

The Eastern Churches in India and the Syrian Tradition

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Till recently the Eastern Churches and the Eastern Christians were identified with both Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, and with the Middle East. In a sense that Oriental world was somehow connected with the Mediterranean world, with its two poles of attraction, Rome and Constantinople.

This is of course to forget first of all that in the original apostolic missions one of them, a capital one, was destined to peoples situated outside the frontiers of the Roman empire in its most extensive territory. Whatever be the role played by the Apostle Thomas-Didymus, he symbolised for centuries that mission which reached out to the Asian peoples.

And in India itself there are at least 6 million Christians who strongly believe that St Thomas the Apostle is their father in the Faith. They may be divided today in various churches, separated from each other by the vicissitudes of history, yet when their apostolic origins are questioned, they react at once like a single human being, sinking their differences.

This is why those Oriental Christians of India are better called the Christians of St Thomas, or St Thomas Christians.

Among them the greatest majority is Catholic, i.e. 2,521,063 who belong to the Syro-Malabar Church and who in Kerala itself are distributed into 12 dioceses and two ecclesiastical provinces. There is another Oriental Catholic Church there, called the Syro-Malankara Church, which counts 270,000 people making one ecclesiastical province and three dioceses. Of those Thomas Christians who are not in communion with the Roman see, there are first the Syrian-Orthodox or Jacobites, who are about 1,800,000, though today divided almost equally into two Churches; then we have the

Syrian Church of Mar-Toma, a protestantized Eastern Church with about 500,000 followers; third the Syro-Chaldean Church, somewhat Nestorian, which has about 15,000 members, and then some 10,000 former Jacobites who became either Anglican, or downright Protestant.

A CHEQUERED HISTORY - THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH

Everybody today accepts that the Christians of St Thomas in India are a very ancient Church, with a long history behind it. That past can be divided usefully into five periods: the apostolic and post-apostolic times, the ancient and medieval period, the first impact of colonialism, the divided community, autonomy for Catholics and the progress registered.

1. *The Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*

There is today hardly any Christian of St Thomas who doubts that his Church was founded by St Thomas the Apostle, that after having founded a number of communities in Kerala, the S.W. coastal and mountainous area of India, he moved to the east, and died the death of martyr at Meliapur (today a south suburb of Madras on the Coromandel coast). From the viewpoint of historical criticism, the connection of St Thomas with India can enjoy only a great probability, especially on account of the tomb named after him and situated in the cathedral of Meliapur. It was mentioned in the 4th century, though without indicating the name of the place. The coming of Thomas to India is also plausible because already before Christ the commercial relations of India with the eastern provinces of the Roman empire were frequent.

Unfortunately nothing really is known after the 1st century A.D., except that in all likelihood the Indian field and for that matter the whole of west Asia belonged to the apostolic mission sent to the non-Hellenistic world. Were those first Indian communities purely local or had they received emigrants either from other parts of India or even from Persia, etc? Be that as it may, the tradition of Kerala reports that ca A.D. 345 there landed in Kerala a certain number of Christian families, who, as it were, came to take refuge there. According to those local sources, this is what formed the still existing division among Thomas Christians into two communities,

the majority called the Northists, and the minority called the Southists. They belong to separate dioceses, be they Catholic or Orthodox. As a rule those two groups do not intermarry.

2. *The Ancient and Medieval Period*

Those emigrants of the 4th century are said to have come from Mesopotamia and from Persia, or even from both. This means that they had already initiated a relationship between the Christians of St Thomas of India and those of such parts in the Middle East which were not in the Roman empire, except sporadically. But the Church of the then Persian (Sassanian) empire had developed rapidly, and by the end of the 4th century it already had a chief metropolitan, soon to be called « catholicos » and later on catholicos-patriarch. It was that autocephalous Church which by far had the easiest relations with the rest of east and south-east Asia.

This explains also why by the 6th century at the latest the Christians of St Thomas in India were connected with that Church of Persia, whose official name was « Church of the East », which will be known later as the Chaldaean Church, the East-Syrian Church. That connection deepened. In the 7th or 8th century the already existing episcopal see in India became metropolitan. Moreover two new groups of emigrants from the Middle East had come to settle in S. India.

That Church in India was not found only in Kerala. It had its followers on the east coast as well, and in many places on the west coast at least up to the mouth of the Indus river. Many of those communities became lost later on due to invasions etc.

