 18: 5, 10, 11
- 19: 3, 4
- 20: 2, 10, 13, 14
- 21: 10, 11
- 22: 5, 8
- 23: 4, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18
- 24: full song
- 27: 7
- 33: 10
- 34: full song

Baptism

- 9: 3, 5
- 11: 7
- 14: 8, 9
- 29: 18
- 30: 1
- 32: 8

Bhakti

Against *bhakti*

- 16: 6
- 23: 13, 17
- 24: 4
- 29: 6, 12, 20

Bhakti to Christ (see also Christ, Prayer to)

4: 13
5: 13
8: 7
27: 4, 6
28: 1, 2, 3
31: full song

Other references to *bhakti*

5: 5, 6
26: 9

Bible quotations or references (see also Scriptures)

6: 3
7: 6
9: 3
10: 10
13: 5, 7
17: 9(?)
25: 5, 10, 11
29: 10, 23
30: 7

Body

Negative references to the body

4: 6
6: 2
9: 2
11: 3
12: 5
20: 3, 4, 11, 13
21: 4
24: 5, 6
25: 2, 7, 9, 10
27: 6, 7
33: 6

Body-spirit dualism

9: 2
10: 10
14: 3
17: 7, 8
19: 3
20: 5, 13
21: 4
24: R
25: 7, 9
29: 8, 9, 19
33: 6
34: 1

Worship of the body

1: 3
5: 6
11: 2
27: 7
32: 5
33: 5

God within the body

7: 3
14: 2
17: 8
19: 3, 6
20: 5
21: 4 (Christ)
24: R, 2, 9
25: 8
27: 9
29: 8, 9
34: 1

Positive references to the body

1: 11
2: 8
10: 10
33: 9

Other references to the body

13: 3
21: 7, 8
26: 2, 8
27: 8
29: 19

Christ

The glory of Christ

1: 2, 4
7: 8 (Christ is God (*parameshwar*))
9: 3 (Christ is God (*deva*))
12: 3 (Christ as essence of *shastra* and *Veda*)
25: 9
27: 4

The love of Christ

4: 2
5: 12
11: 2
12: 1, 2, 5, 6, 8
13: 4

16: 1, 2, 4
23: 8, 12
27: 5, 6, 11, 12
28: 4, 5
31: 1, 3
33: R, 9

Prayer to Christ

3: 6, 10
5: 12
26: 3
28: 5

Christ residing in our body

7: 3, 8
19: 6
21: R
21: 4, 11
23: 10, 11
25: 8
27: 9
29: 8

Become Christ

29: 18 (cf. 22)
31: 4 (become God)
33: 10

Christ in prison

1: 10
11: 1, 2, 4, 6, 9
34: 5, 6

Church, against

1: 8, 9, 10
4: 3
6: 2, 3, 4, 5
9: full song
10: full song, esp. 9, 11
11: 4, 5, 6
13: 2
14: 1, 8, 9
29: full song
30: full song
32: 8, 9

Creation

13: 4
20: 6
24: 3 (against the idea)
34: 3

Cross

1: 7
2: 4
3: 9
9: 5
12: 3
13: 2, 3, 7
14: 3, 10
16: 1, 2, 4, 8
18: 8
19: 9
31: full song

Desire and Anger, see under sin

God

Others as God

14: 5
18: 10
19: 4
21: 10
25: 7
27: 9
30: 1
33: 3

God in us

2: 8
7: 8
14: 2
20: 5

Humans are divine

7: 3
16: 8
17: 8
18: 10
19: 3, 7, 8
20: 5, 6, 13, 14
23: 8, 14, 15, 17, 18
24: R, 2, 9
31: 4
34: full song

Heaven

General comments

2: 3
7: 7
9: 5
10: 5
13: 3, 4, 5
14: 8
16: 2, 7
17: 9
22: 2, 7
23: 16
24: 1
29: 7, 11, 15, 19
30: 9
31: 2
32: 5
33: 10

False promises of

7: 7
9: 1, 3
10: 1, 13
11: 3, 4, 5
14: 3, 7
29: 1, 3

Heaven is within

2: 7
6: 2
9: 3
10: 10
29: 10

Hinduism, comments against

12: 3
16: 4
21: 9

“I and Mine”

1: 6
7: 4
9: 4
15: 2
23: 13
31: 7
33: 9

Karma

General references

5: 11
15: 2
20: 7
23: 3, 5
25: full song
26: 3, 8
32: 1, 5
33: 2
34: 1

Karma as mere deeds

32: 5

Karmakanda

2: 6
7: 5
9: 4
14: 2
20: 12

Karmajeevi

10: 16

Karmayogi

13: 7
14: 9
15: 2

Knowledge/ignorance

1: 3
2: 6
3: 8
7: 3, 8
8: 6
18: 7
19: 6, 7
20: R, 1, 13
22: 1
23: 3, 11, 14
24: R, 1, 5
25: R, 6, 7
27: 9
28: 5
29: 8, 9, 18
31: 3
33: 2, 5

Live for (love) others

6: 2, 5
7: 5 (Christ did so)
13: 1
14: 4, 5, 8
16: 1
18: 8
19: 2, 5, 8
23: 6
25: 4, 5, 9
29: 5, 7, 11
30: 1, 8

Love

Love of God/Christ

3: 9
4: 2
6: 4
11: 1, 2
12: 1, 5, 8
13: 4
16: 1, 2, 4
23: 8, 12
25: 3, 4, 6, 7
27: 5, 6
28: 3, 4, 5
29: 5
31: 1, 3
33: 9

General references

2: 1
5: 11
6: 2
13: 1
14: 4, 8
19: 5
22: 3, 5
23: 3, 4, 5, 6
25: 5, 9
27: 8
28: 3
29: 5
30: 8
33: R
34: 2

Love and sacrifice

6: 5
7: 8
9: 4
16: 1
18: 8
25: 4
28: 6
30: 8

Maya

1: 3, 4
20: 6
23: 13
27: 7, 11
31: 6
32: 2
33: 7, 8, 10

Morality

15: 4
18: 9, 10

Peace

12: 4
13: 1
20: 13
23: 5, 7, 11
31: 8

Prayer

14: 7, 9
16: 6
20: 8
21: 8
23: 1, 2
24: 4, 7
28: 6
29: 6
30: 5
32: 9

Purity

2: 3
7: 7
9: 5
10: 6, 8
11: 3
13: 3
14: 3

16: 7
19: 1
24: 7
27: 12
29: 3, 7, 17, 19

Religion

Anti-religion

1: 7, 8, 9, 10
2: 9, 10
3: 5
4: 5
6: 1, 5
7: 5
8: 7
9: 1
10: 5, 7, 9, 14
11: full song
12: 8
13: 4, 5, 6
14: 2, 6, 8, 9
16: 1
19: 1
21: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
29: 7, 8, 9
30: full song
32: 8
34: 6

