

# **THE GROWING CHURCH**

**(An Introduction to  
Indian Church History)**

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## **THE GROWING CHURCH**

(An Introduction to the Indian Church History)

A Translation of the Malayalam Book

**“SABHA VALARUNNU”**

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Indian Church History)**

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# FOREWORD

Him we declare to you, teaching every person in all wisdom, so that we may present every human person perfect and mature in Christ.

- St. Paul Colossians 1:28

Trusting in the grace of God, we launch this English series: “Divyabodhanam - Growing in the Wisdom of God.” This English adaptation of the Divyabodhanam series in Malayalam is meant for our lay people outside Kerala who are unable to use the Malayalam series.

This first series can only be on an experimental level. After the books have been used for some time, we hope to revise them in the light of users’ comments. So please write to us quite frankly about how the series can be improved.

In our Orthodox tradition, we give only secondary importance to intellectual teaching. The most important thing is to participate regularly in the sacramental life of the Church, in worship and prayer. We grow in divine wisdom as we separate ourselves from evil and grow more God - like.

The sacramental mysteries of the Church, like Baptism, Mooron (Holy Chrism) and Holy Qurbana are the means by which Christ wants us to grow in Him. Equally important is our life of selfless love and service to our fellow human beings. This study series can help you to grow closer to Christ, through worship prayer and the sacramental mysteries and through a life of loving and compassionate service.

As you prayerfully study these lessons, and thereby know Christ more deeply, the Holy Spirit of God will guide you into all truth and into the great mystery of God’s love and wisdom.

May the blessing of God abide upon you, embark on these studies and continue to grow in Divine Wisdom. May your life become a light amidst the darkness of evil, illuminated by the life-giving light of Christ.

New Delhi,  
Feast of St. Thomas

**Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios**  
**President, Divyabodhanam**

# INTRODUCTION

How did the Church come to India? How did it grow? What is its status today? These are questions about the Indian Church which will be raised by any historian who makes a study of the subject. And we, who are interested in that study, should be able to deal with these questions adequately. In this book we make a modest attempt to fulfil the task.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Portuguese came to India and brought its southern parts under their control, they had to deal with a Church already existing in Kerala. The story of that Church before those times, the divisions that took place in it during the 17<sup>th</sup> and later centuries, the Churches that came into being as a result of the Western missionary efforts - these are the issues taken up briefly in this book.

It is in two volumes that we propose to deal with the history of the Indian Church. The first one is the present work. It tells the story upto the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The second volume takes us through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

This is in the main a treatment of the history of the Church of Malabar. With reference to its early history three positions adopted by historians of particular schools are not acceptable to us because in our opinion they do not agree with the available evidence. One of the positions is that from the early times the Church of Malabar was officially part of the Church of Rome. This position is not accepted even by most of the recognized Roman Catholic historians. A second view is based on the theory that union with the Pope of Rome is indispensable for the validity of a Church; it looks upon the Church that does not accept Rome's supremacy as heretical and schismatic. We consider the theory to be the result of a misunderstanding of the words "heresy" and "schism" and do not agree that the Churches that do not come under Rome's universal jurisdiction are heretical or exclusively schismatical. Our position is that the Church universal is in a state of schism and that the Roman Catholic Church and the other Churches are equally to blame for this. A third view is that the Church of Malabar had been in principle under the jurisdiction of Antioch from very early times. This is a theory for which we find no evidence. The Syrian Antioch Church came into the history of the Indian Church only from 1665, and not before that time.

The Church of Malabar had relations with the Church of Persia till the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and afterwards with the Church of Rome with which it became integrated for a time. The Synod of Udayamperur, which Archbishop Menezes of Goa under Portuguese rule held unauthorisedly and forcibly, made the Church accept Rome's supremacy. But it had a reaction, which expressed itself in the Oath of the Coonen Cross in 1653. After that incident, the Church became divided; one section joined Rome and remained as part of the Roman Catholic Church, and the other, after overcoming many hurdles, came gradually into the communion of the Syrian Church of Antioch and exists today as an Eastern Church.

The word "Eastern" has a special meaning for us. The Churches of the East are not united administratively or ecclesiastically. They are autonomous and autocephalous bodies, not copies of each other. In liturgy and life they are different, and each of them has its own identity. The Syrian Church, for instance, is the Church of the Syrian people. In the same way, the Indian Church should be that of the Indian people. It should not grow as part of the Church of any other people. This is the goal we should pursue. To achieve it the Churches in India should have an understanding among themselves and develop a spirit of brotherliness. The study of Church history should be a means to realise this ideal.

May this small book benefit those who use it.

**Fr. Dr. V. C. Samuel**

Easter 1991

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# UNIT 1

## THE BEGINNING OF THE INDIAN CHURCH AND ITS FOREIGN CONNECTIONS

### LESSON 1

#### ABOUT THE BOOK

□ A Word to Begin with □ The Syrian Church of Malabar □ Missions from the West □ The Connections with Antioch □ How the Book Should Be Used.

#### I. A Word to Begin with

This book deals with the following topics: the founding of the Church; foreign connections till the 16<sup>th</sup> century; forced conversion to Roman Catholicism; a rejection of that conversion; division of the Church into two bodies in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; expansion of Christianity to other parts of India through the Portuguese missionaries in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The history of the Indian Church is treated here from the beginning to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A second volume will deal with its history from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

#### 2. The Syrian Church of Malabar

A historian of the Indian Church should begin his account with the story of the Church of Malabar. That a Christian community called “the Mar Thoma Christians” or “the Syrian Christians” ‘existed in the South Western Coastal regions of the Indian peninsula from early times is a well-known fact. Numbering at present more than six million Christians in all, these people have a strong tradition that the faith was brought to their ancestors in the first century of the Christian era by St. Thomas, one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ. They believe that the Apostle founded their Church in Kerala and that it subsequently grew in strength and organizational set-up. In fact, the tradition has it that Christianity spread to a number of other parts of the sub-conti-

ment as well. All of them have gone out of existence, though in the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was a community at Mylapore on the Coromandel coast. The Church on the Malabar coast continued to flourish, and when the Portuguese came early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was being looked after spiritually by Persian bishops.

The Portuguese saw a united Church in Kerala. Soon they gained power and established a commercial empire with Goa as their capital. This affected the Christian community in Kerala adversely, as the Portuguese were interested in winning the native Christians over to Roman Catholicism; the missionaries who had come in the trail of the Portuguese also worked towards this end. Their efforts bore fruit, and the Synod of Udayamperur of 1599 marks their triumph in this direction. However, in the course of half a century an opportunity opened up for the Indian Christians almost as a body to rise in revolt in the famous Oath of the Coonen Cross in 1653. Now Rome interfered directly through a fresh missionary organization, the Propaganda Fidei, and brought back to its communion a majority of the Malabar Christians and their churches. But the community became divided, as a considerable minority refused to yield. From the seventh decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala continued to exist as two bodies, one in communion with Rome and the other asserting its independent status.

Faced with the need for valid episcopal succession, the latter body appealed to several Eastern Christian centres for help. In 1665 a response came from the Syrian Church of Antioch. A bishop of that Church, Mar Gregorios, came to Kerala, and he was welcomed by the community. His arrival led the community to enter into a new alliance that has continued ever since.

### **3. Missionaries from the West**

Portuguese missionaries did not limit their work to the conversion of the ancient Church of Malabar to Roman Catholicism. They put in their effort to evangelize the fishermen of the coastal areas of Kerala and Tamilnadu, besides carrying on missionary programmes in Western India and a number of other regions of the sub-continent. The converts whom they gained were organized on lines different from

those of the Mar Thoma Christians. Whereas the latter had the Syrian Christian liturgy with adaptations which Rome would approve, the other groups had all their traditions taken from the Latin Church of Europe.

From the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the missionaries of the Western Protestant Churches also began to come to India. The story of their work and achievements will be taken up in the second volume.

#### **4. Connections with Antioch**

There are differing views held by historians as regards the foreign connections of the Church of Malabar till the 16<sup>th</sup> century. One of them, which Roman Catholic historians of an earlier period have maintained, is that this Church was part of the Church of Rome, acknowledging the supremacy of the Pope. Since this view has been abandoned by the best of Roman Catholic scholarship, we do not have to examine it in detail.

But there is another view which deserves careful attention. In his book, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas the Apostle*, E. M. Philip argues that the Church of Malabar had come formally under the jurisdiction of the See of Antioch from the time of the Council of Nicea in 325 A. D. Philip bases his position on certain clauses in the *Arabic Canons of Nicea*. Though Philip ascribes to that collection the authority of the great Council of 325, his standpoint cannot be accepted without an examination of the issues involved in it. We therefore take up Philip's theory and the *Arabic Canons* for a brief examination.

The Syrian historians of the Middle Ages look upon the *Arabic Canons* as authentic. One such writer is Gregorios bar Ebraya, a thirteenth century Antiochian Syrian Church father. In his *Ecclesiastiki*, a Church history, he accepts the authority of the *Arabic Canons* as that of the Council of Nicea, and on that ground tries to make out that the ancient Church of Persia, with which the Church of Malabar had cordial relations till the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was officially under the jurisdiction of the See of Antioch. Bar Ebraya does not hint at the existence of an Indian Church anywhere in his book, nor does E. M. Philip claim an acquaintance with the work of Bar Ebraya. Yet he argues

that the Persian Church was part of the Antiochian Church till the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. According to Philip it was through Persia that the Indian Church came under the supremacy of the Antiochian See. While discussing the *Arabic Canons* we shall pay attention to the view of Bar Ebraya concerning Antioch's jurisdiction over the Persian Church as well.

## 5. How the Book Should Be Used

History calls for a careful examination of available evidence. It should be admitted that we have very few documents on the basis of which a proper history of the ancient Church of Malabar can be written. The available documents have been adopted as evidence by other historians in writing their works. Yet, we are not bound by their conclusions, as we have a right to examine the evidence ourselves and express our views, facing the problems in our own way. We do not claim that the standpoint adopted by us is unquestionable. Our point is only that the positions adopted here are corroborated by evidence. Whether we are right or not should be judged by others.

This work is written as a text book for students of the programme of study, which the Orthodox Theological Seminary, has organized for lay people. As the book is meant for educated men and women, a certain degree of academic standard is maintained. We suggest that students read each of the lessons at least three times and then try to answer the questions at the end. In order to help them locate the places noted in the book, a map is given, which they may use carefully.

## Questions

1. What is the importance of the Church of Malabar in the study of the history of Indian Christianity?
2. As a result of the coming of the Portuguese to India what Church groups came to be formed in Kerala?
3. What are the different Church traditions existing in India?
4. What ideal should we promote in the study of Church history?

## LESSON 2

# KERALA IN ANCIENT TIMES

- The Location of Kerala
- Available Evidence Concerning Kerala
- Social and Political Conditions
- Foreign Trade

### 1. The Location of Kerala

On the south-western coastal regions of the Indian sub-continent there is a long but narrow stretch of land, lying north to south, measuring about three hundred and fifty miles in length. That is Kerala. Bounded on the east by the Western Ghats and on the west by the Arabian Sea, it covers an area of 15,002 Square miles. Separated by the mountain range, Kerala exists geographically isolated from the rest of India, with its own natural characteristics and cultural peculiarities.

### 2. Available Evidence Concerning Kerala

The fact about ancient Kerala and South India is that the documentary evidence at our disposal is inadequate to write a history of this region. People do not seem to have taken pains in olden times to record the events affecting them. We have, however, some records which people from abroad have preserved for us. These people had come from Greece, Rome and China to carry on trade in pepper, ginger, cardamom and other farm produce of Kerala. We have thus the writings of Ptolemy and the author of *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries of the Christian era.

We have also some Indian records of the first five centuries or of the Sangam period, when Tamil poets and other writers produced literature containing information of value on the history of South India. We learn from them that the Kerala of those times was one of three independent kingdoms of Chera, Chola, and Pandya, together forming the Tamil region. Madura was its capital; it was here that poets and literary figures flourished.

Of the three kingdoms of the Tamil country, it was to Chera that Kerala was attached. Its rulers were the Perumals. From 41 A. D. to about 150 A. D. there were five Perumal kings who held sway over

the Chera country. Athan I was the king from 41 to 55 A. D. and Athan II from 55 to 90 A.D.

### **3. Social and Political Conditions**

Kerala had five divisions - Venad, Kuttanad, Kudanad, Puzhinad, and Kakanad. The areas covered by each of them are not accurately known. Venad (Vel-nad: the region of the nobles) included the present district of Trivandrum and certain parts of Quilon. In Kuttanad were the remaining parts of Quilon, Alleppey, Kottayam and Ernakulam. Kudanad had in it the districts of Trichur, Palghat and certain parts of Calicut. The remaining parts of Calicut and the coastal areas of Cannanore were in Puzhinad. Kakanad had the districts of Guddalore and Vayanad.

In the Chera country patriarchal tradition was followed in the matter of succession. Accordingly, the eldest son of the ruling king succeeded him. Among the Chera Kings, the one who became most famous was Uthian Cheran Athan. The kings had their royal residence at a place called Vanchimuthur. Regarding its location historians hold different views. Some hold the view that it must have been somewhere near Cranganore.

Chera kings were tolerant in the matter of religious adherence, so much so different religions existed in harmony in their kingdom. In Kerala people followed on the whole a sort of animistic religious practice, in which they worshipped the hills, trees, rivers and such other objects of nature, ascribing to them divinity. In order to gain prosperity they used to pray to these natural phenomena. They performed ancestral worship, seeking the blessings of those who had departed from this world. Believing as they did that evil came to them from the devil, they sought to eschew its influence by pleasing gods and goddesses.

The majority of the people adhered to these primitive religious traditions. But there were other Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism too. Of these religions Buddhism and Jainism were critical of the religious traditions of the Kerala people. But Hinduism would absorb them to a large extent. Consequently, it could spread more rapidly than the other two religions. It was because of this that

the caste distinction among the people and similar Hindu social practices gradually became part of Kerala culture, though they were not there in early times.

In Kerala, where all religions co-existed, it was possible for Christianity also to find a place. Before or after the advent of the religion of Christ in Kerala, Judaism also made its way. Till the coming of the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Jews had their communities in and around Cranganore. Since then conditions have compelled several of them to shift to Cochin.

#### **4. Foreign Trade**

It was possible for Christianity and Judaism to reach Kerala in the first century A. D. In the first place, Kerala offered facilities for foreigners to come to the country and carry on trade. There were convenient harbours in the country where they could easily anchor their ships. In the first century Muziris was an important sea-port. Historians are agreed that Muziris was the name of Cranganore of later times. This information substantiates the tradition that St. Thomas the Apostle reached the Malabar coast through Cranganore.

Kerala had trade relations with foreign lands even before the first century. It is noted in I Kings 10:22 and II Chronicle 9:21 that King Solomon had entered into an agreement with the Philistine King, Hiram, regarding sea trade. Consequently, "once every three years the ship of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, Ivory and peacocks." This incident refers to the 10<sup>th</sup> century B. C. Since the articles noted here are the products of Kerala, we may not be wrong in surmising that Solomon's ships had come to the coastal regions of south western India.

The people of Kerala were on the whole prosperous in their economic life. Ordinarily they were engaged in farming, but there were among them people who took to fishing, weaving, carpentry and other occupations. As a result of foreign trade, Keralites had means of financial well-being then as of now. Thus the people may be said to have been leading a peaceful social life.

It was in Kerala with its foregoing background of religious and

socio - economic - political life that Christianity made its appearance in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A. D.

### Questions

1. What records do we have to learn about Kerala as it existed at the beginning of the Christian era?
2. Who were the Perumal kings?
3. What do we know about the religion of the Kerala people during the early centuries?
4. Who were the foreigners who held trade relations with Kerala in olden times? What facilities did Kerala have to attract them?

## LESSON 3

# ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE AND INDIA

The Tradition    The North Indian Tradition    The South Indian Tradition    Some Concluding Remarks

### 1. The Tradition

The tradition of connecting the Apostle St. Thomas with the Indian Church is not the creation of some interested persons in recent times. We do not have many documents kept by our forefathers referring to the ancient history of the Church of Malabar. But the fact should be admitted that we are not absolutely without any record. In his work, *The Early Spread of Christianity in India*, A-Mingana asserts "it is the constant tradition of the Eastern Church that the Apostle Thomas evangelized India." He goes on to say that though some writers mention also Parthia and Persia among the lands where the Apostle preached, all of them are unanimous that he worked for the propagation of the Gospel in India. The 3<sup>rd</sup> century Syrian author of the *Doctrine of the Apostles* refers to the fact that "India and all its own countries, and those bordering on it, even to the farthest sea,



received the Apostles' hand of priesthood from Judas Thomas, who was the guide and ruler in the Church, which he built there and ministered there."

In India itself we have evidence that the St. Thomas tradition had been known in the past. The Syriac codex preserved in the Vatican archives which had been produced at Cranganore in 1301 A. D. notes the Apostle Thomas as the founder of the Indian Church. Western missionaries who came to India from the 16<sup>th</sup> century heard of the tradition from the native Christians and recorded it in their writings, which are available for use even in our own times.

There are two traditions available on this subject. One of them is the North Indian tradition, which maintains that the Apostle came to the North Western India and preached the Gospel to the people of those regions in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The other, the South Indian tradition, consists on the one hand of the story that he propagated the faith on the Malabar coast, and on the other hand of his martyrdom and burial at Mylapore.

## 2. The North Indian Tradition

There are historians who accept the Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas, but argue that this does not refer to the origin of the Church of Malabar. One such person is George Milne Rae, who wrote *The Syrian Church in India* towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He admits that the Apostle preached the Gospel in North India, but not in South India. On the authority of the *Acts of Judas Thomas* written possibly by Bar Daisan between 180 and 230 A. D. this point is made by him. Bar Daisan is considered a Gnostic,<sup>1</sup> and many historical scholars are of the opinion that his purpose in producing the work was to propagate the ideas of his sect. On this ground and on the

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1. Gnosticism maintains the view that behind the universe there are two eternal forces, one representing the good and the other dominating the evil. We realize this by right knowledge, which the Gnostics claim to possess. In their view the material world including the human body has been created and controlled by the latter. Therefore they insist that the means to obtain liberation from the material world calls for renunciation of marriage and all physical pleasures. *The Acts of Judas Thomas* aims at propagating this view.

basis of the fact that the story which he narrates is fiction, the work had been ignored by scholars. Now there is a change in their attitude. Granting the legendary character of the story which the book tells, it is admitted that the reference to Gondophares implies a kernel of historical truth.

There are two questions here. 1. What is the truth concerning Gondophares? He is a historical figure. His coins were discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On this evidence as well as on some other facts it has been ascertained by historians that Gondophares was a Parthian king who ruled a kingdom consisting of Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the Punjab during the third decade and thereafter of the first century A. D.

2. How did the author of the *Acts* come to know of this Parthian king in his far off Edessa? This question can also be answered. Edessa or Urhoi in Syriac (modern Urfa) was an ancient town in Northern Mesopotamia which claimed connection with the Apostle. There is a tradition that the relics of St. Thomas were removed from India to Edessa some time in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A. D. It is possible that the Apostle travelled to India through Edessa. There are ancient Syriac documents claiming that St. Thomas wrote letters to Edessa from India and that those writings were preserved there in great honour. If this story is credible, it is possible that the author of the *Acts* obtained his information about Gondophares from the letters of Thomas.

In any case it is a fact that there are historians who maintain that St. Thomas the Apostle may have preached the Gospel in the Punjab, where Gondophares ruled. The Antiochian Syrian Church father Bar Ebraya of the 13<sup>th</sup> century points out that Thomas crossed to North India, where he preached the Gospel, through Mesopotamia. In the *Book of the Bee* of the same century its author the Nestorian Bishop of Basrah says: "Thomas was from Jerusalem and of the tribe of Judah. He preached the Gospel in Parthia, Media, and India." The author defends the North Indian Apostolate of Thomas.

### **3. The South Indian Tradition**

The likelihood of the Apostle preaching the Gospel in Northern

India cannot be denied. But the Church which he could have founded in those regions did not last for many centuries. The tradition referring to his work in South India is different. Though contemporary record in its support is not strong, the existence of strong communities claiming to have originally begun in consequence of his labours is an important evidence in its favour.

This tradition maintains in effect that in 52 A. D. the Apostle landed in Muziris (Cranganore), and that as a result of his work people in seven places Maliankara, Palur, Parur or Kottakayal, Gokkamangalam, Niranam, Chayal or Nilackel, and Quilon were converted to the Christian faith. He organized these communities with places of worship and appointed ministers to look after their spiritual needs and guide them. After founding the Church in Kerala, Thomas is said to have proceeded to Malacca and China in order to preach the Gospel there as well. He then returned to India and was killed near Madras and buried at Mylapore.

Though we have no indisputable contemporary evidence to support the South Indian tradition, the following points may be mentioned in defence of its probable truth.

1. Historians like E. M. Philip note that, of the seven places where according to tradition St. Thomas had established churches, four are still extant with the marks of their antiquity. Palur, for instance, was originally a Hindu temple. When a majority of the people of the area embraced the Christian faith, the minority left the place, and those who remained transformed the temple into a church. At Palur as well as at other three places, so these historians claim, there still can be found signs relating them to the Apostle in the first century.

2. We have already noted the fact that there were trade connections between the Mediterranean world and Kerala in ancient times. The articles, for instance, which Solomon brought to Palestine were products of Kerala; also the Hebrew names for them were similar to the Tamil names which were in use in Kerala till the 9<sup>th</sup> century A. D.

3. After the time of Solomon, the Greeks and later the Romans carried on trade with South India. The Roman coins discovered in the South Indian regions and the similarities in certain linguistic usages of

the area with the Mediterranean world have been noted by experts in the field.

In his two important essays *The Apostle Thomas in North India* and *The Apostle Thomas in South India*, J. N. Furquhar shows that the two traditions can go together.

As regards the Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas as a whole we have a number of references in the writings of ancient authors. Some of them may have been indebted to the third century work, *The Acts of Judas Thomas*, but others are not. Scholars in the field consider a statement in the *Doctrine of the Apostles* as evidence of Judas Thomas's connection with India. Also there are places in the writings of St. Ephrem, produced around 370 A. D. where he connects Thomas with India. These have been ascribed to the influence of *The Acts*:

Lo, in India are thy miracles, O Thomas,  
 And in our land is thy triumph and everywhere  
 Thy festival.  
 The sun-burnt India thou hast made fair..

That St. Thomas the Apostle was instrumental in originally founding the Church in India is certainly a well-established tradition that goes back to very early times.

## Questions

1. What do we know about the *Acts of Judas Thomas*? What historically valid point can we draw from it?
2. What are the two traditions concerning the Apostolate of St. Thomas in India? How can we evaluate them?
3. What strong points can we note in support of the South Indian tradition?

## LESSON 4

# AREAS OF THE WORLD WITH THE NAME INDIA AND THE CONFUSION THEREFROM

□ Preliminary Remarks □ The Name “India” □ Some Examples □ The Persian Church, an Exception □ John of Persia and Magna India

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

The place name, “India”, was used by writers till the Middle Ages to denote three areas of the world at least. We have to clarify this point and make sure which area is meant when the word is used by a writer.

### 2. The Name “India”

Three areas of the world were referred to when ancient writers used the term “India.” 1. One of them was *North India*. They took this to include the north-western regions of the Indian peninsula, particularly the Punjab. Since the time of Alexander’s conquest, this part of the world was known to people in the Mediterranean region. It must be to this region that the Book of Esther refers (1:1 and 8:9). 2. *South India*, which geographically formed part of the Indian sub-continent, had an independent political existence till modern times. Consisting of the kingdoms of Chera, Chola and Pandya, it was the Tamil country. Among them, Chera comprised the Kerala region. Though it was part of the wider India from a geographical point of view, writers of the mediterranean world during the Christian periods very seldom referred to it as India. 3. The third was *Ethiopia and the countries surrounding it*. The people of the Western world in general used the name, “India”, often to refer to the regions on either side of the Red Sea towards the South of Arabia. It included modern Ethiopia, Somalia, Southern Arabia (Arabia Felix) and the island of Socotra (Dioscoris). We have recorded evidence to show that from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century that part of the world was known to the writers of those times as India.

Five historians viz. Rufinus, Sozomen, Socrates, Theodoret and Michael the Syrian, referred to Ethiopia and the territories surrounding that country using the name, "India." From 324 A. D., when Eusebius of Caesarea completed his great work dealing with the history of the Church to the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a number of writers have written books on Church history. Many of these books have come down to us in their original languages, Greek and Syriac, with translations into one or another of the European languages. These writers at times refer to North India as India, but not to South India. When they use India they often speak of the third area. Writers of the West Syrian regions show no awareness of the existence of a Church in Kerala at all till the late Middle Ages.

### 3. Some Examples

E. M. Philip and several others speak of a mission of Pantaenus to South India in 189 - 190 A. D. on the authority of Eusebius of Caesarea. Pantaenus, writes Eusebius, "had charge of a school of the faithful in Alexandria." He "is said to have gone to India" and found there "Gospel according to Matthew" among "persons there who knew Christ" from Bartholomew, one of the Apostles, who "had preached to them and left with them the writings of Matthew in the Hebrew language."<sup>1</sup>

Following Eusebius, other ancient writers like Rufinus and Jerome note the incident, but none of them takes the India of Pantaenus as Southern India, and later historians like Assemani, Tillemont, Medlycot and Mingana are positive that the "India" in question here was Arabia Felix. The only basis for connecting the India of Pantaenus to our India is the reference in Jerome to Brahmins and philosophers. Jerome lived most of his life as a monk in Palestine. He testifies that almost every day monks from India, Persia, and Ethiopia, used to visit him. Here "India" refers to a country adjacent to Persia and Ethiopia, and not to our India. The problem can be solved if we realise the confusion in the mind of Jerome; it cannot be solved by ascribing to Eusebius a knowledge of South India, which in all probability he did not possess.

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1. *Eccl. History*, V: 10.

Another instance of the confusion arising from name consists in the story that a certain John of Persia and Magna India participated in the Council of Nicea in 325 A. D. On this basis it has been argued by Philip and others that John was Bishop of Persia and India and that he represented his Church at the great Council of Nicea. Our evidence at this point is a statement of Gelasius of Cyzicus in the fifth century that John of Persia (Pores) and Magna India (Great India) attended the Council and signed the decrees. We shall come back to this subject later in this lesson. Here we may say that the name, "India", has been used vaguely.

A third instance is "Theophilus the Indian." There are historians who see in the "India" here South India. The Arian historian Philostorgius notes that about 354 A. D. the Arian emperor Constantius equipped a certain Theophilus and sent him to India where he reformed many things. Here the India in question is very definitely Ethiopia, or Arabia Felix, or North India, not South India at all.

A fourth example of confusion in name is a statement of Gregory of Tours who died in 594 A. D. Gregory speaks of a monastery of St. Thomas in India, and many historians of an earlier period tried to identify it with a shrine that existed at Mylapore. But historians are now agreed that this refers to a monastery of St. Thomas, which existed on the Arabian side of the Persian Gulf.<sup>1</sup>

In this connection we should make mention of a fifth example. The author of *King Alfred's Embassy of 883* says: "In this year... Marinus the Pope sent a piece of the Holy Cross to King Alfred, and the king conveyed it to Rome and to St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew in India." "India" here, says Mingana, "was not India at all, but South Arabia or Abyssinia."

#### **4. The Persian Church, an Exception**

Regarding the use of the name "India" the Persian Church had a tradition which was different from that of the Churches in Syria and the Mediterranean regions. Its authors, a majority of them, had a knowledge of India, especially South India. This fact we shall see

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1 A. Mingana, p. 20.

more clearly later.

We should remind ourselves of one fact in this context. The language of the Persian Church also was Syriac. This language has three forms. One of them is Aramaic, which in our Lord's time was spoken in Palestine. The second form is the mother tongue of the people who continued in the fellowship of the Church of Antioch. It is called West Syriac or Antiochian Syriac, which developed in North Mesopotamia. It is this language that came into our Church from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and gradually was adopted by it. The third form is the language of the Persian Church. The East Syriac or the Chaldean Syriac as it is called is used by the Persian Church to this day. In Kerala the Syro-Malabar Church and the Church of the East which functions with Trichur as its centre have this as the ecclesiastical language. These three forms have differences in the letters of the alphabet, in the sounds of certain letters, and in the meaning of a few words, but otherwise they are very similar.

However, it was the Persian Church which honoured St. Thomas the Apostle with greater consistency than the Antiochian Church. On this point Dr. A. Mingana writes in part: 'It is the constant tradition of the Eastern Church that the Apostle Thomas evangelized India, and there is no historian, no poet, no breviary, no liturgy and no writer of any kind who, having the opportunity of speaking of Thomas, does not associate his name with India.'<sup>1</sup>

This fact should be compared with the developments in the relationship between the Antiochian Syrian Patriarch Mar Jacob III and the Malankara Orthodox Church in recent times. By his circular letter of 1973 the Patriarch sought to pull down Apostle Thomas to the level of a layman, which no Church man of the Persian tradition would ever do.