By the time Vasco de Gama landed in Calicut in 1498 the Church of the Thomas Christians had just been re-organized. It had received from Mesopotamia a metropolitan and three other bishops, who all belonged to the Church of the East or Chaldaean Church.

3. *The First Impact of Colonialism*

The first real encounter between the St Thomas Christians and the Portuguese took place in 1503. Two very different people thus met, the most Eastern Christians and the most Western ones. Two different worlds, two different expressions of Christianity, two different Churches.

For some time the relations between both remained friendly,

even warm on occasion. Then suspicions from the Portuguese side, above all the clergy who, of Portuguese or other origin, depended on the Royal Patronage of Portugal, i.e. the Padroado, were raised about the faith, the customs, the attitudes of the St Thomas Christians. The first real crisis came in 1558 with the arrival of two Chaldean bishops. By this time there was a Catholic patriarch in Mesopotamia quite recognized by Rome. Yet the two bishops were not welcomed by the Portuguese; one of them finally died in Rome, sent there as guilty of no crime whatever. The last metropolitan of the Thomas Christian, Mar Abraham, had his share of troubles, but could finally die in peace in Kerala itself. Since about 1580 the Jesuits had come into contact with the St Thomas Christians, had opened a seminary for their clerics, and wanted more and more to take them into the Padroado system.

What is called the « process of latinization » had already begun since about 1540, but it got strengthened by the very action pursued by the seminary run by the Jesuits. The votaries of the Padroado aimed at two goals: separate the Thomas Christians from any relation with the Eastern Churches, incorporate them into the Portuguese system of Church patronage. Latinization would be the chief means to obtain such results. It topped with the assembly called the synod of Diamper (Udayamperur), which was called into existence in 1599 by the then archbishop of Goa, the Augustinian Friar Alexis de Menezes. He was a strong personality, ready to use all the means at his disposal to have his own way, i.e. to make the Padroado triumph. It worked all too well. From 1601 onwards the St Thomas Christians were given an archbishop all right, but of the Latin rite and nominated by the king of Portugal. The archbishop was nearly always a Jesuit until the end of the 18th century.

Their liturgical life was considerably disrupted. Only the bare text of the Eucharist with the anaphora of Addai and Mari, not without corrections, and the canonical prayers with much loss of variety, were still kept. All the rest became a Syriac translation of Latin texts. Western devotions of all types were introduced all through the next three centuries. It came to a point where the Eucharistic sacrifice became only a preparation for Benediction.

All those revolutionary changes were not accepted as easily as it looked. A kind of resistance centre was formed around the personality of the archdeacon. He had been for centuries past the local and natural leader of the community, more powerful than any vicar

general and auxiliary bishop. Now the Jesuit archbishops tried their level best to reduce his authority. It was resented, though for some twenty years no real revolt could be staged, but the embers of rebellion were slowly but surely getting hot again.

4. *The Divided Community*

The explosion got off. The spark that fired it was the arrival of a Syrian Catholic bishop, whom the Portuguese refused to land at the Cochin harbour. On 3 January 1653 the chief representatives of the St Thomas Christians gathered at the Mattancherry chapel, then in a suburb of Cochin, and took the oath never to submit anymore to the Jesuits and to their archbishop. The revolt was led by Archdeacon Thomas, who on the following 22 May was « ordained » bishop by twelve priests. Thomas was recognized as « their » bishop by the overwhelming majority of the people and clergy.

The revolt was against the Jesuits, not against the pope. This is the reason why Rome could intervene more directly, but only after four years. For in early 1657 a Carmelite mission, led by an apostolic commissary, Joseph Sebastiani of St Mary, landed in Kerala with full powers to deal with the local situation. Propaganda in Rome had decided to do whatever was possible to calm down the revoltees and to concede to them as much as possible. Meanwhile the archdeacon-bishop was doing all he could to strengthen his position. Then Sebastian went back to Rome, was ordained bishop there, and came back to Kerala in order to gather more St Thomas Christians under the direct control of Rome. But almost suddenly the political situation took a turn for the worse. Cochin was conquered by the Dutch on 7 January 1663. The Carmelites were asked to leave. But Sebastiani could find time to ordain bishop a local priest, Alexander (Chandy) Pazheparambil (perhaps also Pallikaparampil). It was a good choice, and it must be said that Bishop Chandy, as he is known to history, succeeded in gathering under himself the majority of the Thomas Christians. From 1668 onwards he was ably assisted by a growing, though small, number of Carmelites, whom the Dutch authorities had accepted.

