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# THOMAS CHRISTIAN HERITAGE



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## HIERARCHY OF SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH: HISTORICAL AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES 1923-2023

Special Edition

# ***Thomas Christian Heritage***

**Journal of the Syro-Malabar Liturgical Research Centre** is an international theological journal of the Liturgical Research Centre of the Syro-Malabar Church published twice a year (November 21, the feast of the arrival of St. Thomas in India and July 3, the feast of the martyrdom of St. Thomas) to promote research studies in theology, liturgy, history and spirituality of St. Thomas Christians.

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**A Syro-Malabar Liturgical Research Centre Publication**

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The last Chapter is on the future prospects for hierarchical perfection of the Syro-Malabar Church by Rev. Dr James Pulipurmpil. He briefly explains the gradual growth of the Syro-Malabar Church ever since its origin from the apostle St. Thomas. It became a metropolitan Church in the medieval period and later became an autonomous Church with limited jurisdiction in the 19th century. Later in 1923 Syro-Malabar hierarchy was established and in 1955 it was extended with a second ecclesiastical province. In 1992 the Church was elevated to Major Archiepiscopal status. The Syro-Malabar Church was given all India jurisdictions in 2017 with the erection of the eparchy of Shamshabad. The scope of achieving the hierarchical perfection that is patriarchal level is yet ahead. Syro-Malabar Church, the second largest among the 23 oriental churches, has a unique liturgical heritage, particular canonical discipline, long-standing ecclesial tradition and apostolicity. Besides she has the highest number of priests, religious, bishops, and missionaries who are working all over the world. Thus we can say that Syro-Malabar Church is a global Church. All these factors justify her claim to be elevated to a patriarchal Church.

I sincerely thank the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church for his unceasing and fatherly encouragement to all the projects of Liturgical Research Center (LRC). I am indebted to Mar Tony Neelankavil the Chairman of LRC and Mar Jose Plickal, Episcopal member of LRC for their concern and support. I congratulate with my sincere appreciation all the authors of the chapters of this issue. Special thanks to them for their cooperation with LRC. I remember with gratitude Rev. Sr. Lincy Augustine MSMI for the office assistance. Sincere thanks to the Manager and the staff of Viani Printing Press, Ernakulam. I wish and pray that this issue of *Thomas Christian Heritage* (Special Edition) may help the readers to understand the growth and development of the Syro-Malabar Church since the establishment of the hierarchy.

**Rev. Dr. Joji Kallingal**

Editor

## Chapter - 1

# **Battle of Ecclesiological Standpoints: Immediate Historical and Ecclesial Context of the Establishment of the Syro-Malabar Vicariates**

**Rev. Dr. Francis Thonippara CMI**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Syro-Malabar Church is completing 100 years of the re-establishment of her hierarchy, which was mutilated and lost with the Udayamperur Synod in 1599 and with the consequences thereafter. Syro-Malabar Church is a Major Archiepiscopal Church and the full stature of this Church of apostolic origin would be realized only with the Patriarchal status. I give a short historical background till 1876 for a better understanding of the re-establishment of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy in 1923, precisely a historical background for the establishment of the three Vicariates in 1896. Fr Cherian Varicatt has made a detailed scientific study on the topic based on the archival sources in the previous chapter.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cherian Varicatt, *The Suriani Church of India Her Quest for Autochthonous Bishops (1877-1896)*, (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India Publications, Vadavathoor) 1995.



## 1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

St Thomas Christians trace their origin back to Apostle Thomas, had in course of time come into contact with the Persian Church and was ruled over by bishops from Persia, most probably from 345 and followed the East Syrian liturgy or the Chaldean liturgy. The bishops from Persia styled themselves Archbishops and Metropolitans of All India. Their main functions were spiritual, administration of sacraments, including conferring of Holy Orders. We have no clear-cut proofs to substantiate their uninterrupted presence among the St Thomas Christians. A pertinent question may be the absence of native bishops and native leadership to substitute the foreign ecclesial domination. One answer may be, in spite of the foreign domination the Indian Church could develop an identity and autonomy of her own in her daily life as is evident from the following facts. The effective administration of the Community was in the hands of local priests, known as Archdeacons. The title of the Archdeacon was *The Archdeacon of All India*. St Thomas Christians had a privileged position in the Malabar society and they adopted many of the local customs and practices in their daily life. The individuality and identity they developed were profoundly influenced by the socio-political environment of India and in particular, of Malabar. This local influence is found in their everyday Christian life and very specifically in their church administration, *Palliyogams*, Assembly of the Church representatives at different levels. Thus, this Apostolic Church, though ruled by Persian bishops, preserved a kind of autonomy and individuality and these Christians were at home in their homeland. Mar Abraham was the last Persian bishop who died in 1597 and was buried in Angamaly.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Cf., Placid J. Podipara, CMI, *The Thomas Christians*, (London: for Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., by St Paul Publications, Bombay, 1970, in Kalayil Thomas CMI, (Editor), *Collected Works of Rev. Dr. Placid J. Podipara, CMI, Volume I*, (Mannanam: Sanjos Publications, 2007), pp. 313-419, *Special Organisation and Constitution*, pp. 349-358.



