

# Bread and Breath in India: The Mission Pneumatology of Samuel Rayan

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## Introduction

You may be forgiven for not having noticed, but Samuel Rayan does warrant a small mention in the second edition of David Ford's *The Modern Theologians* where his writings are described as containing a "passionate call for solidarity with the poor, and a strong critique of colonialism, ...the Catholic Church, and capitalist culture" (Gispert-Sauch 1997: 460). In the short space allotted to him, George Gispert-Sauch can hardly do justice to the theology of a man of Rayan's stature. Rayan, who is 80 this year, has been Professor and sometime Dean at Vidyajyoti College of Theology in Delhi since 1972, was a member of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission (1968-82), and principal of the Indian School of Ecumenical Theology (Bangalore; 1988-90). He has published regularly and widely in India and abroad in English and in his native Malayalam, and has often been a spokesman for Indian theologians (Rayan 1983) and for Third World theologians in general (Rayan 1990a). His influence on other Indian theologians is greatly in evidence in their citations of his published works. But by all accounts it has been even greater in the classroom to which he brings "passion and commitment" (George 1991; Kunnumparam 1991: 18-20; Mattam 1997: passim.).

Since Rayan's work is not widely available in the UK, I shall aim first to present it to you sympathetically, utilising the poetic expression in which much of it is written. For the sake of time, I will assume some prior awareness of the Indian context. I then propose to reflect on Rayan's work on bread, breath, mission and pneumatology considering its roots, its problems and what it has to say about universality, particularity and contextuality.

Gispert-Sauch is right in characterising Rayan broadly as a liberation theologian but Rayan's is a liberation theology with a difference. It is not just that Rayan has led other Third World theologians in taking cultural and religious realities into account in their theologies of liberation (e.g. Rayan

1990a: 198-99). Rayan's distinctive contribution has been to create a pneumatology of mission in which the Spirit impels the struggle for liberation. The phrase "bread and breath" is an inversion of a line from a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God! Giver of breath and bread". The expression was chosen for a festschrift for Rayan's 70th birthday because it was "suggestive of the two main poles around which Rayan's... theological reflections turn: the question of Bread for all..., and the role of the Spirit..." (John 1990: xii). But the two are more integrated in Rayan's thought than this suggests. They come together in Rayan's vision of a creative mission that draws together men and women, clergy and lay, Christian and of other faiths in a common concern that the earth, which is our bread, is shared among a suffering humanity, in the Spirit who is the breath of life.

## **The Holy Spirit - Heart of the Christian Gospel**

The importance of pneumatology in Rayan's thought is clear from the title of his first monograph, *Breath of Life: The Holy Spirit - Heart of the Christian Gospel*, published by Geoffrey Chapman in 1979 (Rayan 1979a). Rayan begins his book by calling attention to a "fact not always noted" that "uppermost in the consciousness of the early church was the reality of the Holy Spirit" (Rayan 1979a: 1). "[O]ur life and our world stand bathed in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God and of Jesus Christ. This ... is the heart of the Gospel and of Christian hope" (Rayan 1979a: 2).

In a paper given last year, Rayan spells out what this realisation means theologically using the work of Kilian McDonnell, Yves Congar, Joseph Comblin and other recent scholars on the subject. The paper entitled "New Efforts in Pneumatology" (Rayan 1999c) was given at a Jesuit Congress on Ecumenism. Rayan argues that pneumatology is not a separate chapter but "the How and the Horizon of theology" (Rayan 1999c: section 2.3). He sees the documents of Vatican II as breaking with a long tradition in naming the Spirit but finds that the Council "did not work out a real Pneumatology", that is still in process (: section 1.2). In the new article, Rayan surveys "several aspects and areas of theology [which] have been rethought from a spirit perspective", these are Spirit Christology, Spirit ecclesiology, mission in the Spirit, pneumatological cosmism, a pneumatology of religions, the motherhood of the Spirit, and the Spirit's grief (: section 3). Rayan's own

writing touches all these areas and we will visit them all but not in that order. First it is necessary to discuss the liberational emphasis of Rayan's pneumatology.