Meanwhile the minority that was the section of the Thomas Christians faithful to the archdeacon-bishop kept separate from the majority. The archdeacon-bishop, who was always called Mar Thomas, more and more accepted a Syro-Antiochian connection, which was strengthened by successive missions sent to Kerala by the Syrian Ortho-

dox, or Jacobite, patriarch. Yet repeatedly almost all those « Mar Thomases » tried in some way or another to come closer to the Catholics, even to obtain reunion with Rome.

From the beginning of the 18th century those Thomas Christians who had remained in communion with Rome were divided under two different jurisdictions. The majority among them depended on a Carmelite vicar apostolic under Propaganda, but a minority kept under the archbishop of Cranganore, whose office, which had remained vacant for more than forty years, had been at last filled and again by Jesuits, still under the Padroado. The last Jesuit archbishop of the 18th century died in 1777. By this time the Jesuits had been suppressed and their role in St Thomas Christians' affairs had ceased. Only the Carmelite vicars apostolic succeeded in keeping their jurisdiction alive.

In the meantime, however, a mission of two priests was sent to Portugal and to Rome by the St Thomas Christians in union with the Holy See. It aimed at uniting, once more, the whole community, Padroado, Propaganda, Jacobite, eventually under a local prelate. The mission obtained one of its wishes. One of the two priests, Joseph Cariattil, was consecrated archbishop of Cranganore at Lisbon in 1783. He reached Goa in May 1786, but unfortunately he died there on 9 September 1786 without having reached his goal. If he had done so, it can be surmised from the abundant documentation of the period that he would have united all his people under his leadership. It was not to be...

Some thirty years before Cariattil became bishop, the first Thomas Christian to be raised to the episcopacy since Bishop Chandy, an imposing Jacobite delegation had landed in Cochin, very much supported by the Dutch. Yet it took years before the then Mar Thomas could be validly ordained a bishop. He actually received all the orders from the Jacobite prelates, Gregory and John. Mar Thomas VI took then the official name of Mar Dionysios I. It was he who expected that Cariattil would arrange in Rome his reunion with the Catholic Church. Though Cariattil died too early for that, Dionysios I did not cease trying to be reunited, all the more so because he could now hope to become the sole prelate of the whole community. In fact during the second half of 1799 he had become a full fledged Catholic, though for six months only.

5. *The Difficult Way Towards Autonomy*

Hopes for the St Thomas Christians had become fewer than ever before. Even the Christian East seemed to be closed to them, though each time in the past they had appealed to it some intervention of a sort took place. Memories of a frustrated community die hard. In 1701 the first Carmelite vicar apostolic to last in Kerala until his death was, paradoxically, consecrated by a Chaldean bishop, Simon of Adana. He had come to help the Thomas Christians at their own request, but as soon as the vicar apostolic, Angelo Francis of St Teresa, was installed, the Chaldean prelate was spirited away to Pondicherry, lest he make a success among the Thomas Christians... More than fifty years later they were still bitter about it.

Between 1708 and his death in 1731 another Chaldean bishop, called Gabriel, was active in Kerala and had quite a following, above all from among the Thomas Christians, who were supposed to be Jacobites, but actually were not as yet committed to the Syro-Antiochian tradition. Still more significant was the mission made of three young St Thomas Christians, which was sent to the Chaldean patriarchate in 1797. By that time the main branch of that ancient Church was firmly in communion with Rome. One of those young men was ordained bishop at Mosul in January 1798. Known as Paul Pandari, he came back to Kerala and was accepted by a number of Catholic parishes. It was he who received the Jacobite metropolitan in the Roman communion in 1799. But Paul Pandari's influence was neither great nor lasting. Yet he had helped to keep alive the age-long Eastern connection, which the Portuguese, the Jesuits and the Carmelites had done their best to erase.

Actually in Rome itself the authorities of Propaganda were more and more inclined to consider restoring that Eastern connection, at least to some extent. In 1801 they had decided to send to Kerala a Chaldean prelate from Iran, John Guriel, as an apostolic visitor. But that visit never took place. It took nearly half-a-century before the Chaldean patriarchate publicly raised its historical claim to jurisdiction over the St Thomas Christians of India. It was quite a psychological moment, for then these Christians felt more and more independent from the foreign missionaries, and had no love left for the Carmelites.

