

A Man of The World

It was with the deepest sorrow that my wife and I heard on the 3rd of September 1980 of the death a few days earlier of Father X. S. Thani Nayagam. A Christmas card last December had informed us of his failing health, but to learn of his death was still a shock.

I remember him best for his unfailingly calm, efficient, and cheerful administration of the complex affairs of the International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies which I witnessed at Kuala Lumpur and at Paris. The even more difficult meetings at Madras and Jaffna also bore the imprint of his administrative genius. The smooth driving in harness of so many horses, which at times wished to gallop in different directions, was no small matter. But in addition I remember well the elegance of his personal hospitality on these occasions—particularly in Paris at a small dinner at the Tour Eiffel.

Between these occasions at Kuala Lumpur and Paris I remember Father Thani Nayagam's stay at the University of California in Berkeley at the Faculty Club, when he worked in the University Library, said Mass at the Catholic students' chapel, and charmed his fellow residents at the Faculty Club by the erudition and quiet wit of his conversation. He charmed too my wife and myself over dinner at Fishermen's Wharf in San Francisco by his reminiscences of boyhood in similar maritime surroundings in Ceylon, punctuating our view of the sunset over the Golden Gate with apposite quotations from the English poets.

Father Thani Nayagam was indeed an admirable person—urbane and elegant, learned in many cultures, open-minded and intellectually growing, a man of the world in the best sense. Of his spiritual life as a priest of his Church I am ill-equipped to write—but that it formed the central core of his life I have no doubt. His devotion to the Tamil classics too must be spoken of by others—but it was obviously one of his deep interests. We have lost prematurely a most valuable and valued person and friend.

— M. B. Emeneau