In this book the Church of Persia or the Eastern church refers to the Church that uses East Syriac as its ecclesiastical language and the other is referred to as the Antiochian Syrian Church.

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1. A. M., pp. 15 - 16



## 5. John of Persia and Magna India

Gelasius of Cyzicus wrote in his *Ecclesiastical History* published during the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century that Bishop John of Persia and Magna India participated in the Council of Nicea in 325 and signed its decrees. This statement has led a number of historical writers, including E.M. Philip, to argue that John represented the Church in South India at the great Council. We should therefore see whether there is any basis for advancing this argument.

It was around the year 470 A. D. that Gelasius wrote his *Ecclesiastical History*. He had not participated in the Council of 325, but might have had records dealing with it. Here we have a problem. Eusebius of Caesarea, the great Church historian, in his *Life of Constantine* notes the presence in the Council of a persian Bishop. In Ch. VII he says that the Council had “ministers from all the churches... in Europe, Libya, and Asia.” A “single house of prayer sufficed to contain at once Syrians, Cilicians, Phoenicians and Arabians,... delegates from Palestine and others from Egypt.” In this context he makes the statement that a “Persian Bishop too was present at this conference.” Eusebius doesnot add the words “and Magna India.” In all probability by this additions Gelasius must have meant two territories adjacent to each other so that the “India” of Gelasius was Southern Arabia or Arabia Felix, and not our India.

As we discuss the story concerning John, we should remember the following facts as well.

1. The Council of Nicea was a Church assembly which Emperor Constantine who had made up his mind to embrace Christianity, had called in order to find a solution to the problems facing the Church in the empire. He had invited Church leaders from different parts of the empire to take part in that assembly. It is not likely that Constantine sent invitations to leaders of the Church from outside the Roman empire, and we have no evidence to show that he had invited them. Moreover, the relation that existed between the Roman empire and the Persian empire should be noted. The empire of Persia was ruled by Sapor II, the most anti-Christian and anti-Roman emperor Persia ever had. In his day an invitation to a council in the Roman empire

would not have been sent, and if sent, it would not have reached its destination.

2. There was a province which lay towards the south-western corner of the empire of Persia known by the name Pores. By the words "Persia and Magna India" Gelasius could have meant this province and southern Arabia, which lay across the Persian Gulf, not very far from it. It is possible that John was Bishop of the area, who happened to be in the Roman empire at the time when the Council met, and attended it without any formal invitation.

3. Whatever that may be, there is no evidence that John returned to Persia and communicated to the Church there concerning the Council. It was only in 410 A. D., namely 85 years later, that the Persian Church adopted a resolution officially in a synod to approve the decrees of Nicea referring to the faith and its creed. Therefore, even if John attended the Council of Nicea, the Church of Persia did not benefit by that incident. As to the Church in South India, we have no evidence that it ever came to know of the Council of Nicea at all, except much later in its history.

4. Michael the Syrian, says Mingana, understood by the expression "Great India" or Magna India "both Ethiopia and Arabia Felix combined."<sup>1</sup> The same view is held by West Syrian writers like Dionysius Telmahre and Bar Salibi.

## Questions

1. What are the areas of the world denoted by the word "India"?
2. Of these, which one was understood as "India" by the West Syrian and Greek writers in general?
3. What do we know of "John of Persia and Great India"?

## LESSON 5

# THE PERSIAN CONNECTIONS OF THE INDIAN CHURCH

□ Preliminary Remarks □ The Church of Malabar and Its Persian Connections □ An Evaluation of the Argument for an Antiochian Connection

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

All historians are agreed that the Indian church had its connections with the church of Persia from very early times. It was possible to have contacts with North India by land and with South India by sea.

But there are those who argue that the Church of Persia was from the beginning under the jurisdiction of Antioch, so that the Indian Church had formally accepted the supremacy of Antioch through its integration with the Church of Persia. This argument has to be examined.

### 2. The Church of Malabar and Its Persian Connections

The first recorded incident to show that the Indian Church had come in contact with the Church of Persia is noted in the *Chronicle of Seert*.<sup>1</sup> It is said that during the time when Shahlupa and Papa were Patriarchs of Seleucia, between 295 and 300 A. D., the learned Bishop Dudi (David) of Basrah left his See on the Persian Gulf and proceeded to India where he converted many people to the Christian faith. If this story is reliable and the "India" noted here is our India, we can say that the Indian Church had its connections with Persia from the 3rd century. Since the Persian Church had a knowledge of our India, it is possible that Seert who wrote his *Chronicle* during the Middle Ages may be referring to it.

A. Mingana notes two other instances<sup>2</sup> taken from Persian sources which belong to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. One of them is a note in the margin of

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1. A. Mingana, op. p. 18.

2. A. Mingana, pp. 27 - 29.

a commentary on the Epistle to the Romans by Ishodad; Ishodad says: “This Epistle has been translated from Greek into syriac by Komai, with the help of Daniel the priest, an Indian.”

A second instance is the reference to Mana, Bishop of Riwardashir, who wrote religious discourses and hymns in the Persian language (Pahlawi), and sent copies to India. In addition, he translated into Syriac the works of Nestorian authors like Diodore of Tarsus and The dore of Mopsuestia, and despatched them to India.

These three pieces of evidence could easily refer as much to North India as to South India. But the next evidence relates certainly to South India only. Cosmas Indicopleustes who travelled in the countries beyond the Red Sea between 520 and 525 A. D. gives his testimony about the existence of a Church in these countries in his book *Universal Christian Topography*. “Even in the Island of Taprobane (Sri Lanka) ... there is a Church of Christians with clergy and a congregation of believers... And such also is the case in the land called Male (Malabar) where the pepper grows. And in the place called Kalliana (possibly Kallyan of today there is a Bishop appointed from Persia, as well as in the Island Dioscori (Socotra) in the same Indian Sea.”<sup>1</sup>

What is quoted from a fairly extended passage from Cosmas notes that he saw the Church in Sri Lanka, Malabar, and Socotra. The Church in Sri Lanka, he says, consisted of Persian Christians with a presbyter and a deacon appointed from Persia. In Malabar which he refers to as Male and not India, he saw Christians with bishop stationed at Kalliana, who had been appointed from Persia. In the island of Socotra the majority of the population were Christians, who held the Nestorian faith. Besides, Cosmas testifies “Among the Bactrians and Huns and Persians and the rest of the Indians, and among Persarmenians and Greeks and Elamites, and throughout the whole land of Persia, there is an infinite number of Churches with bishops and a vast multitude of Christian people...”

Mingana comments on the testimony of Cosmas: “The above quo-

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1. A. M. Spait p. 29

tations from Cosmas prove not only the existence of numerous Christian communities among many central Asian people in India and surrounding districts, but also of the subordination of all of them to the Nestorian Patriarchate of Seleucia and Ctesiphon.”<sup>1</sup>

In this context it should be noted that from 486 the Church of Persia had formally accepted Nestorius as a Church father and that Cosmas was therefore trying to make the point that the Christians in the areas he observed were all attached to the Nestorian Patriarch. E. M. Philip does not realise this truth because only a very small portion of Cosmas statement attracts his attention. What Cosmas seeks to show is that in the 6<sup>th</sup> century the Church of Persia had a remarkable growth and expansion. This growth continued in fact for several centuries.

In the present context we shall refer to a statement made by Patriarch Timothy I of the Persian Church (779-823). He wrote to the monks of the monastery of Mar Maron concerning the words “crucified for us” in the hymn: “Holy art Thou O God.” “And also in all countries of Babylon, of Persia, and of Assyria, and in all countries of the sunrise, that is to say - among the Indians, the Chinese, the Tibetans, the Turks, and in all provinces under the jurisdiction of this Patriarchal See, there is no addition of *crucifixus es pro nobis*” (crucified for us).”<sup>2</sup>

This passage shows clearly that during the period Timothy I was Patriarch, the Indian Church was within his jurisdiction. In other words, the situation in vogue when Cosmas visited South India continued till the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The relation between the Indian Church and the Church of Persia does go back to a much earlier period. Whatever may have been the place of service of Dudi of Basrah, it was to Kerala that tradition assigns the arrival of Thomas of Cana in 345 A. D. Though in its details the tradition cannot be defended, the possibility of an exodus of Persian Christians to Kerala during the reign of Sapor II (309 - 379) who persecuted Christians most cruelly, need not be set aside. The community with a bishop and clergy accompanied by fami-

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1. A. M., p. 30.

2. A. Mingana, p. 34.

lies may have come to Kerala to escape the inhuman treatment meted out to their fellows in Persia.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. An Evaluation of the Argument for an Antiochian Connection

The argument for an Antiochia connection was put forward systematically for the first time by E. M. Philip, in his *Indian Church of St. Thomas*. Admitting that the colony of Thomas of Cana had come from Persia during the reign of Sapor II, Philip cleverly shows that it indicates the acknowledgement of Antioch's supremacy over it by the Indian Church. Philip's theory calls for a careful examination of facts, for which the following points should be remembered.

1. Philip's basis is canon 33 of the *Arabic Canons of Nicea*. The Council of Nicea in 325 adopted 20 canons. Not one of them corresponds to canon 33 of the *Arabic Canons* noted by Philip. Till the Middle Ages no church tradition, including that of the Antiochian Syrian Church, acknowledged more than these 20 canons for the Council of Nicea.

2. Philip admits that historians raise doubts about the authenticity of the *Arabic Canons*. Yet he does not examine the ground on which

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1. Some say that the Syrian colony was sent to Kerala by the Catholicos of the East; others maintain that the Patriarch of Antioch despatched it. Both viewpoints are advanced by persons in Kerala. Neither the Catholicos nor the Patriarch has made any claim in support of either viewpoint.

The way in which the arguments are put forward in Kerala is indeed interesting. A. Mingana reproduces three documents referring to them. According to one, produced by a member of the Church of Malabar early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the colony had come in obedience to the order of the Catholicos of Seleucia. Later, in 1721 Mar Thoma IV claimed that the colony came in response to the command of King Abgar of Edessa. But a priest Abraham of the Church of Malabar wrote in 1821 that the colony was sent to Kerala by our father, Patriarch Ignatius.

The three positions noted above are enough to show that the role played by Antioch in sending the colony to Kerala is a very late addition. The claim that in 345 A. D. there was Ignatius Patriarch in Antioch exposes the stark ignorance of the man who wrote the story.

they raise their objection, or how, in spite of their questioning, the Canon should be considered authoritative.

3. Philip quotes the opinion of Dean Stanley that the *Arabic Canons* had not been adopted at the Council of Nicea, but then he adds the author's view that it was a collection of canon laws widely accepted by all Eastern Churches. This admission should have led Philip to attempt to unravel the mystery surrounding the *Arabic Canons*.

4. The fact about the *Arabic Canons* is that it is a collection of most of the canon laws formulated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. But to them a number of stipulations were incorporated, some to insist on Alexandria's permanent supremacy over the Church of Ethiopia, and some to make out Antioch's hegemony over the Church of Persia. Those who framed these interpolations tried to enunciate in the name of the Council of Nicea in 325, which was held in high authority, that Alexandria had jurisdiction over the whole of Africa and Antioch over the entire Asia. The question here is how much of authority can these new canons claim to wield. Neither Philip nor any of the authors whom he quotes answers it.

5. We have evidence that in the 9<sup>th</sup> century the Syrian Patriarch Dionysius Tellmahre made the claim in a particular context that from the beginning of Christianity the four Patriarchal Sees of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch had been established, and that the Church everywhere should be under one of them. According to this arrangement Antioch had jurisdiction over the Church in the whole of the continent of Asia and over the Church in Persia.

6. *The Arabic Canons* includes a stipulation concerning the Church of Ethiopia. It says that the Ethiopian Church should be governed by a Coptic bishop who goes there from time to time, and no Ethiopian national should be raised to the episcopal rank. But no such ruling regarding the Indian Church is given. It must be because those who composed the *Arabic Canons* had no knowledge of the existence of a Church in India.

7. Nicea had in its 6<sup>th</sup> canon a statement which shows that the Council was not giving any ruling, but only making the point that the custom prevalent in the Church should be preserved. The *Arabic*

*Canons*, on the other hand, is exercising authority, which is not the spirit of Nicea.

The colony that came to Kerala in 345 might have helped to strengthen the bond of union between the Church of Malabar and the Church of Persia. It was not sent by any ecclesiastical authority in Persia, and Antioch had nothing to do with it. The Church of Malabar had a history that goes back to earlier times. It must be because of a knowledge of the existence of a community in South India that the colony made its way from Persia to Kerala.

### Questions

1. What is our evidence to show that the Church of Malabar had connections with the Church of Persia from ancient times?
2. How can we evaluate the arguments of E. M. Philip in defence of an Antiochian connection from the time of the Council of Nicea?
3. What can we say about the testimony of Cosmas regarding the growth of the Church'?
4. What is the *Arabic Canons*? What is its relation to the Council of Nicea?

## LESSON 6

# SOCIAL STANDING OF THE CHRISTIANS OF MALABAR IN ANCIENT TIMES

PreliminaryRemarks  CopperPlateGrants  TheRoyalDynasty of Viiliarvattam.

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

The Christians of Kerala had a respectable social standing in olden times. In this lesson we try to bring out this fact on the strength of



available evidence. We can point out in this connection the special privileges which the rulers of the country granted them on different occasions and their place in society. To illustrate the first we shall take note of the copper plate grants, and to prove the second the tradition that the Kerala Christians had in ancient times a king and a royal dynasty.

## **2. Copper Plate Grants**

There are some copper plate grants awarded to the Syrian Christians or St. Thomas Christians by the ruling kings of the Chera country where they lived. The first of them in a chronological reckoning is the one granted to Thomas of Cana. Then come the plates given to the Church of Quilon. These consist of two grants. The plate rendered to Iravikorthan is the last.

### **i. The copper plate granted to Thomas of Cana.**

We have noted in lesson 5 above the coming of a colony from Persia to Kerala under the leadership of Thomas of Cana. It is reported that the then ruler of the Chera country, Kochera Kora Perumal, bestowed on the colony tax-free lands and a number of privileges affecting their social life. They and those who joined them were given the town of Mahadevar as a free gift. A copper plate was issued by the king, specifying these grants.

According to tradition the copper plate on which the grants were inscribed was with the Christians of Kerala till the arrival of the Portuguese, but was passed on later to the Europeans at Cochin. The inscription was in three languages - Syriac, Tamil and Arabic. The Portuguese governor engaged a Jew to have it translated into Portuguese. Copies of the translation were made, one of which was despatched to the king of Portugal. It is claimed that this copy is preserved in the British Museum Library. Regarding the original and the other copies nothing is known as to whether they are extant, or if they are, where can be found.

Historical scholars are of the opinion that the grant refers to the free gift of the town of Mahadevar, a Church in it, special privileges to Thomas and his progeny as well as to the adherents his faith. But

they do not agree as to the date of the grant. Whereas some give it as 345 A. D., others specify 774 or even 822. They all agree however that the grant was made to Thomas of Cana. If the writing on the copper plate was in Syriac, Tamil and Arabic the problem of the date is indeed serious. Islam emerged only in the 4<sup>th</sup> decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and Arabic came to be important only after that time. Therefore, if the copper plate was produced in 544, Arabic cannot be there as a language in which it was inscribed, unless it is argued that the original plate was changed later to suit the times.

## **ii. Plates inscribed in favour of the Tharissa Church**

These plates contain rights and privileges conceded by king Sthanu Ravivarma to a Christian Church built at Quilon. Tharissa is the Thrissa of the East Syriac transliterated into Malayalam. It meant the Orthodox Church. Like other Eastern Churches, the Church of the East also calls itself Orthodox. The Church at Quilon was built in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

These plates consist of two sets. In the first there were three leaves. The last of the first and the first of the second have been lost. Of the remaining leaves, three are in the possession of the Malankara Orthodox Church and two are with the Mar Thoma Church.

The copper plates have a special significance. They reveal the place occupied by the Syrian Christians of Quilon in those times. Many of them carried on trade with the Quilon harbour as their base. Quilon was indeed the most important sea port on the Malabar coast after Cranganore. Christians had a high social standing, as the copper plates reveal. They had not only a respectable position in society, but even rights to collect customs duties on a number of articles. Besides recognizing these rights, King Sthanu Ravivarma had permitted them to enjoy seventytwo privileges.

It is possible to determine accurately the time of these plates. They indicate that they were given in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the king. The historians of Kerala point out that Sthanu Ravivarma ruled from 844 to 885 A. D. We can therefore infer definitely that the plates were given in the year 849.

### **iii. To Iravikorthan**

This is a document which records the rights and privileges granted by Emperor Veera Raghavan to a Christian leader named Iravikorthan. The plate is 14.5 inches long and 4 inches broad. It is in the possession of the Malankara Orthodox Church at Kottayam.

Iravikorthan was a Christian who occupied a leading place in the business life of the city of Mahodaya or Thiruvanchikulam, the capital of the emperor, during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. By the copper plate grant Emperor Veera Raghavan recognized Iravikorthan as the leader of a merchant guild called Manigramam. The grant brings out the fact that during those times it was possible for the Christians, like the Hindus themselves, to rise in business and commerce.

Though historical scholars are not agreed as to the date of the plate, from the language used in it we can say that it belongs to the 13<sup>th</sup> or the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The importance of these grants lies in the fact that we can recall that our forefathers had made a significant contribution to the life of Kerala in the past, and through Kerala to India as a whole.

### **3. The Royal Dynasty of Villiarvattam**

The story concerning a Christian royal dynasty in Kerala adds to the social prestige enjoyed by Christians. During the period between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century A. D. Christians had a social standing in Kerala to justify the claim. If they had a royal succession of their own, that would be the time when they had it in fact. But the story that there was a Christian king at one time, ruling one of the many territories constituting Kerala, is on the face of it most incredible, We shall therefore look into our evidence and ask the readers to draw their own conclusion.

Though there are historians who accept the story as credible, there are others who reject it. In 1439 Pope Eugenius of Rome wrote a letter to "our most beloved son, famous emperor of the Indians." In 1502 A. D. the Kerala Christians visited the Portuguese General Vasco da Gama and surrendered to him a staff which they claimed had been possessed by their king. Among the Roman Catholic historians both

Assemani and Gauvea who wrote an account of the Synod of Diamper look upon it as historically accurate. It may be on the above grounds that the Cochin Census Report of 1911 admits its veracity.

The position of those who admit the historicity of the story may be summarized in this way. The first king of the Villiarvattam family had his capital at Cranganore. Subsequently, following a clash with Muslims, it was shifted to Udayamperur, which was an ancient Christian centre. The tradition that the church there was built in 510 A. D. by the then Villiarvattam king cannot be admitted. In that case, the Villiarvattam dynasty goes back to a time before the advent of Cosmas, which is unlikely. In the same way, we reject the stories included by Xavier Koodapuzha on the subject in his *Bharata Sabha Charithram* (*The History of the Indian Church*, pp. 132-133).

Dr. Koodapuzha discusses how the dynasty came to an end. He says that the last Mar Thoma king passed away, leaving his wife alone in the family. Now a prince of the Cochin royal family married her after embracing the Christian faith. The prince being disowned by his people left the country and the bereaved queen died in sorrow.

These stories do not indicate the territory over which the Christian king had his political sway. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century there were three kings and nine vassals in Kerala in addition to many local chieftains. We have no evidence to show that any one of them was a Christian.

The historians who reject the story of the Villiarvattam family as a dynasty of Christian rulers consider them as Hindus. At a time when there was a clash between Christians and Muslims, the king of Cochin supported the latter and the king of Villiarvattam stood by the former. When the Christians became victorious, the Villiarvattam kings demanded of them a special tax and claimed to be the protector of the St. Thomas Christians. However, the successors of the Villiarvattam kings could not fulfil their obligation. Consequently, the Christians were in an unprotected state, when the Portuguese came in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; therefore, they submitted themselves to the Europeans.

Even though there was no Christian king in Kerala, Christians had a memorable social standing in Cranganore, Quilon, and many other places.

## Questions

1. What do we know about the copper plate grant given to Thomas of Cana? What difficulty is involved in assigning to it a date?
2. What are the copper plate grants given to the Tharissa Church? Where are they now preserved, and what is their value?
3. Who was Iravikorthan? What do we know about the copper plate given to him by Emperor Veera Raghavan?
4. What can we learn from these grants about the social standing of Kerala Christians in olden times?
5. Give a critical appraisal of the tradition that there was a Christian royal dynasty in Kerala during the Middle Ages.

# UNIT 2

## CHRISTIANITY IN KERALA FROM THE 6<sup>th</sup> TO THE 16<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

### LESSON 1

## THE CHURCH OF PERSIA AND ITS CATHOLICATE

Preliminary Remarks  The Church of Persia  The Account of Bar Ebraya  How Credible Is the Account?

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

We have seen that the Church of Malabar had relations with the Church of Persia from early times. The question therefore as to when and how the Church of Persia came to be established are relevant to our discussion in this book.

In his ecclesiastical history Gregorios Bar Ebraya answers these questions in a way, and his standpoint has become popular in our Church.

### 2. The Church of Persia

There existed an old city in northern Mesopotamia even before our Lord's time. This was Edessa, which the Syrians called Urhai, its present name being Urfa (we have already mentioned this place). This was the capital of a small kingdom known as Osrhoene. The tradition is that the Gospel was preached there soon after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Eusebius of Caesarea notes in his ecclesiastical history that Abgar, King of Osrhoene had contracted leprosy and asked our Lord for his healing touch through a letter and that on this ground a disciple went to Edessa and restored the king to health. This disciple was Addai. He propagated the faith in Edessa and founded the Church there. Though modern historians discount the story, the fact is admitted that

Edessa had its own form of Christianity very early. From Edessa it was easy for missionaries to move on to Armenia and the different parts of Mesopotamia. Thus the Church spread to Arbil, the capital of Adiabene, in mid-Mesopotamia and areas around that city.

The political atmosphere of Persia at that time was favourable for Christianity to spread. The country was ruled by a dynasty of Parthian kings, called the Arsacids, who were liberal-minded. During their reign the religion of Christ could spread in Persia. But this situation changed from 225 A.D., when the Arsacids were defeated and replaced by the Sassanids. When this happened, there were more than 20 Persian bishops in the country. The Sassanids were conservative adherents of Zoroastrianism, which they adopted officially, as the religion of the empire. During their reign, which continued till the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Church had to face adverse circumstances on several occasions.

The Church of Persia acknowledged Apostle Thomas as its founder. It is claimed that on his way to North India he evangelised certain centres in Persia, including Tagrith. He then entrusted Addai with the responsibility. Addai, while carrying on his work at Edessa, deputed Maris a disciple to Seleucia-Ctesophon, the empire's capital, a twin city on the river Tigris in the South.

In Edessa the Church grew rapidly. It also spread to Nisibis, a little to the East of Edessa. Both cities developed into Christian centres. Though in a conflict between the Roman and the Persian empires, the latter had to give up Nisibis to the former in 226, it was restored to the Persian empire in 363. Thus Edessa continued with the Roman empire and Nisibis with Persia. Edessa played an important role in the evangelisation of Persia from the beginning and in its shaping later. Nisibis helped it later in acquiring a character for itself. "*The Church of the Easterns*" (i.e. of Persia), writes W. A. Wigram, "was the daughter, not of Antioch, but of Edessa and was never included in the Patriarchate of the former city." In fact, it was not geographically possible to go from Antioch to the East except through Edessa. The Church of Persia developed with the help of Edessa and by the 4<sup>th</sup> century it reached a state of autonomy.

There is one thing which we should recall about the development of Christianity during its early period. It was in the third decade of the 4<sup>th</sup> century that Emperor Constantine of the Roman Empire decided to embrace Christianity; in 325 A. D. he convened the first council of the Church with representatives from all over the empire. By that time the Church had spread far and wide in the empire, so much so there were Christian communities in most parts of its vast territories. But the Church was not unified either administratively or in terms of ecclesiastical life. The Council of Nicea marks the first attempt at unifying the Church. The Church of Persia also developed in a similar way. It was not unified during the early centuries.

### **3. The Account of Bar Ebraya**

We have already mentioned this Syrian Church father. A catholicos of Tagrith in the latter half of 13<sup>th</sup> century, Bar Ebraya deals with the founding of the Persian Church and its development till the Middle Ages. But his treatment is partial and one-sided on both counts. Having traced the story of the Persian Catholicate till 629, he takes up the history of both the Persian Catholicate and the Tagrithan Catholicate and traces it to the Middle Ages.

The ecclesiastical history written by Bar Ebraya is in two parts. In the first part he discusses the general history of the Church till the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and then confines himself to the history of the Antiochian Syrian Church later. The treatment is brief and partial all the way. It is in the second part that he deals with the history of the Church in Persia. Though the author died in 1286 A.D., his successors traced the story upto 1496. Thus we have in; Bar Ebraya's work a concise handbook of Antiochian Syrian ecclesiastical history till the year 1496.

As regards the Persian Church Bar Ebraya admits that the Gospel spread to the Persian regions from Edessa, where the first bishop was Addai. He sent his disciple Mari to Seleucia, the capital, and founded the Church there. Mari had three successors, Abrosius, Abraham, and Jacob. The first two of them were consecrated in Antioch, not out of any necessity, but because it happened that way. But the third, Jacob, was consecrated in Jerusalem. This Jacob, before his death, chose two candidates and sent them to Antioch with a letter to



the Patriarch that he should choose one of them and consecrate him for Seleucia. They were Ahodabooy and Qomjesus. In Antioch the two men lodged with a host. Soon the officials having been told of the presence of Persians in the city, searched for them. Ahodabooy fled to Jerusalem; Qomjesus and their hosts were done to death by the orders of the authorities. Grieved at the turn of events, the Patriarch directed the bishop of Jerusalem to consecrate Ahodabooy and sent him to Persia. At this time the “Western bishops” passed a decree that in future the Easterns should themselves consecrate their leader, and that it was not necessary for the candidate to journey to Antioch. This decree was carried out by the Persians, and thus the Catholicate of Seleucia was established, though it did not please the Antiochian Patriarch. Though this story is being taken in good faith in our Church from about 1934, it has many problems.

#### **4. How Credible Is the Account?**

In all probability this story has been created by interested parties in the context in which the *Arabic Canons* had been compiled, with the definite purpose of supporting Antioch’s claim of authority over the Church of Persia.

The story seeks to make the following points. 1. From its early days Seleucia had a special reverence for Antioch and accepted its supremacy. This could not be kept up for a long time or account of the conflict between the empires. 2. Seeing the gravity of the situation “Western bishops”, namely, the bishops of the Syrian provinces, permitted the Persian bishops to raise for them a leader by themselves. Thus was the Catholicate of Seleucia established, without the concurrence of the Patriarch.

The story calls for the following comments. 1. Bar Ebraya says that the incident of Ahodabooy took place around 235 A. D. But he wrote the account in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, namely, over eleven centuries later. But he does not reveal source of information here.

2. As we have noted, the ecclesiastical history of Bar Ebraya surveys the general history of the Church till the 6<sup>th</sup> century, where he deals with the story of the Antiochian bishops (he calls them patri-

archs) as well. But there he shows no awareness of an incident like this as having happened in the days of any patriarch. Not only he, but none of the historians of the Church from Eusebius of Caesarea onwards refers to this incident.

3. The office of the Patriarch with jurisdiction over vast territories is a much later development in the history of the Church. In the third century, when these incidents are reported to have happened, Christian communities everywhere functioned independently, so that a bishop for Seleucia would be consecrated locally with the co-operation of bishops in the neighbourhood. As we have noted, there were more than twenty bishops in Persia in 225 A. D., so that it is impossible to imagine that a bishop of Seleucia would send his nominees to a bishop in Antioch, so far away, to be consecrated by him.

4. In this context these questions are relevant: a) Who was the Patriarch of Antioch in whose time the incident in question happened? b) Who was the Bishop of Jerusalem at that time c) What was the state of Jerusalem then? d) Who were the “Western bishops” who permitted the Easterns to raise their leader by themselves? e) How did they do it? Did they hold a synod for the purpose? If they did, where and when was that held?

5. Jerusalem had two destructions - one in 70 A. D. and the other in 135 A. D. Though Christians could live in the city, its importance had been assigned to Caesarea. The Council of Nicea made a ruling that Jerusalem’s importance should be recognized only without prejudice to Caesarea.

6. The story of Bar Ebraya makes out that Jacob who sent Ahoda-booy and Qomjesus to Antioch had been consecrated in Jerusalem. But he does not state the reason why he deputed his candidates to Antioch, and not to Jerusalem. More curious is the point made by Bar Ebraya that Jacob sent two men to Antioch, asking the Patriarch to choose one of them and consecrate him. This reflects a much later practice.

