

cgcm News

Center for Global Christianity & Mission

M. Thomas Thangaraj

Professor Emeritus of World Christianity at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University for over 20 years, has come to the BU School of Theology for 2011-2012 as a Visiting Scholar.

An Interview with Professor Thangaraj



cgcm: What have you taught at BU, and what will you be teaching in 2012?

Thangaraj: Right now I am teaching two courses. One is titled, Images of Christ in World Christianity, which examines the various images of Christ in the worldwide church to learn from that plurality a fresh and relevant way to build our own images of Christ. The other is, Christian Encounter with Hinduism, which uses a study of Hinduism and Hindu-Christian encounter as a platform for constructing one's own theology of religions. I am planning to repeat the Encounter course during spring 2012 and teach a second course, titled, Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural World.

cgcm: What do you believe is the relationship between Indian Christianity and Global Christianity, or to phrase it another way, how does Indian Christology, interact with theological reflections on Christ from other parts of the world?

Thangaraj: The Christ whom we adore is and will always remain a mystery. We get newer and fresher glimpses into that mystery when we listen to one another's articulation and adoration of Christ. That

means Christologies which are constructed in contexts different from our own offer us yet another profound window into the mystery of Christ. Hymns, paintings, poems, and theological writings from another part of the world are important for our own growth in the knowledge and love of Christ. All this is possible only when we become "quick to hear, slow to speak," as James puts it (James 1:19). Every time we interact in this manner we affirm and celebrate the catholicity of the Church.

cgcm: What have been some of the most significant or surprising changes in your field? What do those changes mean for your students preparing to serve the Church today?

Thangaraj: You may know that my field is systematic theology. From the time when I entered theological education as student in 1965 there have been several significant changes in this field. The impact of liberation theologies, especially the Latin American ones, has shifted the criterion of theology from orthodoxy to

James Gulley:
A Call to
Mission

Money,
Meaning and
Well-Being

Christianity in
South Asia

"Saving the
World?"
American
Missions



James Gulley

A Call to Mission: From Mankana to the Montana

The CGCM invited Dr. James Gulley, head of the United Methodist Missionary Association, to address the BU community. Fifty people gathered to hear him share his call to mission that began when he was eight in Mankana, IL and has since been frequently renegotiated, most recently during an intense five day period when Dr. Gulley was trapped underneath six stories of rubble in Haiti when the Montana Hotel collapsed on him and his missionary colleagues during last year's devastating earthquake. Gulley began by narrating his missionary call according to a fairly traditional script: he was blessed with a rich Christian heritage, an encounter with a missionary book captured his young imagination, and a supportive family and community guided him to-

wards missionary service. But upon his arrival in Africa, that standard script began to wobble. With refreshing candor, Gulley spoke of how his call was interwoven with the allure of status and sense of adventure, and how those forces impacted his early missionary decisions. His story seemed to return to a more familiar arc when he recounted how God confirmed a call for him to take a new assignment in a remote Nigerian location. Right when his call finally seemed purified, Gulley surprised his listeners by announcing he turned the position down. It was not an act of willful disobedience, but an effort to live out his highest missionary objectives. He did not want to take the position away from a Nigerian. And for the audience the light

suddenly came on. Gulley was liberating "the missionary call" to be a dynamic process. It is something continually being discerned not just by an individual, but is constantly worked out among family, a community, and the setting in which a person lives. It was no longer surprising, therefore, to hear that subsequent assignments did not materialize as expected, or that the position that appeared as the "logical conclusion" to his ministry was suddenly cut during organizational restructuring. For him, and for his appreciative audience, the call to mission had matured. Thus, as he lay pinned under the debris in the Montana Hotel, it was not the collapse of his call, but another opportunity to reimagine how he might faithfully respond to the summons of God.

Money, Meaning and Well-being:

Defining 'Development' for Real Life

ChaoLuan Kao

Professor Nimi Wariboko, Katharine B. Stuart Professor of Christian Ethics at Andover Newton Theological Seminary presented a lecture for the CGCM on "Money, Meaning, and Well-Being." Wariboko was formerly a Wall Street investment banker and strategy consultant. Wariboko started by deciphering the title of his presentation and gave an explanation for each term. He stated: "Development must be committed to respecting the inherent human dignity and equality of all citizens (as bearers of God's image and as people endowed with the right and duty to participate in the common good), and it must create the conditions necessary for safeguarding human dignity." In order to expand real economic development, Wariboko proposed focusing on Jesus as the New Being. In him we uncover the truth about money, meaning and well-being. As a Christian ethicist, Wariboko engaged both theology and economics, in order to call economic actors and policy makers to construct a theonomous social welfare (i.e., under the impact of the Spiritual presence). The workshop developed a new way to think about development, while inspiring the audience to examine the issue from their own academic disciplines.



