

'God Has Not Left Himself Without Witness'

A Critical Examination of the 'Fulfilment' Concept in the Christian Understanding of other Religions in Indian Christian Thought, with special reference to the Contribution of Krishna Mohan Banerjea and Sadhu Sundar Singh to Protestant Fulfilment Theology

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ABSTRACT

The Christian Church has since its inception formulated various ways of relating its claims regarding the decisive and universal significance of the Christ-event to the religious traditions and experience of people of other faiths. A common theme that undergirds several of the approaches that have emerged in the history of Christian engagement with other religions is the fulfilment concept.

The fulfilment concept, with its roots in the New Testament and the early church fathers, continues to find prominence and creative theological expression in Roman Catholic circles. Protestant fulfilment theology, however, reached the peak of its development in the early years of the twentieth century, and subsequently fell into decline. This study presents a case for the revitalization of the Protestant fulfilment tradition based on a recovery and assessment of the fulfilment approaches of Indian Christian converts in the pre-independence period, focussing especially on the views of Krishna Mohan Banerjea and Sadhu Sundar Singh.

Our analyses of the fulfilment approaches of Indian converts furnish us with a conceptual framework for a cumulative fulfilment proposal which complements the nineteenth century Protestant fulfilment tradition. The experience of Indian converts affords significant evidence to confirm the fulfilment claim that there are elements in the Hindu tradition that can serve as a 'pedagogy' to Christ. It offers empirical verification of a trinitarian scheme of progressive, differentiated and complementary divine revelation for affirming revelational continuity between Christianity and Hinduism. It also provides components for a theologically coherent Christology upon which to base the fulfilment proposal.

The fulfilment approaches of Indian converts help authenticate the plausibility of fulfilment theology, confirming its adequacy over alternative explanations, in affirming the particular truth claims of the Christian faith while ascribing genuine value to the religious traditions and experience of people of other faiths. The recovery of Protestant fulfilment theology requires attention to several pending tasks, including the development of a Christian hermeneutic of non-Christian text, and a careful assessment of the influence of the fulfilment concept among Hindu converts and "non-baptised believers in Christ" today. This study contributes towards that recovery.