## 2. PADROADO MISSIONARY SYSTEM AND THE UDAYAMPERUR SYNOD OF 1599<sup>3</sup>

With the arrival of the Portuguese Missionaries in 1498, St Thomas Christians, until then practically secluded from the Western Christian world, came into closer contacts with the Western Christian Church, a third world in their existence, besides the Malabar milieu and the Persian Church. The initial relations between the Western Latin tradition and East Syrian traditions were cordial. One reason must be the welcome extended by the St Thomas Christians to the Western missionaries and the need of the latter to depend on the former for their initial ecclesial establishments. The Portuguese Padroado established itself in India by erecting the Diocese of Goa in 1534. In 1558 Goa was elevated to the status of an Archdiocese with the erection of the Diocese of Kochi as Goa's suffragan Diocese. Doubting the orthodoxy of the St Thomas Christians and blaming them as Nestorians, Dom Alexis Menezes, the Archbishop of Goa, and a strong product of the Counter-Reformation, convoked the Udayamperur Synod in June 1599 ignoring all the oppositions and with the support of the colonial power. Some, especially the Latin authors, support the doings of the Archbishop Menezes and justifying his stand. However, others who are well-versed in the Oriental tradition, deny the validity of the Synod and condemn the Archbishop as an intruder. No one denies some of the positive impacts of the Synod on the Malabar society. Although this Synod had an all-embracing influence in the everyday life of the St Thomas Christians, there are documentary evidences to show that the decisions of the Synod were not acceptable to the whole Community and to pacify the Community a Synod at Angamaly was convened in 1603 and the Rosian Statues was published by Francis Ros, S.J., the first

3 Cf., Jonas Thaliath, CMI, *The Synod of Diamper*, (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications), 1999 (Reprint).

Latin bishop of the St Thomas Christians.<sup>4</sup> The Latinization policy initiated by the Archbishop of Goa with the Synod of Udayamperur, culminated in the reduction of Angamaly See as a suffragan See to Goa, which worsened the relations between the Malabar Church and the Portuguese Missionaries. The Synod of Udayamperur in a coup severed the age-long relation that the St Thomas Christians fostered and nourished with that of the Persian Church. All the causes of subsequent dissensions were provoked by Dom Menezes' excessive reforms and also by doing away with the hierarchy of the St Thomas Christians<sup>5</sup>. After strong protests from the part of the St Thomas Christians, on December 22, 1608 Pope Paul V restored the Archiepiscopal and Metropolitan status fully to Angamaly, of course under the Jesuit Pardoado Archbishop. Later the residence of the Archbishop was transferred to Kodungallur.

### 3. COONAN CROSS OATH 1653<sup>6</sup>

Even after the introduction of Latin rule over them, these Christians continued their efforts to get Persian bishops and they had correspondences with the Oriental Patriarchs. Then there spread the news that a Persian Bishop by name Athallah was passing through Kochi and he was denied permission to visit the Malabar Christians by Archbishop Francis Garcia, S.J. of Kodungallur. To receive Archbishop Athallah a large crowd assembled at Mattanchery as per the directives of Archdeacon Thomas Parambil. A rumour spread that the foreign Bishop was drowned in the Arabian Sea, although it was a fake news. To protest against this, the Christians under the leadership of Archdeacon assembled at Our Lady of Life

4 Xavier Koodapuzha, *Christianity in India*, (Vadavathoor, Kottayam: 1998), p. 95.

5 Cf., Jonas Thaliath, *The Synod of Diamper*, pp. 171-174.

6 Cf., Joseph Thekkedathu, *The Troubled Days of Francis Garcia, S.J., Archbishop of Cranganore (1641-59)*, (Rome: 1972); Jacob Kollaparambil, *St Thomas Christians' Revolution in 1653* (Kottayam: 1981).



Church, Mattancherry, put a rope on the cross and took an oath by saying that they would no longer obey the Jesuits. This is known in history as the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653, a revolt against the Latin rule or better to say a protest against their lost identity. On the authority of a falsely fabricated letter, twelve priests imposed their hands on Archdeacon Thomas and they made him Archbishop Mar Thoma I at Alengad on May 22, 1653. Though it was a revolt against the Latin rule and the Jesuits, the consequences of this revolt were far reaching. The Jacobite schism and the subsequent divisions and subdivisions of the St Thomas Christians are the result of this revolt. The Christians who did not follow Mar Thoma I are later called *Pazhayakuttukar* (old party) and the dissident Christians are called *Puthenkuttukar* (new party). At present St Thomas Christians, which was a single community till 1653, are divided into many churches.