7. Both Bar Ebraya in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and Michael the Syrian in the 12<sup>th</sup> century record the incident in which a Syrian Patriarch claimed for the first time in the history of the Syrian Church, possibly also of

all Eastern Churches, that he should personally consecrate all the bishops in his communion. This was Patriarch Severus bar Meseque. He was opposed by senior metropolitans on the ground that in their provinces they and their predecessors used to consecrate bishops. Therefore, they argued, they would not give up that right. The Patriarch answered that though what they maintained was the custom of the Church till about the middle of 6th century, it should not be allowed to continue any longer.

This story is sufficient to disprove the account of Bar Ebraya concerning Antioch's jurisdiction over the Persian Church. If Antioch did not consecrate bishops for the areas comparatively close to itself, how can it claim that right with reference to Seleucia, so far away.

### Questions

- 1 In the appended map note the places where the Church spread in Persia.
2. Evaluate Ahodabooy - Qomjesus story. What did Bar Ebraya intend to establish by it?

## LESSON 2

### WHAT DO PERSIAN RECORDS SAY?

Preliminary Remarks  The History of the Seleucian Church  
 Establishment of the Catholicate  Antiochian Efforts to Influence the Persian Church

#### 1. Preliminary Remarks

Persian Christian writers have recorded how their Church was founded and how the Catholicate was established. Though all those records are not available to us, we have some of them at our disposal. These as well as the studies based on them have been published in recent times. Using some of these documents, we can attempt a re-

construction of the early history of the Church of Persia.

The 4<sup>th</sup> century was on the whole a dark period in the history of the Persian Church. Sapor II (309-379) unleashed on the Christians of Persia a reign of terror. But after that period there dawned on them a time of peace and prosperity. During that time efforts were made by leading men of the Syrian Church to bring the Persian Church within the orbit of its influence. But the Church resisted the move.

## **2. The History of the Seleucian Church**

During the reign of the Parthian Arsacid kings, as we have noted, the Church spread in different parts of the Persian Empire. We may assign the period between 79 and 116 A. D. to the episcopate of Mari at Seleucia. But Christianity did not take strong roots in the centre of Zoroastrianism. In fact, we do not know whether Mari had a successor in the capital, and if he had, who he was. The three persons listed by Bar Ebraya as successors of Mari are not found in Persian records.

Our authority here consists of two modern publications in English, which have been brought out by authors on the strength of Persian documents. These are:- (1) *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church*, by W. A. Wigram and (2) *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph* by William G. Young. Of these two authors, Young is more recent. He describes the appointment of a successor to Mari. After the time of Mari, a priest was appointed there first in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century; then five priests and subsequently a bishop were appointed. The bishop was Papa. After leading the Church of Seleucia for about twenty years. Papa claimed supremacy over the Church of Persia as the bishop of the capital. Wigram accepts this story with reference to the Church of Persia.

The account of Bar Ebraya notes Shahlupa, the successor of Aho-dabooy as the first Catholicos of Seleucia, but in the Persian records Shahlupa was the metropolitan of Arbil, the capital of Adiabene in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. There was then a small Christian community in Seleucia. A wealthy layman took the initiative and requested the Metropolitan Shahlupa of Arbil to visit the capital. Rather unwillingly he responded and came to Seleucia, where in the midst of trying circumstances he spent two years and ordained for the community a presbyter. After

his return to Arbil, he was succeeded by Ahodabooy. In 291 A. D. the new metropolitan was also persuaded to visit the capital, where he ordained five presbyters at first and stayed with them for a year. Before leaving the city, he raised Papa to the episcopate. Papa was a learned man, admits Bar Ebraya, who knew Syriac and the Persian language. Though the year of his consecration, namely 291 A. D., is disputed by some historians, the fact that Seleucia had a bishop by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century is admitted by all.

### **3. Establishment of the Catholicate**

Papa's claim to leadership over the entire Church of Persia was the beginning of the Seleucian Catholicate. This should not be taken as an effort on the part of Papa to assume undue authority for himself. It was in fact a necessity for the Church itself for its wellbeing.

Patriarchates in the Roman Empire and the Catholicate in the Persian Empire were a sort of parallel growths. But the backgrounds of the two empires were different. The Catholicate in Persia took shape at a time before the Patriarchate in the Roman Empire.

The Persian situation called for the evolution of the Catholicate almost from the time when the Sassanids came to power in the empire. As we have seen, the Sassanids were conservative adherents of the traditional Persian religion. The first monarch in that line, Ardashir (225-241), ordered that temples dedicated to the Sun be built everywhere in the empire and he assumed the title, Shah-in-Shah or King of Kings. There was fear on the occasion that he might attempt to wipe out Christianity from the empire. But that was not what he did. Instead he enjoined that whereas Zoroastrianism should continue as the official religion of the state, Christianity should be allowed to function as a sort of second religion on certain conditions. One of them was that Christians should have an acknowledged leader to represent them so that the state should be able to deal with the community through him. It was this position that Papa assumed for himself. The bishop may have obtained the clue from the Roman Empire, where the bishops of the political capitals like Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, etc., had begun to make claims of superiority over the bishops of their neighbouring areas.

Whatever the case may be. Papa assumed the role, but a number of bishops as well as his own Archdeacon opposed the move. They held a council of the Church, the first in recorded history, and resolved to degrade Papa in favour of Simon bar Saboe, the archdeacon. The Bishop of Seleucia did not yield to the verdict; he sought the opinion of a number of leading men of the Church in the Syrian provinces, among whom one was deacon Ephrem. The men contacted in this way supported Papa and censured his opponents. Now he reconciled Simon to himself and assured him of succession. Thus Papa was the first Catholicos of Seleucia till his death in 328 A. D.

When Simon bar Saboe became Catholicos, Sapor II (309-379) was the ruler of Persia. He was a staunch adherent of the Zoroastrian religion, and opposed in spirit to Christianity and the Roman Empire. But so long as Constantine lived, he kept his views to himself. The Roman Emperor died in 337 and in 339 Sapor started persecuting Christians in Persia. Besides, he carried on a series of successive military campaigns against the Roman empire, and brought from the Syrian provinces a large body of people as captives. It was these and similar people taken prisoner in war during the 5th and 6th centuries that stood for connections with Antioch in Persian territories. Sapor ordered the killing of three Catholicoi of Seleucia, a number of bishops, a large number of priests, and thousands of lay people.

Sapor II died in 379. The See of Seleucia was vacant for a period of twenty years. Meanwhile Simon bar Saboe, Sahdost, and Bar Bashmin were done away with by the orders of Sapor II. But from 379 to 399 there was comparative peace in the country, when three emperors ruled. There were also three Catholicoi in succession, the last of whom was Isaac. While he was leading the Church, in 399 Izdegerd I was made the Shah-in-Shah (399-420).

A peace-loving man, Izdegerd established cordial relations with the Roman Empire. Arcadius was emperor in Constantinople. He had sought from Persia a tutor for his son Theodosius II. This was complied with. When Arcadius died in 408, and the young Theodosius became emperor, the two empires were in the best of terms. Now the new emperor delegated Bishop Marutha of Miapharkath as his

special envoy to Izdegerd. The bishop who was also a physician healed the monarch of a head ache and endeared himself to the Shah-in-Shah. After preparing the ground for taking up the issue concerning the Church, the bishop went back and came again a year later.

In 410 Marutha came to Persia a second time and succeeded in eliciting the Shah-in-Shah's formal permission for holding a synod of the Persian Church. The synod consisted of bishops presided over by Catholicos Isaac. This was indeed a great event. The synod took a number of decisions affecting the Church, including the formal acceptance of the Council of Nicea, and particularly its Creed. By approving the Shah-in-Shah's right to nominate the Catholicos whenever necessary, the synod tried to connect the Church with the imperial authority in Persia.

Marutha's role in all this was only a labour of love. When he came to Persia, he had brought letters of introduction from five bishops of the Syrian provinces. The question of Antioch's jurisdiction over Persia had not been known in those times.

What, then, is a Catholicos? Derived from Greek, the word means "one who represents the whole." Patriarch means, on the other hand, "chief of the fathers." Of these two terms, Patriarch came to be used in the Church of the Roman Empire from about the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and Catholicos outside the empire in Persia and Armenia from about the 4<sup>th</sup>. Both refer to the ecclesiastical dignitary who has the right to oversee the Church as a whole. From this point of view, 'Catholicos' is a better term for the office than 'Patriarch.' But as Wigram notes "Catholicos" was a secular office in the Roman empire who held authority over the state's finances. That term obviously was found to be unsuitable for an ecclesiastic in the empire.

#### **4. Antiochian Efforts to Influence the Church of Persia**

The synod of 410 offered the Persian Church its own individuality in a significant way. The argument that the Church of Persia developed under the supremacy of Antioch is contrary to facts. Antioch itself had made no such claim in olden times. But it had another plan with reference to Persia.

To bring out this fact, it is necessary to look into the history of the Church in the Eastern Roman Empire. The 4<sup>th</sup> century, to be sure, is an important period in that history.

Two points deserve mention here. 1. It was in the 4<sup>th</sup> century that the Church formally adopted the trinitarian understanding of God and laid the foundation for the doctrine of the Incarnation with reference to Jesus Christ.

2. The 4<sup>th</sup> century was the period when the ascetic movement developed and controlled the Church. Monasticism which began in Egypt spread from there to other parts of the Church both in the East and in the West. In fact, a monk named Eugene (Augen) went from Egypt to the East early in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and tried to propagate the ideal there. He did not succeed much, because the Persian culture was opposed to the monastic way and celibate life.

In the Roman Empire, on the other hand, the situation was different. Monasticism spread far and wide. A series of canon laws and other literary productions were brought out; a number of provincial councils adopted rulings which sought to promote the ideal. These, in fact, gave shape to a culture highly venerated in the Roman Empire. The most important of these provincial councils were those of Neocaesarea, Gangara, Ancyra, Antioch in 341, and Laodicea.

The Syrian Christianity of the Roman Empire was keen that the Church life based on the monastic way should become the rule as much to itself as to the Church in Persia. Marutha who came to Persia in 409 and 410 did not take up this issue with the Church. But in 420 there was an envoy from Constantinople, when a council of the Church with ten bishops was meeting under Catholicos Yahb-alah. This was Bishop Acacius of Amida (Diarbeker). He took the opportunity to impress upon the bishops to accept the five provincial councils. Thus an attempt was made, not to make the Church of Persia accept Antioch's jurisdiction, but to uphold the Syrian way of regarding ascetic life as superior to married life.

This, however, had a reaction. In 424 another council with thirty-six bishops met under the presidency of Catholicos DadJesus. This time also Acacius of Amida was in Persia, but he was not invited to



attend the council. This council asserted the independence of the Persian Church in clear terms. The council said that on no account would it entertain external interference. This council is important like the council of 410, in that it referred to the Catholicos as the Patriarch of the Persian Church.

### Questions

1. Who was the first Bishop of Seleucia after Mari? How was he raised to the episcopate?
2. What was the effect of Sapor II's persecution of the Persian Church?
3. What is the importance of the synod of 410 in the history of the Persian Church?
4. In what ways did the Antiochian Church try to make the Persian Church conform to its ways?

## LESSON 3

# THE PERSIAN CHURCH AND NESTORIANISM

PreliminaryRemarks  TheChristologicalControversy  TheEfforts of the Nestorian School to Promote Its Tenets  Antiochian Partisans in Persia

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

During the 5<sup>th</sup> century the Church of Persia evolved its autonomy in two ways. One of them was the resistance to external interference, which the council of 424 expressed in clear terms. The second was a decision bearing on doctrinal formulation. We have discussed the first in the foregoing lesson. We shall take up the second in this lesson.

In the Church of the Roman Empire two important councils were held in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, neither of which the Church of Persia recognized. These councils endeavoured to define the faith of the Church

as it concerns the person and nature of Jesus Christ. The first of them, the Council of Ephesus in 431, adopted a position, and in its light condemned Nestorius because he refused to accept it. The Church of Persia had no official participation in that council. It resolved in a council of its own to disown that condemnation. This was the second step which the Persian Church adopted in asserting its independence. How this happened is discussed in the present lesson.

## 2. The Christological Controversy

From the year 424 A. D. to about the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century no important incident is reported to have happened in the Persian Church. Not so in the Roman Empire. From 428 there broke out the Christological controversy in the Church of the Western Empire, which rent the Church there into two. The issue began in 428 around the question whether the Virgin Mother of our Lord should be called *Theotokos*, one who gave birth to God. Nestorius, the then incumbent of the See of Constantinople, expressed the view that the title was not indispensable, but Cyril who presided over the Church of Alexandria insisted that it was absolutely necessary for the maintenance of Orthodoxy. The two men clashed and the Council of Ephesus was convened by the emperor in 431 to resolve the conflict. It favoured the position of Cyril as against that of Nestorius, and condemned the latter as a heretic.

Nestorius was not in fact the propounder of a novel idea, but the teacher of the faith in consonance with a tradition that had a history of its own in the Church. That tradition had been developed by men of the Antiochian school of theology.

The Antioch noted here should be differentiated from the Syrian Antioch, with which our Indian Church came in contact from 1665. The latter followed the Alexandrine tradition, on the basis of which Nestorius was condemned by the council of 431.

The expulsion of Nestorius did not bring peace to the Church. But the men of the two schools carried on the dispute between them for about two decades. Then a third tradition, that of the West, which had been hitherto unknown in the East, expressed itself in a doctrinal letter, the *Tome of Leo*, sent to the East by Bishop Leo of Rome. This

was a setback to the Alexandrines, who rejected it, declaring it to be a modified form of Nestorianism. In spite of the Alexandrine objection the Council of Chalcedon which met in 451 A.D., accepted the Tome and according to its light offered a definition of the faith, which was rejected both by the Alexandrine and the Antiochian sides. Thus the conflict continued unabated. Though Rome stood solidly behind the council, the East was miserably divided between those who accepted and those who rejected it.

Meanwhile, from 475 to 518 the political situation in the Roman Empire was favourable to those on the Alexandrine side, who were opposed to the Council of Chalcedon, and they sought to carry forward their claims with added strengths. This affected those on the Antiochian side, who could not thrive in the Roman Empire.

### **3. The Efforts of the Nestorian School to Promote Its Tenets**

Of the two theological traditions in the East, the Alexandrine was much more widespread than the Antiochian. Antioch itself had a large following. A great centre of the Antiochian tradition was Edessa in Northern Mesopotamia. That city had a school founded possibly in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. From 435 this academic theological centre was captured by the Antiochians. In those days there was no school in Persia where the clergy should be trained, on account of the political and social disfavour which they had to encounter. The clergy of the Church of Persia were trained on the whole in the school of Edessa, which existed on the border between the two empires.

From 435 the school of Edessa adopted its own method of teaching. Among the earlier theologians whom it included in its curriculum were Diodore of Tarsus who had died in 402 and Theodore of Mopsuestia who left his life in 428. These, particularly the latter, were the great luminaries of the Antiochian school of theology. Both these men have been renounced by the Alexandrines as the teachers of Nestorius. Theodore, a renowned biblical scholar, had been called "the Father of Nestorianism."

The Antiochian partisans could not hold on to the school of Edessa

for a long time. By 470 A. D. it was taken over by the Alexandrines of the area. The leading men of the school, particularly Narsai who had served as its head, crossed over to Persia, to the city of Nisibis. With the support of Metropolitan Bar Sauma, Narsai started a school there to continue the teaching followed at Edessa. Even before this date a number of men had made their way to Persia and were welcomed there by the Church. One such person was Bar Sauma, who had been made the Metropolitan of Nisibis. The school of Edessa could not serve either side for long, as Emperor Zeno closed it in 489 A.D.

The Bar Sauma of Nisibis should not be confused with the Bar Sauma noted in the 5<sup>th</sup> section of intercession in our holy Qurbana. They are two different persons belonging to divergent traditions. This Bar Sauma was a very able man who could rise in life to such a position as to be appointed councillor of the Persian Shah-in-Shah, Firoz, and for that very reason he was disliked by the Antiochian Syrian writers.

This Bar Sauma endeavoured to carry out two programmes in the Church of Persia. He was keen, on the one hand, to have the Church adopt officially the Antiochian theological tradition, and on the other to establish the right of marriage for all clergy including bishops.<sup>1</sup> In this, his purpose in all probability was to work out for Persia an ecclesiastical identity different from that of the Church in the Roman Empire. This might have been necessary for that Church to save itself from intermittent persecutions.

The Persian rulers, for instance, had suspected their Christian subjects of being loyal at heart to their co-religionist, the Emperor of the Western Empire, rather than to them. Therefore, to have a form of Christianity for Persia, which was different in faith and life from that of its rival empire in the West was advantageous for the Church of

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1. Bar Ebraya's account is found on pp. 115f of Pampakuda manuscript (Syriac). He lived eight centuries after the incident; so that his source (not specified by him) should have to be checked. Bar Ebraya was opposed to the two programmes of Bar Sauma. The story he preserves should be taken with caution.

Persia. Ignoring Bar Ebraya's uncharitable description of the incident, we may say that the fact is that the Church people in general accepted Bar Sauma's programmes.

It was, as we shall see soon, in 486 A.D. that the Persian Church accepted officially the Antiochian theology, but Bar Sauma had already begun the work towards its realization. Bar Ebraya narrates the story in this way. Babovay, the Catholicos of Seleucia, wrote a letter to some bishops of the Syrian provinces of the Roman Empire in 457, which contained a sentence referring to the Persian Empire which was condemnatory. The letter was intercepted by Bar Sauma, who passed it in to the Shah-in-Shah. On reading the incriminating sentence in the document, he was furious. He ordered that the Catholicos be hanged to death by being tied on his ring finger. The vacancy in the See which arose in this way was utilized by Bar Sauma to carry on with the promotion of his programme, assisted by the soldiers of the King of kings. During this time he called two synods of bishops, which passed resolutions supporting him.

Bar Ebraya admits that there were not many people who opposed Bar Sauma, but that the Church as a whole, with the exception of a small minority of people especially in Northern Mesopotamia, joined Bar Sauma. With the background which we have noted, this development was to be expected. After the time of Babovay, Acacius was made Catholicos in 485. An alumnus of the school of Nisibis, he held a council of the Church in 486 A.D. and adopted a number of resolutions. The decisions in so far as they concerned the faith and discipline of the Church are as follows:

### **1. As Regards the Faith.**

The council acknowledged the doctrine of God as triune, three persons and one Godhead. With reference to the Incarnation, it affirmed that Jesus Christ was one person (*parsupa*), in whom the two natures of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, and of man Jesus of Nazareth, were united indivisibly and unconfusedly.

### **2. Concerning Discipline.**

The council decreed that all clergymen including bishops had the

right, like the lay people, to marry, or in case of widowhood, to re-marry, as from experience it was realised that celibacy, though it might be chosen as a vocation was dangerous, if made compulsory.

It was in 486 that the Persian Church did officially adopt the Antiochian theology and declared Nestorius and other leaders of that tradition doctors of the Church. But Philip puts the date at 498, for which no evidence is really available. The decrees of 486 were ratified again and again in the councils of the Persian Church. We have evidence that Catholicos Babai (497-502) held a council in 497, but this issue was not discussed there. However, there is no record of a council meeting in 498. In the same way the statement of Philip that “the victory of Nestorianism did not last long”<sup>1</sup> is also not correct. We may recall here the story preserved by Bar Ebraya that in 559 Jacob Burdana consecrated Ahudemeh as the spiritual leader of the Antiochian partisans in Persia. But this effort did not succeed, because Ahudemeh was killed by the orders of Khosraw I, the then Shah-in-Shah, for converting a member of the royal family.

#### **4. Antiochian Partisans in Persia**

When the Persian Church adopted the two decisions concerning faith and life, as we have noted, there was a minority of the faithful who did not fall in line with the majority. In general they were not strictly Persians, but were people from Antiochian province, whom Sapor II (309-379) had brought to Persia as captives in war, and their descendants. In the beginning they were so small in number that, at one time they had only one bishop, Charis of Shingar, for the whole of Persia. But in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries their number increased with the addition of captives brought by Khosraw I (531-579) and Khosraw II (590-627). Bar Ebraya notes that Khosraw I built for them a small town and called it “Antioch.”<sup>2</sup>

There was an effort to organize these people as a community; this succeeded in 628-29. The Syrian Patriarch Athanasius Gamolo consecrated for them Marutha as the “Great Metropolitan of the East.”<sup>3</sup>

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1. E. M. Philip, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

2. B. H., p. 117.

3. Michael the Syrian..., pp. 413-414.

After returning to Persia in 629, this Marutha adopted Tagrith as his ecclesiastical centre and brought into being a Church unit in communion with Syrian Antioch. Bar Ebraya refers to Marutha as the “first Maphrian of Tagrith”,<sup>1</sup> who came to be called in course of time the “Catholicos of the East” in Antiochian Syrian circles. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century Bar Ebraya was a Maphrian in the succession of Marutha for about two decades.

From about the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century the Church of Persia continued to remain split as two communities. One of them consisted of Persian Christians who adopted the Nestorian interpretation of the person and nature of Jesus Christ on the one hand, and the Church life that can be traced to pre-fourth century times on the other. However, as regards the question of permission for the clergy to marry it took over the rule of celibacy for bishops from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, allowing priests to marry, and those of them who lose their wives to remarry, if they so choose. The other community enjoyed a large amount of administrative freedom, recognizing at the same time the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch as its supreme spiritual head.

From the 7<sup>th</sup> century the Nestorian Church of Persia evolved into, a great missionary Church. It sent out its missionaries from Persia to far-off lands like China and established churches, which continued to function till about the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Since then the political situation changed in China and the Church there became extinct.

## Questions

1. What are the theological traditions, on the basis of which there were disputes in the Church in the Roman Empire? On what tradition did the Council of Chalcedon base its definition?
2. In what ways did the Persian Church actualize its independence?
3. What is the position of the Persian Church in regard to faith? How did the Church bring that about?
4. What is the practice of the Persian Church concerning the

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1. B. H. op. cit p. 110.

- question of marriage for the clergy? How did it come about?
5. In what circumstances did the expression “Catholicos of the East” come into use?
  6. What do we know of the missionary work of the Church of Persia?

## LESSON 4

# EASTERN ECCLESIASTICAL CONNECTION OF THE INDIAN CHURCH

□ Preliminary Remarks □ Eastern Bishops Who Came to India upto the 16<sup>th</sup> Century □ In the Light of Persian Records □ A Deputation from India for Bishops in 1490 A.D.

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

Cosmas bears witness in about the year 520 to the existence of a bishop at Kallyana who had been consecrated in Persia. It is possible that bishops came to India from the Persian regions even before 520 A.D. Tradition has it that the colony led by Thomas of Cana had a bishop, Joseph, in it. Therefore, the theory that the Indian Church was founded originally by Nestorian missionaries cannot be admitted. Yet, historians of the Indian Church have to face the question as to who may have sent bishops to India subsequent to the Church of Persia's adoption of Nestorianism in 486 A.D.

The small community of believers in Northern Mesopotamia who refused to join the majority after 486 were willing to unite with Syrian Antioch. However, till 628-29, for a period of 142 years, they were not properly organized. Therefore, if bishops came to India during that period, it must have been from the Nestorian Church only. After 629 then where did bishops come from? It is this question that we seek to answer primarily in this lesson.



## **2. Eastern Bishops Who Came to India upto the 16<sup>th</sup> Century**

E. M. Philip answers the question by saying that bishops came to India from both groups. The same answer is being given by David Daniel and C. V. Cherian who have written the history of the Church of Malabar in recent times. All these three historians have an aversion for the word "Nestorian." Philip is eager, in addition, to make out that the Church of Malabar functioned from the beginning under the jurisdiction of Antioch.

We have already shown the obvious difficulty in adopting Philip's point of view. For one thing, none of the historians belonging to the Antiochian Syrian communion, whose writings dealing with history have come down to us, had put forward the claim till 1665 that any ecclesiastic from that Church had visited India. Moreover, there is no evidence from the side of the Indian Church that the Church of Antioch had any connection with it. It is therefore necessary to examine whether any evidence is forthcoming from the side of the Persian Church.

All the historians known to us agree that bishops had come to India from the Nestorian body even after 628. Therefore the question is: had bishops from Tagrith also contacted the Indian Church? Even here we should bear in mind that Bar Ebraya who led the Tagrithan line during a period of about twenty years in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and who himself wrote its history till his time, and whose work came to be updated by people after him till 1496, does not reveal a knowledge of the existence of a Church in South India, let alone of any bishop visiting it from the line of succession represented by him. In spite of this clear fact, Philip writes: "The Church of Malabar had to rely on Seleucia. Yet bishops could not be obtained always. Moreover, the Jacobite Catholicos of Seleucia also claimed that the Church of Malabar was subject to his control and jurisdiction, and used to send bishops to Malabar from time to time."<sup>1</sup> It should be recalled here that there never was a "Jacobite Catholicos" in Seleucia. In the light of our discussion so far the other points made by Philip may be ignored.

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1. Op. cit., p. 75.

### 3. In the Light of Persian Records

We have the following points of information in the record obtainable from Persian sources.

1. Isho-Yahab III (628-643) was the Nestorian Patriarch as the time when Patriarch Athanasius Gamolo of the Antiochian Syrian Church consecrated Marutha for Tagrith. The Nestorian Church had by then grown extensively and with it the Indian Church as well, under the guidance of the Metropolitan of Rewardashir, the capital of Fars. The Patriarch raised the Indian Church to Metropolitan See with a number of bishops, six to twelve, says the historian, as his suffragans. In rank the Indian Metropolitan was ahead of the Metropolitan of China; the latter was to be counted before that of Samarkand.<sup>1</sup>

2. During the Patriarchate of Isho-Yahab III (650-660) there arose a rift between him and the Metropolitan Simon of Rewardashir. It is reflected in a letter of the former addressed to the latter, which has come down to us. Historians look upon this as an important document referring to the relation of the Indian Church with the Nestorian Patriarch, so that even E. M. Philip notes it, though in an unrelated context.<sup>2</sup> The main points in the letter as they relate to the Indian Church are the following:-

i. Metropolitan Simon was violating the canons, as he had “closed the door of episcopal succession in the face of many people of India.”

ii. Consequently, “the episcopal succession has been interrupted in India”, and the country “has since sat in darkness.”

iii. Simon’s negligence has affected “not only India that extends from the borders of the Persian Empire, to the country which is called Kalah, which is a distance of one thousand and two hundred parasangs, but also your own Fars.”

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1. M., p. 64.

2. Op. cit., p. 56.

As to the location of Kalah a number of reputed historians have identified it with Ceylon or even Kollam (Quilon). The reference to Kalah and the distance of 1,200 parasangs (approximately 4,000 miles) show that the patriarch had South India in mind. This letter, therefore, is as important a document in relation to the history of the Indian Church as the testimony of Cosmas.

3. During the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries the chief bishop of the Indian Church had the title "The Metropolitan and Gate of all India." Yet he was not independent. Like other metropolitans, he had to report to the Patriarch periodically. In fact, the decrees of the councils of 410 and 424<sup>1</sup> show that the Catholicos could exercise more powers in his Church than any Patriarch in the Roman Empire within his territory. It was required accordingly that every metropolitan should contact the Patriarch at least once a year. This ruling was however relaxed in the case of the metropolitans of India, China and other remote countries because of distance. Patriarch Theodosius (852 - 859) stipulated that the metropolitans of these countries need report only once in six years.

4. Three incidents happened in the days of the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (779-823), whom even Bar Ebraya praises.<sup>2</sup>

i. He wrote *a letter to the monks of the Monastery of Maron* concerning the words "crucified for us" (This we have already noted). Although the hymn was composed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>3</sup> the addition of these words was made only a century later. Neither the Nestorian Church nor the Chalcedonian body accepted the addition. This is the point made by Timothy in this letter. It is also clear from the letter that in the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries the Nestorian Church had been in touch with many Eastern countries including India and China.

ii. *A letter written by the Patriarch to Hanon Isho of Sarbas*

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1. This fact is clear in records preserved in *Synodicon Oriental*, J. B. Chabot Pain, 1902, pp. 17-53. See also Wigam, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-125. The Catholicos of Seleucia came to be called 'Patriarch' as well from 424. See the account of the Council (*Syn. Or.* p. 51).

2. A. Mingana, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

3. B. H. *op. cit.*, pp. 100ff.

shows that during those times the monks of the Church of Persia were being sent as missionaries to India and China.<sup>1</sup>

iii. *Rebellion of the Metropolitan of Rewardashir*. In the province of Fars, of which Rewardashir was the capital, bishops used to wear white garments like other clergymen, eat meat, and marry. The Antiochian influence had led several leaders of Persia to abandon such customs and Timothy was willing to adopt the change. But the Metropolitan Rewardashir stood against him, claiming to remain loyal to an older tradition. "We have been evangelized by the Apostle Thomas", said he "and we have no share with the See of Mari."<sup>2</sup> The "See of Mari" refers obviously to Seleucia.