Against religious ritual

2: 6
7: 5
9: 4
14: 2
20: 12
21: 6, 7, 8
29: 7, 8, 18
30: 1

Positive sense of religion

13: 2

Renunciation

Conquer self and sin

2: 1
7: 4
10: 7, 11
16: 7
19: 6, 9
20: R, 1, 14

25: 4, 7
27: 1
29: 4

Renunciation of family

14: 10
18: 8
21: 10 (contrasting point)
24: 8
27: full song

Other references

2: 1, 2
3: 3
6: 2, 4
8: 5
13: 3
14: 11
16: 8
17: 9
18: 11
24: 1
28: 5

Scriptures

4: 6
6: 3
7: 8
12: 3(Hindu)
13: 5
16: 1
18: 5
31: 1

Sin

General references

1: 1, 3
3: 1
4: 2
6: 3
10: 8
12: 2, 6, 7
15: 5
16: 4, 5
21: 2
23: 4, 5, 16
25: 3
26: 5
27: 1, 5, 12
28: 1, 2, 3
32: 1

Kama -krodha (desire-anger)

2: 1
16: 7
25: 6

Kama (desire)

3: 2
4: 3
9: 2
12: 4
14: 8
18: 8
23: 4
25: 8

Vasana (desire)

2: 9
3: 6
4: 6
24: 5
25: 10
33: 2

Moha (desire)

12: 8

Korika (desire)

20: 2
23: 4

Passion and hatred (*raga* and *dvesha*)

22: 1, 2, 4, 5

Hatred (*dvesha*)

7: 8
14: 4
22: 3
25: 2, 5

Mamata (attachment)

18: 3, 6
25: 4
27: 7
33: 6

Six enemies

7: 4
20: 14

The Way, following Christ

- 1: 1, 6
- 2: R
- 3: 3, 5, 8
- 4: R, 1
- 5: 1, 3
- 6: R, 1, 3, 4, 5
- 7: R, 1, 5, 6, 8
- 9: 2
- 10: 2, 11, 12, 15, 16
- 11: 2, 3, 7, 9
- 12: 1, 3, 7
- 13: 1, 3, 5, 7
- 14: R, 1, 6, 8, 9, 11
- 15: 1, 4, 5, 6
- 16: 1, 3, 7
- 17: 8
- 19: R, 9
- 20: 12
- 24: 1
- 25: 1, 2, 3, 6
- 28: 2, 3
- 29: R, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 20
- 30: 9
- 31: 2, 5
- 32: 1
- 33: 7
- 34: 6

The World

General references

- 5: 9, 10, 11
- 12: 3, 4, 5, 6
- 13: 3
- 20: 9, 12
- 22: 6
- 26: 4
- 28: 5
- 32: 2, 4
- 33: 1, 4
- 34: 2

Impermanence of the world

- 4: 4, 7
- 5: 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11
- 7: 2
- 12: 5
- 20: 9, 10
- 32: 2, 7

Appendix Three:

Annotated Bibliography of Writings from the Subba Rao Movement

Literature related to K. Subba Rao is a bibliographer's nightmare. Various editions of works appear undated and borrow from other works without acknowledgement. I have arranged the material under five topics rather than alphabetically by author, partly due to the fact that quite a number of the items do not even have author or editor information. I located all but one of the primary source materials that I have seen reference to, and have made bibliographical comments on all this material below in the hope that a fuller bibliography will develop as other scholars research the Subba Rao movement.

Biographical and Personality Studies of K. Subba Rao

Airan, C. D.

1963(?) *The Miracle Man of Munipalle*, privately published, printed in Vijayawada. This is the account of Airan's first visit to Subba Rao and his observations and impressions, with an appendix of Scripture verses considered relevant to understand Subba Rao and his ministry.

1965(?) *Kalagara Subba Rao: The Mystic of Munipalle*. At least two editions published, neither dated, one without publishing information and the other published privately in Vijayawada. What seems the earlier edition is longer due to 13 testimonials as a penultimate chapter; the other edition has only one such testimony. In both the final chapter is a Subba Rao letter to Airan dated March 5, 1965. Most of the text of Rao: n.d.(a) appears as chapter 10, and chapter 11 is an edited version of the appendix in Bai 1971. Page references in this dissertation are to the shorter edition since copies of this are still available in Munipalle.

Baago, Kaj

1968 *The Movement Around Subba Rao: A Study of the Hindu-Christian Movement around K. Subba Rao in Andhra Pradesh*. Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society. A reprint was done by the Subba Rao people that is not dated, the publisher being The Society for the Understanding of Christ.

Fiala-Ghosh, Hanna

n.d. *Subba Rao: A Cornerstone of Truth; A Way-Showers to Christ of World Importance*, no publishing information. The only edition of this that I have seen has footnotes printed in the middle of pages; a typesetter clearly did not distinguish notes and text, perhaps from a previously published edition. A personal tribute by an Austrian woman to Subba Rao, with comments on his ministry and teaching.

Thyagaraju, A. F.

1971 *Subba Rao: The Man and His Message (A Personal Assessment)*, privately published in Machilipatnam.

Reports

Airan, C. D.

1963b "Message from an Unbaptized Christian". *The National Missionary Society Intelligencer*, vol. 57 no. 5, Nov. 1963, pp. 47. A report of Subba Rao's meeting in a church in Secunderabad.

Songs of Subba Rao

Airan, C. D. (ed. & trans.)

1964 *The Outpourings of My Heart*, privately published in Guntur. Translations of 19 of the 34 hymns of Subba Rao found in the Telugu song book.

Unknown

n.d. *Translation of the New Songs*, privately published in Vijayawada. This is mentioned and quoted in Baago, but I have not been able to find a copy. The translations quoted reveal that this, like *The Outpourings of My Heart*, is more of a paraphrase than a careful translation.

Teaching of K. Subba Rao

Devi, Janaki

n.d. *The Teacher I Know*, no publication information. A booklet of eight pages praising the work and teaching of Subba Rao, with translations of a few lines of his songs filling the last page.

Rao, Kalagara Subba

n.d.(a) *Gurudev! Where Can I Get So Many Millstones?*, privately published in Vijayawada. At least two editions done, one with “O! Lord!” rather than “Gurudev” in the title. Also appears in an abridged form in Airan 1965.

n.d.(b) *Dandakamu* (Telugu; Dandakamu is a type of Telugu poetry which is direct address to a deity.) This is a small leaflet, a prayer in adoration to Christ in highly Sanskritized language with many images from Indian sources. No author is mentioned but it is known to be by Subba Rao.

1958 *Retreat Padri!*, no publisher listed. Second revised edition in 1972 entitled *Retreat Padre*, with a new preface and a foreword by A. F. Thyagaraju, again without publisher but printed in Machilipatnam.

1965 *Three Letters: Don't Pray, Become Christ, Man Created God*, privately published in Vijayawada. Letters of Subba Rao to C. D. Airan.