#### 4. PROPAGANDA FIDE<sup>7</sup>

Rome was informed of the revolt in Malabar and the Propaganda authorities who were waiting for a chance to interfere in the affairs of the St Thomas Christians immediately took action by sending four Carmelites (OCD) to Malabar to heal the wounds of division. The Carmelites were already known to the Malabar Christians and already had some initial contacts with them and had great esteem for them.<sup>8</sup> With their arrival Propaganda found its way to Malabar. St Thomas Christians should be grateful to the Carmelites for their success though partial in healing the wounds caused by the revolt of 1653. The smooth functioning of the Carmelites were hampered by the emergence of the Dutch power in Malabar and thus Chandy Parambil, was made the bishop, the first known native bishop of

7 Thomas Pallipurathkunnel, *A Double Regime in the Malabar Church* (Alwaye: 1982).

8 Joseph Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India, Volume II*, (Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 2020), (Reprint), p. 97.

the St Thomas Christians, who ruled from 1663 to 1687. Due to the efforts of one Carmelite priest, Fr. Peter Paul, the Carmelites were allowed to continue their mission work in Malabar under certain conditions. The See of Kodungallur remained vacant after the death of Archbishop Francis Garcia, S.J., in 1659 and due to the changing political situations in Malabar his successors did not come to Malabar or did not accept the nomination. The Holy See had to face a serious problem as the Christians, who were in the Dutch territories, were deprived of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. For their good Pope Innocent XII with the Apostolic Brief on February 20, 1700 appointed Fr. Angel Francis O.C.D., Vicar Apostolic of Malabar or of St Thomas Christians, however, with the clause "till the Archbishop of Cranganore and the Bishop of Kochi have personally occupied their respective Sees". Now Padroado authorities acted immediately and appointed Fr. John Ribeiro (1701-1716) to the See of Kodungallur. He and his successors resided in Pukkotta, and sometimes also at Puthenchira, outside the Dutch territory. The jurisdictional conflicts between the Padroado and Propaganda authorities were very common in Malabar. The Vicariate Apostolic of Malabar was an interim arrangement to save the situation of the faithful who were deprived of pastors. The jurisdictional conflict was mainly between the Carmelites and the Jesuits to whom respectively the Vicariate Apostolic of Malabar and the Archiepiscopate of Kodungallur were entrusted. Carmelites were the Vicars Apostolic and they had jurisdiction over the St Thomas Christians until 1887. Their mutual accusations with regard to the jurisdictions and the preoccupation with their own interests created only confusion. Thomas Christians confounded with different jurisdictions, some obeyed the Carmelites, some the Jesuits and others the schismatic bishops.

## 5. NEW INITIATIVES

The reunion efforts of Mar Thoma VI or Mar Dionysius the Great, the delegation of Joseph Cariattil and Thomas Paremmakkal



to Rome and Lisbon and the election of Joseph Cariattil as the Archbishop of Kodungallur in 1782 and the sudden death of Mar Cariattil in 1786 in Goa and Thomas Paremmakkal as Governor of Kodungallur till 1799 and the Angamaly Padiyola of 1787 are the major events of the second part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. One notices four different attitudes among the St Thomas Christians from the last part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They wanted to get rid of the Carmelite missionaries, awakening of national consciousness and strong desire for native leadership, attraction towards Padroado jurisdiction and to re-establish the hierarchical relationship with the Chaldean Church. The Angamaly Padiyola of 1787 clearly ventilated their grievances against the Jesuits and Carmelites and the Community resolved to request the Queen of Portugal to do the necessary to promote Thomas Paremmakkal as their Archbishop and decided to disobey the European Prelates except for Holy Oil and Holy Orders.<sup>9</sup>

## 6. NINETEENTH CENTURY

During the time of Thomas Paremmakkal, the ecclesiastical Administrator of Kodungallur, a delegation went to the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch requesting a bishop and since Propaganda Fide did not give a reply to the requests of the Chaldean Patriarch, Archbishop Mar John Hormez, the Administrator of the Chaldean Church, consecrated Paulose Pandari, one member of the delegation, and was sent to Malabar with two priests to teach Syriac. Since Paul Pandari was ordained without the approval of the Pope, Thomas Paremmakkal did not permit him to exercise any jurisdiction. But after the death of Paremmakkal, Pandari Paulose began to exercise his jurisdiction and ordained some priests. The so-called Pandari schism lasted for a few months till the end of

<sup>9</sup> Cf., Francis Thonippara, CMI., *St Thomas Christians of India: A Period of Struggle for Unity and Self-Rule (1775-1787)*, (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1999).

1800 when the Archbishop of Goa nominated a native priest, George Shankurikkal as Administrator, who died in 1801.