Direct interventions from the Chaldean side followed rather quickly and also awkwardly. The then Catholic patriarch, Joseph VI Audo, who meant well but used inadequate means, was all in

favour of restoring the ancient links between India and the Chaldaean or East-Syrian patriarchate. After more than seven years of various attempts, a newly ordained bishop, Thomas Rokos, was sent to Kerala as patriarchal delegate. He stayed there for one year only, though his local success was considerable. We are then in 1853-1855. After less than twenty-years a new effort was made to restore those links. This time the delegate, Elias Mellos, was quite a remarkable bishop, but the Thomas Christians had become much less enthusiastic about their ancient relations. Yet Mellos had a local priest, who had been ordained bishop by the Assyrian patriarch outside the Roman communion, as a strong supporter. Mellos lasted some ten years in Kerala.

Rome had forbidden those renewed contacts between the Chaldaeans and the Malabarians. But it had early realized that something should be done to provide some kind of autonomy to the St Thomas Christians. Visitation after visitation took place in order to grasp the real situation. The most important of them was that of Msgr Leo Meurin s.j., vicar apostolic of Bombay. He was received by the St Thomas Christians as a saviour. Meurin favoured more autonomy for the Syrians and their eventual removal from Carmelite care, which by that time had become more a burden than a help. I have no doubt that the Chaldean interferences in the affairs of the Thomas Christians had at least one good result: they forced the Roman authorities to consider the possibility of providing them with autonomy under their own bishops. It took them some twenty years more to take the right decision.

In 1887 Pope Leo XIII gave the St Thomas Christians of India a relative independence from the Latin jurisdiction, though still under two non-Indian vicars apostolic. They were nominated mostly in order to pave the way towards real autonomy. In 1896 came the nomination of three St Thomas Christian bishops for three vicariates apostolic. In 1911 a fourth one was created, and on 20 December 1923 the St Thomas Christian hierarchy was established for good with one metropolitan see and three suffragan sees. It is to be noted that the Syrian Orthodox, those whose ancestors revolted in 1653 and refused to be reconciled, had since 1876 seven metropolitan sees all with local bishops, besides the metropolitan who was the spiritual heir to the archdeacon-bishop of 1653, and who had been always a prelate taken from among the local clergy.

Autonomy led to revival, revival led to all-out developments,

all-out developments led to greater self-awareness. In this way there can be summed up the history of the St Thomas Christians, or the Syro-Malabar Church, for the last hundred years. In 1876 there were 200,000 people with 420 priests and 125 seminarians, a still divided Church. In 1931, they had more than doubled their number, religious women were already more than one thousand, schools of every description were some 617. In 1960 there were nearly one million and a half faithful, with 1,130 diocesan priests, 872 seminarians, 363 religious priests, 6,500 religious women in 362 convents. The Syro-Malabar Church runs then 884 schools and 14 University Colleges. As we already mentioned, the total number of the Syro-Malabarian people today is more than two millions and a half, with 1,955 diocesan priests and 1,453 seminarians. They have now two major seminaries, the older one at Alwaye, the more recent one at Kottayam. They are so full that Syro-Malabar seminarians are to be sent to Latin-run seminaries in S. India. There are 1,423 religious priests belonging to five congregations. The most important of these are the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, who were founded in 1831. They are by far the largest congregation with 1,018 members in 1987, out of whom there are 346 scholastics and 162 novices.

The Syro-Malabar Church is proud to have some 20,500 religious women, who belong to sixteen congregations, five of which are of pontifical right. It has also three women's societies and three secular institutes.

Which are the main developments, the main thrusts, that characterized the Syro-Malabarians of the last hundred years? Four could be singled out. Firstly, educational institutions multiplied to such an extent that today the percentage of literacy in Kerala is the highest in Asia after Japan. Obviously the Syro-Malabar Church was not the only one to contribute to that progress, but one can say that she did at least half of the work. Both lay people and clerics vie with each other to do higher studies, be it in India or abroad. Secondly, the rise of vocations to the priestly and religious life is outstanding. This is the only reason why twenty-six years ago another major seminary had to be built for them. Today it is full to the brim. Thirdly, the rise of vocations is to be related to a fairly recent (some forty years old) and quickly developing awareness of the missionary dimension in the Church. It deeply affected the youth and was partly at least responsible for sending so many young Syro-Malabarians to the Latin missions and dioceses all over India, and even more recently to

Africa and Latin America.