However, after a time of dispute, Timothy united the Church of Fars with himself by acknowledging the metropolitan's independence in his province, but stipulating that bishops should no longer marry, eat meat, and dress themselves in white garments. He did also relieve the metropolitan from his responsibility over the Indian Church. From that time the Church in India came directly under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch.<sup>3</sup>

5. It must be during the time of Timothy or close to it that a colony of Persian Christians with two bishops landed at Quilon. They had been known as Prodh and Sapor. But Mingana insists that Sabrisho was the name which came to be known as Sapor wrongly.

What was the ecclesiastical affiliation of these bishops? Philip does not answer the question directly, but leaves it vague.<sup>4</sup> He rejects, however, the opinion that they were Nestorians, implying subtly that they belonged to the other line. If it can be made out that they were not Nestorians, the only possibility is that they should be "Jacobites"-the only "Jacobite bishops" to come to India. He maintains that the list of bishops sent to India by Patriarch Timothy, which Assemani gives, does not include these names. This answer of Philip is not sufficient to disprove the position adopted by Asseman himself and

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1. W. Young, op. cit., p. 154.

2. B. H., op. cit., pp. 100ff.

3. Ming, op. cit., p. 35.

4. op. cit., pp. 80-81.

others that they were indeed Nestorians<sup>1</sup> sent to India by the Nestorian Patriarch.

Prodh and Sabrisho settled down at Quilon with the people who accompanied them. It was they who received the copper plate grant from King Sthanu Ravivarma in 849.<sup>2</sup> The Christian community of Kerala considered them saints, and a number of churches dedicated to them were built in different parts of the country. But in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese in South India criticized the practice, as they were Nestorians, and at the Synod of Udayamperur of 1599 they changed the names to “Saints.” All churches in Kerala currently known to be dedicated to the “Saints” were dedicated to these bishops before the Synod of Udayamperur.

6. Our evidence for the state of things during the period between 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries is practically negligible. In Persia the Arab Muslims conquered the country by the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century; they had Damascus as the seat of their Caliphate till 750 A.D. under the Umayyad dynasty. Then the Abbasids captured power and held it till the 13<sup>th</sup> century, with Baghdad as their capital. The Nestorian Patriarch shifted his residence to Baghdad about 35 miles to the north of Seleucia in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and to Northern Mesopotamia in the 13<sup>th</sup>, when the Abbasids had lost their power. It is reported that in 1129 the Nestorian Patriarch sent to Kerala a bishop named John.<sup>3</sup> Marco Polo, the Venetian traveller who visited Kerala in 1295 testifies that he saw there “Nestorian Christians.” Mingana notes<sup>4</sup> that there is a lectionary composed at Cranganore in 1301 at the archives of the Vatican Library,<sup>5</sup> which we have already mentioned. It shows that it had been compiled in the days of the Nestorian Patriarch Yahb-Alaha V and of the Indian Metropolitan Mar Jacob. The compiler refers to Mar Jacob as the leader of the holy Indian Church by occupying the See of the Apostle St. Thomas, and to himself as dea-

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1. Ming, p. 66.

2. About, p. 26.

3. On the authority of Le Quien in *Oriental Christiana* G. T. Mckenzie notes this fact See *Christianity in Travancore*, p. 7.

4. Mingana, op. cit. pp. 69-70.

5. Vat. Syn. Codox XXII.

con Zachariah. It is clear from this document that the reference to the "See of St. Thomas" had been in use in those times, and that the Indian Church functioned then under the jurisdiction of the Nestorian Patriarch.

#### **4. A Deputation from India for Bishops in 1490**

Since the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> we have no record about the history of the Indian Church from Eastern sources. But from the close of the 15<sup>th</sup> century we have evidence for writing a connected history.

In 1490 a three-man delegation was sent by the Indian Church for bishops to the Nestorian Patriarch Mar Simon. The delegation went to Northern Mesopotamia, broadly known as Babylonia. As a result of the political change the Patriarch had, as we have noted, to shift his residence from Baghdad. The delegation proceeded to Mosul where the Patriarch then was.

One of the three men died on the way, and the other two, named, George and Joseph, reached the Patriarch and submitted to him the Indian Church's request for bishops. The Patriarch ordained both the men from India as priests. As for bishops, he chose two monks from the monastery of Eugene, named Thomas and John, and raised them to the episcopal rank. They were sent to India in the company of George and Joseph. Shortly after arriving in Kerala, Bishop Thomas went back to Mosul with Joseph, who returned to India in 1493. It was this Joseph who travelled to Europe in 1500 with the Portuguese Admiral Peter Alvares Cabral, and earned the name "Joseph the Indian."

In 1502 Patriarch Simon died. He was succeeded by Mar Elias. The new Patriarch consecrated three bishops, Yahbalaha, Jacob and Denha. One of these three was intended for China, and another for the island of Socotra, and the third was to serve the Indian Church. Following their arrival in India in 1504, they wrote a letter to the Patriarch, informing him of the state of the Church. The letter has come down to us,<sup>1</sup> and an English translation of the same is included by

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1. Ming, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-42.

Mingana in his work.

By that time, from 1498, the Portuguese had begun to come to India, and started their work in Kerala. The Syrian bishops wrote the letter to their Patriarch at a time when they were on good terms with them. Of these bishops, Mar Jacob continued in India.

### Questions

1. Who is the Maphrian of Tagrith? How did that office come into being?
2. What is the basis of the relation between the Church of Malabar and the See of Antioch?
3. What is the evidence that establishes the connection that existed between Seleucia and the Church of Malabar?
4. How is it that some of our Churches are called by the name of "Saints"?
5. What do we deduce about the foreign connection of our Church from the fact that a delegation approached the Nestorian Patriarch for bishops in 1490?

## LESSON 5

### PERSIAN CROSSES

- PreliminaryRemarks  AbouttheCrosses  InscriptionsonThem  
 Which Is the Original Cross?

#### 1. Preliminary Remarks

There are concrete pieces of evidence in South India for the Persian connection of the Indian Church. One of the most important of them is the presence of the Persian crosses in a few ancient churches. They consist of crosses carved on stone slabs with inscriptions in Pahlavi or old Syriac. Four such crosses are found, one each at Mylapore, Kottayam, Kadamattam and Muttuchira.

## 2. About the Crosses

After establishing themselves in India in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese carried on excavations at certain selected spots in Madras area and discovered a cross in 1547. Soon it came to be looked upon as a miracle-performing object and was taken under Portuguese direction to the church at St. Thomas Mount, where it was dedicated. This is known as “The Cross of the Mount.” Sometime later this cross was shifted to Mylapore.

At the Valiapally, Kottayam, there are two crosses made out in relief on stone slabs and fixed on the wall in front of the lower altars on either side of the sanctuary. The older of the two is smaller in size and is in front of the northern altar. Archaeological experts are of the opinion that this cross and the Pahlavi inscription on it may have been produced in the 8<sup>th</sup> or the 9<sup>th</sup> century A. D. The cross in front of the southern altar is admitted to have been made later. The inscription is in old Syriac characters, which is easily readable. Since it is of a later period, it is not considered of much value by historians.

## 3. The Inscription on the Older Cross

In 1925 when Mingana wrote his paper on the subject the translation of the inscribed piece was that of Burnell. E. M. Philip also claims to follow Burnell’s translation. Yet on the wording of the second of the two sentences Philip and Mingana do not agree. Philip gives it as follows:<sup>1</sup>

“In punishment by the cross (was) the suffering of this one; He who is true God and God above all, and Guide ever pure.” Mingana quotes Burnell in this way.<sup>2</sup>

“In punishment by the cross (was) the suffering of this one; (He) who (is) the true Christ, and God above, and Guide ever pure.”

Philip is trying to make out that this inscription which belongs to the 8<sup>th</sup> or the 9<sup>th</sup> century was opposed to the Nestorian tenet, and that, therefore, the theology of the Indian Church was not Nestorian

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1. Philip, op. cit. p. 81.

2. Ming, op. cit. p. 74.



in those times. Mingana, on the other hand, questions the veracity of Philip's quotation of Burnell's translation, and shows that the translation of Burnell does only justify the claim that the Indian Church was well in contact with the Nestorian Church of Persia.

In this book, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, L. W. Brown points out<sup>1</sup> that by 1950 world scholarship has superseded Burnell's translation in favour of a new rendering offered by Winkworth. It reads: "May Lord Christ have mercy on Afraz, son of Chaharbukt the Syrian who cut this (or had this cut)." The Afraz noted here is identified by many with Prodh, whom we came across in a preceding lesson. If that is the case, the person responsible for the creation of the first cross was one of the two Nestorian bishops who came from Persia in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The other crosses were produced thereafter on its model in India.

#### 4. Which Is the Original Cross?

Which, then, must be the original cross? Two views have been expressed in answer to this question. One of them which Winkworth sponsors is that the older cross at the Valiyapally, Kottayam, with the inscription thereon is the earliest of them all. It is his translation of the inscription concerned that we have mentioned. T. K. Joseph, as L. W. Brown shows, argues, on the other hand, that the cross of the Mount with its inscription is the oldest. However, Joseph's position that the copies of the first cross were made only after 1580 sounds unconvincing.

It may be assumed that till the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was usual in Kerala to have a "Persian Cross" fixed on the wall in front of an altar within the church. This custom had changed since then, and a stone cross was put up on a pedestal in front of, but a little away from, the church concerned. In the present century this tradition has given place to erecting a tall and slender cross outside the church on the wayside.

#### Questions

- 1 What are the 'Persian crosses.' How did they come into existence?

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1. Brown, op. cit., 1956, p. 80.

- 2 How does E. M. Philip interpret the inscription on the Persian Nestorian crosses?
- 3 How do scholars interpret those inscriptions now?

## LESSON 6

# SOME CUSTOMS AND DOCTRINAL TRADITIONS

□ Preliminary Remarks □ European Visitors in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries □ Some Salient Customs □ Doctrinal Traditions □ Possible Conclusions

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

It was in the 9<sup>th</sup> century that, as we have seen, the Persian crosses appeared in South India. By and by a number of churches in Kerala adopted them. The presence of these crosses is an added proof of the Indian Church's connection with the Church of Persia.

This by itself does not say much about the Church's faith and life. In seeking to discuss it we have to admit that the evidence at our disposal is very inadequate. Our forefathers did not take the trouble to place on record the state of the Church in their times. We have therefore to depend upon sources preserved by persons from abroad who visited South India or worked there. Here we have three sources: (1) the memoirs of European travellers who passed through South India during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries; (2) letters and other writings of Western Christian missionaries who worked in Kerala and other parts of South India in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; (3) the decrees of the Synod of Udayamperur of 1599. On the strength of the evidence which we can gather from these sources it is possible for us to discuss briefly the state of the Indian Church in ancient times.

### 2. European Visitors during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant and traveller visited South India

possibly in 1288 and definitely in 1298 A. D. He came on his own, but about forty years before that date Pope Innocent III founded a missionary society with the intention of gathering missionaries to be sent to eastern countries. Some of these missionaries, either on their way to or on their return from the land of their assignment spent periods of time in South India and endeavoured to carry on evangelistic work there also.

Marco Polo testifies that he visited the tomb of St. Thomas the Apostle. He says that both Nestorian Christians and Saracens (Muslims) look upon it as a sacred place and go there on pilgrimage. The missionary society founded by Innocent III had in it men from both the Dominican and the Franciscan congregations. The first missionary to visit India from the society was John Monte Corvino. On his way to China in 1291 he stayed in India for thirteen months. He testifies to the existence of Christians in South India. After he had gone, there came Catalani Jordan who worked at different places including Quilon. Entertaining great hopes for the success of his labours at Quilon, he returned to Europe to enlist support for it. The Avignon Pope John XXII being impressed by his report consecrated Jordan Bishop of Quilon in 1328. But he could not come back to India, as he died in Europe.

While Jordan was still in India, there came another missionary. He was Odoric Pordenone. He notes the existence of Nestorians in South India; "that is to say, Christians but vile and pestilent heretics." Later in 1346, Bishop John Marignolli arrived in Quilon. He was offered fitting hospitality by the Syrian Christians of the area for the sixteen months he lived there.

It must be on the strength of the reports from these people that Pope Eugenius wrote his letter to the king of the Indian Christians, which we have already noted.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Portuguese established themselves in India, they brought with them Dominican and Franciscan missionaries. Then from 1542 Jesuits and others also came. The writings of these men have been collected and preserved in different places under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Synod of Udayamperur noted in its decrees a number of facts about the Indian Church.

From these sources, the following points about the Church of Kerala, can be deduced;

I. The Kerala Christians had a respectable standing in society. Yet they had various defects. The most important of them all was a lack of understanding of the faith and life of the Christian religion which they professed.

II. Only a very few of them knew by heart the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary. In other words, they did not have proper Christian nurture.

III. It was customary for mothers after child birth to stay away from church for forty days, if the baby was male, and for eighty days, if it was female. Then the child was taken to the church and baptized. The Synod of Udayamperur decreed that this delaying of baptism should be stopped.

IV. In churches there were more priests than one. Though the oldest of them all was specially honoured because of age, the custom of any priest being made "vicar" or "assistant vicar" was not known. The income from the church was divided equally among the priests.

V. Memorial services for the departed souls were common. The priests had a special income from them.

VI. A priest's first celebration of the Mass was held very ceremoniously.

VII. Both Christians and non-Christians alike honoured the clergymen.

#### **4. Some Doctrinal Traditions**

i. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Church of Malabar was part of the Nestorian Church of Persia. This is admitted even by E. M. Philip. The most important issue on which that Church held its own had reference to the interpretation of the person and nature of Jesus Christ. We have already noted that the position which came to be character-

ized as “Nestorianism” later was a theological tradition developed in the Antiochian areas from about the closing decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The men who worked out that tradition in the East were pre-eminently Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestin. With Nestorius himself, these luminaries were highly honoured and included in the list of saints by the Church of Persia and the Church of Malabar.

ii. The prayer “Hail Mary” addressed to the mother of our Lord was in use in the worship of the Church in Kerala, but the concluding petition, “O Mother of God .....” had in its place, “O Mother of Christ .....” This difference did agree, in fact, with the Antiochian emphasis that Mary was in reality the Mother of Christ, and not of God *per se*. At this point the Church of Malabar conformed to the Nestorian tradition, which the Church of Persia followed.

iii. In preparing the Eucharistic bread, that is the bread for the holy Qurbana, the Church of Malabar used oil, as all other Eastern Churches did. But Western missionaries, in their occidental prejudice, criticized this tradition and sought to correct it. In so doing, they were only exposing their ignorance of the way the Eastern Churches had been doing things.

iv. The priests of the Church of Malabar were on the whole married. There was no restriction as to when, either before or after their ordination to priesthood, they should marry. Also, widower priests used to remarry, if they so wished. But in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese churchmen exerted their influence to change this practice in favour of celibacy for all clergymen. Their success here was partial, so that the Synod of Udayamperur adopted a decree enjoining celibacy on all priests.

v. Auricular confession before a priest was not in practice in the Church of Malabar. In the Eastern Church, though they provided for it, the custom of making confession before the receiving of communion every time, was not in vogue. It may be that this Eastern practice was being followed in the Church of Malabar. But in consequence of the Portuguese influence the Indian Church began to adopt the Western practice.

Although European missionaries came to Kerala during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and worked to propagate the faith in consonance with their tradition, their labour left no mark in the country for any length of time. These missionaries succeeded in organizing Christian communities and even building up churches in certain places which adopted the Latin rites, but their existence did not affect the history of the Church of Malabar. As we have noted, it was to the Nestorian Patriarch residing at Mosul that in 1490 the Church sent a delegation for bishops. It was the bishops who came from there that guided the Church during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## 5. Possible Conclusions

The state of affairs which we have discussed so far brings out two facts concerning the foreign relations of the Church of Malabar.

**i. The Church of Malabar had no connection with the Syrian Church of Antioch.** If any connection existed between them, leaders of the latter would have enquired into the way in which the former was carrying on its life. The following facts are important and may be kept in mind. a) The list of saints adopted in Kerala included men whom the Antiochian Syrian Church had renounced as heretics. b) In contrast, the saints of the latter corresponding to these men were not included in the Malabar list.<sup>1</sup>

c) Order of liturgical service which bears the names of these Persian saints was commonly used in the Church of Malabar. d) In liturgy the Indian Church was not indebted to the Antiochian Church. Yet we have no evidence that anybody either from the side of the Antiochian Church or from that of the Indian Church raised any objection to this state of things.

**ii. The Church of Malabar had no connection with the Church of Rome.** None of the authors belonging to the Roman Catholic Church who visited South India has put forward the claim that the Indian Church had any connection with the Church of Rome till their times. At the same time, they admit that a church existed in Malabar. This

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1. Whereas the Malabar list contained the names of Diodore, Theodore, Nestorius, etc. it did not include the names of Cyril, Severus and Phiolexenos.

Church had continued in the fellowship of the Church of Persia, which in the 9<sup>th</sup> decade of the 5<sup>th</sup> century recognized Nestorius as a Church father. This development, however, did not affect the relationship between the Indian Church and the Church of Persia till the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Questions**

1. Who were the European missionaries that visited the Church of Malabar in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries? What do they say about this Church?
2. With what foreign Church did the Church of Malabar have connection at that time?
3. What do we know of the faith and practices of the Church of Malabar then?

# UNIT 3

## THE CHURCH OF MALABAR IN CONTACT WITH THE PORTUGUESE

### LESSON 1

#### THE ARRIVAL OF THE PORTUGUESE

□ Preliminary Remarks □ The Portuguese in India □ Efforts to Bring the Church of Malabar under the Portuguese Control

#### 1. Preliminary Remarks

Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese General, landed in Calicut on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1498. In a brief period of time thereafter South India came under the political sway of the Portuguese power. Having thus established themselves in the country, these Roman Catholic Christians from the West turned their attention to religious propaganda. Seeing a Christian community in the country owing no allegiance to Rome, they sought to bring it within the sphere of their influence and control.

It is this story that is briefly told in this lesson.

#### 2. The Portuguese in India

Calicut where Vasco da Gama set foot on Indian soil was the capital of the Samuthiri, who ruled over a large part of Kerala. As it had a convenient harbour, ships could anchor there comfortably. Gama took advantage of this facility and reached the Indian shore safely.

Three points in relation to this visit deserve notice.

##### (i) *Vasco da Gama's route*

Journey from Europe to India was not easy in those days. The Suez Canal had not been built. Therefore it was not easy for ships from the Mediterranean Sea to pass to the Red Sea and proceed to an Indian port. The Red Sea was at that time under the control of the



Muslim Turks, the adversaries of Christian Europe from the days of the Crusades.

A number of men had taken upon themselves the task of finding a sea route to India avoiding a confrontation with the Turks. They had proposed a route which consisted in sailing along the western coast of Africa to the Cape of Good Hope, then sailing round it to Mombassa on Africa's eastern coast, and finally crossing the Arabian Sea.

Bartholomew Dias, a Portuguese navigator, is credited with having made the discovery of this route, and Vasco da Gama followed the plan. At the head of a fleet he travelled along this untried route and reached Calicut successfully.

*(ii) Purpose of Gama's adventurous journey*

Historians are agreed that the immediate purpose which Gama and the Portuguese king who deputed him had was to establish contacts with India. It had been rumoured abroad in Europe that India was a Christian country ruled by a powerful emperor who was himself a follower of Christ, and that the tomb of St. Thomas the Apostle existed there. Pope Eugene IV (1431-47) had, as we have noted already, addressed a letter to his "beloved Son in Christ, Thomas, the illustrious Emperor of the Indians." Gama was eager to contact the emperor as a representative of the Portuguese monarch, as also to pay his respectful homage at the sacred shrine where the holy relics of Apostle Thomas lay buried.

In all probability the Portuguese king, as one of the two leading rulers of Europe at that time, had other more far-reaching plans to achieve by this undertaking. One of them was to make common cause with the Indian emperor; in the same way as Portugal had about this time dreamt of an alliance with Emperor Prester John of Ethiopia, with a view to crushing the power of the Muslim Turks. The other plan was the propagation of the Christian faith in agreement with the Latin tradition of the Church of Rome. The first of these hopes was based on an empty dream with reference as much to Ethiopia as to India, and it evaporated into thin air.

The second plan had a history. Evangelisation, whereby to bring

the entire human race within the orbit of Rome's spiritual leadership, was the fond hope of the Papacy. About the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century a way to initiate its realization had suggested itself to Pope Nicholas V (1455). He influenced the then leading nations of the West, Portugal and Spain, to take up this work, the former in the East and the latter in the West. The nation concerned, enjoined the Pope, might amass as much wealth by trade and other means as possible where it went, and accrue as much political power as it seemed necessary to it. But the Pope laid down one condition. The nation should undertake the responsibility of propagating the Christian faith at its own cost and converting people to the Roman Catholic Church in the countries where it worked.

Whether Gama came to India with an awareness of this Papal injunction or not, the Portuguese carried on their activities in India with the idea of conversion in mind. They saw to it that the Indian Church, including even the ancient Church of Kerala, functioned subject to the Padroado (Portuguese protection). This arrangement granted certain rights to the Portuguese crown and demanded of it corresponding obligations. As regards the first, the Portuguese monarch was granted the right to present to the Pope suitable candidates for elevation to the bishopric as well as to nominate persons for certain ecclesiastical offices to the bishop concerned for appointment. In return the Portuguese king was expected to bear the entire cost of Church maintenance including all salary payments.

*(iii) The welcome which the Portuguese could expect*

The Turks had established their trade relations with India for a pretty long time. Controlling the Red Sea, they exercised hegemony over the Arabian Sea as well. Consequently the people of Kerala were at their mercy in selling their pepper, cardamom and other produce of different kinds. They would naturally welcome a new agency as a competitor in the field. The Christians of Kerala in particular had grievances of different types and would welcome the support of a powerful Christian nation from abroad.

Vasco da Gama, however, could not achieve anything substantial during his first visit. It is said that guided by the impression that India

was a Christian country, he confused a Hindu religious shrine dedicated to Kali for a Christian chapel. He went in there and prayed before the idol taking it to be an image of the Virgin. He did further look upon Hindu men of noble appearance as Christian believers. The fact is that Gama did not come across an Indian Christian, nor did he see the relics of Apostle Thomas during his first visit to India. His negotiations with the Samuthiri for a place to initiate Portuguese mercantile enterprises failed and he moved down to Cannanore. After making contacts there, he went back to Lisbon the same year.

After Gama had gone, there came in March 1500 the Portuguese Admiral Peter Alvares Cabral at the head of a navy; he was accompanied by missionary priests of the Franciscan Order. As they did not receive the expected welcome at Calicut, within a few months of their arrival, they came down to Cochin, where they obtained the necessary permission to stay. After making this beginning Cabral returned to Portugal. With him two Indian Christians also went to Europe. They were Mathias and Joseph. The former died in Lisbon, and the latter became famous as "Joseph the Indian." He was the same Joseph who had gone with two others in 1490 to the Patriarch of Babylon to be ordained for the Indian Church. To him is ascribed a number of statements about the Indian Church, both factual and fictitious.

On April 1 1502 Vasco da Gama set sail from Lisbon on his second visit to Kerala. This time he came with considerable military might, determined to drive away the Turks from their position of strength in the Arabian Sea, and even to bring the Samuthiri of Calicut to his knees. Both programmes he carried out with great ferocity and extreme cruelty. Impressed by this barbarous feat and definitely with a view to strengthening itself against Calicut. Cochin now entered into a formal alliance with the Portuguese. This was the occasion for the representatives of the Kerala Christians to meet Gama. Along with various presents, they handed over to him "the rod of justice", which they had in their possession and submitted themselves to the protection of the Portuguese Crown. How much significance they attached to this submission is hard to make out.

When the Portuguese made their presence felt in India, the Church of Malabar was being looked after by Nestorian bishops from Babylon. Between 1490 and 1504 there came five bishops, two in 1490 and others in 1504. It was after the arrival of the second batch that the letter to the Patriarch, which we have noted already, was written.<sup>1</sup> After informing the addressee of their safe arrival, the letter speaks of the Portuguese being in the country and gives a brief description of the Indian Church. We need not go into details concerning these bishops.<sup>2</sup> In the beginning the relations between the Portuguese and the Indian Christians with their bishops were cordial, but things changed later.

### 3. Efforts to Subdue the Church

The friendship shown to the Indian Church by the Portuguese could not be lasting. In the matter of Church traditions and loyalties the two sides disagreed with each other. The Portuguese followed the Church traditions developed in Europe within the Latin cultural milieu, and acknowledged the jurisdiction of the Roman Pope over them. But the Indian Christians kept to the East Syrian Church traditions, and owed allegiance to the Nestorian Patriarch of Babylon.

This by itself should not have created problems in their relationship, if only both sides respected each other as brethren of the same faith. The Portuguese side was not willing to adopt this stand. From their point of view the Latin traditions which they followed were the only right positions for Christians all over the world to adopt, and the Church everywhere should be under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Pontiff of Rome. So, after establishing themselves firmly in the country, they began to work for the subjugation of the Indian Church.

Three steps that the Portuguese adopted to gain their end should be noted here. i. **To bring the Church of Malabar under the administrative control of the Portuguese.** In 1510 the Portuguese captured Goa and within a few years made it the administrative cen-

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1. For an English translation of the letter, see Ming. pp. 36-41.

2. These may be gathered from A. M. Mundadan: *History of Christianity in India*, pp. 283f.

tre of their eastern provinces. They succeeded in converting a large number of people of Goa and the coastal regions, whom they organized into a community, which adopted the Latin Church traditions. Then in 1534 Goa was made a diocese. They planned that the ancient Syrian Church as well as the new converts from the fishermen's community should together be under the administrative control of Goa. In 1558 the Portuguese further created Cochin into another diocese and arranged that it should function under the Goan control. In this way the Portuguese authorities, with the silent approval of Rome, went on ignoring the Church of Malabar's right to self-determination.

Among the several westerners who tried to convert the Church of Malabar to Roman Catholicism, the most important person in the beginning, was a Portuguese priest named Penteado. He had no respect for the Eastern tradition preserved by the Indian Church. In the letter written by him to the King of Portugal in 1516 he made the suggestion that the Christians of Malabar should be given some economic aid and thereby brought to accept the Latin life-style. On this occasion the Portuguese King wrote to Mar Jacob. But it did not have the expected result. On the contrary, the Metropolitan, who till then had been trying to get on smoothly with the Portuguese, was mentally alienated from them. In this difficult situation there were other Portuguese priests like Joa Caro who befriended the Metropolitan.

But Penteado did not stop. He made a special trip to Portugal, from where he came back with letters of authorization to have his plan worked out. On this occasion the King of Portugal demanded of the Metropolitan a report on his activities; in his helplessness he had to comply with the demand.

Another incident that happened at this time should be noted here. There were two bishops working in the Church at that time in Kerala. Mar Jacob, the senior of the two, had his residence at Cranganore. The junior bishop lived in Quilon. In the beginning he did not like the gentleness of the senior bishop. But as Roman Catholic historians testify, the junior bishop, realizing that life would not be smooth for him without yielding, made his submission. In any case about four decades after the Portuguese had come to India, men like Penteado

were able to convert a section of the Syrian Christians to a frame of mind which would not object to being absorbed by Roman Catholicism. Their cooperation was helpful to the Portuguese in later times.

*(ii) Clergy training institutions*

To Latinize the Church was the plan of the Portuguese. For that they needed clergy trained in the Latin rites. With this aim in mind Vincent de Logos, a Franciscan priest, started a seminary in 1541 at Cranganore.

The policy of those who designed the seminary was to teach Latin in place of Syriac which had been in use in the Church, and the Roman Catholic traditions instead of the Persian Nestorian traditions, with which the community had been conversant. Therefore, the young men trained there were not useful to the Church of Malabar. They served only the communities of the Latin tradition.

It took the Portuguese forty years to realise that the seminary at Cranganore did not serve the purpose for which it had been founded. When they understood it, they started a seminary at Vaipicottai in 1585 under the stewardship of the Jesuits. It was designed to serve the Church of Malabar and therefore Syriac was taught there as one of the subjects. By that time the extreme policy of Latinizing was given up by the authorities. But the Church refused to accept its services. Mar Abraham, the Persian bishop, did three things against it. I) He sent a circular to churches asking them not to send their children to that school. II) He forbade Syriac books being sold to the seminary for use as text books. III) He did not ordain the men who, having completed the course successfully, came out of it.

The effort of the Portuguese to subjugate the Church of Malabar in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by means of seminary education did not succeed.

*(iii) Eastern Bishops hindered from coming to India*

We have seen that there were two Syrian bishops in Kerala during the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. What happened to the junior of the two is not known. Mar Jacob, the senior, died in 1552 in a Franciscan monastery in Cochin in a pitiable condition. How the bishop who had his residence in Cranganore happened to be in Cochin is told by histo-

rians in this way.