Subramaniam, M.

1980 *Kalagaraguru Gitaabhaasyam* (Telugu; *Commentary on the Songs of Kalagara*). Vijayawada: City Pharma Distributors. A discussion of some of the songs of Subba Rao from a Vedantic perspective.

Testimonies of Healings and Encounters

Bai, B. Manjula

1971 *The Haunted House*, privately published in Tambaram (Madras). (An abbreviated account appears in Chowdary 1971.) A foreword by A. F. Thyagaraju and an appendix containing a brief account of a Subba Rao church sermon reprinted from *The Church of Christ*, Sept. 1965, which is about half of Airan 1963b. (This appendix is further edited into chapter 11 of Airan 1965.)

Chowdary (Choudary), V. Kesava Rao (ed.)

1962(?) *Divine Healing of Outstanding and Incurable Diseases by Sri K. Subba Rao*. No publication information. Translated by Dr. R. G. Harding from the Telugu original. Sixty-nine testimonies.

1971 *Some Opinions and Divine Healing of Outstanding and Incurable Diseases by Sri K. Subba Rao*, privately published in Vijayawada. Only 28 of these 106 testimonies are from Chowdary 1962, many others being found also in the other collections, so in spite of similarities this is a new collection rather than a new edition.

1977(?) *Krishthu Apostolulu Kalagara Subhaa Raao Gaaru Adbutha Swathathalu Abhi Praayaalu* (Telugu; Christ's Apostle Kalagara Subba Rao's Wonderful Healing and Opinions: A Collection) From information in the foreword it seems this appeared 6 years after the English collection published in 1971. 121 brief testimonies are recorded, many from the 1971 English collection but in completely different order.

Collections

n.d.(a) *About Christ's Miracles Through His Chosen Mystic Subba Rao*, no information on editor or publisher. One edition clearly from India, another with an American address (American edition without the word "about" in title and "of Munipalle India" appended to title). Twenty-eight testimonies.

n.d.(b) *Divine Healings by Kalagara Subba Rao*, no editor or publication information; one edition printed in Nellore. At least two editions, one with 31 testimonies and the other with 39 (including the same 31). The layout of the covers of this booklet (there are no title pages) actually give the impression that the title is *Divine Healings* and the author is Kalagara Subba Rao; the contents suggests that the title should be as indicated here.

n.d.(c) *Ruhani Elaj* (Urdu; *Spiritual Treatment*). No editor, privately published in Hyderabad. Thirty testimonies of healings.

Notes

Notes to Chapter One

1. Cf. Inden: “We should not think here that Indology was marginal to the project of making the human sciences in the image of the natural sciences and assume that [historian Vincent A.] Smith has had recourse to his machine metaphor merely as a stylistic device or to make what he had to say sound vaguely more scientific. Indology as a branch of comparative philology was right at the center of the action in the middle of the nineteenth century: the philologists themselves were making strong claims to have their discipline treated as a natural science.” (2000:13)
2. Cf. also one of Said’s striking insights, how the textuality of much Orientalist study kept scholars immune to the actual realities of life in the countries they were supposedly studying. (Said 1994[1978]:52)
3. Note also these comments: “A major concern will be to criticize the essentialism in Indological texts.” (2000:2) “The multiple effects that this essentialism has had on the study of Indian politics, religion, and history is the major focus of the rest of this book.” (2000:83) “This metaphor of [Hinduism as] a still, sacred lake as a shared source of ideas sums up rather well the essentialist tendencies of nearly all these Indologists.” (2000:105) “Throughout this book I have argued that the problem with Orientalism is not just one of bias or bad motives and, hence, confined to itself. The problem lies in my view, with the way in which the human sciences have displaced human agency on to essences in the first place.” (2000:264)
4. For an excellent detailed discussion on *varna* and *jāti* see Dermot Killingly 1991; he suggests that *jāti* is properly caste, and *varna* is quite a different construct (1991:8).
5. Note the prevalence of “clean” Sudras in a state like Andhra Pradesh, a reality that is hard to reconcile with *varna* theory.
6. Walker’s *Hindu World* suggests that “there are about 3,000 castes in India, and over 25,000 subcastes.” (Walker 1983[1968]:203) The Anthropological Survey of India in their massive work in the late 1980s enumerated the communities of India (4694 in the revised count of 2002) rather than the castes. See Singh 2002, especially pages 9ff where the explanation is given for defining “communities” rather than *jātis*. This shift of terminology (and conceptualization) supports Inden’s critique of Orientalist discussions of caste.
7. Inden is here clearly referring to caste as “the distinctive element of Indian civilization” with tongue in cheek; this is what the Orientalists said, and he really is mocking them in suggesting that this feature only really arose in the thirteenth century. He presents no evidence whatsoever for the claims made here, instead referring readers to his 1976 study *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture: A History of Caste and Clan in Middle Period Bengal*.
8. See Sontheimer and Kulke 2001[1989] for papers updated from a 1989 conference called to reconsider Hinduism and seek a scholarly consensus; note Kulke’s reference to “rather heated and controversial discussions.” (1997:1)
9. Cf. King: “In the contemporary era we can see a great deal of continuity between modern conceptions of religion and the Christian understanding of *religio*. Both tend to place a great deal of emphasis upon a faithful (*sic*) adherence to doctrine as indicative of religious allegiance, upon sacred texts as of central importance to religious communities and to questions of truth and falsity as of paramount importance to the religious adherent or ‘believer’.” (1999:38-39)
10. It must be noted here also that King points out and discusses at some length the fact of Indian and particularly Brahman influence in the development of Orientalist perspectives of

Hinduism; for example, a bias towards Sanskrit texts is evident in Brahman religiosity in a way not generally true of non-Brahman Hindus.

11. It should be noted that Inden also points out how Orientalist constructs lie behind many modern Hindu self-definitions. Both Inden and King also point out how deeply much Dalit or subaltern discourse is rooted in an Orientalist perspective.

12. Exemplifying that broad sweep, note Trautmann's comment on Inden's work: "the root and branch extremity of its criticism is disarming: Inden flays practically everyone in sight, including close colleagues and even his own earlier work." (1997:21)

Notes to Chapter Two

1. Frykenberg does not need to name his antagonists when he comments that "the concept of 'Hinduism' as denoting a single religious community has already done enormous, even incalculable, damage to structures undergirding the peace, security, and unity of the whole Indian political system. What's more, continued popular use of this concept and popular belief in the existence of a monolithic 'Hinduism' – in short, fervent adherence to any doctrine which assumes that there is one single religion embraced by the 'majority' of all peoples in India – can still do even greater damage." (2001:82-83)

2. The main problem regards the treatment by the state of those who are relegated to minority status, but Chatterjee is also deeply concerned about the entire Islamic heritage of India which is denied its place in Indian historiography and tradition ("The classical heritage of Islam remains external to Indian history" (1995:127)). Ironically again, the European element is not so demonized as it in fact underlies the whole concept of Hindutva and Hindu nationalism: "The idea that 'Indian nationalism' is synonymous with 'Hindu nationalism' is not the vestige of some premodern religious conception. It is an entirely modern, rationalist and historicist idea. Like other modern ideologies, it allows for a central role of the state in the modernization of society and strongly defends the state's unity and sovereignty. Its appeal is not religious but political. In this sense, the framework of its reasoning is entirely secular." (1995:126)

3. Cf. Mathew and Bakshi (1988:1): "In India, in personal matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption, each religious community has its own laws. They are known as personal laws or family laws. They are recognized by the State. These laws are derived from the scriptures, customs, traditions and statutory codifications. Thus Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis have separate personal laws."