I say «partly at least» because the boom of vocations could not be absorbed at once into the Syro-Malabar Church. But that remarkable rise of vocations was also quickened by more and more organized recruiting by religious congregations. Some of them even have one or several houses of their own as recruiting centres in Syro-Malabar dioceses. There are today about 2,000 priests of Syro-Malabar origin who work in Latin units all over India, and about 30,000 Latin nuns in India are actually of Syro-Malabar origin, without counting those who have gone abroad. There are today even three or four Latin bishops in North India, who are Syro-Malabarian.

Sooner or later that missionary zest was bound to affect the Syro-Malabar Church itself. The first consequence was the creation in 1962 of the first missionary territory, that of Chanda, entrusted to the Syro-Malabarians. Others followed till 1977, in such a way that today there are in Central and North India eight missionary dioceses run by the Syro-Malabarians. Half of them are in the hands of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. The second consequence was the foundation in 1968 of a clerical missionary society, which took the name of «The Missionary Society of St Thomas». Basically it is the missionary society of the diocesan clergy. By 1987 it had already 223 members with 182 seminarians. Since its foundation it is in charge of the missionary territory of Ujjain, which became a bishopric in 1977.

The fourth main thrust of the Syro-Malabar Church is the increasing tempo of socio-charitable activities. There is no diocese which has not a major hospital. Orphanages, houses for the aged, dispensaries are found in good number. In some of the richer dioceses housing for the poor, irrespective of religion and social group, has already been implemented, or at least launched.

All that tableau is quite optimistic. It cannot be denied that much development and success characterize the Syro-Malabar Church. Yet it also has its problems and difficulties. Among these three can be singled out as particularly important.

1. Since 1962 the Syro-Malabar Church has engaged in restoring its liturgical life. One cannot insist enough on the negative effects of four hundred years of systematic latinization. More than any other Eastern Church in communion with Rome the Syro-Malabar Church had almost entirely lost its basic character as an Oriental reality. That loss affected not only the liturgy, but also spiritua-

lity, theology and law. Its own people hardly knew that they were « oriental ». After having been told during so many centuries that everything oriental was wrong, backward, unworthy of Catholics, one wonders how some clergy and laity could still hope for a restoration... It explains also why such a restoration comes about so slowly, so hesitantly, with much inner tensions, discussions, personal oppositions. The fundamentals of the Syro-Malabar liturgy are of the East-Syrian type, often, though wrongly, called Chaldaean. Some of the Syro-Malabarians, including some of their prelates, have become allergic in the course of centuries to those words, as they symbolized in their eyes a backwardness unworthy of their Indian Church.

2. The boom of vocations in the Syro-Malabar Church was mentioned above. Unfortunately it too often suffered from abuses, such as easy-going recruitment, propaganda against the Syro-Malabar Church as an Oriental body, and a way of sending Syro-Malabar girls to join convents abroad. It cannot be denied that for some years hardly any control of those abuses was exercised.

3. Owing to a variety of social and economic factors, the Syro-Malabarians emigrate easily. In the first place emigration inside Kerala began more than eighty years ago, particularly from south to north. The diocese of Tellicherry, which was established on the last day of 1953, is almost wholly made up of people who had left the region of Palai in central Kerala in order to find available land for cultivation in its northern parts. Especially during the years that followed World War II and Indian independence (1947) thousands of Syro-Malabarians emigrated all over India, above all to the most important of industrialized centres. Today they also emigrate, either for a time, e.g. to the Persian Gulf, or for good, e.g. to North America. In Bombay and its immediate surroundings there are today some 100,000 Syro-Malabarians. It took years for the Syro-Malabar hierarchy to realize the urgency of pastoral care for their emigrants. It took them a long time to find out their own people had to be looked after in a more active and organized way. That new awareness was followed at once by a concerted move to obtain parishes of their own tradition in the rest of India, if not dioceses. Pope John-Paul II confirmed it in July 1987. Meanwhile some of the Syro-Malabar bishops are already busy with organizing parishes for their own people in North America.