There was a movement of the people which extended from Cranganore and Quilon to the interior. The movement came into being for three reasons. (1) The Portuguese adopted mixed marriages between their men and native Christians as a means to enhance their power in the country. The people who did not like this idea moved out of Cranganore and Quilon, where the Portuguese had established themselves. (2) A section of the Syrian Christians were opposed to the interference of the Portuguese in their Church matters, and they tried to be away from them. (3) The Syrian Christians were afraid that the immoral living of the Portuguese would corrupt the morals of their women.

For some time after the death of Mar Jacob, the Church of Malabar had no Eastern bishop. Taking that opportunity the Portuguese hoped that the Church could be brought within the Roman Catholic fold under the Latin tradition. Accordingly, they began to control Eastern bishops coming to India. But the Church of Malabar sent appeals for bishops to the Patriarch of Babylon. It must be in response to such requests that between 1555 and 1558 there came three bishops, Mar Joseph, Mar Elias, and Mar Abraham. These bishops could not come into Kerala, straight. They had to pass through Portuguese surveillance.

## Questions

- 1 How did the Portuguese establish their power in India?
- 2 In what ways did the Portuguese endeavour to bring the Church of Malabar into the Roman Catholic fold subject to their control?
- 3 What do we know of Mar Jacob?
- 4 How did the Syrian Christians leave their ancient centres, Cranganore and Quilon?

## LESSON 2

# THE PERSIAN CHURCH IN THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AND THE CHURCH OF MALABAR

□ Preliminary Remarks □ Division in the Persian Church □ Mar Abraham □ Archdeacon Geevarghese and the Church of Malabar

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

By the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there arose a division in the Church of Persia. A section of that Church joined the Roman Catholic Church. The other section continued its independent existence.

A knowledge of this division did not seem to have reached the Church of Malabar. There came bishops to Malabar from both these groups. But the Portuguese were not willing to entrust the responsibility of administering the Church to either of them. However, Mar Abraham succeeded in transcending the hindrances in his own way and came to Kerala. Supported by Rome, he guided the Church till 1597.

### 2. The Division in the Persian Church

Before Mar Jacob of the Church of Malabar died in 1552, the Nestorian Patriarch of the time Simon Bar Mama had breathed his last. Soon a section of the bishops of the Church consecrated the deceased Patriarch's nephew, Simon Bar Denha, as the next Patriarch.

The Church of Persia had adopted a tradition from the Middle Ages, unknown in other parts of the Church, according to which a nephew of the deceased Patriarch succeeded him. It was this custom that the Church of Malabar was maintaining in the appointment of the archdeacons and also of the bishops from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Whatever that may be, when Bar Denha was chosen by the bishops, there was a section of the bishops who were opposed to the election. They chose a monk named John Sulaqa to be the Patriarch. Behind the action of these bishops there was the influence of the



Franciscan missionaries who were working in those areas. John Sulaqa went to Rome and was made Patriarch by Pope Julius III in 1553. He returned to his country along with Bishop Ambrose Butigegue and a priest named Sahara whom Rome had nominated. But a little after their return, John Sulaqa was arrested by political authorities and was killed by someone in jail. The Church which supported Sulaqa was not disheartened; it chose Bishop Abdisho and raised him to the position of Patriarch. The new Patriarch, in order to strengthen himself, tried to bring the Church of Malabar under his control. He sent to Malabar bishops Mar Joseph and Mar Elias. They came to Malabar with Butigegue and Sahara.

These bishops came to India as prelates of the Roman Catholic Church, not as metrans of the Nestorian Church of Persia. But they were not permitted by the Goan authorities to proceed to Kerala and fulfil their episcopal functions. It should be remembered that the policy of the Portuguese was to Latinize the Church, and they were opposed to having a Syrian connection introduced at all. Patriarch Abdisho himself might not have known that Rome had entrusted the responsibility of looking after the Church of Malabar to the Portuguese. In any case the bishops whom he sent to India, in spite of the fact that they made a good impression of themselves on the Portuguese, were detained for eighteen months in Goa.

By that time another incident happened. Patriarch Simon Denha, who had not joined the Roman Catholic Church, sent a bishop to Malabar. He was able to get through the Portuguese surveillance and reach his destination. Now the Portuguese thought it advantageous to send Mar Joseph with Butigegue and Sahara to Malabar to confront the new bishop. Mar Elias who had come to India with Joseph had gone back to Mosul. Butigegue died soon after his arrival in Kerala. Joseph and Sahara succeeded in converting the Nestorian bishop to Roman Catholicism and in sending him back to his country.

This was how Mar Joseph happened to be the only bishop left in Kerala. When he saw the Syrian Christians, it was natural for him not to insist on the Latin ways of life but to take to the Syrian ways. In his view it was not necessary for him to give up the Syrian traditions in order to be a Catholic. But this point of view did not find favour with

the Portuguese, whose one aim was the Latinization of the Church. For this reason, they had Joseph taken away to Goa for examination. They found him guilty and sent him to Lisbon for action to be taken against him. The authorities there found him innocent and sent him back to India.

Meanwhile Simon Bar Denha sent another bishop named Mar Abraham. He reached Malabar and was gladly received by the Church. It was after a little while that Mar Joseph came with his credentials. Now there was a division among the people, some joining Mar Abraham and others Mar Joseph. On this occasion Joseph asked the Portuguese for help against Abraham, They seized Mar Abraham and sent him to Europe. But he escaped on the way and went straight to Patriarch Abdisho and later to the Roman Pope. From the latter he received all the orders over again and came back to India as a Roman Catholic bishop in 1658.

Again two Eastern bishops came to Malabar. They were both obedient to Rome. The suggestion to have the Church divided, and one part entrusted to one bishop and the other to the other, was given by Patriarch Abdisho with the approval of Rome. But the Portuguese did not accept it. On the other hand, they seized Joseph and sent him to Europe. There he was accorded great honours, and while about to be made a Cardinal by the Pope, he died in 1569.

### **3. Mar Abraham**

Mar Abraham arrived in Goa with the wholehearted support of the Roman Pope and Patriarch Abdisho. But the Portuguese authorities were not willing to send him to Kerala. He escaped from detention and reached the Church of Malabar, where he was accorded welcome.

Mar Abraham was a man of discretion. He was sent to India by the Nestorian Patriarch, but without the least compunction he joined the Roman Catholic Church. But when he came to India a second time, he realized that his Roman connection alone would not enable him to get control of the Church of Malabar. In order to obtain it, he saw that he needed the support of the Jesuits who were working in the country. Accordingly, he tried to win their favour and in 1577 he

built for them a house in Vaipicottai, which from 1585 they used as a seminary. The Goan authorities were no longer interested in proceeding against Mar Abraham. But they insisted that he should take part in the meetings of the Provincial Council held in Goa once every five years and carry out the decisions taken there.

Mar Abraham did not, however, attend the meetings of the Provincial Council. The Portuguese regarded this as a dereliction of duty on his part. But his friendship with the Jesuits helped him at first. He prepared a statement of the faith, with which no body was likely to find fault, and sent it to Rome. This enabled him to obtain the Pope's approval.

It was out of fear of the Portuguese that Mar Abraham did not attend the Provincial Council meetings. But in 1885 he received a special directive from Rome that he should go for the meeting that year; he was also assured of safe-conduct. Accordingly he went for the meeting. The subject discussed there had reference to the Church of Malabar. It was pointed out at that meeting that the Church had to undergo various reforms including changes in the liturgy. The meeting nominated Francis Ros, a teacher at the Vaipicottai seminary, and entrusted him with the work of bringing about reforms and changes.

Mar Abraham had no intention of working out any reform in the Church. Because of this he earned the displeasure of the Portuguese. In addition, in 1590 when the students of the Vaipicottai seminary were ready to be ordained Priests, he did not oblige them. Further, he turned down the invitation to the meeting of the Provincial Council which was to be held that year. For these reasons many complaints against him were sent from Goa to Rome.

At this time a young and energetic man, thirtyfive years old, Alexis de Menezes, was appointed Archbishop of Goa. Rome had entrusted him with the responsibility of looking into the conduct of Mar Abraham and of taming him, if found guilty. The new archbishop, who was eager to impose the claims of the Roman Catholic Church on the Church of Malabar and subject it to the Portuguese administrative set-up, ably worked out his plan of action. The Roman Catholic historians have, in fairly recent times, begun to deplore the way in which

Menezes conducted the Synod of Udayamperur and took other actions in connection with it, without blaming Rome. In trying to save Rome from the embarrassment of a crime perpetrated by the Portuguese against the Church of Malabar, these historians deserve credit. But other Church traditions make it difficult for us to admit it as a fact.

The Portuguese authorities could not bring Mar Abraham to trial or take any action against him. The reason was that he was living in Angamaly, not within easy reach of their authority. The importance of Cranganore where the Portuguese could exercise their authority had gone and Mar Abraham had no connection with that place. There are historians who maintain that in 1595 when he was indisposed, Mar Abraham made up with the Jesuits and was reconciled to Rome. But in 1597 when he left this world, he had no contact with them. He was the last bishop of the undivided Church of Malabar. Mar Abraham was a Nestorian bishop, who tried ably to meet all Roman Catholic efforts to bring to its knees the Church of Malabar, which was maintaining its Eastern character. He lived in the midst of trying problems, but without joining in heart and mind either the Roman Catholic Church or the Portuguese, he loved his Church. The political atmosphere of the time did not permit a continuation of his work.

The authorities of the Roman Catholic Church were looking forward, as it were, to the disappearance of Mar Abraham so that they could subjugate the Church of Malabar completely. In 1597 an order came from Rome to Goa to appoint archdeacon Geevarghese as the Vicar of the Church after the death of Mar Abraham. This bull was later changed, and it was enjoined that anybody who was competent enough should be given the position. But without looking into what Rome would do, Mar Abraham had appointed the archdeacon as the Vicar of the Church of Malabar. In addition he sent an application to the Patriarch of Babylon for bishops. Realizing these facts, the Portuguese alerted the port authorities not to let bishops from Persia to land in India. They were assured that through them the Church of Rome would soon have an ultimate success over the Church of Malabar.

#### 4. Archdeacon Geevarghese and the Church of Malabar

Archdeacon Geevarghese helped Mar Abraham in the administration of the Church. The archdeacon was a person, chosen from the family of Pakalomattam, who used to co-operate with the bishop coming from Persia, and managed Church matters. We have evidence that an office like this existed in Persia. In his *Archdeacon of All India* Dr. Jacob Kollaparambil deals with the subject very ably. By means of its connection with the Church of Persia, the Church of India came to have this office (Even though the archdeacon is there in other Churches, he does not have the same administrative responsibilities). He was, to be sure, the person who helped the bishop in maintaining cordial relations with the people, in appointing or removing priests in parishes, and in managing matters concerning churches. A system like this was in vogue in Ethiopia till the time the Church there became autonomous. An Abuna (bishop) used to come to that Church from Egypt from time to time and offer episcopal services, and a local administrator called *Itchege* was managing all matters pertaining to Church government. A custom of this kind was followed in the Church of Malabar.

Mar Abraham was assisted by the archdeacon in the administration of the Church. But the Portuguese were interested in the Church taking up the matter of reform in consultation with Francis Ros of the Vaippicottai seminary. This Ros was a Jesuit, who deserves our attention. As a teacher at the seminary he knew, in addition to European languages, Syriac and Malayalam. He had written a book entitled, *The Errors of Nestorianism*. In it he raised the criticism that the Church of Malabar and Mar Abraham were indeed Nestorians. After the Synod of Udayamperur Ros took particular care to wipe out that “heresy” from the Church.

At the same time, Mar Abraham had to face opposition from the Nestorian Patriarch of Persia. Annoyed with him, he sent bishop Mar Simon to Kerala. This bishop could get the support of a section of the people in the Church as well as of the Franciscan missionaries. The fact that the missionaries of the various societies in the Roman Catholic Church were not on good terms with each other is a matter to be

remembered in this context. The Portuguese captured Mar Simon and sent him first to Rome and then to Lisbon. But before leaving India, he appointed a priest as Vicar-General in order to carry on the conflict with Mar Abraham and the Portuguese. But as that priest died in 1596 and Simon in 1599 in Lisbon, the effort did not have any impact.

### Questions

- 1 How was it that there arose a division in the Church of Persia in 1551? What happened to the Church of Malabar in consequence of that division?
- 2 Who were the Persian bishops who came to Kerala in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century?
- 3 What was the reason why the Portuguese authorities, who were Roman Catholics, did not receive bishops from Persia, who were Roman Catholics themselves?
- 4 What do we know of Bishop Mar Abraham?

## LESSON 3

# THE INDIAN CHURCH FORMED BY WESTERN MISSIONARY LABOURS

Preliminary Remarks  Franciscan Monks  The Jesuits  Francis Xavier  Robert de Nobili  The Work Done in Other Parts of India

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

The work which the Western missionaries did in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries was different from that which the Portuguese carried out in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Portuguese had brought missionaries in large numbers who engaged themselves in propagating the faith and establishing the Church.

The missionary activities of the Portuguese were carried on with the active help of their administrative set-up. These activities proceeded along four lines: (i) activities in areas where the Portuguese had direct control; (ii) the work done among the fisher folk; (iii) the labour taken up in the interior; (iv) the growth of the Church due to Christians moving out from areas where they were living.

## **2. The Franciscan Monks**

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries five societies of the Roman Catholic Church took an active part in the work. The earliest to enter the field were the Franciscans. In 1500 these came to Cochin many Franciscan missionaries with the Portuguese admiral Cabral. Then consequent upon the coming of Goa under the Portuguese control in 1510, the society established its centre there. In 1542 there came the Jesuits and in 1548 the Dominicans. The Augustinians, the Carmelites, and the Theatines came in 1572, 1612 and 1640 respectively. All of them established their centres in Goa.

It was in Cochin that the Portuguese established themselves to begin with, and started propagating the faith. They established a fort with the permission of the King of Cochin. After that they built forts in Cranganore and Quilon, the two centres of Syrian Christians. From 1505 the Portuguese were successful in gaining much ground in India. Conquering Goa and the islands surrounding it, they converted the people of the area to the Christian faith.

The fort in Cranganore a centre of Syrian Christians, was chosen by the Portuguese in order to strengthen their contact with the native Christians and also to carry out their evangelistic work. In establishing a seminary in Cranganore in 1541 this idea was there foremost in their minds. The Franciscans started it. Though the experiment did not serve the Church of Malabar, it was of use to the Church of the Latin tradition. This seminary continued to function even after the institution at Vaippicottai was begun by the Jesuits in 1577. But a majority of the Syrian Christians had, for the reasons already stated, left Cranganore and established themselves inland. However, Cranganore and Cochin continued to be under the control of the Portuguese. This resulted in the Franciscans holding sway there.

Quilon had a Portuguese fort. The Franciscans carried on evangelistic work under the protection of the Portuguese there. From Quilon also the Syrian Christians had gone inland. But as a result of the work done by the Franciscan missionaries between 1535 and 1537 a large section of the fisher folk were converted in the coastal area extending from Quilon to Cape Comorin. Then in 1544 the rest of them were brought to the faith by Francis Xavier; after this the Jesuits entered the field and continued the work. They established churches and chapels for the people of the area. The Franciscans also were carrying on their missionary activities there. So, in order to have their relations smooth, the Viceroy of Goa divided the areas to the south of Quilon from the north, and gave the southern portion to the Jesuits and the northern portion to the Franciscans. Subsequently, the Franciscans built churches and other institutions for those people.

### **3. The Jesuits**

The Society of Jesus was founded in 1540 with the official permission of the Pope. In 1541 Pope Paul III appointed Francis Xavier as a member of that society, and also as his delegate in India and Eastern Provinces. He arrived in Goa in 1542, and it was then that the missionary work of the Jesuits began.

The Portuguese established business settlements at Mylapore and Nagapatnam. While making forts in those places, they were also engaged in propagating the faith. In this labour four societies, namely those of the Augustinians, the Dominicans, the Franciscans, and the Jesuits, co-operated. Each one of them formed parishes under its control. Of the many places they organized in this way Velanganny was one. It was a chapel in the beginning for the Christians of the fishing class to worship. But it developed into a church of St. Mary and became famous as a pilgrim centre.

Mylapore grew into a diocese in 1606 bearing the name of St. Thomas the Apostle. In 1639 the English built the Fort of St. George at Madras. After that Madras became much more famous than Mylapore. The Capuchin Society founded a house there in 1642. This was how Mylapore developed into a Christian centre, though it did not grow like Velanganny.



In coastal Karnataka the Portuguese built forts in a number of places and tried to strengthen themselves there. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Arabs and other marauders were going on with their piracy, these forts gave protection to the people. In 1558 the Portuguese captured Mangalore and built churches in its neighbourhood to carry on evangelistic work. But the victory they gained was shortlived. Between 1563 and 1567 Nayak of Ikkeri seized all the forts and drove out all the foreigners. As a result, there was not a single priest in 1568 in the land of Canara.

The Portuguese had extended their activities upto the Indus Valley. But it was not easy for them to hold out. In many places they had to meet with stiff opposition. Consequently, the Church did not grow in those areas.

#### **4. Francis Xavier**

Two individuals who made the work of the Jesuits in India really effective are Francis Xavier and Robert de Nobili. Xavier came to India in May 1542 and maintained cordial relations with the people of the country till 1553.

Francis was born in Nevara in France, and lived eleven years in Paris with Ignatius Loyolla, the founder of the Society of Jesus. Xavier became a member of the society from its beginning. He was not a Portuguese national; he came to India in his thirtysecond year after the Portuguese had established their political authority. After the Society was founded, its President suggested to the Pope to appoint Simon Rodrigues, who was a Portuguese national, and Francis Xavier, to take up evangelistic work in India and other eastern lands. Of the two men, Rodrigues continued to live in Portugal; there he established a College at Coimbara, where missionaries were trained. Xavier set out for India.

After reaching Goa, Francis made the acquaintance of Master Dioge, who had founded St. Paul's College. As a result, he had to take over charge of the institution for a time, though unwillingly. He then came to Kerala in 1544; it was there that he was expected to work. It was among the fisher men in the coastal areas of Travancore

that he laboured. A large section of those people had already become Christians as a result of the work of the Franciscan missionaries.

From among the fisher men who had not already become Christians, he was able to convert more than ten thousand within a month. Baptizing them, he made them members of the Church. He confirmed them in the Latin tradition.

After finishing his work on the Malabar coast, he visited Naga-patnam and Mylapore. He offered prayers at the place where St. Thomas is believed to have been buried, and proceeded to Malacca where he took up evangelistic work for a time. He then returned to India in 1548. On this occasion he passed through Cochin, Bassein, Goa, and other coastal areas, spending a few months in each of them. From 1549 to 1551 he was in Japan, where also he preached the faith. He came back to India in 1552 and went to Europe in the same year.

That year India was declared to be the foreign Province of the Society of Jesus, and Xavier was appointed as its first President. In all these ways he was able to serve the cause of the Church's mission in a very praise worthy manner. He met his death, without having fulfilled his desire to visit China.

Xavier was not only an illustrious missionary leader, but an educationist as well. He loved the poor and tried to improve their lot through education. There are people who criticize the style of his missionary activities. Their criticisms may be valid. But the Church of Rome respects him very deeply. The other Church traditions also pay him great honour. In the Catholic Church there are pilgrim centres bearing his name in Goa and Cothar, and the Churches in many places are dedicated to him. Schools and Colleges and other institutions bearing his name carry on their activities in many parts.

During the time of Xavier a number of persons belonging to the Jesuit order came to India. As the Provincial of the society, it was he who chose them. Thus in many and varied ways Xavier worked for the propagation of the Christian faith.

## 5. Robert de Nobili

The religious worker who cares to propagate his faith in India should be willing to identify himself with India. The person who for the first time emphasized this idea and tried to carry on work accordingly was Robert de Nobili. An Italian, de Nobili joined the society of Jesus and came out to India in 1606 to work as a missionary.

The place he chose was Madurai. Soon after coming to India, he realized three things: (i) Christianity had not taken roots in India properly. It spread to some extent only among the lower strata of society. The higher classes it had not even touched, (ii) The reason for this state of affairs is that the people of India look upon Christianity as something foreign. Western missionaries are subject to their language, dress, culture, and so on. Unless they undergo a change in these factors, they cannot propagate the faith (iii) Hindu society is based on castes. In order to communicate the faith we have to accept the caste in the Church also to some extent.

The four castes of Hinduism are: *Brahmana*, *Kshatria*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra*. Of these castes, *Brahmanas* are priests and *Kshatrias* are royal people. De Nobili claimed that he belonged to the royal lineage in Europe. On this ground he made himself ready to live as a *Kshatria*. He separated himself from other missionaries, and chose for himself a simple abode and began to live there. He put on the dress of a *Kshatria* wore sacred thread and spotted a kudumbi, and tried to mingle with high caste Hindus. The King of Thanur who was eager to maintain good relations with Christians, permitted him to live as a Hindu and at the same time keep a cross inside his royal insignia.

In his eagerness to be identified with India De Nobili learned Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu, and tried to obtain a deep grounding in the culture and thought patterns of India. In this way he endeavoured to bring to bear Christian truths on Hindu spirituality, and made it possible for the people of India to understand Christian ideas better.

Many people at that time questioned the legitimacy of De Nobili's method of evangelism. There were men in Goa who criticized it drastically. But the Provincial of the Society of Jesus saw it as a worth-

while engagement. The Archbishop of Cranganore, Francis Ros, who had authority over Madurai, supported him. In this situation, though there was ideological exchange in Goa, the leaders there left the matter for Rome to decide. The matter was not decided there either. In the end, in 1623 Pope Gregory V recognized De Nobili's way conditionally. Thus it secured a victory.

The Madurai mission which De Nobili started spread to Trichinopally, Dindigul, Tanjore, and so on. As a result of its work, 11,198 conversions took place.

## **6. The Work Done in Other Parts of India**

The work which the Portuguese carried out among the Muslims in North India is very interesting. That was a time when the Moghul rulers were holding sway over Northern India. The most important of these kings was Akbar. He cannot be said to be a good Muslim. To form a religion made out of the best principles of all religions was his fond hope. In order to achieve this goal he was interested in studying the various religions of the world. So during the time of his reign (1556-1605) he brought to his palace Christian missionaries and talked with them.

In 1578 Akbar invited Julian Pereira, a Roman Catholic priest, for this purpose to his palace at Fatehpur Sikri. But that priest, who did not feel competent to deal with theological matters, declined, and suggested instead Jesuit scholars from Goa. Accordingly in 1579 three Jesuits under the leadership of Rudolf Aquaviva came for discussion with Akbar. They held discussions for three years and went back disappointed. The effort was carried on twice later also, nor then did Akbar yield his ground. But Christian churches were built in places like Agra, Delhi, Lahore, Patna, and so on. When Shah Jahan succeeded Akbar, he ordered these churches to be closed, and they remained in an inoperative state till 1641.

During the time when the Portuguese were in power, the propagation of the faith was carried on in Bengal. The Dominicans, Franciscans, and Jesuits were engaged in missionary work, where the Portuguese had their forts. The Augustinians were involved in the labour more than others. They built two houses for missionaries in

Hooghly. In 1625 there were 14,000 Christians in Bengal. Even though Shah Jahan tried to curtail this missionary advance, he withdrew his objection in 1641.

To sum up. It was from Goa that the Portuguese controlled their missionary activities during the period they were in power. By the year 1552 their power reached its zenith. In 1510 they conquered Goa and in 1530 it was made their capital. In 1534 they raised Goa as a diocesan centre and in 1558 it was made the provincial headquarters. Their plan was to bring the ancient Church of Malabar under Goa. It was with this scheme that they tried to work in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### Questions

- 1 In what ways did the Portuguese build up Goa? How did it affect the Church of Malabar?
- 2 What do we know of the missionary work undertaken in the coastal areas of South India?
- 3 What do we know of Francis Xavier and Robert de Nobili?
- 4 What were the areas where Christianity spread, subject to Portuguese protection and Latin tradition?

## LESSON 4

### THE SYNOD OF UDAYAMPERUR

Preliminary Remarks  About the Synod  Before the Synod  In the Synod  After the Synod

#### 1. Preliminary Remarks

The Synod of Udayamperur is the culminating point in the process of making the Church of Malabar part of the Roman Catholic Church, subject to Portuguese administrative control. Mar Abraham, as we have seen, died in January 1597. Before he breathed his last, he had entrusted the administration of the Church to Archdeacon Geevarghese.

This Geevarghese was not the archdeacon who had served the Church with Mar Abraham for a long time. That was George of Christ, as the Roman Catholic historians used to refer to him. He had died in 1585 according to some and in 1591 according to others. In any case, that he died before 1597 is clear. This archdeacon Geevarghese was a man of reputable character, well-spoken of by everyone. There was a proposal that he should be made a bishop, but he turned that down.

After his death, his brother John was given the post. He also died shortly thereafter. Another Geevarghese was now installed as the archdeacon. He is George of the Cross of the Roman Catholic historians, who had the misfortune to face the Synod of Udayamperur.

## 2. About the Synod

There are three standpoints adopted by historians about the Synod: (a) **Justifying it as a whole.** After the Synod, a European writer Antonio de Gauvea brought out a book under the caption *Jornado*. That was intended to justify the Synod and to praise Archbishop Manezis for holding it. The position adopted in that book was an expression of total admiration for what was achieved. Till very recently the Roman Catholic historians as a whole used to adopt that standpoint regarding the Synod.

(b) **Critical, but arguing that it proved beneficial to the Church of Malabar.** This is the standpoint adopted by the Roman Catholic historians in recent times. Their argument can be summarized thus: (i) There was hardly, anyone in the Church of Malabar who had any objection to admitting the supremacy of the Pope of Rome. All the bishops who guided the Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century had acknowledged this fact. They opposed only the unauthorized Portuguese endeavour to bring the Church under Goan administration, (ii) The Portuguese activities in this regard were not done with the permission of Rome, (iii) The reforms which the Synod carried out in worship, faith and discipline, were necessary for the Church at that time. The Church had begun to work out many of them under the leadership of the Eastern bishops. In that situation there was no need for the Synod of Udayamperur to be held, ignoring the history of the Church and violating its conscience, (iv) In any case, the Synod has

not been formally approved by Rome. Therefore, the way is still left open for the Church to unite, in the way the Church existed before the Synod, but accepting necessary reforms.

**(c) Rejecting the Synod:** The Church traditions that have not joined the Roman Catholic Church maintain in general this standpoint. (i) That there was no one in the Church of Malabar who would not object to the supremacy of the Pope is not the truth of the matter. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was in a state of ignorance (of Church history and theology) that the Church of Malabar existed. The Portuguese were putting in all their efforts to subjugate a Church of that description by using all the means at their disposal. In that century except for Mar Joseph there was no bishop who automatically would accept Rome's supremacy. No statement by them, which they might have given under duress can be taken as reflecting their real standpoint. Mar Abraham, for instance, wrote against Nestorius after he joined the Roman Catholic Church and praised Rome.<sup>1</sup> But he did avoid contact with that Church before he died in 1597. (ii) It is to be admitted that there was a section of people in the Church who would have joined Rome. At the same time, there was a considerable section of people in the Church who would resist the move. (iii) The Roman Catholic authors assume Rome's supremacy as basic to Church membership. But the Churches of the East, which have a history older than that of Rome, and the Churches of the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Catholic Church, have not accepted this argument; so that we too cannot accept it. (iv) There is no doubt that a Church cut off from the rest of Christendom stood, in need of reform in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. On that ground it is not necessary to plead that the Synod of Udayamperur was the only solution to the problem. (v) The argument that Rome, which is reaping the benefit of the Synod of Udayamperur, had no responsibility regarding its conduct is very weak.

### 3. Before the Synod

As we have seen, Rome approved the appointment of Alexis de Manezes, as the Archbishop of Goa in 1595; he had the confidence

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1. *The Syriac Manuscripts of St. Thomas Christians*, J. P. M Van der Plog, pp. 13 - 14.

of the Portuguese too. Complaints portraying Mar Abraham as a heretic and as a person opposed to the Catholic Church had reached Rome. The bull dated 27 January, 1595 by Clement VIII authorizing the archbishop to examine the metropolitan and bring him to book, if found guilty, was received by Menezes soon after he reached Goa. He, however, without taking any immediate action, collected information concerning Mar Abraham from the missionaries. It might be because the metropolitan was old and his end fast approaching that he acted cautiously. In January Menezes received another letter from Rome. In that Menezes was authorized to appoint a Vicar General for Angamali, in case Mar Abraham met his death. Before this letter reached Goa, Abraham died.

Now without any delay Menezes took action. He nominated Francis Ros for the post. It is not known whether the fact that Mar Abraham had appointed the archdeacon to be in charge of the Church had come to the attention of Rome or Goa. In any case, Menezes, in accordance with the counsel of others, unwillingly appointed none other than the archdeacon himself to the post. But he insisted that the archdeacon should take the oath that he would keep the faith, before the rector of Vaippicottai Seminary. After giving the assurance that the oath would be taken four months later, he took over the responsibility. A meeting of the Church at Angamali supported him.