4. Of course, if in following Jesus Christ Subba Rao also considered himself a Christian, or if his life suggested to others that he had "become a Christian," then it would be problematic indeed to consider him a Hindu disciple of Christ in light of the political definition of Hindus and Christians under two separate legal categories.

5. Cf. Sugirtharajah (1998:162): "The image of the Divine as a personal god is central to the theistic tradition, whereas the image of an impersonal Absolute is central to the monistic tradition."

6. The classic statement of *avatâra* theory is found in Bhagavad Gita 4:7-8: "Whenever, O descendant of Bharata, righteousness declines and unrighteousness prevails, I manifest Myself. For the protection of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of religion, I come into being from age to age." (Vireswarananda n.d.:91-92)

7. V. Chakkarai (1981[1932]) affirms this in his study of *Jesus the Avatar*. Geoffrey Parrinder (1982) and Julius Lipner (1996) dissent and consider it inappropriate to use *avatâra* terminology for Jesus.

8. For details about the theology and worship of Vishnu, Shiva and the Devi see Banerjea 1996[1953].

9. This triadic combination must be considered more important than the conception of the *trimurti*. Cf. Farquhar (1993[1914]:100-101): “An attempt was made to reconcile all sectaries by the doctrine of the three-fold manifestation of the Supreme in Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; but the concept never truly laid hold of the Hindu people. The Triad is frequently mentioned, and it is now and then represented in sculpture; but it was Siva and Vishnu that drew the reverence of men.”
10. Note Bhagavad Gita 2:20 on the *âtman*: “It (self) is not born and it does not die at any time. And it does not again come into existence by being born. It (self) is birthless, constant, eternal and ancient; it is not slain when the body is slain.” (Vireswarananda n.d.:38)
11. Note Francis Clooney’s impressive case that even Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta is best thought of as a theological position. (1993:1ff)
12. The striking similarities of this *bhakti* theology to Christian teaching have often been pointed out, not least in Rudolf Otto’s *Christianity and the Indian Religion of Grace* (1929), a careful study of similarities and differences.
13. One might expect such a theological shift to undermine scholarly study of scripture, and Rambachan laments just this development in modern Hinduism: “The decline of scholarship and its dissociation from spirituality is one of the most lamentable trends in the recent history of Hinduism. Its reflection in the poor state of theological education in Hinduism needs more study.” (Rambachan 1994:135-136)
14. The first stage is student, the third recluse.
15. For a different perspective on the most important stage of life (*âsrama*), note this from Manusmriti VI: 89-90 as quoted by P. V. Kane: “just as all big and small rivers find a resting place in the ocean, so men of all *âsramas* find support in the householder and the householder is declared to be the most excellent of all the *âsramas* by the precepts of the Veda and *smrtis*, since he supports the other three.” (Kane 1997[1941]:640)
16. Two passages from the Gita may be quoted: 2:47 says “To work alone you have the right, but never claim the results. Let not the results of actions be your motive, nor be attached to inaction.” (Vireswarananda n.d.:51) 18:5-6 says “Work in the form of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be relinquished, but should indeed be performed; (for) sacrifice, gift and austerity are sanctifying to the wise. But even these activities should be performed giving up attachment and fruit – this is My decided and best view.” (Vireswarananda n.d.:329-330)
17. *Pujâ* is not rooted in ancient Vedic tradition which was aniconic; cf. Choudhury 1998:204: “In the course of time the sacrificial worship of the vedic Aryans was replaced by *pujâ*, worship of the deities or gods with images.”
18. Cf. Bhagavad Gita 9:26: “He who with devotion offers Me a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, that devout offering of the pure-minded one I accept.” (Vireswarananda n.d.:193)
19. *Prasâd* means grace, and the food returned to the worshipper is often taken away and shared widely with others.
20. This description of *pujâ* is indebted to Choudhury 1998:217-219, supplemented from my own observations of various *pujâs*.
21. It should be noted that women can also be gurus, and manifestations of power are another reason a person may be accepted as a guru.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. Each of the three great branches of the church are present in India. The origins of the Eastern Orthodox Churches cannot be conclusively determined despite a tradition pointing to the Apostle Thomas; that a Syrian language liturgy developed is sufficient proof of strong outside influence. Roman Catholic and Protestant churches took root in India during the colonial era.

2. Further church union discussions were held, especially between the Church of South India and the Lutheran churches and between the Church of South India, Church of North India, and the Mar Thoma Church. But the momentum for organic church union seems to have waned, both in India and internationally. On the unions that were achieved, among many studies note Sundkler 1954 and Marshall 1987.
3. But note also his comment that “Subba Rao’s movement – one fears – is more likely to develop into a form of Hinduism than into a form of Christianity.” (1979:219)
4. “One discovery that I made in the course of my experience of Christian Missions, and also of the Christian Churches in the West, is that the Jesus Christ, whom the non-Christians everywhere have begun to love and revere, is an entirely different person from the Christ of the Christians, and I have no doubt in my mind that the former is nearer to the original Jesus than the latter.” (Parekh 1947:vi)
5. Rabindranath Tagore’s brilliant novel *Gora* (1997[1928]) is almost an extended commentary on this statement, although it is also much more. The Christian Church and community lie in the background in *Gora*, clearly smitten with a still more deadly version of the disease that infected the Brahma Samaj.
6. In McGavran’s survey these are type three churches, monoethnic churches from one caste. Type four is very similar, monoethnic churches from one tribe. Type one are also monoethnic, being the Syrian churches of Kerala. Type two are the fully conglomerate churches, the original goal of most mission work, being people gathered from various castes and classes into a new community. Type five is a hybrid, a type two that has received a wave of people of type three (usually) and so becomes a “modified multiethnic church”. His remaining four types are adjustments to these five major types of church.
7. The Delhi study by Alter and Jai Singh and the Punjab study by Campbell were reprinted along with a tribal study from Orissa by Barbara Boal in *The Church as Christian Community* (Hayward 1966), an apt title that defines the problem of communally-isolated churches.
8. It should be noted 35 years on from this statement that in urban India there has indeed been a continued weakening of the association of culture change with baptism, but simultaneously the concept of change of community related to baptism has grown still stronger, and so the sociological offense of baptism is perhaps an even larger problem today than it was at the time of this report.
9. A powerful statement of the case for this approach was also made by the Jesuit Hans Staffner (1988), who presented the twin theses that “Hinduism is a culture that has room for many religions, and Christianity is a religion which can become incarnate in any culture.” (1988: 121) Staffner finally appeals for the abandonment of Christian personal law, and for Indian Christians to live under “Hindu” law. (1988: 240ff)
10. Subba Rao, as might be expected, was mentioned a few times in the volume.
11. There is debate about the exact referees for “Dalit”; some would include tribals and other backward castes along with the “scheduled castes” (from a schedule or list of most backward or “untouchable” castes prepared by the government early in the 20th century), while others would confine the term to the latter group only. Cf. Rasquinha (2002:258): “Many of the important thinkers in Dalit Christian theology are aware that the term Dalit has also been used in a wider sense to mean various sections of the oppressed in India. S. Chatterji holds that the liberation of Tribals, Dalits and women, oppressed by the caste-class nexus, depends on their united struggles. Hence, he suggests that Dalit theology should be an umbrella concept to include the theological thinking of the various sections of the oppressed and so widen the meaning of the term Dalit.”
12. This fact alone makes the title (“Christianity is Indian”) suspect; note the telling observation of Michael Amaladoss on this line in his review of the book: “Christianity is