After the death of Thomas Paremmakkal the Catholic Thomas Christians were once again divided between Padroado and Propaganda jurisdictions, one under Propaganda, Apostolic Vicariate and another under Portuguese Padroado, Archbishop or Governor or Administrator of Kodungallur and some of the Administrators did not even come to the Archdiocese. Since the Coonan Cross Oath Carmelite missionaries governed the major section of the Catholic Thomas Christians as Vicars Apostolic of Malabar (1700-1853) and later of Verapoly or Varapuzha (1853-1886). The last Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly was Leonard Mellano of St Louis (1868-1886).

The story of the present Syro-Malabar Catholics of the nineteenth century was unique and unparallel compared to the history of many other churches. It was an unorganized, confused and manipulated community with no proper leadership of their own. "Yet they were proud of their faith which their traditions traced back to the evangelizing mission of Apostle Thomas, whence their name of "Mar Thoma Christians", and they struggled to keep up their Christian faith and traditions against the different politico-religious forces met in the course of their history."<sup>10</sup> This was really a period of disorder and quarrel and the conflict of jurisdictions confused the faithful.

## 7. **MULTA PRAECLARE**

With the apostolic letter *Multa praeclare* of April 24, 1838 Pope Gregory XVI suppressed the Padroado jurisdiction in India and China except in the archdiocese of Goa, and granted all the Vicars Apostolic exclusive and proper jurisdiction over their territories. Therefore, all Catholic Thomas Christians and Latins

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10 Cherian Varicatt, *The Suriani Church of India Her Quest for Autochthonous Bishops (1877-1896)*, p.2.



were ordered to be members of the Vicariate of Verapoly. Some St Thomas Christian parishes under Padroado, however, did not accept *Multa praeclare* and remained under the Administrator or episcopal Governor of the Archdiocese of Kodungallur and the diocese of Kochi, giving rise to the so-called Goan schism. Thoroughly disappointed with the suppression of the Archdiocese of Kodungallur, the St Thomas Christians implored the Holy See and thus the title of archbishop was granted to the Vicar Apostolic in 1840. For an efficient administration the Vicariate was divided into three in 1853, Verapoly, Kollam and Mangalore and the last two were exclusively for Latins.<sup>11</sup>

The Catholic Thomas Christians always desired bishops of their own ecclesial tradition. At that epoch the only means of information for the Propaganda Fide concerning the Malabar Church were the reports of the Carmelite missionaries, who were against a separate administration for the Catholic Thomas Christians, and absolutely opposed to the appointment of native bishops. The missionaries never wanted to divide the Vicariate and to permit the majority of their flock to set up any separate administration.

## 8. ROCOS SCHISM<sup>12</sup>

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the St Thomas Christians made some desperate efforts to get ritual bishops. The Syrian Catholics placed under the Portuguese *Padroado* jurisdiction did not have a bishop in Malabar to ordain their candidates for the priesthood. That might have been the main reason why they approached the Chaldean Patriarch. Under the influence of a Chaldean priest, Dhanah Barjona, who reached India in 1853, and was staying at the Kuravilangad church, some St Thomas Christian leaders met together in 1854 at Kuravilangadu and resolved to

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>12</sup> Cf., Paul Pallath, *The Catholic Church In India*, (Roma: Mar Thoma Margam, 2003), pp. 97-98.

send a representation to the Chaldean Church: two priests, Antony Kudakkachira and Antony Thondanatt were to lead the delegation. This delegation, consisting of priests, seminarians and laity, started for Baghdad in 1857. At the death of Antony Kudakkachira, Antony Thondanatt took up the leadership. They petitioned the Catholic Chaldean Patriarch Joseph VI Audo to send them a bishop. The Patriarch sent the petition to Rome together with his own recommendations. Already in 1860, Pope Pius IX had asked the Chaldean Patriarch not to interfere in the affairs of the Syro-Malabar Church. In 1861 Antony Thondanatt came back to Kochi with Mar Thomas Rocos who was sent by the Chaldean Patriarch, Mar Audo. The great majority of the Catholic Thomas Christians followed Mar Thomas Rocos since he claimed to have been sent by the Patriarch at the order of the Pope. He visited many parishes and ordained more than a hundred priests.

Vicar Apostolic Bernardine of St Theresa knew well that it was the absence of a native head or bishop in the Malabar Church that provoked the schism of Rocos. Hence, in order to fight against Rocos, he adopted the best tactic of appointing Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara, (1805-1871) the founder and first Prior of the CMI Congregation, the well-known, the most respected and the saintly priest of Malabar as Vicar General of Verapoly, entrusting to him the spiritual care of the Catholic Thomas Christians.<sup>13</sup> Propaganda Congregation and Holy See were willing to grant a Vicar General endowed with episcopal character in the person of Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara. The missionaries were not in favor of promoting the cause of Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara.<sup>14</sup> The whole

13 Paul Pallath, *Rome and Chaldean Patriarchate in Conflict, Schism of Bishop Rokos in India* (Changanacherry: HIRS Publications, 2017), p. 346.