All those rather recent developments have prompted many Syro-Malabarians to ask for a patriarchate according to the declaration of

Vatican II on the Oriental Churches. Since the patriarchate in this case was for all India, then the question of having additional dioceses in India would be solved easily.

A CHALLENGING HISTORY - THE SYRO-MALANKARA CHURCH

It has already been explained how the original united community of the St Thomas Christians in India became split since 1653. A hard core of them refused to be reconciled with the Catholic Church and decided to go alone on its own. After various attempts it finally became closely connected with the Syrian Orthodox patriarchate of Antioch, whose prelates lived mostly in today's South Turkey, and who belonged to those Churches which refused to receive the doctrinal decisions taken by the council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.

The links forged between the St Thomas Christians who had ceased to be Catholic and the Syrian Orthodox (or Jacobite) patriarchate only got stronger in course of time. Yet several times the heads of the St Thomas Christians, usually called Mar Thomas as seen previously, tried to effect a *rapprochement* with the Catholic majority, even to join the Catholic communion. All those attempts were frustrated through mutual misunderstanding and lack of easy communications with Rome.

In the course of the 19th century the Syrian Orthodox community of India took advantage of the early educational activities of Anglican missionaries to improve their educational standards. Actually they soon became far better educated than their Catholic counterparts. This progress, however, had to be paid for in one way or another. The contacts with those Anglican who belonged to the evangelical variety, led to two successive schisms within the Syrian Orthodox. The first brought straight into the Anglican Church a fairly large group of Thomas Christians. Today they are part of the central diocese of Kerala of the Church of South India. Then, a much more considerable number of the Indian Syrian Orthodox succeeded in launching a new Church. They called it « The Syrian Church of Mar Toma ». In doctrine and in discipline it was an adapted Anglican Church, in worship and externals it kept a large amount of Syrian traditions. In 1874 the Syrian Orthodox patriarch, Peter III, made a momentous visit to his Indian flock. It was considerably re-organized, a synod was held, the Protestant infiltrations were stopped, and the Orthodox Thomas Christians could look forward towards a bright future.

Yet, it dawned slowly on many of them that the dependency of the Indian Orthodox on the Jacobite patriarchate was somewhat odd, if not abnormal. It at all, by sheer number the Indian Orthodox could claim a much greater measure of autonomy, greater, at least, than the patriarchs were ready to grant. Already the finances of the Church in India were regarded as out of the patriarchal supervision. By about 1905 a strong party of clerical and lay leaders stood around the then Indian metropolitan, Dionysios VI, who himself favoured a greater autonomy for his Church. In 1909 the recently elected Syrian Orthodox patriarch, Abdallah Sattuf, who had been a Catholic bishop for more than ten years, thought it was time to come and settle matters in India. His official visitation provoked a split within the Indian flock. A majority rejected the patriarchal claims, a minority acknowledged them. Mutual excommunications, endless lawsuits to obtain ownership of churches, several attempts at reconciliation mostly made the history of the Syrian Orthodox of India till 1958.

Among those clerics who supported the Metropolitan against the Patriarch was a deacon called P.T. Geevarghese (George Thomas Pannikar). He was the first cleric from Kerala to have graduated at the Protestant University College in Madras. It was he who with other leaders had the idea of calling to India the former Orthodox Patriarch, Abd-ul-Massih, predecessor of Abdallah Sattuf, and deposed by the Turkish government in 1906. By this time P. T. Geevarghese was a priest, principal of the Orthodox Seminary and known preacher. Patriarch Abd-ul-Massih was prevailed upon to set up or rather re-establish the Catholicosate, the office of catholicos or maphrian, in favour of the Indian flock. The creation of a catholicos added fuel to the fire in the protracted dispute between the two sections among the Indian Orthodox, but definitely strengthened the quest for autonomy, in fact already then for autocephaly.

Father P.T. Geevarghese was not yet satisfied. He wanted to give rise to a spiritual revival in his Church. An Eastern Church without a religious quest is unworthy of its name. After a stay as a professor of Syriac and other subjects in the Protestant college of Serampore, near Calcutta, he founded in 1919-25 the Brotherhood and the Sisterhood of the Imitation of Christ. It was the first time since the split of 1653 that the Orthodox Thomas Christians enjoyed the blessing of organized religious life. P. T. Geevarghese received considerable help from the Anglican sisterhood of the Epiphany, above all their superior, Mother Edith. She admirably trained the

Orthodox sisters. Father Gevargheese left Calcutta for good, received land in a mountainous «desert», and began his Brotherhood under very poor and ascetic conditions. That place was called «Bethany» and it gave the name to both the congregations.