indeed Indian if we look only at the people who are the agents of these various movements. The only exception is de Nobili. But apart from a few examples in the first part referring to previous centuries, like Tilak, Sunder Singh and de Nobili, there are no examples of any serious effort at indigenization, though the evangelical zeal of individuals and groups is certainly praiseworthy. One could further wonder how far they are indigenous financially. If this is all the evidence we have for Christianity being Indian, it is not very convincing.”

(2001:154)

13. In fact Ambedkar announced in 1935 that “I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of ‘untouchability’: that is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu: this is in my power.” (Kadam 1993:43) But his conversion to Buddhism took place only on Oct. 14, 1956, along with over five hundred thousand of his followers. (Kadam 1993:58) This long gap between announced plans to renounce Hinduism and decision to opt for Buddhism kept the Indian religious world in suspense for over two decades.

14. Sebastian Kim rejects the interpretation of Thomas about a “covenant” between Christian and Hindu leaders. His reading of the controversy about conversion and propagation suggests that Hindus first made concessions, probably due to the circumstances of communal tensions around the time of Independence. “If one considers the chronology of events, it is evident that Christians put their confidence in the Hindu majority *after* the latter had made provision for the minorities in the fundamental rights.” (Kim 2003:54; italics original)

15. Webster in his outstanding introduction to Dalit theology shows how Wilson completely rejected the spiritual message of sin and salvation, which he considered as emphasizing Dalit weakness and encouraging dependence, as well as giving a sense of superiority over (and so separation from) other Dalits. (Webster 1992:225-226)

16. Subba Rao, being from a “clean” caste, stood outside the issues that concern Dalit theologians. Thus the cursory treatment of this topic in this chapter.

17. There is little sign of an end to the tensions between those who focus on classical cultures and those who have a liberational focus; for fascinating interaction between the two camps see the letters exchanged between Fr. George Soares-Prabhu from a liberational perspective (“ashrams are not suitable places for doing theology in India today” (Soares-Prabhu 1993:153)) and Sara Grant and Swami Amalraj of the Ashram Aikiya (“the specific contribution of ashrams is to keep alive in the human race the sense of being rooted in the Eternal.” (Grant and Amalraj 1993:160)

18. It is worth noting that Upadhyaya arrived at this position after a period when he preferred to relate to “Vedic theism” rather than Advaita philosophy; on this remarkable figure see the outstanding biography by Julius Lipner. (1999)

19. Chandran is very briefly introducing these figures so does not even mention Master CVV. For the latter’s influence on Chenchiah see Boyd 2000[1969]:146.

20. For an example of this, with very strong advocacy of pluralism, see Eck 1993:167-199.

21. Aleaz in the end aligns his categories with the exclusivism (reject Advaita), inclusivism (reinterpret Advaita) and pluralism (receive Advaita) positions just mentioned, a truly unacceptable outline. (Aleaz 1996:199)

Notes to Chapter Four

1. Airan says that in the book he “forecast certain details of events of the II World War.” (Airan 1965:23)

2. Note the striking words of his wife in introducing the first edition of the book *Retreat, Padri!*: “Years ago he was so intensely worldly that I never dreamt of his change. I know it was not at all his effort. Lord Jesus Christ himself did it. It was all like magic. It was all

sudden. I myself could not believe. I can't account for all that. It was nothing else but His grace. The change was abnormal." (Rao 1958:iii)

3. Munipalle is the ancestral home of Srimatti Nagendramma.

4. This event needs to be understood in light of the discussion about spirit possession in popular Hinduism in the last section of chapter two.

5. Jeevaratnam is briefly mentioned in the work of the noted scholar of Pentecostalism, Walter J. Hollenweger (see 1972:377, 481).

6. Much later he wrote a poem about this vision, which is now the first item in the collection of songs of the Subba Rao *sampradaya*. This song will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

7. Cf. Baago: "He was forced to accept the power in that name and therefore also the reality of his calling." (1968:5) Cf. also Airan 1965:27.

8. There is a Lutheran church in Munipalle. Dr. B. V. Subbamma indicates that Subba Rao went here for a time, and others of his caste status followed along due to his influence in the society. But he and his friends were not well received by the Christians of low caste background; there was a fight about who got to sit on chairs and who sat on the floor and the Christians claimed the church had been built for them and not for these newcomers. (Interview of April 30, 2002.)

9. Further comments on this follow in chapters five and six. Note that Subba Rao claimed he had received from Christ the true Spirit baptism that precludes a water ceremony. (Airan 1965:92; Airan 1963a:4; Chowdary 1971:72)

10. Airan refutes the charge of Subba Rao being an anti-Christ, which it must be said he does rather easily. He, however, brings the counter accusation that saying this about Subba Rao is the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit! (1965:40) Subba Rao mentions a triplicate of epithets he clearly had heard; anti-Christ, devil's child and magician (Rao 1958:1, cf. Rao n.d.:12). Thyagaraju in his forward to Manjula Bai's story notes that "there are those who assert that Sri Subba Rao derives his strength from some diabolical force." (Bai 1971:2)

11. Note that Das generally approved of Subba Rao. (Richard 1995:270)

12. The theology in these three letters is also reflected in the songs, and will be noted in the discussion there.

13. In September of 1963 in a church hall in Trimulgherry (Secunderabad) Subba Rao said "This is the first occasion in the past 20 years when I was welcomed by a group of friendly Christians and allowed to speak to them." (Airan 1963b:5) See also an enthusiastic reference by Rev. T. Mathew in the longer version of Airan 1965:135.