14 Cf., Pallath Paul, *Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly and the St Thomas Christians in 1867, Kuriakose Elias Chavara Unworthy of Episcopate?* (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018). The author presents original documents to show the mind of the Carmelite missionaries towards native leadership.



story of the Syro-Malabar Church would have been different if he were appointed as the Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Church. Yet another lost chance for indigenous leadership. The silly obstacles raised by the missionaries against the episcopal consecration of Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara such as inexperience in governance, insufficient knowledge of morals, advanced age, indisposition and extreme weakness of body were groundless and unjustifiable.<sup>15</sup> The leaders of the Syrian Catholics wished and hoped to see Fr Kuriakose Chavara a bishop, but their hopes were in vain as the reports of the archbishop of Verapoly were against him. Thus, as the Rocos schism subsided, there remained practically no hope for a native bishop. The missionaries had a very prejudiced attitude towards the native leadership as they were of the opinion that only the so-called whites could occupy administrative and leadership positions. However, a few missionaries, Leopold Beccaro and his brother wanted a separation of the Syrian Catholics from Latins, with a Carmelite Apostolic Vicar for each.<sup>16</sup>

At the order of Pope Pius IX, Patriarch Audo had to recall Mar Rocos on September 7, 1861, but eighty-six full parishes and thirty-one parishes joined the Rocos schism. Through the hard work of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara and others the schism could be brought to an end.

Antony Thondanatt who accompanied Mar Rocos, received episcopal ordination from the Nestorian Patriarch Mar Shim'un, and returned to Malabar as Mar Abdiso.<sup>17</sup> The situation was made even more acute owing to the increasing unpopularity of the Carmelite rule on the one hand, and to the increasing dissatisfaction resulting

15 Ibid., p.118.

16 Cherian Varicatt, *The Suriani Church of India*, p.8.

17 Ibid., p.6.

from the restoration of Padroado rule in Cochin and Kodungallur on the other.<sup>18</sup>

After the return of Mar Rocos, most of the churches were reintegrated into Verapoly, except for a few churches who were under the Padroado Jurisdiction. They were in a vicious circle: they did not want to go back to Verapoly, but the option for Padroado was not available. They followed Antony John Ignnace Santimano who lived in Kollam as Governor of the Goan schismatics. In 1863 Archbishop Salvator Saba, Apostolic Commissary, reached the Malabar Coast, accompanied by Msgr. Howard and a lay representative of the Portuguese king. The purpose of their commission which began in 1861 was to put into effect the concordat of 1857 between the Holy See and Portugal. Among the terms of the concordat, it was endorsed that those churches and Christians under Propaganda and those under Padroado on the day of the signing of the concordat, were to maintain their *status quo*. On April 21, 1863, Saba ordered the churches in Malabar to decide within eight days either for Verapoly or for Portuguese Padroado. Under Verapoly there were 104 churches, 37 under Padroado.

Some followers of Mar Rocos joined the Padroado; but there was no bishop in Malabar under Padroado jurisdiction and according to an order given by the papal commissary, Archbishop Saba, that "all those who were ordained by Mar Rocos should remain in those minor orders until the reception of an order from the Vatican."<sup>19</sup> There were among Syrian Catholics, seven priests and more than a hundred clerics who received other minor orders from Rocos. They waited for an arrangement from Rome, and after repeated petitions, they received no positive sign from Rome. Some of them sent petitions to Patriarch Audo asking for a bishop. The

18 Pareparambil Aloysius, *An Account of a very Important Period of the History of the Catholic Syrians of Malabar*, (Ernakulam: 1920), part 2, p.87.

19 Cherian Varicatt, *The Suriani Church of India*, p.7.



Patriarch still claimed powers of jurisdiction over the St Thomas Christians in India. The Patriarch came forward with his arguments in the First Vatican Council in 1869, but no clear-cut decision was taken. The Apostolic Vicar of Verapoly, Msgr. Mellano, who was in Rome asked permission from Propaganda to receive the Syrian Christians from under Padroado and the reply to his petition dated February 5, 1870 advised him to receive them at their request without endangering the 1857 concordat.

## 9. MELLUS SCHISM<sup>20</sup>

From the second half of the 1860s, after the Rocos schism, some Syrian Catholics from the Padroado jurisdiction, especially priests, deacons and other clerics wrote many supplications to Rome, asking for native bishops of their own tradition. Numerous petitions were sent to the Chaldean Patriarch, too. Due to repeated requests from Malabar, under the initiative of a Chaldean monk, Philip Aziz, the Chaldean Patriarch yet again sent a bishop, Mar Elia Mellus, to Malabar who reached Bombay in August 1874. In spite of the efforts of Msgr. Leo Meurin, the then Apostolic Vicar of Bombay, he reached Trichur on October 21, 1874. As Mar Mellus reached Malabar, Mar Abdiso, (Antony Thondanatt), the parish priest of Edamattam who had been reconciled with the Catholic Church, relapsed and joined him. The parishes of Syrian Catholics which followed Mar Mellus were mainly in the North of Verapoly and under the jurisdiction of Goa. Mar Mellus also ordained many priests in Malabar and, at his request, another Bishop, a certain Mar Philip Jacob Uraha, reached Malabar from Persia to help him. The presence of Mar Mellus increased the confusion and division among the Syrian Catholics. The net result of the presence of the Mellus in Malabar is the present Assyrian Church of the East in Trichur.