## **Bread - The Spirit of Liberation**

Rayan's book on the Spirit is based on a 'charismatic' retreat given by Rayan at Maryknoll in 1975. *Breath of Fire*, in common with much of Rayan's work - both devotional and academic, is a Bible study. It seems that "Most, if not all, of [Rayan's] theological insights are the fruit of a creative reading of the Bible" (Kunnumpuram 1990: 19). Rayan is sceptical and cynical about much of the teaching of Rome but is captivated by the gospel portrayal of the man Jesus, which is the primary reference-point for his theologising. He prefers stories of liberation, believing they most closely express the heart of the historical Jesus. His is primarily a theological reading - or re-reading - not an exercise in biblical criticism. He seeks to understand selected gospel stories as we have them within the socio-economic and political environment of first century Palestine and relate them to contemporary "Indian realities". Though a meditative Bible study in style, the book is not a comforting aid to devotion. As the title says, Rayan's Holy Spirit is a *Breath of Fire* who comes "to enable us to re-create our earth, not to put us to sleep". In Rayan's book, the Spirit is present "not in ethereal euphoria, but in committed historical action" (Rayan 1979a: vii).

It is helpful to be aware of some of the experiences that formed this distinctive liberationist understanding of the Spirit. After joining the Jesuits in 1939, Rayan worked as a teacher in a Catholic high school and also studied philosophy and Malayalam literature in his native Kerala. He studied theology at De Noboli College in Pune and did his doctorate in Religious Studies at the Gregorian University in Rome, graduating just before the second Vatican Council took place. He imbibed the contemporary interest in the historical Jesus, the kingdom of God, and humanisation (Rayan, 1974b: 288-295; c.f. Rayan 1972). In 1970, which is the date of the earliest writing I have of his, Rayan is committed to the process of reform he sees as begun by Vatican II and believes it necessitates a rethinking of the whole meaning and purpose of mission work with man at the centre, especially in light of the fact, stated in the Council documents, that "the Holy Spirit has been at work in the world even before the glorification of Christ" (Rayan 1970: 416-17, 421).

From 1960-72 Rayan was advisor to the Kerala Branch of the Catholic student movement, the AICUF. This led to a fruitful dialogue with Marxism. Rayan often acknowledges a debt to Karl Marx and unashamedly advocates

socialism as a necessary consequence of the teaching of Jesus. This and the example of Gandhi were among the other reasons why he and many other Indian Catholics missionaries were drawn into development work in this period. In Rayan's case defending the rights of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin (Rayan 1986a [1979]: 351).

Rayan made his name internationally in 1970 with a paper in which he gave theological justification to this involvement - well before the encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) (Rayan 1971; see Hendricks 1990: 14). He argues, on the basis of Vatican II documents for the unity of "grace and nature". God has reconciled them in "the man Jesus", who "is the ultimate basis of the connection between... bread for breakfast and for the Eucharist". "In both [evangelisation and development] there is the presence of the risen Christ and of his Spirit". This seminal paper resulted in Rayan's first visit to the USA and a further paper on "Evangelization and Development" (Rayan 1975) in which, nearly twenty years before David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* (Bosch 1991), Rayan sets out a contextual understanding of mission that sounds very similar to that of Bosch (Rayan 1975: 104).

Rayan's concern for the poor and awareness of Marxist analysis gave him a natural affinity with Latin American liberation theology. At this point Rayan decisively rejects the motif of development in favour of "structural change" on the basis of justice (Rayan 1986c: 357-8). As Rayan puts it in a poem, the earth is bread to be shared, a single rice bowl:

rice is for sharing,  
bread must be broken and given.  
Every bowl, every belly shall have its fill,  
to leave a single bowl unfilled is  
to rob history of its meaning;  
to grab many a bowl for myself is  
to empty history of god. (Rayan 1986b)

## **An Asian Spirituality of Liberation**

However Rayan recognised early on that an Asian theology of liberation must take cognisance of not only the poverty but also the religions of Asia, and therefore be expressed in Asian religious and spiritual terms. In Rayan's estimation, the latter are not as unconcerned with matters of justice as Western scholars have claimed, but in

any case a message of liberation can be conveyed in spiritual terms. Rayan illustrates this by re-reading the Fourth Gospel, much admired in India for "its atmosphere of mysticism and its contemplative horizon", to find just such a concern for the historical as is evident in the Synoptics (Rayan 1978: 213).

As Gustavo Gutiérrez observes in Rayan's festschrift, Rayan intuitively found that "justice is not a theme alien to the contemplative life" (Gutiérrez 1990: 4). In liberation theology's key text, Luke 4:18, Rayan recognised early on a link between "good news to the poor" and "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Rayan 1979a: 96-7) and concluded that the source of bread is "the breath of God by which we breath". Spirituality is thus inherent in Rayan's missiology from the start in the very literal sense of Spirit-uality. By defining spirituality in this way, Rayan hopes it avoids being docetic, individualistic, dualistic or elitist, and is acceptable to all religious traditions and to Marxists. He makes the Spirit both the origin of the contemplative traditions of Asia and also of the aspiration for freedom and readiness to struggle to bring this about. Rayan further defines spirituality as "response-ability". It consists in critical openness to the depth-realities of nature and history, together with a "willingness and readiness to respond" by acting to transform reality (Rayan 1992: 22-26). Such spirituality he believes is not just the spirit of many a biblical story - the exodus, the Lord's prayer, the Good Samaritan - it is also characteristically Asian (Rayan 1992: 28-30; cf. Rayan 1999a, section 8).