14. This gives the impression that this second edition is moderate in tone, but in fact the changes are very few, perhaps most striking being the removal of eight illustrative drawings that mock the work of Christian priests as opposed to the cause of Christ. The first line of this second edition is "My dear Padre, you who are sticking fast to the church forgetting God, you who are tightly embracing Religion de serting the Lord, and you who are glorifying the body ignoring the soul, why do you speak of God and heaven?" (1972:15)

15. A note in the front of Chowdary 1962 indicates that Subba Rao had recently retired. In the text is a reference to his retirement coming due on Aug. 15, 1962. (Chowdary 1962:84)

16. Numerous photographs from these foreign visits, now badly fading, adorn the walls of the prayer hall in Munipalle.

17. Kamma dominance in the *sampradaya* is evident from my visits and interviews. The information on marriages with non-Subba Rao Kammās is from my Dec. 24, 2001 interview with Sri N. Subba Rao.

18. Whether "philosophy" or "theology" is the proper designation for Subba Rao's teaching could be debated, as is the case even for the standard schools of Indian philosophy. I much

prefer to consider Subba Rao's teaching as theology, and will do so through most of this study. But at this point, in deference to the constant usage of his current disciples, I use the term philosophy.

19. The *samadhi* (grave) of Subba Rao is now behind this prayer hall.

20. The tambura is a single -stringed instrument.

21. In an interview on Oct. 7, 2003, Subba Rao's widow affirmed that he always read from the New Testament in his meetings, but generally without comment unless a question was raised.

22. Most of my visits have been for special occasions or private interviews, but on my first visit in 1993 I attended the regular Sunday afternoon meeting. At one point Sri Kesava Rao Chowdary, who presided, asked for a New Testament to be passed to him; but instead of reading from it he proceeded to introduce and talk about me. I was similarly the subject of a discourse on my visit in December of 2001, at which time Sri Chowdary identified me as a Presbyterian (true enough) who had become a follower of theosophy (a total fabrication) and now was a follower of Subba Rao (not as untrue as the theosophy line, but hardly true either). This of course was all in Telugu so I was only informed of these details by my translator after the meeting (who was curious to learn from me if I had indeed ever followed theosophy.) Hopefully that begins and ends my being the subject of sermons!

23. See the full translation, the last song in Appendix 1.

24. Subba Rao's widow confirmed that Jeevaratnam had laid hands on people, another clear link between the two. (Interview of Oct. 7, 2003)

25. Baago's experience is recorded in 1968:8; he touched the eyes of a blind man, who apparently was not healed despite his inexplicable collapse. Airan's account is in 1963a:6, where a woman is directed to look at Airan instead of the cross, and she soon passes out repeating "Yesu Prabhu" (Lord Jesus). For a further example of this phenomenon see Chowdary 1971:10 where it is a legislator of the Andhra Pradesh government who sees someone fall at his touch.

26. Harding witnessed Subba Rao's ministry in Hyderabad and wrote an appreciative foreword to Rao 1958. Note also his testimony in Collections n.d.(b):5. Five of the books related to Subba Rao are only collections of testimonies (most related to healing experiences, but one small booklet tells about deliverance from spirits invading a house) and a sixth book includes other testimonies. These six lists of testimonials are not mutually exclusive and some of them clearly borrow from the other lists. (See the annotated bibliography in appendix 2 for details.)

27. Baago's account of an exorcism is in 1968:11; Airan mentions a few in 1963a:7; Thyagaraju tells of his coming to believe in the demonic realm in Bai 1971:1ff. Note Baago on cobra bites in 1968:7, and a testimony of such healing in Chowdary 1971:14f. On Subba Rao's wife being present for exorcisms see Airan 1963a:7.

28. "I thought he was a Christian propagandist", said one who was relieved to learn otherwise (Chowdary 1962:7). A man from the Ramana Maharshi ashram credited *Gurudev! Where Can I Get So Many Millstones* with helping him understand Christ (Collections n.d.(b):15). A third wrote that "Missionaries some how came to know about my having been healed and they were after me pressing me to change my religion and take baptism. I could not understand what connection there was between my cure and baptism. Besides these people who were after me belonged to the Pentecostal Mission whose doctrines were very confusing. They said that if I accepted their faith I would attain salvation. It is my earnest prayer to God that he will protect me from these fools." (Chowdary 1962:43-44)

29. Regarding lack of monetary motives see Airan 1963a:13 and Chowdary 1971:24f; on lack of ostentation see Airan 1963a:1 and Chowdary 1971:43. My own experiences with the followers of Subba Rao demonstrate that these virtues are still present among his followers.
30. Cf. another comment of Airan, "I had some amazing unbelievable mystical experiences." (from the longer version of Airan 1965:138)
31. The suffix "ji" indicates reverent affection.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. For a full translation of the 34 songs see appendix 1.
2. This in contrast to Baago who sees "vehement denunciation of all religions" (1968:13) as the beginning point of Subba Rao's theology.
3. For Subba Rao's own denial that he was a philosopher see Airan 1965:31f. and note this from Baago: "It is one of his firm convictions that philosophies and doctrines do not save anybody." (1968:13) For just a few other references in the songs to following the way of Christ see the refrains of songs 2, 4, 6 and 7 and all of song 14. (Many other references are listed in the thematic index under Way.) This emphasis on obedience to Christ or the imitation of Christ is also the main positive theme of the three published prose writings of Subba Rao (two of which are mainly negative attacks on the church and its leaders).
4. N. Subba Rao, in an interview on Dec. 25, 1998, affirmed that K. Subba Rao taught reincarnation. In an interview on Dec. 24, 2001, he stated that "there are so many types of *janmas* [births]." In an interview earlier that day Subba Rao's widow had strongly stated that K. Subba Rao did not speak on this topic or on life after death of any kind. Song 23 stanza 5 seems clearly to refer to the traditional Hindu theologies of *karma* and *punarjanma*; but song 26 stanza 3 has a similar reference followed by an appeal to Christ to correct the writing of fate, which is certainly suggestive of a significant departure from traditional Hindu teaching. For further discussion of this stanza see note 9 below.
5. *Maya* is further referred to in the fourth stanza of this first song as also in song 20 stanzas 6-8, song 27 stanzas 7 and 11, song 31 stanza 6, song 32 stanza 2 and song 33 stanzas 7, 8 and 10. The word appears in a number of other places in a non-philosophical sense.
6. See for example 2:6, 7:3, 19:6 and 7, all of songs 20 and 22, 23:14, 24:1 and 5, 31:3, 33:2 and 5.
7. Note a similar emphasis, often in contrast with external cleansings, in 7:7, 10:6, 13:3, and 29:19.
8. At one point in his prose writings Subba Rao even refers to this radical inner change as a rebirth in the spiritual sense: "Is not 'Christ the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth?' Is it a lie that 'by him all that believe are justified from all things?' Is 'purifying their hearts by faith' false? The various rules of law are there for no other purpose than to bridle the desires of the body and to ride it straight. But when that body itself is dead to desires, do you say that it has still to be in the bondage of the law? Has not the old man died and altogether a new man formed? Has not spiritual nature taken the place of the bodily nature? Is it not rebirth?" (Rao 1958:24)
9. There is perhaps an indirect reference to forgiveness in song 26 stanza three, where Subba Rao appeals to Christ to "correct my destiny." In the context he is referring to *karma*, yet at this point he uses a colloquial expression referring to the writing on the forehead, which in fact is less ambiguous than the philosophical term *karma* with its many shades of meaning. To overrule *karma* and "correct" the path that fate has prepared is arguably a stronger concept than mere forgiveness, but would seem to necessarily involve the putting away of sin. Note that Baago also highlights this stanza, but the inadequacy of his translation mars his treatment as he discusses the "re-writing" of "*karma*," and although Baago does not discuss this point the translation he used also quite gratuitously introduces