20 Cf., Paul Pallath, *The Catholic Church In India*, pp. 98-99.

## **10. WHY THESE SCHISMS**

It is to be noted that the principal cause of the schisms of Rocos and Mellus was the legitimate desire of the St Thomas Christians to have bishops of their own rite and liturgical language, and the impossibility of the clergy and the Christian faithful to verify the authenticity of the canonical mission of the bishops, sent by the Chaldean Catholic Patriarch under the pretext of the ancient tradition, who affirmed to exercise jurisdiction in the name of the Patriarch at the order of the Roman Pontiff. The whole situation was further complicated by the general frustration engendered by the administration of the Latin bishops and the continuous jurisdictional conflict between the ministers of Propaganda and the Padroado.

## **11. CMI CONGREGATION**

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the community members took the lead in writing petitions to Rome ignoring the prohibitions of the missionaries, requesting for a separate bishop of their own Rite and nation. The Malabar Carmelites (CMIs) took the lead in this campaign and Mannanam monastery, the Mother House of the CMIs, founded in 1831, was the place for this type of meetings and consultations. Of course, we do not belittle the prophetic, ecumenical and dynamic leadership of Nidhirikal Mani Kathanar, (Fr. Emmanuel Nidhiri) who could make use of the human resources and infrastructural facilities of the Malabar Carmelites. During the time of Vicar Apostolic Archbishop Leonard Louis Mellano (1868-1887) the Thomas Christians used to assemble at Mannanam and Pulincunnu monasteries and the CMI fathers there gave them the leadership to submit petitions to Rome asking for native bishops and to liberate them from the Carmelite foreign rule. These petitions in history are known as "Mannanam Petitions." The content of the petitions includes the evil effects of Rocos (1861) and Mellus (1874) interventions and the request to separate the Catholic Thomas Christians from the Latin jurisdiction and to



appoint a native bishop. The petitioners also demanded that a Visitor may be appointed to study the problems in Malabar and the Visitor should not be a Carmelite. Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara had already written to Rome about the negative consequences of the Rocos disturbances and the need to appoint native bishops. The Malabar Syrian Carmelites fought a strenuous fight against the schisms of 1861 and 1874, distinguished themselves conspicuously, and merited a letter of praise from Pope Pius IX, dated September 5, 1861.<sup>21</sup>

The Vicar Apostolic Archbishop Louis Mellano did not take much interest in carrying out the instructions of the Propaganda Congregation to appoint native bishop for the Catholic Thomas Christians. More and more members joined in the petition campaign for a division of the Vicariate with a separate bishop for them. On September 1, 1875 a few CMI priests sent a petition to Rome and the missionaries who came to know about this decided to take action against them. In December 1875 and in February 1876 seven members of the CMI Congregation were expelled from the religious Community for having written to Rome without the permission of the Carmelite missionaries. The expelled ones are known in history as the Seven Dolours, an expression used by Msgr. Leo Meurin, S.J., Apostolic Visitor, which included Mar Louis Pazheparambil, who in 1896 became the Vicar Apostolic of Ernakulam.<sup>22</sup> The seven dolours are Fr. Paulose Shankoorikal, Fr. Mathai Mathekal, Fr. Mani (Emmanuel) Meenattoor, Fr. Ouseph Chavara, Fr. Varghese Keeri (Irimpan), Fr. Hilarios Tharavattathil and Fr. Louis Pazheparampil. Fr. Varghese Thoppil also was expelled from the Congregation.

21 Bernard, TOCD, *A Brief Sketch of the History of the St Thomas Christians* (reprinted with updated details by Francis Thonippara, CMI), (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2019), p.93.

22 Cf., Francis Thonippara, CMI, *Seven Dolours of the Syro-Malabar Church*, in *Ascend to Holiness*, Francis Thonippara, CMI, (Editor), (Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2018), pp. 345-363.



## 12. APOSTOLIC VISITORS

Roman authorities took the volatile ecclesial situation of Malabar Christians seriously and wanted to collect the details of the ecclesial situation directly through their non-Carmelite representatives. Till then the Roman authorities acted on the reports of the foreign Carmelite missionaries, which were very often biased and prejudiced. Hence, in 1876 the Propaganda Congregation appointed Msgr. Leo Meurin, S.J., Vicar Apostolic of Bombay, as Apostolic Visitor.