## **History as the Action of the Spirit**

The fact that liberation theology arose out of a theology of development produced a "problem of history". Since, from a Third World standpoint, the Western modernisation model of history had caused so much human suffering (Rayan 1980 [1976]: 131), a re-definition of history was called for. Rayan complains that in Vatican Instruction on the theology of liberation (1984 and 1986), "Significant African and Asian experience and history are not considered". He complains, "...is it that we, Africans and Asians, are not supposed to have a history and experience of our own? or that our experience cannot be really different from that of the West? or that ours is not worth considering?" (Rayan 1987: 252).

A further complication, which did not immediately arise in the overwhelmingly Christian context of Latin American, was how to define Indian or Asian history in Christian theological terms when it has been dominated by other religious traditions. Thus Rayan found it necessary to define history in such a way that

it is not continuous with Western history and also that it can be held in common with other religious traditions. Rayan came to the conclusion that history was neither linear nor cyclical: "history has its depths and involutions, and its movement is best described as inward rather than forward.... in personal terms of interiority and relationship". "It is a partial view of history to describe it exclusively in terms of external action" (Rayan 1980 [1976]: 125,129). Therefore he defines history neither in terms of the apostolic succession nor in terms of development or humanisation as conventionally understood but in terms of pneumatology: history is the movement of the Spirit recognised by liberation of the downtrodden to new life, "the Spirit of God carries our history and moves in its depths" (Rayan 1990a: 206).

## **Spirit Ecclesiology**

Rayan has long been a strident critic of the Church hierarchy and an advocate of the reform of its structures and liturgy. He finds the Catholic Church guilty of classism, casteism, sexism, and ageism. Freedom and equality are not valued and the central place which should be given to the human person is taken by laws and systems (Rayan 1976: 307-12). Furthermore, Rayan argues that the Church in India is not Indian but Roman, it is part of an extension of the local Church of Rome "effected in the semicolonial and colonial periods of India's history...". As "in all colonial relationships", "decisions are made and goods are processed at the centre for eventual exportation to and consumption by the periphery" (Rayan 1984: 196-208). As far as Rayan is concerned, the Church is the greatest missionary problem (Rayan 1970: 420). Nevertheless, Rayan emphasises the importance of the Church and eschews individualistic religion because he believes the kingdom of God preached by Jesus is not "an interior mystical reality" but a historical one, "a visible social reality". The reform and re-structuring of the church must therefore be an important part of mission.

In 1970, Rayan saw the key to renewal as reform of the Eucharist (Rayan 1970: 420). He believed the Eucharist should be an illustration of how the Spirit inspires a redistribution of the earth's wealth, a sharing of the common bread (Rayan 1974b: 295). Reflecting on the WCC Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document, to which - as a member of the Faith and Order Commission - he was party, Rayan writes, "Our task is to make known without arrogance or anxiety the One Baptism in which the whole Earth stands bathed; to communicate the One Spirit who impels us to fulfil justice and liberate the downtrodden and to invite men and women to come to taste the

One Bread or Rice-Bowl of life which all of us are called to become and break with one another" (Rayan 1985a: 186).

In his most recent paper, Rayan ascribes the faults of the Church to its neglect of pneumatology. In a rather simplistic reading of early church history, Rayan explains that the Holy Spirit, the initiator of radical changes, was perceived as threatening to the Church the after it made its peace with the Roman Empire (Rayan 1999c: section 1.5). So he sees the new consciousness of the Spirit in the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, and especially the base communities, as bringing hope for the "decolonization of theology". In Rayan's "Spirit ecclesiology", the Holy Spirit belongs to the first moment of the Church, it is as constitutive of the Church as Christ is. The new consciousness of the Spirit therefore signals a return to the NT experience of the Spirit, of "collegiality, lay participation,... witness and teaching, and the home-church" (: 2.3.5/2.4.2). For Rayan, love is the distinctive mark of the church (John 13.35), and the ministry and mission of the disciples (Rayan 1999a: 9; cf. Rayan 1979a: 25-26). Rayan applies this criterion to all religions not just Christianity (Rayan 1995: 18-35).