The founder and religious leader enjoyed a considerable influence in his Church. It explains why in 1925 he became bishop of Bethany with the episcopal name of Mar Ivanios (John). Truly enough there was in the Syrian Orthodox tradition a custom of making bishop the head of a large monastic establishment, but this was so far unknown in India. Moreover Mar Ivanios, who became metropolitan with a suffragan in 1928, directly depended on the catholicos without fearing any lay interference. Meanwhile all attempts at reconciliation of the catholicos' party with the patriarch and his followers failed. Hence in 1926 the catholicos and his synod decided to find out which possibilities of «unity in diversity» Rome held out. Mar Ivanios was asked by all to open correspondence in the synod's name.

Whereas Ivanios had become increasingly convinced that only union with the Catholic Church could bring to his own Orthodox people the spiritual benefits he looked for, his own Orthodox colleagues and most of the leading laity became more and more hesitant. Though the answers from Rome were rather positive, they were neither clear nor ready about recognizing the catholicosate as a permanent institution after union. Moreover the catholicos, Basil II, who stood by Mar Ivanios, died in 1928. His successor hardly wanted to accept Ivanios' views. This reluctance was all the more understandable, because the catholicos' party had just won some important lawsuits against the patriarch's side.

As regards Mar Ivanios and his suffragan, Mar Theophilos, the need for union with Rome had become compulsory. Since the last reply from the Congregation for the Oriental Churches was favourable, both the bishops joined the Catholic Church on 20 September 1930. Within fifteen months they had some 5,000 followers. All the sisters of Bethany and nearly all the brothers, actually almost all their priests, had joined their founder, as well as some forty diocesan priests.

Within the last fifty-seven years the Syro-Malankara Church, as it is officially known, grew and expanded. Its people came mostly from the Syrian Orthodox, members of the Church of Mar-Toma, various Protestant denominations. The head of the Church is at Trivandrum as the initiator, Mar Ivanios, wanted it. In around Trivandrum many Protestants who belonged to the London Missionary

Society became Catholics in the Malankara Church. Also in the same area a goodly number of non-Christians who belonged to the Nadar social group were incorporated into the Malankara Church, this despite the fact that Nadars usually became Latin. Priests came later on from among them. One of them is Mar Ephrem, the present auxiliary bishop of the Malankara Archbishop of Trivandrum. When he was consecrated, it was the first time in history that a Christian who did not belong to the traditional community of St Thomas Christians had become a bishop of the Malankara Church.

The Malankara Catholics have remained by and large faithful to their liturgical and other religious traditions. Their attachment to regular reading of the Bible, either in family or in groups, is quite strong. In most families they are faithful to reciting together their evening prayers culled from the West-Syrian office. They did not escape from certain latinizations. This is mostly due to the formation of the new clergy, or rather to the lack of a solid Oriental formation.

The Malankara Catholics were bent until recently on « reuniting » as many non-Catholic Christians as possible. The new ecumenical spirit which took the Catholic Church by storm was bound to give to the Malankara Catholics much food for thought. After Vatican II, was it still valid to speak of a « reunion movement », which sometimes in the past appeared very close to, if not the same as, proselytism? As a matter of fact the drive toward « reuniting » as many other Christians as could be has considerably slowed down. Today the Malankara Catholics are more aware that their Church should make a bid to become a model of what Christian unity should be like among Eastern Christians, without trying to increase its numbers by taking Orthodox into its fold.

Dispersion of its faithful all over India and abroad has posed to the Malankara clergy and laity pastoral problems often difficult to solve. From among the Oriental Catholics in India they were the first to obtain a parish of their own outside Kerala. It was in Madras. Elsewhere they have been allowed by Latin bishops to cater to the needs of the Malankara faithful by having chaplains of their own tradition, either visiting or permanent. In the United States of America there is an attempt under way to organize a parish, even several parishes for the Malankara Catholics, who have migrated there in recent years.

SEMINARIUM

COMMENTARI PRO SEMINARIIS, VOCATIONIBUS ECCLESIASTICIS, UNIVERSITATIBUS

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