The aim of Menezes was to bring the Church of Malabar under the control of Goa. In December 1597 he wrote a letter to a friend explaining what he intended to do in the Church of Malabar. He said that he proposed (i) to visit all the churches of Malabar, (ii) to remove from them all schisms and heresies, (iii) to teach the people the Catholic faith, (iv) to destroy all books which contain heretical teaching, and (v) to hold a synod of all priests.

So Menezes decided to visit Malabar. Though he wanted to leave Goa in April 1598, he was able to accomplish his plan only in December of that year. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 1599 he reached Cochin. While he was staying at the Vaippicottai Seminary, he attended the Eucharistic service of the Syrian Christians. In that service it was the Patriarch of Babylon that was commemorated. Historians note that this enraged the archbishop. The Roman Catholic historians make out that it



was the Patriarch in the succession of the one who had joined Rome in 1551 that was thus commemorated and that the anger of Menezes was pointless. The uniatism in Western Asia was not taken seriously by Menezes.

Menezes made all preparation for holding a synod. In order to prevent any opposition from the King of Cochin, he won the King and his officers over to his side. Menezes had realized that the Syrian Christians had a special regard for the bishop who ordained them. So he ordained priests in large numbers in order to have a large following. During the Holy Week of that year he had the services, particularly of Good Friday, held at the Church of Kaduthuruthy to the accompaniment of the choir of Cochin. In his dealings with people in general he showed a great deal of affection and courtesy; thus he won their hearts. Using such tactics he was able to strengthen his position and bring the archdeacon to his knees. After having accomplished all these niceties, he went into the fort of the Portuguese, and wrote down the decrees which he wanted to get approved by the Synod.

#### **4. In the Synod**

The Synod of Udayamperur was held for eight days under the presidentship of Archbishop Menezes. It began on 20<sup>th</sup> June which was the third Sunday after Whitsunday. Apart from some theologians there were four Jesuit teachers of the Vaippicottai Seminary to help him. These four teachers were guided by Francis Ros. The synod had from among the members of the Church of Malabar 153 priests and 600 laymen. What was the criterion on which these delegates were chosen is not known.

The synod had nine sittings, in which it claims to have adopted 200 decrees. How they were approved is noted by Ros in his writings. He says: (i) Most of the decrees were written earlier by Menezes. They were all read in a hurry and passed without any discussion on them. No change was made in what had been written already. (ii) The decrees were read to the assembly, but the people did not understand them, nor did they express any opinion on them. (iii) The delegates signed the decrees because Ros and others pressed them to do so.

(iv) Some of the decrees which are said to have been approved by the synod were written only after the synod was over.

The synodal decrees cannot be discussed here in detail. Five of them may be touched upon very briefly. (i) **On the faith:** Subjects such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Mother of God, the Original Sin, Intermediate State, Invocation of the Saints, Adoration of Pictures, the Church and Its Organization, the Books of the Bible are treated, in agreement with the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, following the example of the Synod of Trent. (ii) **The Supreme Head of the Church is the Pope of Rome:** The Patriarch of Babylon is a heretic and a schismatic. He should therefore be renounced. (iii) **The list of saints** which was in vogue in Malabar contained the names of Nestorius and others; the decree strikes off these names from the list. (iv) **The priests should keep celibacy** as a necessary vow. They should not be engaged in worldly affairs. (v) **The Church of Malabar should be divided into parishes.** Each parish should have its vicars and assistant vicars. Besides the Church is required to abandon the many errors which have crept into its life from the Indian milieu.

## 5. After the Synod

Menezes lived in Malabar for a period of four months following the synod, visiting churches and making people accept the synodal decrees. There is a tradition that in certain Churches like Arthat Kunnankulam he was not welcomed. But in most other churches he had easy access and was received cordially.

He himself made his confession before the people and set an example. He baptized children celebrated the Eucharist, and conducted marriages. Besides, he gave the Church of Malabar consecrated oil and the prayer book, which was a translation into Syriac of the Latin form.

Wherever he went he had the books brought to him for inspection. These were either corrected by the priests like Ros who were with him, or if correction was found to be impossible they were all burnt. In this way Menezes was able to make a new beginning for the Church of Malabar.

Before leaving Kerala, Menezes appointed the Archdeacon as the Governor of the Church. In order to help him in the fulfilment of his duties he nominated Francis Ros and Stephen Britto, and ordered that without them, he should not do anything important.

The Archdeacon wrote a letter to the Pope, in which he praised the Archbishop and the Synod. He requested that Menezes himself or Ros should be made the prelate of the Church of Malabar. That letter was written in Latin; the archdeacon was not conversant with the language; therefore, the letter in all probability could have been written by somebody else in the archdeacon's name. It is difficult to say how much of its contents the archdeacon had approved.

### **Questions**

- 1 Evaluate the three points of view regarding the Synod of Udayamperur.
- 2 How did Menezes score his victory through the Synod of Udayamperur?
- 3 From the decrees of the synod, what can we say about the state of the Church of Malabar?
- 4 What did Menezes achieve through the Synod Udayamperur?

## LESSON 5

# THE CHURCH ADMINISTRATION OF THE JESUITS

□ Preliminary Remarks □ Francis Ros □ Stephen Britto □ Francis Garcia

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

The Church of Malabar, which through the Synod of Udayamperur came under the Portuguese administrative control was ruled by the Jesuits from 1599 to 1653. This responsibility was fulfilled by three men, who know only to rule the Church autocratically; they did not know the traditions of the Church, and therefore failed to keep its unity. The implication of the Udayamperur decrees had not been fully understood. The archdeacon could have helped the bishops to carry on their leadership effectively. But none of the bishops could get his co-operation whole heartedly. The non co-operation of the archdeacon reached its climax at the time of Garcia. All this constituted the basis of the 1653 revolt.

### 2. Francis Ros

That Menezes appointed the archdeacon as the Governor of the Church was only a temporary measure. After Menezes returned to Goa on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1599. Rome appointed Francis Ros the Bishop of Angamaly. The condition was that Angamaly should remain under Goa. More than that, in August 1600 Rome enjoined on the Church of Malabar that it should function subject to the King of Portugal. It was very thoughtful that Ros who knew the language and the life-style of the people of Kerala was appointed to hold this post. In any case Menezes gave it his whole-hearted support.

But the appointment did not meet with the approval of the Syrian Christians of Kerala. The reason was the condition behind the appointment which insisted on subjection to the King of Portugal. Realizing this fact, Ros used the opportunity well enough to enhance his prestige. Along with the archdeacon he appealed to Rome that Angamaly's importance should be guaranteed. Pope Paul V granted

the request by the bull of 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1608. This gave rise to the position that the Church of Malabar was not under Goa.

Another step which Ros took was to shift his residence from Angamaly to Cranganore. Being the ancient centre of the Christians, Cranganore had a charm of its own, but for Ros the main consideration was safety. Angamaly was situated at some distance from Cochin, which was the administrative centre of the Portugueses and was ruled over by a Hindu Raja. In Ros's view Angamaly was not a safe enough place. Whether this change of residence created any ill-feeling among Christians is not known. But the Latin bishop of Cochin was not reconciled to it for a long time. He had his residence in Cochin since the inception of the bishopric in 1558. To have the seat of another bishop near Cochin, (i.e. at Cranganore), especially when he had no special relations with him, was not agreeable to the Bishop of Cochin.

Three things that happened during the episcopate of Roe deserve our attention:

(i) **The action which he took concerning the decrees of Udayamperur.** Ros called together a Synod of the Church of Malabar. About 300 priests and a larger number of laymen attended it. The meeting lasted several days and took up the decrees of Udayamperur for a re-consideration; this was because Ros did not think that the decrees were satisfactory. However, the attempt made at the meeting did not bear fruit. Accordingly, in 1606 Ros himself published a book containing precepts necessary for the Church of Malabar. (ii) **Work done in parishes:** In 1603 Ros with a few missionaries visited a number of parishes. In all of them, they taught the people the faith of the Church and helped them grow up in life as Christians. They took special care to give children education in religion. One of the programmes they adopted was to propagate confession and reception of Communion among the members of the Church. This kind of service Ros conducted later from 1615 to 1618 also; that was the period when Ros was not on friendly terms with the archdeacon. Apart from the above, few priests belonging to the Society of Jesus used to visit parishes and encourage people to live in the light of the

faith. (iii) **Relation with the Archdeacon:** From 1599 to 1624, when Ros was in charge of the Church, the Relation between him and the archdeacon was not cordial. Their differences came to light at first in 1605 and continued till 1615. In 1609 there was an occasion when Geevarghese opposed the archbishop openly. Ros excommunicated the archdeacon. Without yielding to the bishop, Geevarghese left the Society of Jesuits and tried to be friendly with the Franciscans.

There was a reason for this breach in the relations between the archdeacon and the archbishop. Ros before he was made bishop, used to praise the character and the ability of Geevarghese, and even expressed the opinion that, after the first bishop of the Church of Malabar, he should be made to succeed him. However, after he became bishop, he not only forgot what he had said earlier, but adopted a policy of not letting him exercise his rights as the archdeacon. Being angry at this behaviour of Ros, Geevarghese tried to obtain the friendship of the Franciscans, and through them, to get his hope fulfilled. But he was disappointed in this calculation, and was reconciled with Ros on Easter day in 1615.

When the archbishop and the archdeacon were not friendly with each other, a section of the community was with the latter; this affected the unity of the community. Also the archbishop and the archdeacon were not well disposed to each other from 1618 to the time of the archbishop's death. In December of that year, Ros had to go to Goa. On such occasions it was customary for the archbishop to ask the archdeacon to look after the affairs of the Church, but that was not what Ros did on this particular occasion; instead he requested the rector of the Vaippicottai Seminary to do that. This Geevarghese did not like.

Ros died in February 1624. Before he left this world, he had written on a piece of paper that the archdeacon should, according to custom, manage the affairs of the Church till a successor was appointed.

### **3. Stephen Britto**

The successor of Francis Ros was Stephen Britto, who received his orders on 29 September 1624, and took over charge of the Church

on 20<sup>th</sup> November of that year.

Britto was a man, well acquainted with the Church. He carried on his affairs with the definite intention of maintaining hearty relations with the archdeacon. In all important matters he took decisions only after consulting the archdeacon. The friendship between them was such that it annoyed the Archbishop's fellow Jesuits and made them remark, "not so far."

Yet even between them there were occasions when certain frictions marred their relations. The important reason for this state of affairs was that Geevarghese did not trust foreigners, but tried to be self-reliant. In order to achieve this goal, what he did was to try to organize a monastic order called "The Society of St. Thomas" with Edapally as the centre. This was a project which no one was likely to misrepresent, and which Britto and the Jesuits encouraged in the beginning. But later Britto came to realize that the Society could very well prove to be an institution, which would turn against the archbishop, and began to discourage it. He insisted that his permission was required for membership in the Society. On this occasion the archdeacon tried to alienate the Jesuits and to befriend other societies, in order to obtain Rome's approval of his Society. When Britto came to know of this plan of the archdeacon, he was furious.

However, since Britto was a peace-loving person, he did not harbour ill-will for a long time. Till his death on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1640 he was friendly with the archdeacon. Britto appointed Parambil Thomas, the nephew of Geevarghese, as his successor. He could have avoided making this appointment. There are historians who maintain that he did this in order to get the support of the Pakalomattam family. Whatever that may be, the fact that Britto kept up his friendship with the archdeacon deserves notice.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1641 Stephen Britto died.

#### **4. Francis Garcia**

Garcia was nominated while Britto was alive to succeed the latter. Accordingly, soon after the death of Britto, Garcia took over charge of the Church. Eleven years after his assuming responsibility came

the Oath of the Coonen Cross.

All these years Garcia and Thomas did not see eye to eye with each other. The reason was that Garcia was determined to rule the Church without seeking the co-operation of Thomas, and Thomas had equally made up his mind not to give up the rights which he traditionally had.

In the face of the fact that the archbishop was not willing to respect tradition, the archdeacon, supported by the Kings of Cochin and Vadakkumkur, was ready to cause him trouble. So, when the Portuguese Viceroy in India passed through Cochin, the archdeacon, accompanied by a large number of priests, met him and submitted his complaint. The Viceroy intervened in the matter, and Garcia agreed to certain conditions. Since the conditions were favourable to Garcia, no satisfactory reconciliation could be brought about.

The Dominicans and the Carmelites came forward to help Thomas. When Garcia heard of it, he was greatly offended. In spite of his feelings, the Carmelites took the appeal of Thomas to Rome. In addition, the archdeacon engaged three Carmelites, one in Lisbon, another in Rome, and a third in Goa, to argue his case for him. But Garcia had enough support in all these places and the archdeacon's efforts did not bear fruit. Thomas on his part did not keep silent; he appealed for help to the Patriarchs of Babylon, Antioch and Alexandria who were not in communion with Rome between 1648 and 1649. Did these letters reach their destinations?

Thomas was steeped in confusion, not knowing what to do. At last he decided on a course of action to make his revolt effective. He decided to join the "Society of St. Thomas" at Edapally, which his predecessor had founded and which Archbishop Britto had suspected would turn out to be against him. In order to safeguard his interests, Britto had enunciated that those who joined the society should have his permission to do so. According to this stipulation Thomas and those with him had to take Garcia's permission to become members of the Society. But Thomas and the men with him deliberately violated this rule, and Garcia took it as an offence. In January 1650 the archdeacon and his companions were tried and found guilty. In spite



of the injunction which the archbishop imposed on them, Thomas and the priests with him continued to live in Edappally and Angamaly, where they had taken over the churches; they also continued to hold services in these places.

In 1652 the Portuguese captain in Cochin tried in vain to bring about a reconciliation between them. It was a short period after this that in January 1653 the great rebellion broke out.

### Questions

- 1 What do we know of the Portuguese archbishops?
- 2 Why is it that they and the archdeacons were not on good terms with each other?
- 3 What were the reasons why Archbishop Garcia and Archdeacon Thomas fell out with each other?

## LESSON 6

# THE POLITICAL CONDITION OF KERALA IN THE 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, AND 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES

□ Preliminary Remarks □ The Way the Portuguese Befriended Cochin □ The Coming of the Dutch □ The Growth of Travancore □ South India Under Foreign Rule

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

Soon after the early centuries of the Christian area, Kerala came under the rule of the Perumals. From about the 10<sup>th</sup> century it lost its unity. The land continued to be disunited when the Portuguese came. Subsequently, till India became independent, Kerala and South India as a whole were under foreign rule.

### 2. The Way the Portuguese Befriended Cochin

In 1498, when Vasco da Gama landed in Calicut, Kerala was ruled

by a number of small Kings and Lords. Numbering about fifty, these rulers enjoyed perfect internal freedom, but acknowledged the supremacy of one of three Kings. These three in the beginning were the Samuthiri of Calicut, the Kolathiri of Kannanore and the Thiruvadi of Travancore. Cochin had not attained the status of these three Kings.

The Samuthiri of Calicut did not care to welcome the Portuguese and Vasco da Gama. But they were not disappointed thereby. They left the Samuthiri and approached the Kolathiri. After that, they came to Cochin. The King of Cochin, who was not on friendly terms with the Samuthiri, took advantage of the Portuguese offer of help to enhance his importance.

The Portuguese gained victory over the native Kings on account of the fact that the latter were not united. Beginning with Kerala, they brought under their control the whole of South India, and ruled the country for about a century and a half. This affected the Syrian Christians of Kerala seriously.

At the time, when the Portuguese came, a large part of the ancient Christians of Kerala were living either in the kingdom of Cochin or in the areas connected with it. With the disappearance of the Villiarvattam, they expected the Cochin kings to give them protection. The Portuguese were trying to change the ways of living of these native Christians by replacing them with the Latin traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. In the face of this reality, the King of Cochin had the moral responsibility to shield them from foreign incursions. But the King was receiving aid from the Portuguese against the Samuthiri, and would not antagonize the Portuguese in favour of the native Christians. The thought of uniting the fifty old small kingdoms and of meeting the challenge of the foreigners, and of safeguarding the freedom of Kerala, had not come to the mind of anybody at that time.

### **3. The Coming of the Dutch**

However much the Portuguese tried they could not hold on to India. They had to give way to the Dutch. Like the Portuguese the Dutch came to India for trade in 1604. They landed in Calicut. The Samuthiri, who was eager to see that the Portuguese were defeated

and wanted to teach the King of Cochin a lesson entered into an alliance with the Dutch. There was no immediate advantage derived from the alliance. But 54 years later, in 1658, the Dutch seized Ceylon and drove out the Portuguese from there. Then they got ready to conquer Kerala. In 1661 they captured Quilon, in 1662 Cranganore, and in 1663 Cochin and Kannanore. In this way all the institutions over which the Portuguese held sway came into the Dutch possession.

The Dutch came to realize that it was to their advantage that Calicut and Cochin became friendly. They tried to bring about a diplomatic reconciliation between them but in vain. The Samuthiri's alliance with the Dutch was not intended to help the latter blindly. So, when an opportunity came, the Samuthiri with co-operation of some of the native Kings defeated the Dutch and captured all their possessions in North Kerala. This victory of the Samuthiri and the advance of the British were against the interest of the Dutch. By 1775 the Dutch were about to leave Kerala.

#### **4. The Growth of Travancore**

The Dutch tried in vain not to let the British enter Kerala. The strategic role played by Travancore was the reason why the Dutch were defeated. The two Kings of Travancore in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Marthandavarma (1729 - 1758) and Karthika Thirunal Ramavarma (1758 - 1798), were responsible for Travancore's increasing importance in the region. Very able rulers, they strengthened the country. Since Travancore, had made a treaty with the British and had their support, the Dutch were not able to obtain possession of any institution in the land. Therefore, when they left Kerala, the Dutch had in their possession only the port of Cochin and Thankaserry, and they withdrew from all other places.

The great achievement of Marthandavarma consisted mainly in the formation of Travancore. He captured Quilon, Kottarakara, Kayamkulam, Ambalapuzha, Thekkumkur, Vadakkumkur, Meenachal and the small kingdoms lying to the North of Travancore, numbering about eleven, and annexed them all to Travancore. In 1741 he defeated the Dutch completely at the battle of Kolachal. In this way, after pre-

serving the honour of Travancore and broadening its borders, this great King signed a treaty with Cochin in 1757 and died in 1758.

The successor of Marthandavarma was his nephew Karthika Thirunal Ramavarma. This able young King led the country till 1798. Following his uncle's policies, Ramavarama administered the country very skilfully. He was a person who encouraged the development of arts and science. He took possession of Parur and Alangat, and conquered Shengottai and Kannyakumari. He renewed the treaty with Cochin. It was in his time that Tipu attacked, Kerala. Ramavarma beat them back by entering into an alliance with the British East India Company.

The treaty with the British was advantageous to Travancore in the circumstances in which the country then was. As a result of the treaty, Tipu was called away to Mysore, and Cochin and Thankaserry were released from the Dutch. This second point deserves mention here because the Dutch had become helpless after the defeat of Napoleon, who had been supported by Holland against the British.

## 5. South India Under Foreign Rule

In the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries most of South India was under Portuguese rule to begin with, and then under Dutch rule. The British came to Kerala in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and established themselves as a power in the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The foreign power which came to Kerala first was the Portuguese; they were Roman Catholics. Then came the Dutch who were Protestants. The Portuguese were carrying on trade, but were also propagating the faith. The Dutch, on the other hand, did not want to enter the field of evangelisation. They tried in principle to maintain religious neutrality. But between the Roman Catholic Church and the independent Syrian Church, the Dutch preferred the former and helped it. They ignored the latter, so much so that it was a neglected community so long as the Dutch were in power.

## Questions

- 1 In what ways did the Portuguese obtain political power in India?

- 2 How did they happen to leave India?
- 3 How did the Dutch capture South India?
- 4 In what way did they leave India?
- 5 Describe how Travancore succeeded in strengthening itself.

# UNIT 4

## MAR THOMA CHRISTIANS IN TWO CAMPS

### LESSON 1

## THE REBELLION OF 1653

□ Preliminary Remarks □ The Appearance of Ahatalla □ The Revolt of the People □ Mar Thoma I

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

Though the purpose which the Portuguese had entertained about the Church of Malabar was achieved by them successfully through the Synod of Udayamperur, it had its own repercussion. This expressed itself in the rebellion of 1653. To meet somehow the consequences of that event of 1653, in which the Syrian Christians almost as a whole had taken part, Rome put in much more effort than Archbishop Garcia and the Portuguese. As a result, a majority of the community were brought back to the Roman Catholic fold. Yet there was a considerable number of Christians who did not yield to Rome. This section, assuming a seemingly dangerous stand for over ten years, slowly moved towards the Syrian Church of Antioch. In this way the Church of Malabar, which was one till the 17<sup>th</sup> century, came to be split into two bodies.

There are two questions here: (i) How did the division in the Church occur? (ii) How did a section of the Church which was part of the Nestorian Church of Persia happen to fall within the communion of a Church which was much more vehemently critical of the Nestorian Church than the Portuguese? To begin, with, let us consider the first question.

### 2. The Appearance of Ahatalla

It was when the tug of war between Archbishop Garcia and Arch-deacon Thomas had reached its zenith that Ahatalla made his appearance. Who is this Ahatalla? He who in Arabic is called Attalla

and in Chaldean (Eastern) Syriac as Aitalaha (in the Antiochian or Western Syriac his name must be ithaloho) is the person in question. How did he come to India at that time? These questions are not given the same answer by all historians.

E. M. Philip says: "The members of the Church of Malabar believe that he was Patriarch Mar Ignatius of the Antiochian Syrian Church who had come down to deliver his Church that had suffered much under the yoke of Rome."<sup>1</sup> This reading is justified by the fact that there are churches in Kerala, which celebrate the feast of Ahatalla as that of Patriarch Ignatius. At the same time, something factually incorrect cannot be correct just because people believe it to be so. This author has direct knowledge of a statement made by Patriarch Ignatius Jacob III, while he was in India as a monk, that there was no record of a Patriarch by that name in Antioch, or that any Patriarch had left the See to come to India then. Commonsense does not permit us to believe that, in response to an appeal of Archdeacon Thomas of 1648 or 1649 for help, the Patriarch himself, without looking into his obligations to his own Church, would have undertaken such a venture. Therefore, the point of view which Philip reflects we have to ignore.

In fairly recent times too the Roman Catholic historians claim that they have evidence regarding the antecedents of Ahatalla. They say that Ahatalla was an Antiochian Syrian bishop, who became a uniat by joining the Church of Rome in 1631. About that time there was a patriarchal election in Antioch, for which he gave his name as a candidate, but lost. Disappointed at the defeat, he went to Cairo, where he lived as a uniat. That was the time when the request of Archdeacon Thomas for bishops came to the Coptic Patriarch at Cairo in 1648 or 1649. Coming to know of this fact from the Patriarch, he left for India. This is the story which the Roman Catholic historians have to say; we find this unacceptable. For one thing, a person who left the Antiochian Church is not likely to offer himself as a candidate at the patriarchal election of that Church with any hope. If it is argued that such things were possible in the West Asia of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, why

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1. Philip, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

should Ahatalla be disappointed about his defeat and why should he go to Cairo?

Ahatalla came to Surat in 1652, where he was captured by the Portuguese; they took him to Mylapore. They kept him in custody with the intention of taking him to Goa and of trying him there.

Meanwhile two seminary students who had gone on a pilgrimage to Mylapore saw him by chance. Philip gives their names as Itty and Kurien. They went back to Kerala with a letter from Ahatalla addressed to the archdeacon. On reading it, he came to know of the arrival of a bishop, and publicized the news among the members of the community. That the archdeacon had very definite leadership in the community is a fact that we gather from this incident. His ill-will towards the archbishop may have been the reason for him to give the news to the people who themselves had not been pleased with Archbishop Garcia.

The news resulted in a great commotion among the people. The Roman Catholic historians try to make out that this was a reaction against Garcia and the Portuguese, and not against Rome. But in the light of what we have seen so far, and of what these historians themselves admit, it is not possible to say blindly that Archdeacon Thomas and those with him would have in their heart of hearts agreed fully with Rome. There is no doubt that there were people in the Church who would express real appreciation for the Roman Catholic Church and the Latin traditions. But to say that the Church as a whole had an innate reverence for Rome cannot be right. On the contrary, if they were assured of a relation with the Church of Persia or with a Syriac-speaking Eastern Church, there was a large body of people in the Church, who would have given up not only the Portuguese but even Rome. This is what history shows clearly. That section would have stood behind Thomas and Thomas would have guided them. The leaders tried to include the whole community in their section of the Church. In that attempt they definitely failed.

### **3. The Revolt of the People**

Kerala Christians were very much disturbed about what was going to happen to the Eastern bishop who had come to guide them. It



was then that the Portuguese took Ahatalla to Goa, in order to try him and take necessary action against him.

In the letter which Ahatalla had sent to the archdeacon it was noted that the Christians of Kerala should take steps to release him from the clutches of the Portuguese. Accordingly, a large body of people moved to Cochin, in order to release the bishop. Meanwhile the ship carrying Ahatalla anchored at Cochin for fuelling. The people first approached the archbishop with the request that the Eastern bishop should be freed. But Garcia made it clear that the Church of Malabar, being subject to Portuguese control, without the written permission of the King of Portugal, it was not possible for him to do anything. The King of Cochin would not do anything against the wishes of the Portuguese. That which Garcia rejected was not acceptable to the Portuguese authority either. Now realizing the possibility of people using force to release the bishop, the ship was ordered to leave the harbour. On this occasion the news spread that the bishop was thrown into the sea and drowned. When the King of Cochin heard the news he was greatly grieved. The Christians in a body went to the Church and took counsel as to what they should do. In the end they took a pledge together. This is known as the "Oath of the Coonen Cross."

Historians do not agree as to the way in which the pledge was taken. The Kerala version of what took place is as follows. On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1653 a great number of people gathered in front of the Church. In their despair they tied ropes of great length to a cross, which was slanting on one side, and uttered the words of the pledge holding on to the cross. There is another tradition about this incident. According to it, the archdeacon and the priests as well as the people who came first entered the Church and took the oath. At that time those standing outside had the ropes tied to the cross and might have joined in the oath-taking.

Historians are not in agreement about the words used on the occasion of the oath. The Roman Catholic historians say that the words aimed at cutting off the relation with Archbishop Garcia and the Jesuits and meant acceptance of the Archdeacon as their superior. In the opinion of others the oath was meant to break off connection with Rome represented by Garcia and the Jesuits. At that time in the Church

of Malabar there were three groups holding three different views. One of the views was that the Christians should accept the Latin tradition and Rome's supremacy. A second view was that they should reject the Jesuit supremacy and accept Rome's leadership direct. There was a third view which wanted to reject Rome also along with the Jesuits. People belonging to all the three groups took part in the oath-taking. But to each group the meaning of the oath was different.

All historians agree that after the oath-taking, for some considerable time, there were very few people ready to co-operate with Garcia. One view is that he had only about 200 laymen and 15 to 25 priests with him; yet another is that there were about 1000 laymen and 15 priests.

#### **4. Mar Thoma I**

The oath which was taken at Mattancherry on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1653 was a great victory for Archdeacon Thomas. The community almost as a whole accepted his leadership. It was an event which could not have happened in the normal circumstances. This was followed by two other events of great importance.

One of them was a meeting of Church people in connection with the three-day lent. It was held at the church of Edapally in February 1653. A great crowd of men and women gathered on the occasion. They declared the archdeacon their administrator. In addition, this meeting appointed a council consisting of four prominent priests in the Church to help the archdeacon in his work. The four men so chosen were Parambil Chandy of Kuravilangat, Vengur Geevarghese of Akaparambu, Kadavil Chandy of Kaduthuruthy, and Anjalimoottil Itty Thommen of Kallisserry. Some historians are of the view that these men were chosen on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1653.

The second event happened at Alengat on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1653. A detailed account of that meeting has not come down to us. On one point historians are unanimous. That is, twelve priests laid their hands on the archdeacon and raised him to the episcopal rank. We can say definitely that the twelve priests had with them the four priests who were chosen to form a committee to help the archdeacon. Parambil Chandy of Kuravilangat was one of the four. Can twelve priests raise

a person to the episcopal rank? They cannot; this is the answer which both sides will give. In order to solve this problem, E. M. Philip has an argument, which deserves attention. He says: "In the letter which Ahatalla sent to the archdeacon it is written that Archdeacon Thomas, the successor to archdeacon Geevarghese, is temporarily made Metran, subject to the condition that till the position is ratified, he should not ordain priests, consecrate Holy Oil and do such other episcopal functions."<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic historians question the authenticity of this letter. They argue that there was only one letter despatched by Ahatalla and that it did not contain a sentence like this. They are positive, however, that Itty Thommen read at the Alangat meeting a letter with this sentence in it, but that it was a forged letter.