## **A Pneumato-centric Theology of Religions**

As we have seen, Rayan's missionary concern incorporates not only liberation but also evangelisation. In order to interpret Christ in the context of India's religions, Rayan rejects explicitly Christo-centric approaches and leads the way in developing a Pneumato-centric theology of religions. The first reason for this is that the universal work of the Spirit means "There can be an implicit knowledge of God, an existential faith, a lived obedience..." (Rayan 1970: 421-22) and therefore, as early as 1970, Rayan called for a dialogical approach on pneumatological grounds: The Church must be "the listening Church, listening to the Spirit speaking in the Gospel and in the hearts of men" (Rayan 1970: 426).

The second reason why Rayan's christology is pneumatological is that "the genius of India seeks the Universal Spirit". "An Indian Christology will therefore centre on the Lord who is spirit,... on the indwelling Christ, the *Antaryamin*,..." in contrast to Western emphasis on the historical particularity of Jesus (Rayan 1974a: 231). Rayan's reason for situating Jesus in history is not because Christianity stands or falls on the basis of historical fact but only

to show "in relief the significance of Jesus for society and social change" (Rayan 1974a: 231).

Rayan does not wish to commit himself to any particular Indian tradition in his interpretation of Christ. He is cautious of the *advaitic* tradition of Brahmanism because it is not "the living religion of the people", though he acknowledges that "there is an *advaitic* quality to most Indian thought and life". He believes account must be taken of dalit, feminist and tribal criticism of brahmanical traditions as elitist and oppressive (Rayan 1989a: 69). He finds the influence of *bhakti* in India "much wider and deeper" and the use of *bhakti* to express the gospel less problematic than *advaita*. However, Rayan's suggestion is that "perhaps even greater courage and sensitivity will be required to think of Christology in the context of a tradition far less prestigious than *advaita*, less known than *bhakti*, but somehow implicit in most Indian experiences, namely *Sakti*" (Rayan 1977: 189). *Sakti* in Indian thought is the Goddess, the life-Spirit, the earth-Mother, we will return to this briefly later.

A critic of inculturation approaches to contextualisation in India, which focus chiefly on dialogue with Brahmanic tradition on a doctrinal or a mystical level, Rayan claims his dialogue is with all communities for the purpose of achieving justice in society. Rayan notes the Indian tendency, underscored by the dominant political ideology, to emphasise the fundamental unity of all religions. However he does not think that communal harmony is promoted by generalisations, or "by reduction of reality to a lowest common denominator", this approach indicates "fear of the other, threatens the identity of each" (Rayan 1991a: 134-35): "It will not do to suppress the roseness of the rose and the jasmineness of jasmine and class them all as flowers in order to secure ecological balance" (: 135). He finds in the differences the greatness of each tradition. (: 135). So intolerance is "the refusal of the otherness of the other", "the refusal of pluriformity" and it stultifies common growth (: 135). For Rayan, "The other is interior to... our encounter with the One who is the ultimate Other" (: 132).

## **Spirit Christology**



Rayan writes that, in view of the "cultural, religious and psychological mosaic that is India" an Indian Christology should be a process and a "full and firm Christology" is unlikely to be finalised. (Rayan 1974a: 230). However, in his most recent paper he seems to find an acceptable, worked-out Christology in the shape of the Spirit Christology developed particularly by Congar and Comblin. In Rayan's estimation, it presents an interpretation of Jesus in a way analogous to Logos Christology but is not as exclusive (Rayan 1999c: section 2.4.1). It has the advantages that it affirms and safeguards the integrity of Jesus' humanity, while at the same time it "obviates adoptionism" (because the Spirit is at work in Jesus from the Annunciation not just the Baptism) (: 2.4.1.1-6).

Since Jesus is the "normative" symbol of the Spirit, Rayan's pneumatology is christological. The Breath is recognised by the Bread of life. But conversely in Rayan's thought, christology is pneumatological. Bread and Breath are universal categories, which the justice of God sees fit to distribute to all, they are combined in the person of Jesus Christ and in the work of mission. (Rayan 1999c).

## **Breath - The Spirit of Creation**

As we are aware, in Rayan's theology the liberating intervention of the Holy Spirit in history does not begin at Pentecost or with the mission of Jesus Christ, it goes right back to creation. The overcoming of chaos and "[t]he process and progress toward order, peace, and beauty" which the Spirit effects in the world and in human hearts continues to Revelation (Rayan 1979a: 3). Rayan writes, "[T]he Spirit is associated with all great beginnings. He is the Initiator of fresh developments and the Leader of new movements. He is alive at every turning point in the march of life on earth. He is the Creator Spirit" (Rayan 1979a: 9).

