



## **A New Light to Enlighten the Indian Church: The Significance of Samuel Rayan S.J**

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Samuel Rayan SJ (1920- ) is a Catholic priest and a great Indian Christian theologian who is a Jesuit. He is an ardent protagonist of life and growth. His writings radiate the rays of social justice and express his love and care for the poor and downtrodden. Being a radical humanist, he is convinced that the human person in community is the object of God's special love. Rayan also speaks of the care of the earth, concern for life and commitment to people. Rayan's theologizing is deeply rooted in his life, his land and his commitment to Jesus.

Rayan was born on July 23, 1920, at Kumbalam, near Kollam, Kerala, South India. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1939. He was ordained a priest in 1955. He did his doctoral studies in Theology at the Gregorian University, Rome from 1958-60. He was appointed Chaplain of AICUF in Kerala, in 1961. He became Principal of Vdyajyoti,

Delhi in 1971 and taught as professor of Theology over there until December 2009 when he returned to Kerala where he now resides at Sameeksha, Kalady. For some years he was actively involved with the International Association of Catholic Theological Faculties. And he still continues to be a leading member of EATWOT, Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.

The contributions of Samuel Rayan to Indian Christian Theology are highly appreciated and he is regarded as one of the first theologians who have adopted a new and different approach to theologizing. He has sought to understand and interpret the Christian faith in the light of the religious and secular realities of our country. Prof. Kurien Kunnumparam states emphatically that Rayan's articles bear witness to three things: 1. His radical commitment to the person of Jesus. He is powerfully attracted to the fascinating personality of Jesus and has made an irrevocable commitment to him. 2. Rayan's amazing familiarity with the Bible, especially the Gospels. Many years of reading and reflection on the text have led to this familiarity. 3. Rayan's deep insights into the biblical text. The text seems to open up and reveal its depth to him. Long years of meditative reading of the Bible have enabled Rayan to gain such insights into it that are rarely found elsewhere.

Rayan's new perspectives on mission, promotion of justice and peace and work for a new society need to be highlighted. As a result the Dalits in India have got a lion's share of the experience of God's unconditional love and care. Thus, the Christian faith has offered them emancipation, a new awareness and a new identity. His visions of nature, woman and the Church bring out his concern for the preservation of nature, the empowerment of women and his quest for a meaningful understanding of the Church. Rayan's articles on doing theology raises certain meaningful questions such as 1. For whom are we

producing theology? 2. How do we see the reality and meaning of theology? But the task of theology is to clarify for each generation the implications and promises of the flesh-becoming of God's Word that should resonate with our life and faith. The aim of doing theology is to enable people to live authentically and joyfully as human beings and as Christian believers. Samuel Rayan has contributed to all the spheres of life and theology which challenge and motivate us to be better human beings.

The national seminar on "Samuel Rayan S.J. and his Contribution to Indian Christian Theology" was held on Dec 28-31, 2014 at Christ Hall, Kozhikode. It reflected on the scope of Indian Christian theology and the new openings or horizons based on Rayan's valuable insights. Many theologians from different parts of India presented papers on his theology and discussed its relevance in the pluralistic context of India. One of the major discussions paved way to think that Samuel Rayan is a prime path-finder of Dalits as he stood for an ethical fight against social evils and oppression and for the establishment of a just society. It is emphatically stated that the starting point of doing theology is not concepts but concrete reality, life and history. It is required to have a first-hand experience of life realities of subaltern people and their oppressions and sufferings. But this fact is often forgotten by theologians and their theology becomes bookish. This was challenged and questioned logically by the participants. For Samuel, the rootedness in reality is the external manifestation of faith in the God of justice. Further, the celebration of Eucharist is a promise to overcome oppression and division and to build a community of justice and equality.

Another powerful question was raised: Was Jesus aware of his divinity during his earthly life? But his Abba-experience explicates his relational aspects of life that he is

fully human and fully divine. Even then the sad part of the story is that the human face of Jesus is often forgotten. Thus there was a consensus that one should not just see Jesus in others, but be Jesus to others. Rayan's emphasis is on the historical Jesus, the real human being who is recognized as the supreme revelation of God, the compassionate. He is compassion enfleshed. Rayan's interpretation of Jesus Christ and his mission evolves from his basic conviction that God became a human to reveal to us how God is involved in the struggles and sufferings of humans to become authentically human. The commitment to Jesus demands a commitment to struggle with and for the poor and the exploited and all victims of social, cultural, religious and political discrimination and oppression.

The integral reflections of Rayan on the commercialization of the earth, the global imbalance and the ecological crisis are effective to show his concern for life and its growth. It was unanimously claimed that though Rayan's articles have been written decades ago, his views are ever-new and significant. He seems to have been ahead of his time in his reflections on serious concerns regarding ecological and environmental crisis, at same time to have a grass root level theologizing that might enable us to create an Indian Christian theology. In order to pay due respect to Dr Samuel Rayan and for his contributions to Indian Christian theology, it was suggested that we need to teach these reflections of theology in our theologates of India as well. Thus I would like to conclude by saying that Rayan has enkindled a new lamp to enlighten the Indian Christian Church. 🕯