What Philip says is that Thomas was made bishop conditionally. Two things must be said about this. (i) In that letter nothing of any consequence is said. No right which the archdeacon had not already possessed is specified. Therefore, what Philip says is that Thomas was made a metran, without the rights that go with that title. (ii) Even to confer this title, had Ahatalla any authority over the Indian Church? Philip answers this question by saying that the Patriarch of Antioch had given him authority.

The Roman Catholic historians point out that in the letter which Ahatalla sent to Kerala it was stated that he was Patriarch Ignatius of India and China, who had received all authority from the Pope of Rome. The Eastern Churches consider the President of the Church of Rome as one of the Patriarchs of the Universal Church. Therefore, none of them will admit that he received his authority from the Roman Pope. Whoever Ahatalla was, if he made a statement like this in the name of the Antiochian Syrian Patriarch, that does not reflect the truth of the matter. If Ahatalla spoke about himself in this way, that may be the basis on which Philip makes out that he was in fact the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch without admitting that his authority had come from Rome.

The Roman Catholic historians allege that Mar Thomas indulged in deceitful dealings to establish his episcopal title. In the face of this

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1. Philip, *op. cit.* p. 147-148.

allegation, it should be recalled that in 1653 the Portuguese had a great deal of power in South India. Though they were not as powerful as they were a little before that time, it is a fact that there was no force in the country to raise its voice against them. In such a situation everything done by those who tried to oppose them need not be considered justifiable or beyond criticism. Moreover in the history of the Church Universal, including the Roman Catholic Church, many actions, which are considered basic, are no longer looked upon as defensible. In a situation, where it was felt no other way was available, if the Christians of Kerala did anything wrong, that was what the Roman Catholic Church leadership made them do.

There are Roman Catholic historians even today who contemptuously treat the ordination of Mar Thoma I by twelve priests. It seems that they forget the fact that Mar Thoma I was raised to the episcopate at a ceremony in which their forefathers fully participated. The fact about the incident is that nobody justifies it. The section of the Church which is not with the Roman Catholic Church does not claim that its orders can be traced to that event. It should be observed that priests alone consecrating bishops was a factual reality in the early Church. For example, we have indisputable evidence for the fact that in the famous Christian centre, Alexandria, the bishop was made by the Council of Presbyters. The ruling concerning how a bishop should be consecrated was enunciated for the first time by the Council of Nicea in 325 A. D. The fact that Alexander of Alexandria, who had leadership in that council, had been consecrated by presbyters is noted by Severus of Antioch. In the light of the decree of the Council of Nicea, and the tradition maintained in the Church on its basis, we can say that the way in which Mar Thomas I was made bishop in 1653 was not right.

## Questions

- 1 What circumstances was the Oath of the Coonen Cross taken?
- 2 What does the oath taking point to?
- 3 What do historians say who Ahatalla was?
- 4 What do we know about the letter said to have been sent by

him to Kerala ?

- 5 Who consecrated Mar Thoma I? What was the background of that incident?

## **LESSON 2**

### **THE EFFORTS OF ROME TO FACE THE DEFEAT**

□ Preliminary Remarks □ The Efforts of Garcia □ Rome's Skilful Intervention □ Mar Thoma in Difficulties

#### **1. Preliminary Remarks**

That was a time when Archbishop Garcia and his Jesuit friends were in a state of confusion, not knowing what to do. But before 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1659, when Garcia died, he was able to get some losses recovered. The Carmelites came to Kerala in 1657 and started their work. Even before that, Parambil Chandy Cathanar left Mar Thoma and joined the other side. As a result of his conversion, when the Carmelites came, they were able to obtain his full co-operation.

Mar Thoma and Parambil Chandy were sons of brothers. In addition, he was one of the four men chosen to form a committee to help Mar Thoma. After his conversion, Kadavil Chandy of Kaduthuruthy also joined him. But Itty Thommen of Kalliserry and Vengur Geevarghese continued to be with Mar Thoma, the former playing a leading role in the conflict. From 1657 till 1663 Mar Thoma had to undergo much suffering. In 1661 the Roman Catholic section was very powerful. On that occasion the leadership of that body hatched a plot to do away with Mar Thoma and Itty Thommen, and thereby bring to an end the conflict. Though there are Roman Catholic writers who regret that the plan failed, the other side considers "the failure of the plan providential.

#### **2. The Efforts of Garcia**

As soon as the revolt broke out, Garcia asked for Portuguese as-

sistance to put down the rebellion. He also appealed to the native kings for help. The Goan authorities after due consideration advised him that, the time being unsuitable to use force, he should seek the co-operation of other societies in the Church of Rome itself and find a solution to the problem. Garcia was not satisfied. He sent his secretary to the King of Portugal and the Pope to explain and justify his stand vis-a-vis the revolt.

Meanwhile the authorities in Goa tried to work out certain programmes. They deputed first John Rangel and then John de Lisboa to take up the issue with Thomas. They came to Kerala and negotiated with Thomas, but John Rangel achieved nothing. John de Lisboa, after insisting that Mar Thoma should desist from exercising episcopal functions, had him send a letter of apology about the revolt to Goa, on condition that he should be recommended for the bishopric of the Church. It is not certain whether this letter was written by Thomas. Possibly he did it at a time when he was not sure of the future. In any case, Mar Thoma went back on the letter later.

The effort of the Goan authorities did not bear fruit. Now they requested Rome to intervene in the affairs of the Church of Malabar, promising all possible help.

Garcia did not keep quiet. He prepared himself to strengthen his position. Where force did not work, he had no difficulty in gaining his ends by means of money. His greatest victory in this direction was to obtain the support of Parambil Chandy and others. Philip quotes a letter written by Itty Thommen expressing sorrow at Chandy's change of sides.

### **3. Rome's Skilful Intervention**

By about the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese power in India began to decline. By now Rome had come to realize that it was possible for the missionaries of non-Portuguese nations to carry on missionary work in eastern lands and thereby to bring to an end Portuguese monopoly in missionary work in India. With this purpose in mind, Rome established the "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel" (de Propaganda Fidei) in 1622. It was after this event that in 1647 and in 1649 Archdeacon Thomas wrote letters to Rome, asking for the

Carmelites in place of the Jesuits. On this basis the authorities thought that the confusion in Kerala would come to an end if the Carmelites under the auspices of the Propaganda were sent within the overall control of Rome.

Rome acted very cleverly in sending the missionaries. They were sent in two batches, one from Portugal by sea under the leadership of Hyacinth, and the other under that of Joseph Sebastiani by land. Of the two batches, the one led by Sebastiani which went through Syria and Iran arrived in Kerala first in 1657.

The Portuguese authorities, realizing the situation, gave all co-operation to Sebastiani, who had been sent to India by the Propaganda. The King of Cochin also was ready to give him assistance. In the Church there were many priests, including Parambil Chandy, to support his mission. He visited many churches and brought them over to his side.

The most important reason for Sebastiani's success was the fact that he could legitimately question the validity of Mar Thomas episcopal standing. He and his supporters made use of the question of legitimacy. Those who felt a dislike for the "fake metran" joined Sebastiani and the others who cared more for the freedom of the Church stood by Mar Thoma. All the same before Sebastiani went to Rome in January 1658 to submit his report, a large part of the community had left Thomas and joined the Roman Catholic communion. Two months later Hyacinth and party reached Kerala. As a result of the work of the two men supported by the Portuguese, the Kings of Cochin and Vadakkumkur issued injunctions prohibiting Mar Thoma from entering their territories. But in those kingdoms and in many other small states of Kerala there were still some followers for Mar Thoma.

Rome raised Sebastiani, who was directly under its jurisdiction, to the status of archbishop of the Church of Malabar. Because of the fear that the Portuguese might oppose it, the service was held secretly. The new archbishop reached Cochin on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1661 and took over charge of the Church administration.

By now the Portuguese who had been driven out of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) by the Dutch had seen the possibility of the Dutch overcoming

them in Kerala too. They were ready to bring the Church of Malabar under the full control of Rome. The Roman Catholic historians themselves narrate the story of how the Portuguese joined hands with the King of Cochin in planning to finish off Mar Thomas and Itty Thommen, who were opposed to Rome.

It was 9<sup>th</sup> October 1661. The two men were in detention at Thrippunithura. The plan was to attack them stealthily and kill them, but it did not work. E. M. Philip describes how they were saved. They were kept in custody by the orders of the King of Cochin. While they were thus in custody, two lay friends from Mulanthuruthy came to bid them farewell. They took that opportunity to exchange clothes with the men, and leave the place. When the authorities heard of the incident, they were furious. They beat up the men and sent them home. The palanquin and the things belonging to Mar Thoma were set fire to. This incident gave rise to the saying, "If it is so much for the palanquin, how much more would it be for the metran?"

After this incident Mar Thoma had to live in hiding. The King of Cochin required of the churches at Mulanthuruthy and Kandanad to stand surety for him. Mar Thoma did not have to be in hiding for a long time. For in January 1663 the Dutch invaded Cochin; this greatly relieved Mar Thoma.

#### **4. Mar Thoma in Difficulties**

Mar Thoma is known in history as a controversial figure. It is sad that no record showing his side of the story is available. Our ancestors did not keep records of what happened subsequent to his elevation on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1653. Because of this fact historians have to rely on the writings of the missionaries who criticized him mercilessly, it is not possible to know whether they are factual or exaggerated or false. Whatever it is, a number of writings claiming to be authoritative have been published in recent times. This book is based on these writings.

Any historian must admit one fact. That is, the elevation of Mar Thoma in 1653, whether it was right or wrong, was not an act of his own. It was a step taken by the Church of Malabar as a whole after due consultation. Parambil Chandy was one of the men who provided the leadership in this. The community almost as a whole was with



Mar Thoma for a few years. After all these happenings, a section of the people left Mar Thoma and joined Garcia, or directly Rome, and began to blame Mar Thoma and the people with him for the division.

There is another fact which also should be mentioned here. A large section of the historians who put the blame on Mar Thoma were those who considered that supremacy of Rome was indispensable for the Church. But it is not possible that many in the Church at that time could have accepted the supremacy of Rome. We may however say that if Rome were willing to respect the Eastern character of the Church of Malabar, many in it would have objected to being united with it. But the fact is that Rome would not have accepted this. On the other hand, Rome had its own norm for Church union, which was not acceptable to other Church traditions. The reason why there was a flow of people from the side of Mar Thoma to that of Sebastiani was, more than the love for Rome, the fear that the bishop's orders were defective. To remove this fear from the minds of people was pre-eminently the concern of Mar Thoma.

In order to achieve this goal Mar Thoma is said to have resorted to certain questionable actions. One of them was undertaken, as records show, while Sebastiani was away in Rome in 1658. It is said that Mar Thoma displayed a sealed envelope, claiming to be an order from Ahatalla, before the people who had gathered at the Edapally church in connection with the three-day fasting. It said that the Pope ordered that, if Ahatalla showed signs of impending death, Archdeacon Thomas should be made a Patriarch before Ahatalla's death. It is asserted by historians that this was deception on the part of Mar Thoma to secure his position and make it acceptable to the people.

In 1659 Mar Thoma had recourse to another deceptive action. This time the point made was that the Roman Pope himself ratified his position. It was claimed that the predecessor of the ruling Pope had sent his brother's son, before his death, with the letter of ratification. Mar Thoma used an Armenian who had come to Cochin for trade, to act as the Pope's brother's son.

These two stories are taken by Roman Catholic writers as evidence of Mar Thoma's duplicity. But that is not the whole truth con-

cerning them. If they are actual incidents, and if they happened as they are reported, they must be taken as evidence of the difficulties which he had to undergo in fulfilling the obligations given to him by the Church as a whole on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1653.

A third incident also is reported about Mar Thoma by the Roman Catholic historians. In order to clarify the point behind it, we have to recall certain historical facts. Faced with the problem concerning the validity of his orders, Mar Thoma used to write to the Patriarchs of the East requesting for an Eastern bishop, to be sent to Kerala for the ratification of his consecration as bishop. But till 1665 no response came from any one of the Patriarchs. He waited for a period of twelve long years and felt desperate. In the end, he is said to have approached the Jesuits with the request for a reunion with the Roman Catholic Church. Mar Thoma is said to have sent a priest with a letter to the Jesuit fathers. If he did this, it was not surprising that he did it.

Mar Thoma's waiting came to an end. Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem, an Antiochian Syrian prelate, arrived in Calicut. Mar Thoma and his people were satisfied, and they received him with open arms.

## Questions

- 1 What did Archbishop Garcia do in order to defeat the rebellion of 1653?
- 2 What action did Rome adopt in order to meet the rebellion and to bring the Church under its control?
- 3 What do we understand by the "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel?"
- 4 What do we know of Joseph Sebastiani?
- 5 What difficulties did Mar Thoma have to undergo after the Oath of the Coonen Cross?

# LESSON 3

## THE CHURCH OF MALABAR IN A STATE OF DIVISION

□ Preliminary Remarks □ The Victory of the Dutch □ Parambil Chandy Becomes a Bishop □ The Coming of Gregorios

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

Mar Thoma had two objectives: (i) to encounter the charge that his episcopal orders were imperfect; (ii) to bring to an end the custom of royal power entering the religious field and forcing people one way or the other. When in 1663 the Dutch invaded Cochin, the centre of Portuguese power, and drove them out from there, the second problem was more or less solved.

The Dutch victory brought in another problem. A native bishop to lead the Roman Catholic section, confronting Mar Thoma, was raised. That bishop was none other than Parambil Chandy. Soon after he was made bishop, he excommunicated Mar Thoma, who was his own cousin, and Itty Thommen. As a result, the attack was taken a step further. Now the drawbacks of Mar Thoma were not only imperfect ordination, but also ecclesiastical ostracism.

Mar Thomas had to carry on in this way for about three years. At that time Bishop Chandy (he is called Alexander de Campo, by Western writers) did everything possible to bring Mar Thoma down to his knees. This must be the time when he tried for a reunion with the Jesuits.

### 2. The Victory of the Dutch

The Dutch had their victory at a time when Archbishop Sebastiani had proceeded very much against Mar Thoma. The Dutch invaded Cochin on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1663 and destroyed all churches in Cochin, except the one dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi. In addition, they ordered all missionaries, except four or five Franciscans, to leave Cochin. Archbishop Sebastiani and his missionary priest asked for permission to continue serving the Church in their capacity as religious workers, but that was denied. They had to leave the country.

Before bidding farewell to Kerala, Sebastiani did two things for the Roman Catholic Church. (i) He raised Parambil Chandy to episcopal dignity. As he had already secured the necessary permission from Rome to perform all that was needed for the welfare of the Church, there was no need to obtain a fresh sanction for his consecration. (ii) He went with Bishop Chandy to Cochin and had an interview with the Dutch Commander General Rijicloff and the Dutch chaplain Baldeus. Sebastiani requested them to give protection to the Roman Catholic Church, which they undertook to do. In his conversation with Baldeus, Sebastiani is reported to have said, as L. W. Brown points out:

*As people who oppose us Catholics, you Protestants might think that it is possible for you to have a union with them, and on that basis you must be drawn to help them. But in the light of faith it is not possible for you to have any understanding with them. For they limit the faith to the adoration of pictures and the cross, the holding of fasts, prayers and masses for the departed souls.*

Whether this statement of Sebastiani was taken seriously by the Dutch leaders or not, it is a fact that the archbishop tried his best to prevent them from being helpful to the section of the Church led by Mar Thoma. In any case, it is a fact that during the time of the Dutch it was to the Roman Catholic section that they were in many ways more helpful than to the other body. They did not directly harm the section guided by the Mar Thoma bishops, as the Portuguese had done. There were times when the Dutch did some good to these bishops, but on such occasions they demanded of the bishop concerned heavy monetary benefits. On the whole, the Dutch policy was to ignore the section of the Church under the guidance of the Mar Thoma bishops, so that when the Dutch had gone they left it as a neglected community.

So long as Bishop Chandy was alive, the Dutch helped him in various ways. The apt example for this is the political support to the attempt to raise Parambil Mathew, Chandy's nephew, as his successor. The Carmelites, who from 1657 held sway over the Church, were

against the bishop. These Carmelites worked under the Propaganda, which was controlled by Rome. If at that time Bishop Chandy had consecrated his nephew or anybody else, the Dutch would have supported him. But he was not the man to perpetrate this reckless action. On the contrary, he behaved as a faithful servant of Rome. Blaming the Carmelites and praising Rome, he fulfilled his functions. No one took into account the contradiction inherent in the gains that Rome secured from the activities of the Carmelites, who were condemned by the Bishop and his followers.

During the time when the Dutch were in control, there were Western missionaries working in certain parts of Kerala with or without their knowledge. All of them had only one idea with reference to the Syrian Christians. That was not to bring them closer to the early culture and history and make them a strong community in India, but to make them owe allegiance to Roman Catholicism with or without the blessings of the Portuguese crown. Though the Dutch rule did not allow the Portuguese to continue their government for long, it did not allow the growth of a Church tradition in Kerala that rejected Roman supremacy.

The attitude of the Dutch towards European missionaries changed. Even though the Carmelites who were working in the Church of Malabar tried from 1663 to reach an understanding with the Dutch on this issue, their effort did not bear fruit. But Innocent XII (1691-1700) took the initiative and reached an agreement with the Dutch. On 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1698, the Dutch government agreed to allow a few Carmelite missionaries and a bishop who were not Portuguese nationals to work in Kerala. As a result of this understanding non-Portuguese missionaries and a bishop were permitted to go to Kerala and give leadership to the Church there. In this way the Church of Rome and the Dutch government reached an agreement between them, and the Roman Catholic Church in Kerala became confirmed in a tradition which had no relation with its early history.

### **3. Parambil Chandy Becomes a Bishop**

When Archbishop Sebastiani had to leave Kerala, the only thing which he could do for the Church led by him was to raise a person to

the episcopal status. We have already seen that the person he chose to fill this need was Parambil Chandy. He was selected and consecrated by Sebastiani with the active co-operation of two priests. Chandy was made a “bishop”, not archbishop, “Bishop of Megara” and “Vicar Apostolic of Angamaly.” The new bishop had to give the undertaking that he would not ratify Mar Thoma’s orders or raise anybody else to episcopal dignity, without Rome’s clear directive. He followed this injunction strictly, for as soon as he received the position, he excommunicated Mar Thoma and his companion, Itty Thommen, as we have already noted.

Chandy did not have any educational qualification beyond a knowledge of Syriac, just enough to hold the services of the Church. But he got the help of the Dutch and some native kings in his conflict with Mar Thoma. In spite of his inadequate education, he had hopes to gain many things through his association with Rome. One such hope was to have his nephew succeed him. We have seen that he was disappointed in this.

In the situation then prevailing the Carmelites did not find anybody in Kerala, who could be raised to the episcopal rank. At the same time they realised the need to find someone who would help Chandy and be his successor. The person they found for this appointment was Raphael Figueredo de Salgado. He was a person born to Portuguese parents living in India, but not an Indian. Moreover, there were complaints about his conduct. But without looking into these matters, the Carmelities chose him, and Rome ratified the nomination. This selection was not to the satisfaction of Bishop Chandy, the Dutch and many others concerned. There was no one to consecrate him, and the Carmelites pressed the Vicar Apostolic of Canara to do this. Bishop Chandy died in 1687; till his death he was not reconciled to Raphael. Not only between Chandy and Raphael but also between Chandy and the Carmelites and between Raphael and the Carmelites there were conflicts. These conflicts lasted till the death of Raphael in 1697.

#### **4. The Coming of Mar Gregorios**

In his disappointment Mar Thoma might have thought about a reconciliation with the Jesuits. Then he received the news that an East-

ern bishop had arrived in Calicut. The prelate was, he came to know, the bishop of Jerusalem in communion with the Syrian Church of Antioch. He was Mar Gregorios who came in the company of two monk-priests; he was welcomed by Mar Thoma and a large body of priests and laymen. This incident is of great importance in the history of the Church of Malabar in as much as the Roman Catholic historians regretfully state that it closed the possibility of a reconciliation between the two sides. Other historians see in it a means of deliverance which the Church needed at that time.

Mar Thoma and Mar Gregorios were engaged in the service of the Church in co-operation with each other. As a result, the freedom-lovers in the Church of Malabar entered a new phase of history. They accepted relationship with the Syrian Church of Antioch, with which it had no connection so far. In this way, the early Church of Malabar as a whole happened to give up the foreign connection which it had till then, one section of it joining Rome and the other accepting contact with Antioch.

The intention of the new metropolitan was to bring into the Church of Malabar the liturgy and traditions of the Syrian Church of Antioch. But it was not possible all of a sudden to get this done. Gregorios found it convenient to use the Syriac language to have dealings with the Church people. It was a form of that language that was in use in the Persian Church, and the same was the ecclesiastical language of the Indian Church. However, Mar Gregorios employed in the beginning only the practices with which the people had been conversant. But he changed the clothes which priests were wearing at the time of holding services, the tradition of unleavened bread in the Eucharist, ecclesiastical calendar, etc. which the Synod of Udayamperur had introduced, and made them conform to the Syrian ways. In all these customs the Syrian Churches of Persia and Antioch had very similar traditions. The changes were necessary in the face of the Latin traditions brought in by the Synod of Udayamperur. We do not here ignore the scornful remark made by the Roman Catholic historians that Mar Gregorios could get acceptance in the Church because Mar Thoma and Itty Thommen deceived the people by telling them that the bishop had been sent by the Pope. In support of their contention they quote

the authority of the missionaries, without raising the question how impartial they were.

The Christians of Kerala in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were not a people who knew Church history or the difference in tradition pertaining to ecclesiastical authority between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of the East. What the Portuguese and after them the Carmelites, who were directly under the control of Rome, did was to use all methods at their disposal to bring them to unite with the Roman Church. The group that stood with Mar Thoma had to face many difficulties while withstanding these efforts. We should try to understand sympathetically the stand taken by Mar Thoma and his group instead of looking into the question whether they were right or wrong.

There are historians who opine that Mar Gregorios did ratify the episcopal standing of Mar Thoma; there are also others who hold the opposite view. The truth of the matter is that there is no evidence that he did not. That the two men co-operated with each other in serving the Church is evidence enough to show that the position was indeed ratified.

Mar Gregorios died on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1671, and was buried in the North Parur church. On 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1673, two years after the death of Mar Gregorios, Mar Thoma too left this world. He was buried in the church of Angamaly. Subject to several limitations, it was possible for Mar Thoma to keep the pledge he had taken in 1653, and to leave this life with a sense of satisfaction.

Mar Gregorios joined Mar Thoma in confirming the Church of Malabar in its Eastern (Syrian) tradition against the Roman Catholic Church. A common language and common traditions shared by the Church of Persia and the Church of Antioch made his efforts successful. In a general letter which Mar Gregorios despatched to the churches of Parur, Mulanthuruthy, and Kandanad, on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1668 he made his position clear. E. M. Philip has translated the relevant parts of this letter from the original and has quoted the same. The following are the ideas emphasized in the letter.

i) The first 1600 years of the Church of Malabar was not part of the Roman Catholic Church. The Portuguese had no legitimate au-



thority to change the customs which the Church had observed for hundreds of years. Do not the people, who lived and died during this period in close relationship with the Church, then deserve Christian salvation.

ii) All these years the Church had permitted priests to marry. The Roman Church prohibited marriage to deacons and priests. As a result they were prone to immoral living.

iii) The fasts which the Church of Malabar used to hold had been changed by the Portuguese, so that during Easter lent they ate fish and took liquor.

iv) Mar Gregorios points out that he had shown in another letter where the Churches disagreed in the matter of faith.

v) We should believe not in the Church of Rome, but in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

## Questions

- 1 What service did the Dutch render to our Church? What good did they do to the Roman Catholic section of the Church?
- 2 How shall we evaluate Bishop Parambil Chandy?
- 3 What good did the coming of Mar Gregorios do to our Church?

## LESSON 4

### MAR THOMA BISHOPS

Preliminary Remarks  17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries  The Defeated Efforts of Mar Gabriel  The Advancement of the Antiochian Syrian Efforts

#### 1. Preliminary Remarks

After the death of Mar Thoma I, five Mar Thoma bishops guided the Church till the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Mar Thoma II and Mar

Thoma III did not do much for the Church. But Mar Thoma IV led the Church for a long period of about forty years. During his time there came from Babylon Mar Gabriel. His effort to re-establish the connection with the Nestorian Church came to an end when he disappeared from the scene. Mar Thoma V and Mar Thoma VI were able leaders of the Church.

Though the Church of Malabar was divided into two sections, neither party had assumed its stand with any factual understanding of the early history of the Church. In the situation in which they were, they did not have the ability to do so. The section that joined the Roman Catholic Church was given intellectual leadership by the missionaries. The other section gained some ideas from the fathers deputed by the Antiochian Syrian Church. All the same the leaders of that group were never prepared to give up their freedom to administer the Church. The most important wish which the Roman Catholic section had was to have for them native bishops under the control of Rome. They however discussed the question why there should be subjugation to Rome.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries both sides had the desire to unite. But this was not out of a concern for Church union that was derived from a theological understanding of the Church. The desire for union was motivated by the urge for Syrian Churches to come together or by the desire for gaining leadership. Similar efforts were made till the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In all these efforts the Roman Catholic side was keen that Rome's approval was necessary. But the other side did not have the ability or the knowledge to meet the Roman demand in the light of Eastern traditions.

## **2. 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

Mar Thoma I was succeeded by Mar Thoma II. E. M. Philip says that he was consecrated by Mar Thoma I and Mar Gregorios, but the historian does not record when and where the consecration took place. Mar Thoma I died, according to Philip, on 12<sup>th</sup> Medam 1670. This date is also not accepted by historians in general.

There is difference of opinion among the historians about the consecration of Mar Thoma II. Those who do not agree with Philip are

generally of the opinion that when Mar Thoma I died, a brother of his assumed leadership. Within a week he died having been hit by lightning. So a meeting was held at Kothamangalam, which appointed a brother's son of Mar Thoma as his successor. If this story is true, Philip is right that Mar Thoma I and Mar Gregorios together must have raised two men to leadership. As we have no evidence to substantiate this view, it is pointless to discuss the issue.

We have evidence that Bishop Chandy, the leader of the Roman Catholic section, and Archdeacon Mathew, his nephew, whom he had appointed to hold that post from 1678, had high respect for Mar Thoma II. It was in 1687 that Bishop Chandy died. Before his death, Chandy had a desire to have Mar Thoma II consecrated as his successor and thus to unite the two sides. Why this plan did not succeed, we do not propose to discuss here, as it is not relevant for us. As for Archdeacon Mathew, the Roman Catholic historians have gone on record that he met Mar Thoma II at Palai and had discussions with him. On that occasion the archdeacon paid his respects to Mar Thoma by kissing his hand. This, in fact, was one of the accusations raised against him by the Carmelites. They said that because of showing respect to the leader of the opposition, he was not fully loyal to the Catholic Church.

Mar Thoma II died in 1686 and was buried in the Niranam Church. Before that incident, in 1685, there came from Syria Mar Baselios Yaldo and Mar Ivanios. We shall have the occasion a little later to deal with them as well as Andrew who had come earlier. Baselios Yaldo did not live long in Kerala. He died at Kothamangalam and was buried there. But Mar Ivanios lived for eight years in India, and he was the man who gave episcopal leadership for the consecration of Mar Thoma III and Mar Thoma IV.

Mar Thoma III lived for two years more and Mar Thoma IV served the Church for forty years, it was during his time that Mar Gabriel arrived in Kerala and tried to bring the Church under the Nestorian Patriarch. More information is given later about Mar Gabriel. Here it should be noted that in confronting Mar Gabriel, Mar Thoma IV found himself incompetent, and he appealed to the Syrian Patriarch for help.

He wrote three letters, but none of them reached the Patriarch. The letters were written in Syriac, and were sent in Dutch boats, which were the only means of transport in those times. The first letter which was sent in 1709 reached Amsterdam. There it was printed and copies of the same were used as a textbook for students of the Syriac language at the university of Leiden. The second and third letters which were written in 1715 and 1720 respectively were intercepted, and found their way to Rome, where it is said they are preserved in the Propaganda Library. In these letters the bishop asked the Patriarch for a patriarch, bishops and priests, competent to teach the faith opposing Mar Gabriel.

Mar Thoma IV died on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1728 and was buried at the Church of Kandanad. Before he died, he consecrated Mar Thoma V, as his successor. Regarding his status as a bishop, there was a dispute in the Church. The nature of the dispute deserves our attention. Some people argued that his elevation to the episcopal rank had not been properly accomplished, and therefore they would not accept him. The reason they stated was that he was consecrated by one bishop only. But this could not have been the real reason; for one bishop ordaining another was the tradition followed in the Church of Malabar so far on both sides. Therefore, the real cause of the dispute has to be sought elsewhere. The Syrian Christians of Kerala had a tendency to revere foreigners, so much so that Mar Gabriel having been in the country, they expected his participation in the ceremony of Mar Thoma V's consecration. Since the privilege of participation was denied to him, the people questioned the validity of Mar Thoma V's episcopal standing. The Roman Catholic side who had been calling in question the validity of the ordination of Mar Thoma I to Mar Thoma V might have influenced them to raise this objection.