## **The Spirit of Life**

While Bread in Rayan's thought refers primarily to the Spirit as liberator, Breath draws attention to the role of the Spirit as Creator. The two are brought together most clearly in Rayan's theology of life. Thus he explains Hopkins' description of God as 'Giver of breath and bread' in the following way "God shares his life with us, and we all live by the same breath of God, all races and all nations. That is why we are one family, all sharers of his life, all divine beings as it were" (Rayan 1979a: 66). He continues: like Ezekiel, "[i]t is our mission to keep breathing along with God and prophesying to the four winds, saying: 'Come, O Spirit, and breathe into these slain that they may come to life'" (Ezek. 37:9). For Rayan, "Ours is a ministry of life-giving" (Rayan 1979a: 70) in the face of the death brought by colonialism and capitalism (see Rayan 1982).

## **Eco-theology**

Rayan's awareness of the creative activity of the Spirit means that he has from the beginning a great appreciation of natural beauty. When Christians in general became concerned about the environmental crisis, he became a leading Indian spokesman on the subject. His most widely read article on ecology is probably, "The Earth is the Lord's" (Rayan 1994a [1991]), which is a biblical celebration of creation, expresses concern for its welfare, and ends by urging a poetic appreciation of nature: The earth speaks to us in "the eloquent silence of hills and trees", "in the quiet language of many colours, and of graceful movements...".

Rayan's concern for bread as well as breath brings to his eco-theology not just aesthetic but also human concerns. From the beginning, his Indian context, in which most people are directly dependent on the land, causes him to see the needs of the human and the needs of the earth as bound up together. "The earth is also ours", Rayan writes, it is given by God to human beings, it is "a large round of bread God bakes, a big bowl of rice God cooks each morning over the fire of God's heart". Rayan quotes Hopkins, St Francis, early Christians, tribal peoples, and modern scientists in support of a "cosmic sisterhood/brotherhood" and to stress that "matter matters". For Rayan, the earth is a theological and a liturgical reality. Because it is imbued with the Holy Spirit, the earth is precious and to be treated with "reverence and tenderness". He argues against private ownership of land, and for "a planned and peaceful reallocation of land to peoples" (Rayan 1994a).

Rayan describes the "integrity of creation" in terms of the famous verses in Romans 8 in which the liberation of the earth to security in the heart of God is brought about by the power of the Spirit (Rayan 1990b: 24,34). He finds John V. Taylor's description of the Holy Spirit as the "go-between God" helpful in explaining the way in which the Spirit works to create mutual awareness (Rayan 1999c: 2.2.2) and therefore holds the universe together (: 3.1).

Rayan's eco-theology is therefore perhaps best described as a "pneumatological cosmism" such as is expressed in Hopkins' poem "God's Grandeur", which Rayan quotes:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God...  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things...  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings (Rayan  
1994a: 135).

## The Depths of the Spirit

In Rayan's thought, the Spirit is not found above and without so much as within and below. This concern with the depths of the Spirit has much in common with Indian spirituality. I suspect a link here between Jesuit imagery of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Hindu ideas of the Self, but Rayan is always cautious about pursuing such metaphysical reasoning. He sees reflection on inner spiritual struggles as common to all religions and ideologies, and sees the contribution of the biblical tradition as showing that "the spiritual is the historical" (Rayan 1987: 238). Therefore his focus is not on the mystical experience but on its potential for liberation as expressed in the lines of one of his poems:

the invitation is to...  
... bring the whole wealth  
of this aesthetic-mystic experience  
to our work for life and people,  
and to our co-work with God  
for the realization of His rainbow-dreams  
for our earth (Rayan 1994b).

Rayan believes that part of the uniqueness of biblical religion is that "Jesus' self-identification with the victims of injustice means that the grief of the oppressed is now the symbol and sacrament of the grieving Holy Spirit of God" (Rayan 1990d: 14, 17). It is in the depths of suffering, struggling, wrestling with God that the Spirit meets people and that theology is born (Rayan 1989b). But "[t]his Spirit who lives within our depths" (Rayan 1979a: 122) is also, in both Hindu and Christian thought, "the song, the dance, the joy and the celebration of God". In the ferment of every creative and liberative movement, "there is the Joy of the Holy Spirit... welling up unto life" (Rayan 1990e: 23-24).