“sin” into this stanza (“rewrite my karma, so that I may not fall into the cesspool of sin”). (Baago 1968:25)

10. Song 30 is pretty much entirely on this theme of religion as an excuse for avoiding obedience. Note also this from Rao n.d.:11: “No more trials and tribulations; no more strait and narrow paths. They have laid a new, smooth, straight and easy cemented highway to heaven. No more need for conquering the ‘self’; no more annihilation of ‘I’; no more need for love and sacrifice; no more necessity for carrying the cross, goaded by kicks and abuses; no more need for ‘gnana’. Salvation is simply free and is no more a difficult problem to the soul. It is only a simple affair of the body. Nothing else. Just lift up the body from one pit of religion, dip it in a pool of water and dump it back deeper into their pit of religion and proclaim from the housetops ‘I believed in Christ! I am now a child of God!’” Cf. also Rao 1958:34 where he mocks priests for granting divorces despite Christ’s clear condemnation of divorce.

11. See the full text, which is the last song in appendix one. In my October 7, 2003, interview with Srimatti Nagendramma Kalagara, she stated that Subba Rao himself initiated the singing of this song from the early days of his ministry. Note also that Christ is called God (*parameshu*) in 7:8 and God (*deva*) in 9:3.

12. Other examples of *bhakti* (devotion) to Christ in the songs are in 4:13, 5:13, 8:7, 27:4 and 6; song 31 on the cross, and particularly the last stanza, should also be noted.

13. Song 29 stanzas 6 and 20 seem to clearly be against such false worship, and song 24 stanza four also can be mentioned in this light. But note also this strange absolutizing of options in one of Subba Rao’s letters to Airan: “There are only two alternatives: (1) Living like Jesus so as to become Christ; or (2) worshipping, praying, and do all the rest of things except living like Him.” (Rao 1965:13)

14. Interview of Dec. 24, 2001.

15. The full context should be noted, as in the phrase following this statement Paul refers to the life he now lives, indicating the tension in his mystical thought. It must also be noted that in Pauline thought the emphasis is on the indwelling of Christ in his disciples as a blessing (perhaps the supreme blessing) of the new covenant instituted by Christ. Christ’s immanent indwelling of all things is more an inference from general statements Paul makes rather than a distinct teaching of his. Subba Rao’s emphasis is quite the opposite, as will be noted in the further exposition. His emphasis is so strong on the immanent Christ that the new covenant blessing of Christ indwelling his people is almost completely neglected, although perhaps this can be inferred from a number of statements.

16. See this same perspective in 7:3, 14:2, 17:7-8, 20:5, 21:4, the refrain of song 24, 25:8, 27:9, 29:8-9, 34:1. From the songs of Subba Rao with their denigration of the human body one would never guess that the composer was a healer! This massive paradox further confirms the approach of this study which refuses to impose any neat system on the thought of Subba Rao.

17. See 7:3 and 8, 27:9 and 29:8.

18. See also 19:6, 21:4 and 11, 25:8.

19. In stanza 22 of this song, while defending himself against accusations that he is antichrist, Subba Rao says that antichrists are found among Christians, but “among the outsiders (heathen) are real Christs.” This clearly suggests that by no means are all humans Christs. Song 33 stanza 10 again refers to the fact one needs to “become” Christ, and song 19 stanza eight refers to “become the supreme spirit.” Note also the conditional clause in 16:8. 24:2 seems even to refer to a becoming and unbecoming and becoming of God again. 20. Note Walker on the *mahavakyas*: “Specifically a *mahavakya* refers to the short maxims taken from the Vedas, mainly the Upanishads, which stress the identity of all things in

Brahma.” (1983[1968]:363. Among the *mahavakyas* he gives in illustration are *aham brahmasmi* (I am *brahman*) and *tat tvam asi* (thou art that).

21. Some other statements showing the centrality of renunciation are 2:2, 6:2, 8:5, 13:3, 14:11, 16:8, 17:9, 18:11, 24:1.

22. For general attacks on religion note especially 3:5 which refers to the “demon of religion” and 8:7 where religion is an anchor that keeps the boat from progressing.

23. In 16:4 and 6 there is also an unfavorable comparison of Hinduism to Christ.

24. For examples of anti-ritualism see 2:6, 7:5, 9:4, 14:2, 20:12, 21:6-8, 29:8 and 30:1ff.

25. See Rao n.d.:4 for example. But note also that Airan’s explanation that Subba Rao really only opposed baptism without any spiritual reality: “Mr. Subba Rao has no objection to any convert being sprinkled or dipped to satisfy himself that he is saved thereby.” (Airan 1965:93). Cf. Dr. B. V. Subbamma, whose wording is more clear: “He did not have anything against baptism, but one should become a disciple of Jesus. One must accept Jesus as *paramaguru*, the guru of gurus, the chief guru. Then let them even be drowned in big rivers like the Krishna and Godavari. He did not have any objection.” (Interview of Oct. 7, 2003)

26. For the words of Christ see Mt. 18:6. Subba Rao makes reference to this verse in song 29 stanza 23 and this is the basis for his little booklet “Gurudev: Where Can I Get So Many Millstones?” (n.d.)

27. See 13:6 and 25:8.

28. There is an implication in this direction in 5:13. Note also a reference to “complete surrender” in a list of obligations in Rao 1958:19.

29. See all of song 9, especially stanza 2; all of song 10, especially stanzas 1-4; 29:15-16.

Notes to Chapter Six

1. On Baago see Mundadan 1989 and Jorgensen 2001.

2. For the song reference see 17:9. On *nishkama karma* see chapter two in the section on renunciation.

3. Note that there are numerous allusions to heaven and judgment in Subba Rao’s work. For example, song 29 stanza fourteen reads

Do not think that God
Does not know the way you live.
This waiting on his part
Is only until the time of harvest.