Catholic Thomas Christian priests and lay representatives assembled at Mannanam and Ollur and submitted their petitions to Msgr. Leo Meurin, who had selected Nidhirikkal Mani Kathanar, a leading member of the Community, as his interpreter. The Malabar Carmelite monastery at Elthuruth and the members of the Elthuruth monastery extended their full support to Msgr. Leo Meurin for the effective carrying out of the mission entrusted to him. The Apostolic Visitor was presented with what came to be called the *Mannanam Petition* signed by 136 priests. Msgr. Leo Meurin spent almost one year in Malabar and presented a detailed report to the Roman authorities on his assessment of the situation.

After receiving opposing reports from the Vicar Apostolic and Apostolic Visitor, the Propaganda Congregation in November 1876 decided to send Msgr. Ignatius Persico, a Capuchin and bishop of Bolina, to study the Malabar situation and present a report. His visit was of a private character. Both Visitors presented their reports and the Roman ecclesiastical authorities for the first time got reports free from the prejudices of the Carmelite missionaries. In his report Msgr. Persico suggested ritual division and proposed the Carmelite missionary Fr. Marcelline of St Theresa as bishop for the Catholic Thomas Christians, while Vicar Apostolic Msgr. Mellano should continue for the Latins.<sup>23</sup>

23 Cf., Varkey J.Vithayathil, *The Origin and Progress of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy*, (Vadavathoor, Kottayam:1980), pp. 52-54.



### 13. IDENTITY OF THE ST THOAMS CHRISTIANS

Patriarch Iso Yahab III (650-659) created the Metropolitan See of India with suffragans and the bishops might have come from Persia and thus there was a hierarchy for the Indian Church and enjoyed lot of autonomy in the daily life.<sup>24</sup> In 1567 Mar Abraham was appointed the Archbishop of Angamaly and Superior of all the Bishops and Metropolitans of India by the Chaldean Patriarch Abdiso, according to the directions given by Pope Pius IV.<sup>25</sup> The Indian Church maintained an identity of her own and she was distinct from the Persian Church culturally, geographically and politically, although St Thomas Christians followed the East Syrian liturgy, spirituality, theology and church discipline. "Thus, the Malabar Church was not a branch or offshoot of the Nestorian one, as was the early Christianity in China, but it became, and long remained, a voluntary associate member of the Syro-Chaldean Patriarchate for practical not for doctrinal reasons. Their mutual relations were the outcome not of organic development of one moral body but of historical intercourse between two moral bodies each retaining separate corporate responsibility."<sup>26</sup> Fr. Placid Podipara even argues that the Indian Church was autonomous to the extent that the Metropolitan of India was considered a quasi- Patriarch.<sup>27</sup>

24 Tisserant-Hambye, *Eastern Christianity in India*, (Bombay: 1957), p. 31-34; Podipara Placid, *The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church*, (Aleppy: 1976), p. 49.

25 Podipara, *Hierarchy*, 68, 71; Thekkedath Joseph, *History of Christianity in India, Vol.II*, p. 48.

26 From a letter of Msgr. Leo Kierkels, the Apostolic Delegate in India, to Rev. Fr. Placid Podipara CMI, on 14 November 1938 from Bengaluru, published in *Christian Orient* 3 (1981), pp.120-129, pp.125-126.

27 Fr. Placid depends mainly on Schurhammer G, S.J., *The Malabar Church and Rome during the early Portuguese Period and before*, Trichinopoly, 1934, p. 28 and Vallavanthara Antony, CMI, *India in 1500 AD The Narratives of Joseph the Indian*, (Mannanam: 1984), pp.168 -169. This needs further research. However, it is interesting

The Metropolitan See of Angamaly was reduced to the status of a simple diocese and it was made a suffragan to the Archdiocese of Goa on August 4, 1600, by extending the *Padroado* over Angamaly. The Thomas Christians when they came to know of the degradation of their Church they gave vent to their bitter feelings saying: "What wrong have we done...? Was not our Church founded by an Apostle? Is it not the most ancient Church of India? This is the doing of the Archbishop of Goa.... How can he be the Primate if our Church is more ancient than his?..."<sup>28</sup> This spontaneous reaction is the clear testimony of the sub-conscious identity consciousness of the St Thomas Christians. On account of the jurisdictional conflicts between Archbishop Francis Ros of Angamaly and Bishop Andre of Kochi, the Holy See decided in 1610 to restrict the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan of Angamaly to a limited area irrespective of the ecclesial identity of the faithful living in that area. Consequently, on December 10, 1610, India was territorially divided among the *Padroado* prelates of Goa, Kochi, Kodungallur (Cranganore, old Angamaly) and Mylapore. "Thus the All-India of the Metropolitan and the Gate of All-India of the Syro-Malabarians was *de facto* and *de jure* abolished. The Syro-Malabarians were divided between the Sees of Cochin and Cranganore under which there were also Latins."<sup>29</sup>

With the imposition of Portuguese *Padroado*, Kodungallur became part of the Portuguese Latin hierarchy in India and began

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to note that just before the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653, in a letter sent by Atallah, designated himself as the "Patriarch of China and of All India"; Cfr., Podipara Placid, *The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church*, p.124.