## Signs, symbols, and sacrament

It is apparent by now that sign, symbol, and sacrament are of great importance in Rayan's theology. He points to John's Gospel in which Jesus' action comes first, as a sign, the meaning of which is later unlocked (Rayan 1987: 237). Symbols are also important because in Asian religions, God cannot be the object of speech or thought, that is "to reduce God to creaturehood". Symbols preserve God's Mystery (Rayan 1999b: 10,11; cf. Rayan 1985b: 3-8). For Rayan, the Spirit is at the depth-meaning of all symbols, the Spirit knows the heart of God and "the hidden meaning of everything..." (Rayan 1979a: 109, cf. 98). Thus "the Spirit is like a poet", who "sees and senses symbolism, relationships, and meanings..." and points them out to us (Rayan 1979a: 110). It is this ability of the Spirit to "delve into the heart of God" that makes the Spirit the place where the content and goal of mission come together. (Rayan 1979a: 97).

One increasingly important symbol of God for Rayan is the feminine. This is implicit in his suggestion that *Sakti* may be the most appropriate tradition

within which to express the Christian gospel in India. This far-sighted remark made in 1977 has been developed by Indian feminists and ecologists in the 1980s and 90s. The *Sakti* tradition is pre-Aryan and is therefore seen as a way of freeing Indian thought from Brahmin domination. *Sakti*-thinking is implicit in Rayan's pneumatological approach and in this period he changes from the masculine to the feminine pronoun when discussing the Spirit. Bread and Breath is a symbolic way of combining the immanence and the transcendence of the divine. The emphasis on Breath is particularly important for Rayan because it is a way of upholding the mystery of God in the face of "positivism, rationalism and juridicism" (1979b: 195-96). This would seem to apply not only to Enlightenment secularism but to ecclesiastical legalism as well, which is also "atheism" to Rayan's mind. This desire "to see the mystical character not only of faith experience but also of theological discourse emphasised" is in part due to his own mystical faith-experience but it is also due to his concern for mission in India, where mystical discourse is an integral part of life, and to his conviction that "the mystic's and the poet's perception of reality is as valid and profound as (if not more valid and profounder than) the scientist's and the technocrat's" (Rayan 1990b: 34).

## Theology as art

Some of Rayan's recent published work has been poetry and this is the outcome of a desire to change perceptions of theology as a science and develop it as an art. Rayan is not alone among Indian theologians in this endeavour, and he acknowledges the pioneering work of artist Jyoti Sahi in this regard. Rayan regrets that he is neither an artist nor a dancer but finds in poetry the creative expression he seeks (Rayan 1996: 40; cf. Rayan 1985c: 170-71). He argues that "the root of the artistic in us is to be found in the radical Godward orientation of ourselves along with our history and our cosmos" (Rayan 1996: 38; cf. Rayan 1979c: 85). Therefore, despite the efforts of iconoclasts, "[i]n religion imagery is irrepressible.... In the end truth and beauty are one" (Rayan 1996: 13-14). He writes, "the fragrance of the Breath that breathed, breathes, life into us and into our earth... [has] mixed in our making, constituting us artists, imaginative and creative" (Rayan 1996: 39).

There is a missionary motive behind reconstituting theology as art: the purpose of theology is to communicate, to do this, "We need to see with the heart and speak its language" (Rayan 1979c: 79-81). Art is the clearest way of exposing the depth-meaning of every reality. Where "[w]ords may reveal or

veil; or do both... [a]rt strips and rips open. It offers... [a] vision of the heart of reality.... [t]he heart of our heart" (Rayan 1996: 3). However, theology, Rayan believes, has "succumbed to the Age of Enlightenment's attack on words" which "reduced language", stripping it of "resonances and ambiguities, emotional undertones and historical associations". Thus it has become a matter of the head rather than the heart (Rayan 1979c: 78-79). By remaking theology as an art we can "see what is essential and to see it rightly, and express it richly, appealing, tellingly" (: 79-81).

## **The spirituality of Indian culture**

So Rayan, who has always put liberation before cultural and religious sensibilities as the touchstone of an authentic theology, was also one of the first to articulate Indian unease with the generally acultural approach of Latin American liberation theologians. In 1981 Rayan led the Indian delegation to the 5th EATWOT conference of Third World theologians in arguing the need for a new theological language, a poetic approach reflecting the... various Indian traditions (Rayan 1983: 37-41; cf. Rayan 1991b), "a dialogue with the earth" (Rayan 1991b: 45-46) that uncovers the "latent theology in the heart of people's struggles" (: 52-60).

Rayan's approach to culture is "to reflect and integrate not elements from any [one] religious tradition..., but the social symbols which are meaningful and common to the (oppressed) masses of the people" (Rayan 1984: 210). He argues that culture has a spiritual element in that it embraces values but also in the sense that it is a people's response to realities (Rayan 1999b: 3).