He asks the following rhetorical questions in a prose work:

Are those outside your prison doomed to hell even though they are spotless saints?
Is there no hell for sinners and heaven for righteous people – punishment for wrong
and reward for right? Is there no other way to the kingdom of God except by the
sprinkling of your dirty water? (Rao 1958:29)

In his preface to the 1972 edition of *Retreat Padri!* he wrote in this way: “May the Christian church and its agents realize that I am paving the way to the kingdom of God, the kingdom of righteousness and the many mansions in our Father’s heavenly home.” (Rao 1972:6) In mocking Christian pastors he wrote: “After escaping your bait now, on that Last Day when God will raise us up, be ready, if you can, with your dreadful chains of religion, your big book of names and your wonderful bucket of water, to hunt us down.” (Rao 1958:34) Yet still it is true that Subba Rao, rather like the Buddha, did not see any point in speculating on matters related to life after death. His followers are true to this, to the extent of not knowing or caring about what happened to Subba Rao after his death. In an interview on Dec. 24, 2000, Sri N. Subba Rao would not comment on whether his guruji was now in the presence of Christ.

4. Thyagaraju does not present any evidence of the kind of conflict with Hindus that existed with Christians. His words on this point about the focus on Christ are instructive in this line: “While they [Hindus] are happy that he does not call himself a Christian, they are unhappy at his insistence on using the name of Christ.” (Thyagaraju 1971:14) Subba Rao did not compare religions or religious ideas; he rather dismissed religion with sweeping comments. Yet his thought and practice were Christo-centric, and fit well with this statement: “Don’t you realize in your life-time that God Himself had sent Jesus Christ to teach practically to His children of this world what He had been advising through various prophets through different tongues (but what they could not do) how they should ‘as strangers and pilgrims abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul’.” (Rao 1958:31) This gives a central place to Christ without denigrating other prophets or religions; but this is another of Subba Rao’s passing comments and it is dangerous to enshrine this (or any other such points) as central to his theology.

5. One can only speculate concerning how far the criticisms of Christianity aided the ongoing acceptance in Hindu society, and it is more speculative still to ask whether this factor might have influenced, even if only subconsciously, Subba Rao’s attacks on the church. There is room to read Subba Rao in the paradigm of globalization spelled out by Fred Dallmayr, where the universal and local must be kept in creative tension, with neither capitulation to globalization forces nor reactionary withdrawal into local tradition being acceptable options. Subba Rao embraced a global faith and was clearly pressurized to conform to global standards. Had he done so his local Hindu credibility would have suffered severely. Yet he borrowed from mainstream Christianity, particularly in the “Holy, Holy, Holy” song, and affirmed numerous Christian friends. This parallel with Dallmayr’s analysis of the proper response to globalization does not seem to be an acceptable paradigm for framing the whole of Subba Rao’s life and work, and yet the correspondences are such that it is worth noting.

6. In making this point I am quite intentionally distancing myself from the warning of Donald McGavran quoted in note 3 of chapter 3. Perhaps the intent of McGavran’s concern about Subba Rao’s movement developing into a form of Hinduism rather than a form of Christianity could be defended, but the expression itself raises questions regarding whether McGavran really understood just where the principles he spelled out would lead.

7. It is very interesting to note that even though Subba Rao spoke so strongly against organized religion, did virtually nothing to organize his own followers, and never taught in any way on the New Testament meaning of “church”, yet in the end his ministry resulted in the birth of a *sampradaya* which unquestionably must be accepted as a legitimate expression of what the New Testament calls “church.” In light of this there is room to question how far the development of New Testament churches was due to active organizational activity and how far that also might have been a natural development related to people surrendering to Christ and coming together on that basis.

8. For further study of this see Hoerschelmann 1998 and Raj 2003.

9. It seems no one questioned Subba Rao on how his Advaitic perspective fits with demon possession and exorcism. I got no coherent responses to questions on this line to various of the present leaders of the Subba Rao *sampradaya*. Baago notes the two strands but does not identify the tension between them, and Aleaz never notices the demonic element in Subba Rao’s thought.

10. The dynamic diversity of terminologies in Hindu traditions massively complicates the development of Indian Christian theology, causing almost all students of this field to affirm that there cannot be one Indian Christian theology but rather diverse Indian theologies must develop in relation to the various paradigms and definitions of terms of various Hindu schools of thought.

11. But note this comment, which seems obviously to have been elicited by probing from C. D. Airan: “He [Subba Rao] does realise the gulf between those who possess Christ and those who don’t.” (Airan 1965:83) This is backed up by some comments in the prose writings:

Who are those that are in Christ? Is it not those whose spirits are united with that of Christ, those who surrender themselves to His will, those who are living in His light and glory, those who turned their minds from this external world, those who are dead to the body so are really living? (Rao 1958:17)

“God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” He has divided all human beings into two groups without any distinction of caste, creed or religion – those who killed the soul and became servants of the body (dead), those who killed the body and became servants of the soul (living). (Rao 1958:19)

But the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in those who surrender to Christ is unmentioned in any of the Subba Rao literature.

12. One suspects that, so far from being insulted by this conclusion, Subba Rao might have responded with mirth to the very suggestion that he was an Advaitic theologian.

13. Origen of Alexandria can be taken as a striking example. J. N. D. Kelley outlines his outstanding contributions but also some ideas that are strange indeed in light of later orthodox definitions. “We recall his belief that the world of spiritual beings, including human souls, pre-existed from all eternity; he applied this as the key to the incarnation.” (1960:155)

14. Especially in Hindu contexts this must be stressed. A major fault of Orientalist paradigms (as discussed in chapter one) was their rationalism, and the introduction of rationalistic Western theology to Indian churches is similarly problematic.

15. Not to mention the fact that there are various Advaitic systems, and even Aleaz objected to one major aspect of Subba Rao’s “Advaita.”

16. See especially 6:3 which will be quoted immediately, but also 13:5 and 18:5.

17. Note also this astute comment: “Nobody, after passing an examination, carries the text books for daily reading, but only for occasional refreshing the memory.” (Airan 1965:82)

18. Cf. also the strange paraphrase (?) in Rao 1965:14: “Man is matter and spirit. Matter has desires, lusts, hatred, etc. God, who is the Spirit, is quite free from all these qualities of matter....You can’t be both God and Mammon.”

19. For a biting orthodox critique of particular Subba Rao viewpoints see R. C. Das’ evaluation in Richard 1995:155-160.

20. It can be noted that this complicates matters for the analyst of Subba Rao also; on what basis should his thought be analyzed when he seems to appeal to no authority for his viewpoints?

21. Airan continues in the immediate context to criticize the church for making no effort to explain things properly to Subba Rao.

22. Despite all the derogatory comments about the body in the songs, Subba Rao denied to Baago that he had “contempt” for the body. (Baago 1968:28) There are also a few positive references to the body in the songs; see 2:8, 10:10, 33:9. These comments only prove the point that Subba Rao was over-reacting and not presenting a balanced perspective in much of his anti-body rhetoric.

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