28 Placid J.Podipara, CMI, *The Individuality of the Malabar Church*, in Thomas Kalayil CMI (Editor), *Collected Works of Rev.Dr. Placid J.Podipara, CMI, Volume II & III*, (Mannanam: Sanjos Publications, 2007), pp. 553-562, p. 554; Beltrami Giuseppe, *La Chiesa Chaldea*, (Roma: 1933), pp.134-135.

29 Podipara, *Hierarchy*, p.119.



to be considered as one of the Latin dioceses. From that time the Church of St Thomas Christians ceased to exist as a separate entity, although the Latin Portuguese Padroado Archdiocese of Kodungallur was mainly intended for the St Thomas Christians. The lost All-India Jurisdiction was restored with the Letter of Pope Francis on October 9, 2017 to the Indian Catholic Bishops and with the erection of the Eparchy of Shamshabad on October 10, 2017. Catholic Thomas Christians had to wait for four hundred and seven years for the restoration of the All-India Jurisdiction. .

## CONCLUSION

With all respect to the Carmelites missionaries and appreciating their efforts in bringing unity among the St Thomas Christians, one can notice all through the history the unwillingness from the part of the Carmelite missionaries to give up their biggest mission in the East. At the end of the nineteenth century the Carmelites put a determined fight to hold on their mission. The firm stand taken by Pope Pius IX and the Holy See in the interference of the Chaldean Patriarch in those critical years from 1850 to 1877 was but a reaction. But in the light of history, we can recognize in the decisions of the Holy See a very important and beneficial action towards institution of the indigenous ritual Hierarchy in Malabar. For, had the Chaldean Patriarchate succeeded in the attempts made to place once more Chaldean bishops over the St Thomas Christians, we would not have a Syro-Malabar Rite, nor a Syro-Malabar Hierarchy. The present Syro-Malabar Church would have been but an extension of the Catholic Chaldean Patriarchate of Babylon.

In 1860 Rome told the Patriarch of Babylon not to interfere in the affairs of the Malabar Church and when, in spite of this prohibition, Mar Rocos was sent to Malabar, the Pope severely reprimanded the Patriarch, informed the Malabarians that Mar Rocos was not from Rome and hence not to be followed, and even threatened the intruder with excommunication if he did not leave

the Malabar Church alone. The same quick and severe action was taken when Mar Mellus was sent to Malabar.

The events of these years focused the attention of the Holy See on the necessity of considering seriously the question of granting to the St Thomas Christians ritual bishops. Thus in 1865 we can see that the Propaganda Congregation consulting Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli, (1853-1868), the Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha, on the question of the appointment of a Syrian bishop without jurisdiction and in direct dependence on him.<sup>30</sup> Again in 1875 after considering the matter in a General Congregation, it was insisted upon that a Vicar General should be appointed for the Syrian rite. Attention was thus turned, too, to the question of providing for the faithful of the Oriental rite with a separate Vicariate. With the question of a separate provision for the St Thomas Christians brought to the fore, we notice the old prejudice still weighing against the Syrians.

The Holy See took every care to study the situation in Malabar to see the possibilities. The Pope even sent two visitors, Msgr. Leo Meurin S.J., Vicar Apostolic of Bombay, and Msgr. Ignazio Persico, Bishop of Bolina, to find out the real state of things in Malabar.

In analyzing the attempts of the Holy See to provide for the best interests of the St Thomas Christians, we notice that, down through the centuries, the Holy See seemed disposed to grant ritual bishops and was prevented from giving indigenous Prelates, owing, to a certain extent, to the reports received from the missionaries who worked in Malabar.<sup>31</sup>

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30 In that letter the Vicar Apostolic was invited to consider before God the matter of appointing a Syrian Bishop, without jurisdiction, depending on him and for this purpose to forward information regarding the qualities of Fr Cyriac Elias.

31 Varkey J.Vithayathil, *The Origin and Progress of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy*, Kottayam, 1980. pp.44-45.



The ardent desire of the Syrian Catholics to have indigenous bishops was a question which troubled Propaganda continuously from 1862. The provisions taken to regulate the problems were not fruitful, especially since the missionaries in the field overlooked the Holy See's orders. The nomination of a Vicar General for Syrian Catholics was the first arrangement made, but the missionaries objected to Propaganda's suggestion to provide a Vicar General with episcopal character.<sup>32</sup>

32 Cherian Varicatt, *The Suriani Church of India*, pp.485-486.