Culture is also a social dream and a means of political resistance, therefore spirituality is culture-creating (: 5). "Incarnated spirituality" then consists in creating counter-culture as did Gandhiji in the struggle against the British, and as Asian peasants have done for centuries (: 8-11). In Rayan's view, it is the Holy Spirit that generates these "dreams and visions" (cf. Joel and Acts 2), and who urges us to subvert unjust structures (Rayan 1979a: 38, 41). "[T]he world is full of icons of the Holy Spirit" in the people who, like Jesus, "love liberty and uphold human dignity" (Rayan 1990c: 10).

## **Mission in the Spirit**

We have seen that Rayan has a strong sense of mission, his is a mission pneumatology. Rayan's biblical foundations for mission are partly Matthean - the

Sermon on the Mount is "the formal charter of mission" (Rayan 1999b: section 10) - but chiefly Johannine. They revolve around Jesus' command to love one another in John 13, where it is expressed in "concrete relevant service to, and acceptance of" the other person (: section 12).

Rayan's focus is not on the Spirit of mission as developed in Bosch's work, in which the Spirit is inspirer and guide of the church's mission. Nor is it on the mission of the Spirit as in the work of Jürgen Moltmann, the mission to bring life with which the church co-operates, though both of these pictures are found in Rayan's thought. Rayan's chief concern is with "mission in the Spirit". He describes mission as "the sphere of the Spirit": "Mission is the extension in space and time of the Incarnation of God's Word.... Those who engage in it are co-workers of the Spirit.... to the extent that they live in the Spirit"(Rayan 1999b: section 16). For Rayan, mission is spirituality. After all, the Spirit was with Jesus from the Annunciation not just his baptism, and Pentecost and the commission of the disciples in John 20 are one and the same.

For Rayan, mission is also a mystery (Rayan 1979a: 104-5) rooted in the Trinitarian sending within the Divine: "each particular reality... is on a mission to the rest.... in an intricate web of cosmic interdependence..." (Rayan 1999b: section 11). Like the components of creation, human cultures are meant to complement and supplement each other. Religions too "must be respectfully sought, offered, received, assimilated, integrated and lived for the benefit of the human family and its earth-home. That is mission" (: section 12).

Rayan describes what he means in a poem:

little candle,  
i wish you would touch me  
with your fiery finger;  
clasp me in your blaze,  
and kindle at my centre,  
till i too glow and melt,  
and bear on my heart and head  
the searing sorrow of my people,  
and thaw in love and dissolve  
in service of light and warmth  
and fresh dreams and hopes  
spread out at their sacred feet (Rayan 1993: 251)

# Reflections on Bread, Breath, Mission and Pneumatology

I find there is much to appreciate in Rayan's work. It is not all new, it has followed - and sometimes led - the path of ecumenical theologising over the second half of the last century. But Rayan has integrated the strands of this theology to a great degree in his concern for mission and pneumatology. The symbols of Bread and Breath in particular become a richly poetic way of combining the two natures of Christ, the immanence and transcendence of God, and the liberative and evangelistic dimensions of mission.

Rayan is a Jesuit and an Indian and draws from both contexts an appreciation of beauty and the contemplative life. But he also has a strong sense of truth and justice and a concern for the suffering of others, which leads him into liberative action. His ability to combine these two, which is based on his re-reading of the Bible and his desire to emulate Jesus, is his greatest strength. His use of the concept of "mission in the Spirit" as the integrative centre of his thought may be his greatest legacy.

## Problems

There are, of course, problems with Rayan's approach. An obvious one is that he uses cerebral, Enlightenment methods to argue for an artistic, intuitive one. But the power of his poetic expression is ample evidence that theology can and should be both an art and a science. Another problem is that Rayan shows a certain naiveté about identifying nature, social movements and other religions as works of the Spirit. His idealism may be a help in mission but calls into question some of his interpretations of reality. However, his main point that history is created by the action of God's Spirit is well made, and I think it deserves closer attention.

## Roots

It is interesting to speculate further on the roots of Rayan's thought. We have noted the influence of Indian traditions, explicit and implicit in Rayan's work. But we have also seen the influence of Hopkins' poetry, the origin of the term "bread and breath". There is a close affinity between Rayan's thought and that of his fellow Jesuit, not least their choice of poetic expression. It is interesting to speculate on the roots of Rayan's thought but it is not, I think, possible to draw any conclusions. For Rayan, like all of us perhaps, is a person formed by multiple contexts, life-experiences, and influences - direct and indirect - from East and West, South and North. His theology, and I submit any theology, stands not as a universal theology nor even a theology for India but as a deeply felt, thought, experienced and acted, human expression of the

realities of earth and heaven, reflecting also many concerns of his community. From this theology of bread and breath, I think we can all learn and be grateful.