The Challenges and Prospects for Christianity in South Asia

CGCM Visiting Scholar Jesudas Athyal introduced the *Oxford Encyclopedia of South Asian Christianity*, a decade long project in which he has been the associate editor.



On April 4th the CGCM hosted a seminar on the Challenges and Prospects for Christianity in South Asia in anticipation of the forthcoming publication of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of South Asian Christianity*. Jesudas Athyal introduced the work, describing its comprehensive scope, the representative character of the authors (over 400), and its ambitious goal of charting the significant place of Christianity in the history of the region. In recognition of the valuable contribution the encyclopedia will make to the field, distinguished representatives from various institutions offered special congratulations on completing the herculean task. Mary Elizabeth Moore, dean of the BU School of Theology; Catherine Cornille, chair of the Boston College Department of Theology; Jonathan Bonk, Executive Director of the Overseas Ministries Center; Thomas Thangaraj, Indian theologian and visiting professor at BU; Titus Presler, president-elect of

Edwardes College in Peshawar, Pakistan; and, Michael Nai-Chiu Poon, Director for the Center for the Study of Asian Christianity in Singapore all expressed their gratitude for the advances in knowledge and scholarship that will become available through the publication of the two volumes. John Webster gave the keynote address, offering his analysis on the challenges and prospects for Christianity in South Asia. He began by noting that Christians are overwhelmingly among the poorest, most marginal, most vulnerable people in India. They are a living reminder of Paul's description of the Corinthian Christian community: not many were wise, powerful, or of noble birth, yet God chose the foolish, the weak and what was not, to reduce to nothing the things that are. India recreates the vulnerable community dependent on the mercy of God. Although vulnerable from without, through Hinduvata – a political movement that seeks to

define Indian-ness in terms of Hinduism, and from within because of superficiality, Webster was nonetheless optimistic. Some Hindus he



acknowledged may be the enemies of Christianity, but others are among the faith's best friends. Many Hindus are working to create a truly pluralistic environment. Internally, the church has the resources for the renewal of worship. The theology articulated in India is good news, he concluded, and when it is creatively expressed in local liturgies it will breathe new life into the Church.

Thangaraj Interview (continued)

orthopraxis. It also has brought to light the relative character of our theology in terms of race, caste, gender, color, and class. This led to a clarion call to “contextualize” our theologies. As a young theological teacher in India, I found contextualization as a major shift in my study and teaching. My move to teach at Emory highlighted another change. It is not enough to talk about the local context; one should take seriously the global context. As a professor of World Christianity I saw theologies that take “world Christianity” as a theological method come into being. Today, we have Comparative Theology that engages in profound conversation with Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and other religious traditions. Now it should be seen as vulgar and uncouth if a Christian theologian fails to ask the question: What do my Hindu-Muslim-Buddhist-etc colleagues have to say on this issue I am dealing with? Theological education today should take note of these changes and prepare our ministers to engage the kind of world we live in the 21st century.

cgcm: What comes next? What will you do after BU?

Thangaraj: Well, there *is* life after BU! I am not quite clear about continuing the current ease-into-retirement plan (i.e. teach a semester in the US and spend rest of the year in India). Therefore after spring 2012, I need to decide whether to continue this pattern or take “full” retirement in India. I have bought all the materials needed to engage in serious oil painting and started taking classes; perhaps that is what comes next.

Saving the World?

Travis Myers

Wheaton College and Graduate School’s Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals (ISAE) held a conference titled “Saving the World? The Changing Terrain of American Protestant Missions, 1910 to the Present” at Duke Divinity School, conference co-host, on



March 24 - 25. Dana L. Robert was a plenary speaker and one of four participants in a panel discussion (with Brian Stanley, Jonathan Bonk, and Angelyn Dries) that concluded the conference. Historians Mark Noll (Notre Dame), Joel Carpenter (Calvin College), Grant Wacker (Duke), and Edith Blumhofer (Wheaton), conference chairperson, were among conference conveners who moderated plenary and breakout sessions. In her groundbreaking presentation, Robert traced a correlation between the “frontier” ideal in American culture and the use of the term in American missions discourse from the late nineteenth century through today. Other papers featured such topics as Evangelical missions to Muslims, the impact of the world wars on American perceptions and practice in mission (especially

the surge of evangelistic and relief ministries in Europe), and the global transmission of Methodism. Case studies included those of past celebrity missionary careers and current denominational “sister church” relationships. The event included a “missionary hymn-sing” and an interview with Leighton Ford, a former vice president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, co-planner of the first Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization (1974), and current board of trustee member for both World Vision and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The CGCM sponsored ThD candidate Travis Myers to attend. Other institutions represented by students or professors were Emory University, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Bob



Jones University, Hannover College, Northeastern, United Theological Seminary, St. Louis University, Brigham Young University, Union Theological Seminary, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Tufts, Baylor, the Universities of North Carolina and Illinois, and the University of Edinburgh.