The standpoint of the Roman Catholics on the issue is well brought out by Dr. Jacob Kollaparambil. While discussing the division in the Church following the coming of Mar Gregorios he writes; "Mar Gregorios brought to Malabar the Jacobite faith. Thus the revolt of the archdeacon gradually resulted in schism. This enabled heretics to find a place in the society of Mar Thoma Christians. Those who joined the false metran were called 'Puthencootukar' and those who fol-

lowed Mar Alexander were called ‘Pazhayacootukar.’<sup>1</sup>

*The Archdeacon of All-India* by Father Kollaparambil is a good book, but it contains many errors like the one given above. Father Kollaparambil deals with the subject assuming that the Church of Rome is the only right Church. No study of Church history in the light of this view, which all the Churches of the East reject unanimously, can be said to be objective. There was a schism in the Church of Malabar. Schism means “cutting” or “division.” In the schism that happened in the Church of Malabar, the Roman Catholic Church and the Church that stands outside it are equally in a state of schism. Neither of these Church traditions can claim superiority over the other. The terms “Puthencootukar” and “Pazhayacootukar” are used by Roman Catholics unilaterally, in order to claim that their section of the Church is older than the other.

The Roman Catholic view concerning the validity of the consecration of the Mar Thoma bishops is maintained by some other writers as well. But ordaining a bishop, if necessary, is the prerogative of the Church. In the light of this principle, it is not necessary to look upon the ordination of any of the Mar Thoma bishops as invalid. Though we cannot say that all historians, who consider the question negatively, are falsely motivated, we can say that their motivation is not right.

### 3. The Defeated Efforts of Mar Gabriel

The most upto date treatment of the activities of Mar Gabriel is found in *A Double Regime in the Malabar Church* by Thomas Pallipurathukunnel.<sup>2</sup> This book, which can be evaluated as scholarly, is liable to the same criticism as that we have levelled against Father Kollaparambil’s book.

The author includes the following information regarding Mar Gabriel. In December 1708 he came from Madras to Quilon. While he was serving as bishop of Odurbijan under the jurisdiction of Patriarch Elias X (1700-1720) of the Nestorian Church, he claimed to have been

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1. *The Archdeacon of All India*, pp. 146-47.

2. *A Double Regime in the Malabar Church*, p. 136-147.

converted to the Roman Catholic Church, through Patriarch Joseph II (1696-1713) of the uniat Church of Persia. He sent a statement of the faith through the Patriarch to the Propaganda to obtain Rome's approval; this was not found satisfactory. So a proposal to correct the statement and send it again was despatched to him. Before that suggestion came into his hands, he had left for India. When he started on his journey, he had with him credentials from Patriarch Joseph and a letter from the Chief of the Propaganda. With these documents it was possible for him to get acceptance among the Syrian Catholics of Kerala.

As a result of the coming of Gabriel the Church under Mar Thoma IV began to face difficulties. Some sections of people belonging to the Church were ready to welcome Gabriel. It was on this occasion that Mar Thoma IV tried to approach the Antiochian Syrian Patriarch. As we have seen, his attempt did not bear fruit. In all probability, it was these people who turned against Mar Thoma V later and questioned the validity of his consecration.

Some questions may be raised here. If the history of the Malabar Church is as we have seen, why was it that Mar Thoma IV was displeased with Mar Gabriel? Till the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was not the foreign connection of the Church of Malabar with the Church of Persia? Was it not the Syriac language and the sameness in many traditions which the Antiochian Church and the Persian Church had that gave Mar Gregorios of the Antiochian Syrian Church an opportunity to deal with the Church of Malabar?

While answering these questions, we should remember three things: (i) Mar Gabriel came to capture the government of the Church of Malabar. That Mar Thoma used all his power to resist it is what any administrator would do. (ii) Gabriel was a Nestorian. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese had portrayed Nestorianism in a most insulting manner, and had done everything possible to wipe it out completely. (iii) If, in the circumstances in which Mar Gregorios came to Kerala, he was able to make much of the similarities between the Churches, in 1685 Mar Ivanios, who came to Kerala, made the differences between the Churches very clear.

The most important of the differences was the one referring to the person and nature of Jesus Christ. What Mar Ivanios emphasised in his attack on the Council of Chalcedon in 451 held under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church was the standpoint adopted in the Council of Ephesus by the Antiochian Church. The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon were two 5<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical assemblies held in the circumstances obtaining in the then Roman Empire. Even though both these councils were accepted by the Church of Rome, it attached more importance to the Council of Chalcedon. The Church of Antioch, on the other hand, accepted the Council of Ephesus, and on its authority rejected, not only the Council of Chalcedon and the Churches that endorsed that council, but also the Church of Persia which opposed the council of 431 and criticized it vehemently.

Although Mar Gregorios established the connection between the Church of Malabar and the Syrian Church of Antioch in 1665, it was not possible for him to introduce the faith and traditions of the latter in their real colour in the Malabar Church. This was accomplished to a great extent, by Mar Ivanios who came in 1685. Of these traditions Mar Ivanios and Mar Gabriel had different viewpoints only on the teaching concerning Jesus Christ. But this was not so with the Roman Catholic Church; the global supremacy which Rome claimed, was a major point of difference, besides other issues. No one in Malabar understood this fact properly at that time. It is sad that even today many writers belonging to the Roman Catholic Church do not appreciate this truth.

Mar Gabriel reminds us of Mar Abraham who guided the Church of Malabar in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Both of them were Nestorians. Because they were not able to pull down the great edifice of the Roman Catholic Church in Kerala, they pretended that they joined the Church of Rome. Whatever that be, twentytwo churches from both sides in Kerala gave him support. In 1731 he died in Kottayam and was buried at the Cheriapally. It is only after the C. M. S. missionaries came in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the tradition of celebrating his feast there gradually died down.

#### 4. The Advancement of the Antiochian Syrian Efforts

After the arrival of Gregorios in Kerala, the Antiochian Syrian people began to hear of the Church of Malabar. This resulted in the coming of a certain Andrew in 1678. E. M. Philip, an ardent lover of Antioch, says about this Andrew that “nobody knows, to what Church he belonged, or whether he was a priest at all.”<sup>1</sup> But he was called in Kerala “Anthraos Bava” in a very respectable way. A short-tempered man and a lover of liquor, he was drowned in the Kallada river. Whatever the case be, Andrew was able to win votaries in Kerala, and there are churches still which observe his feast in great pomp and ceremony, as the feast of *Kallada Valiappan* or *Puthencavu Valiappan*.

About this Andrew, Father Pallipurathukunnel gives some, information, which should be relevant for us to note here.<sup>1</sup> It was in the days of Mar Thoma II that, he came to Kerala. He did not regard Mar Thoma as a bishop. Claiming himself to be a patriarch, he ordered that Mar Thoma should not raise anyone to any clerical rank. In spite of this order, once Mar Thoma got ready to ordain certain persons at the Kothamangalam church. On that occasion Andrew went into the sanctuary with a cane in hand, and drove out the bishop and the candidates from there. The author tells this story on the strength of a record which is found in the Propaganda Library. It is possible that the story must have been invented to insult the bishop, or if it is true it shows that, like the European missionaries, the Antiochian Syrians also exploited the ignorance of the people of Malabar and their spirit of hero-worship.

Father Pallipurathukunnel points out that this Andrew was a “Jacobite” priest, who had been disowned in his country because of infamy. With Andrew there came to India a brother, who married from the Kattumangat family and settled down in Kerala.<sup>2</sup>

From the discussion on Andrew one point becomes clear. That is, since 1665 the Church of Malabar had not been one single community, which could stand on its own feet. Anybody, who came from the

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1. Philip, op. cit., p. 155-56.

2. Brown, op. cit., p. 131.



tradition of the Antiochian Syrian Church and who spoke Syriac, would receive a welcome in Kerala. He would in fact have dictated terms to the leaders of the community.

A firm foundation for this state of affairs was laid after 1685. Mar Baselios and Mar Ivanios came to Kerala in that year. We do not adopt the standpoint of Z. M. Paret, who questions the fact that they were Antiochian Syrians,<sup>1</sup> or that Baselios was a Catholicos or Maphrian. Therefore, the question we have to raise is: why did the Patriarch send a Catholicos to Kerala? The Patriarch who had by then come to know the state of the Church in Malabar must have deputed him with a purpose. That must have been to give the Church episcopal dignity, and thereby to bring it under his control.

In any case, though the Catholicos died within a fortnight of his arrival without accomplishing anything, Mar Ivanios lived in Kerala and worked for the Church about eight years. It was he who advanced the work which Mar Gregorios had started, by trying to bring in the faith and the traditions of the Syrian Church of Antioch. Philip<sup>2</sup> refers to six ideas which he emphasized in this connection. Father Pallipurathukunnel mentions ten. Between the two authors, there is no substantial difference. We shall note here the ideas noted by Philip, (i) One, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which the Creed refers to, is not the Church of Rome; but is the general Church which is based on the principle enshrined in the Councils of Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus.

(ii) Jesus Christ is one person and one nature. In Christ Godhead and manhood are united without confusion, absorption and division. The natures being perfect and the properties of each being preserved, He is one.

(iii) The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and is worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son.

(iv) Adoration of pictures is wrong.

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1. Op. cit., iii P. 21-22.

2. Philip, op. cit., p. 169.

- (v) The unmarried state of priests is neither catholic nor canonical.
- (vi) In the holy Qurbana leavened bread should be used.

The second idea namely, Jesus Christ is one person and one nature, is the only one over which the Church of Persia and the Church of Syrian Antioch differ. This is a point on which the Roman Catholic Church also disagrees with the Church of Antioch. It was this fact that Mar Gabriel emphasised. It was to confront this problem that Mar Thoma IV sought the help of the Patriarch. But the request was not answered, and the Church of Malabar went ahead in spite of opposition from Gabriel.

In this way the seal of the Antiochian Syrian Church was fixed on the Church of Malabar.

### Questions

- 1 What do we know of Mar Thomas II, and III, and IV?
- 2 What must have Mar Gabriel aimed at accomplishing? How did he happen to fail?
- 3 In what ways did the Church of Malabar accept the traditions of the Syrian Church of Antioch?

## LESSON 5

# THE SYRIAN CHRISTIANS WHO JOINED THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Preliminary Remarks  The Church in Kerala and Propaganda Society  Portuguese Jesuits again in Kerala

### 1. Preliminary Remarks

The Roman Catholic historians as a whole try to make out that the Church of Malabar was, from the days of the Synod of Udayamperur part of the Church of Rome, subject to Portuguese administration till

1659, when Archbishop Garcia died. In their view the Coonen Cross incident was an illegitimate revolt. They emphasize that as a revolt it was not against Rome, but an expression of protest against the Portuguese and the Jesuits.

This is not the position which we assume here. Before coming to our position we should understand the difference between the Roman Catholic Church historians and us. The difference centres round the following stand of the Roman Catholic historians. (i) They accept Rome's global authority as a matter of faith. On this account, while calling in question the rightness of the way Archbishop Menezes conducted the Synod of Udayamperur, they justify the synod and the official Roman supremacy which it brought into being. (ii) On this basis they endeavour to establish that the Coonen Cross incident was not meant to abandon the supremacy of Rome. (iii) They do not raise the question on what authority the Portuguese Jesuits or European Carmelites sought to subjugate to Rome a Church which has the right to claim almost the same ancientness and historicity as Rome itself. In other words, they write history with a prejudice in favour of their standpoint. Here they should undergo a change.

Our position is this. The Church of Malabar, traditionally founded by the Apostle St. Thomas, was connected with the Church of Persia till the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Portuguese action in converting the Church of Malabar to Roman Catholicism was totally unauthorised. Rome's claim of universal jurisdiction is not accepted by any Eastern Church. This is a unilateral claim which is being advanced with Rome's money by making uniat churches with members from Eastern Churches. As for the Church of Malabar, it is out of ignorance of Church history and incapability to hold on its own, that it happened to fall into the state of a uniat Church from 1599. But after over half a century, in 1653, when an opportunity arose, the community almost as a whole abandoned that connection. Rome now used non-Portuguese European missionaries and did everything in its power to regain the loss. Even then about half the people did not yield to Rome. Though this section did not have adequate knowledge of theology and of Church history, yet it maintained its Eastern character and ecclesiastical freedom.

## 2. The Church in Kerala and the Propaganda Society

Following the incident of the Coonen Cross the Portuguese, particularly the Jesuits, and the Church of Malabar parted company. The Roman Catholic section kept up their connection with Rome through the Propaganda Society instead of through the Jesuits. Thus from 1659 to 1663 Joseph Sebastiani and from 1663 to 1687 Parambil Chandy led the Church. Bishop Chandy's wish to have either his nephew, or Mar Thoma II (if he joined the Church of Rome to succeed him) as his successor and thus to entrust the responsibility of the Church to an Indian national was not fulfilled. His plan did not work because of opposition from the Carmelites. More than that, Bishop Raphael, whom the Carmelites nominated did not satisfy them, or the Roman Church as a whole. The Carmelites not only objected to Mathew being made a bishop, but raised against him many accusations. Without regard to their views Bishop Chandy appointed him as Archdeacon in 1678, and thus entrusted the Church administration to a national.

Complaints against Raphael whom the Carmelites had chosen to be bishop were raised. The Carmelites themselves sent to Rome, their accusations against the man. Now the leaders of the Propaganda asked Custodio Pinho, Vicar Apostolic of the Moghul region to enquire into the matter. On the strength of his report the Propaganda suspended Raphael and appointed Pinho to take his place. Bishop Pinho did not come to Kerala. And Raphael; died before the order of suspension reached him.

The Propaganda Society did not intend to appoint a national in place of Raphael, in their view there was no one qualified to be made, a bishop from among the Indians. As a result, in the light of the agreement between the Dutch and Rome in 1698, Rome appointed Angelus Francis, an Italian priest, as bishop of the Church of Malabar. He was chosen in December 1700 and the matter was communicated to Kerala. But the Portuguese authorities did not look kindly at this action of the Propaganda Society. At that time there was an archbishop in Goa as well as a bishop in Cochin. Both of them expressed their unwillingness to consecrate Angelus. It should be remembered that since Cochin was under the Dutch the bishop of Cochin was a resi-

dent of Goa and not of Cochin. It was from Goa that he was guiding the Church through correspondence.

Angelus Francis was consecrated by Simon of Ada, a Chaldean bishop. Who was this Simon? Was he a Nestorian, or a uniat? These questions have been asked. That he was a uniat is what the Roman Catholic historians maintain. Whatever that be, on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1701, Archbishop Simon consecrated Angelus Francis as bishop of the Roman Catholic Church of Malabar. It is worth remembering that it was in the same church that fortyeight years before Mar Thoma I had been made bishop by twelve priests; including Parambil Chandy. Those who made arrangements for the consecration in 1701 had ignored that incident.

Sadder still was the way the Carmelites requited Archbishop Simon for the help he had rendered them. This fact is noted by Father Pallipurathukunnel in his *Double Regime in the Malabar Church*. Though Simon of Ada was used by the Roman Catholic Church in a particular situation, the authorities did not trust him. Therefore, soon after the consecration, Angelus Francis and Simon went to Verapoly together. From there Simon was sent in a boat bound for Pondichery. He was kept there in the custody of the French Governor till 1720. There he spent his days in a helpless state, and after he had attained ninety years of age, he was found dead in a well. Some people say that he was killed and the body was thrown into the well, but others say that as an old man he had gone to draw water from the well and had slipped and fallen into the well. We may surmise that the Carmelites suspected Simon to be a Nestorian, and therefore removed him from Kerala for ever, in order that he would not create any problem in the life of the Church there. This incident shows that like the Portuguese Jesuits who tried to keep the Church of Malabar either as a whole or part thereof in their custody, the Carmelites also endeavoured to treat the Church as their own property.

Angelus Francis could not guide the Church of Malabar for a long time. The reason for this was that Rome could not reconcile the Portuguese Jesuits with the Italian Carmelites. Through the incident of the Coonen Cross of 1653, the Jesuits had lost the confidence of the Syrian Christians. Though at that time they did not object to the

Carmelites being used by Rome in order to bring the Syrian Christians into the Church of Rome, they were not agreeable to the Indian Church being given away to the Carmelites permanently. The Dutch domination affected only a few centres like Cochin in Kerala. The Portuguese had realized that they could live in other places and rule the Church in Kerala. Rome also, being conversant with the Portuguese mind, had appointed Angelus Francis temporarily, till an archbishop of Cranganore and a bishop of Cochin were nominated.

### **3. Portuguese Jesuits again in Kerala**

The perplexity confronted by Angelus Francis was the result of Rome's lack of strength. Rome did not have the strength even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to act against the understanding which it had reached in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with the Portuguese. It was because of this that Angelus Francis was nominated only temporarily.

We have shown in a previous lesson that Francis Ros had done two things in 1603. One, he was able to obtain approval to make Angamaly an archbishopric, and two, he transferred the seat of the archbishop from Angamaly to Cranganore. After the death of Garcia in 1659 no successor was appointed to the archbishop of Cranganore. No interim arrangement was found to be satisfactory. Therefore, an archbishop was needed for Cranganore. Taking advantage of the agreement between Rome and the Dutch government, the Portuguese king nominated John Ribiero, the head of the Jesuit seminary at Amalakat, to be archbishop of Cranganore. Pope Clement XI (1700-1721) accepted the nomination. Angelus Francis was informed of this appointment in 1703 by Ribiero. In July of the same year Ribiero took over the administration of the Church, and Angelus Francis retired into a quiet life in a monastery at Verapoly.

Archbishop Ribiero was not able to administer the Syrian Christians for two reasons. One, a great part of the Syrian Christians were living in places under the political control of the Dutch, so that Ribiero could not contact them. The Dutch would not permit the archbishop to enter into relations with them. Two, among the Syrians a large part had more liking for the Carmelites than for the Jesuits. Archdeacon Mathew, for reasons already specified, had greater regard for the

Jesuits than for the Carmelites. Therefore he was willing to support Ribiero, but he died in 1706, so that the archbishop could not benefit by his friendship.

Angelus Francis who was living in retirement at Verapoly contacted the leaders of the Propaganda Society and asked them to specify what he should be doing. The Syrian Christians who were not willing to join Ribiero also acted in support of Angelus Francis. As a result of this, Rome sent a directive in 1709 giving him administrative responsibilities. But it was only in 1711 that he received it. Since he died in October 1712, he could not hold the post for a long time. After that in January 1716 Ribiero also died. It was not possible for him to govern the Syrian Christians. Ribiero lived in the Jesuit seminary at Ambalakat, which was in the territory of the Samuthiri of Calicut. He guided the Christians in areas where the Dutch had no political control.

### Questions

- 1 What is the position which the Roman Catholic historians are assuming with reference to the Coonen Cross incident? How shall we evaluate it?
2. How did the Carmelites rule the Syrian Christians who joined the Roman Catholic Church?
- 3 How did the Jesuits and the Carmelites fall out with each other? How did that affect the Roman Catholic section of the Church?

## LESSON 6

### CONCLUSION

□ Preliminary Remarks □ The Church and Its Foreign Connection upto the 16<sup>th</sup> Century □ The Roman Catholic Connection from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century □ The Antiochian Connection from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century

#### 1. Preliminary Remarks

The history of the Indian Church, which, according to tradition, begins with the Apostolate of Thomas, till the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is discussed in this book. The most important point taken up here is the history of the Church of Malabar. To this is added the story of the Church which, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Catholic missionaries have brought into being.

The Church of Malabar had three foreign connections till the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They were, with the Church of Persia, with the Church of Rome; and with the Syrian Church of Antioch. As a result, the Church, which till the 16<sup>th</sup> century was one became divided into three sections. Not only that the Church lost its unity, but it came to lose its character and individuality.

#### 2. The Church and Its Foreign Connection upto the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

Though the fact that the Indian Church was founded by Apostle Thomas is not supported by recorded evidence, yet four arguments can be adduced. First, there were trade relations between the Mediterranean world and South India that went back to the pre-Christian times, and there was Musiris (Cranganore), a good harbour, on the Malabar coast, which attracted tradesmen. Therefore, it was possible for the Apostle to come to South India in the first century of the Christian era. Second, on the authority of the ancient book, *Acts of Judas Thomas*, it is possible to make out that the Apostle preached in northwestern India, including the Punjab, and either from there or directly from Western Asia he came to South India. Third, historians claim that in churches like Palur which, according to tradition, had been founded by the Apostle, there are indications which make them



out to have been once Hindu temples, but later converted to Christian places of worship. Fourth, at least from the fourth century A. D. almost all historians dealing with the subject refer to Apostle Thomas as the Apostle of India.

The following points referring to the foreign connection of the Church of Malabar before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which all historians admit and ought to admit, should be noted.

First, the Church of Malabar had connection with the Church of Persia at least from the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

Second, in the Persian Church a Catholicate was established with Seleucia-Ctesiphon as its seat in about the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The Catholicos was the ecclesiastical dignitary who controlled the relation between the Church of Malabar and the Church of Persia.

Third, as in other places, in Persia also the Church advanced independently. But the Church in Persia had friendly relations with the Church in the Antiochian provinces, which lay to the west of the Persian Empire, till 424 A. D. But through the two synods of the Church of Persia, which met in 424 and 486, it cut off those relations and declared itself completely independent. The second of these councils rejected the Council of Ephesus in 431 of the Roman Empire, and declared as Church fathers Nestorius and those who were of his persuasion in theology. This incident was taken by the Church in the Roman Empire to mean acceptance of "Nestorianism" by the Church of Persia.

Fourth, when the Church of Persia took this decision, there was in the country, particularly in the north, a small minority of Christians, who did not join the majority. They were mostly captives in wars taken by the Persians from the Antiochian provinces, and naturally they had a special liking for Antioch. From 486 to 628, (that is, for a period of 142 years), this minority had no organization or men to give it leadership. It was not possible for this group to send a bishop to Kerala and maintain any relation with the Church there.

Fifth, after 628, the minority which had not joined Seleucia be-

came part of the Antiochian Syrian Church, and Patriarch Athanasios Gamolo of that time ordained for them Marutha as ‘the Great Metropolitan of the East’ or “Maphrian.”

Sixth, the Church under the Maphrian had never grown beyond a tenth in size, of the Church of Seleucia. Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries the Seleucian Church advanced very much. Its missionary work reached India, China, Tibet and other countries beyond. But because of opposition from Muslim political leaders, which it had to suffer like any other Church of the East, this Church fell into difficult days and lost its ancient glory.

Regarding the foreign connection of the Church of Malabar, that it was with the Syrian Church of Antioch, respecting the supremacy of its Patriarch, is an opinion held by certain persons. E. M. Philip is one such person. He is eager to establish this point about the Church of Malabar. In his effort to make the point, he takes as evidence some rulings found in a collection of canon laws, which had been unknown till the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This is the *Arabic Canons of Nicea*, in which, the laws made in the fourth century and certain rulings were interpolated in the 9<sup>th</sup> century to claim, on the authority of the Council of Nicea in 325, permanent supremacy over the Persian Church for Antioch and over the Church of Ethiopia for Alexandria. The collection was made very cleverly in the name of the Council of Nicea to make it authoritative. It is made out that Antioch’s authority extends over the whole area covered from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean sea to the far end of the earth, so that the Church of Persia and the Church of Armenia should be under the jurisdiction of the see of Antioch. However, it does not say anything about India or Malabar as coming under the jurisdiction of Antioch; this is proof enough to show that the author had no knowledge of the existence of a Church either in India or in Malabar.

The story of Ahodabooy and Qomjesus, which Bar Ebraya notes in connection with the establishment of the Catholicate of Seleucia, is artificially made up to strengthen the view that Persia was and should be under Antioch, which the *Arabic Canons* specifies. This story has no relation with history.

The relevant question for us is this. Since the Maphrian of Tagrith was installed in 629, from that time to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, did the Church of Malabar have any connection with the Syrian Church of Antioch, or with that of Tagrith? In Kerala we raise this question in the face of the dispute in the Church to defeat the opponent. That is not our concern in this book. We seek evidence. Though our ancestors in India have not left any record for us to write a history, those in the Antiochian Syrian Church were not like that. They have recorded in every generation what happened, in their Church. Bar Ebraya, for instance, wrote his history of the Church in the thirteenth century. It was then updated by his successors till the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In that book neither Bar Ebraya nor any of his successors makes mention of a Church in Kerala, let alone a bishop being sent to that Church either from the Antiochian regions or from those of Tagrith.

But it is not so about the Church of Persia. There is documentary evidence that the Catholicose of Seleucia had connection with the Church of India. We also have some evidence.

These are the facts shown in this book. On the basis of evidence, what can we say about the foreign connection of the Church of Malabar?

### **3. Roman Catholic Connection from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century**

It is following the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the presence of the Roman Catholic Church became a fact in India. How this happened is discussed in the third unit of this book. As a result of the work of Portuguese missionaries the Syrian Church of Malabar became absorbed in the Roman Catholic Church, subject, to the Portuguese administrative control.

Behind this development the Portuguese insisted on two ideas. First, all traditions that the Church of Malabar received in terms of faith, liturgy and life, from the Church of Persia should be so changed as to conform to the traditions preserved by the Church of Rome. Second, that the Universal Church should be subject to the Roman Church, must be the norm for the Church of Malabar as well, In order to carry this out, the Church of Malabar should look upon the Patriarch of Babylon, the head of the Persian Church, as a schis-

matic and a heretic, and abandon him.

What the Portuguese took on hand in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the realisation of the above two aims. And their efforts in this direction culminated in the Synod of Udayamperur. The activities of the Portuguese at that synod were unauthorized, and they were insulting to the individuality of the Church of Malabar. To an extent the Roman Catholic writers admit these facts now. But they strive to get Rome out of this criticism. The argument based on the global authority of Rome, which no Eastern Church accepts and which Rome has unilaterally proclaimed, is something for which Rome struggles hard to get approved by the East. Therefore the proposition that Rome had no responsibility in what the Portuguese did in Kerala cannot be accepted.

The Oath of the Coonen Cross was an incident in which the legitimacy of the Portuguese domination over the Church of Malabar and Rome's claim of supremacy were called in question. But the Roman Catholic historians take great pains to make out that it was not against Rome that the oath had been directed. Many of them try to say that the incident was a "rebellion against the holy Church" and that the Church tradition which remains loyal to the pledge made there has been wrong. This position seems to us very sad.

The Syrian Christians of Kerala are not the only people belonging to the Church of Rome in India. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century churches of the Latin tradition have been established and are growing in Kerala and many other parts of the country. How they began is noted briefly in this book.

#### **4. The Antiochian Connection from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century**

No evidence has been brought forward, either from the side of Antioch or from the side of the Church of Malabar, to justify the argument that the Church of Malabar had connection with the Church of Antioch from early times. The only evidence which can be produced is some rulings taken from the *Arabic Canons of Nicea*. These were produced spuriously in the name of the Council of Nicea in the 9<sup>th</sup> century; therefore, these cannot be taken as evidence at all. The Council of Nicea did not give any directive to churches, but only tried to regulate the life of the Church on the strength of existing practices.

However, we have evidence for saying that in 1665 Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem came to Kerala and the Antiochian connection came into existence from that date.

The Church of Malabar, which sought to remain loyal to the pledge contained in the Oath of the Coonen Cross, thus entered a new ecclesiastical relation and grew in it gradually. Mar Gregorios who had no connection with either the Church of Persia or the Church of Rome had his dealings with the Church of Malabar very carefully. Similarities in ecclesiastical language and in the customs that existed in the Church of Antioch and the Church of Persia helped Mar Gregorios in his dealings with the Church of Malabar. He was able to make the dislike of Nestorianism, which the Roman Catholics had bequeathed, deep-rooted in the Syrian Christians of Kerala. So also, he strengthened in them an aversion to the Roman Catholic Church. In this way Mar Gregorios was able to turn the course of the Church of Malabar towards Syrian Antioch.

Mar Gregorios only started the work. Twenty years after his coming, there arrived Mar Ivanios who confirmed the Church much more deeply in the faith and traditions of the Antiochian Syrian Church than Mar Gregorios.

## Questions

- 1 What are the facts which we can point out in support of the tradition that St. Thomas the Apostle preached the Gospel in India?
- 2 What facts should we know about the Church of Persia with which our Indian Church had contacts till the 16<sup>th</sup> century?
- 3 Evaluate the steps which the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the Carmelites in the 17<sup>th</sup> century took to bring the Church of Malabar under the supremacy of Rome?
- 4 How did a section of the Church of Malabar, which till the 16<sup>th</sup> century was part of the Nestorian Church of Persia, happen to become associated with the Syrian Church of Antioch in the 17<sup>th</sup> century?

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