## **Universality, Particularity, and Contextuality**

I would like to focus my reflection on the issues of universality, particularity and contextuality raised by Rayan's work. Though Rayan is a staunch critic of the Catholic hierarchy, what strikes me is the extent to which Vatican language and Rayan's coincide. On his visit to India last autumn, the Pope released the Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Asia", which re-emphasises the conclusion of the 1990 Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* that "[The Spirit] is... not an alternative to Christ". This has been interpreted in India and elsewhere as an attack on Indian theologies. Yet in his Exhortation, John Paul II allows that "the Spirit is in a certain sense a hidden power at work in history" and that "the presence of the Spirit in creation generates order, harmony and interdependence" (para. 15).

It would seem in that case that there is not such a difference between the thought forms of the Vatican and Rayan as he would have us to believe.

Rayan's is still basically a Vatican II pneumatology, a universal theology from above. Even where he argues most vehemently against the "order model" imposed by Rome, it has been pointed out that Rayan is working with his own order model, an ecumenical model in which the emphasis is on unity rather than diversity (Athappilly 1984). Is it not possible for *Sakti* to be as totalising as Brahminism, if both posit a universal spirit. Marxism illustrates that we can have totalitarianism from below as well as from above.

Despite his aversion to Brahmin elitism and Catholic hierarchy, Rayan does show an inclination in the same direction by buying in, as he does in his recent paper, to a view that there are levels of spirituality: a basic level common to the human psyche evidenced in the charismatic movement and an authentic spirituality, that of the basic communities, which is liberational. Nor does his Pneumato-centric theology of religions escape from the accusation that Rayan thinks he understands the depth-reality better than believers in other faiths. Where is the line between elitism and personal conviction? There seems to be a clash here between the liberationist and the creationist impulses. Rayan wishes to affirm religious difference but to trace it to a common source.

Rayan's universal Spirit is too all-embracing, too overwhelming. It does not seem to allow space for the experience of other spirits, for the experience of



difference, or of evil. If the Spirit is the Spirit of nature, how can we fail to be "in" it? Where does human choice come in? In Aloysius' Pieris' terminology, Rayan's theology is metacosmic, a true theology of the people would use cosmic terms. The cosmic is the world of spirits rather than Spirit, this was a world that Jesus addressed in its own language.

It seems that Rayan hears the socio-economic critique of the masses but not the religio-cultural. Despite his attention to "the little tradition", Rayan is searching there for universal symbols, such as bread and breath, to the neglect of separate, particular identities. Incidentally, bread is not a universal concept - certainly not in Asia - which is why Rayan has to intersperse his work with references to rice-bowls. Rayan tends to see a general category of common people, the masses, and resists theologising in any particular tradition. Whereas at a global level, his theology is particular to India, it is general as far as India is concerned.

Rayan wants to emphasise the historicity of Jesus in order to inspire concrete action for liberation but he downplays the importance of the historical facts about Jesus for fear of limiting the scope of salvation to institutional Christianity. But there is another way in which awareness of the historical particularity of Jesus is important: it leads to an appreciation of context and the meaning of contextuality. While Rayan is contextual at one level, the level of India, he lacks appreciation of the multiple layering of contexts on one another, the multiple identity that is the reality of human experience. This is apparent also in his approach to the Bible, which tends to be primitivist. To search for the historical Jesus alone is to ignore the Bible's rich contextuality. But context is not only historical, it is also geographical, spatial. Rayan's view of church history, for example, is very linear, paying scant attention to Asian manifestations of Christianity. Could the concept of contextuality provide an alternative way of circumventing Western vested interests in history?

Rayan's aim is to make liberation religious and religion liberational. He utilises religion for purposes of liberation but he does not reduce it to a device for secular ends, it is to be appreciated for own beauty. Rayan wishes to keep hold of transcendence, to maintain the meta-narrative in his understanding of reality. In his context it is perfectly natural to be religious and to appreciate the

spiritual and, as he argues, Enlightenment thought, in its materialism, is impoverished in this respect. But as Rayan remarks (in rather mixed metaphors), "religion is a delicate flower easily hijacked". So are meta-narratives. Truth is notoriously difficult to grasp. Its actualisation is fleeting. Its precise location is uncertain. In pointing India to Christ in a way that is sympathetic to Indian religion and culture, Rayan does the church a great service. Whether the people of India come to agree with Rayan that the Spirit of Christ is the source of Bread and Breath will be up to them.

## Notes

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