

# **TANGAZA COLLEGE**

**CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY  
OF  
EASTERN AFRICA**

**THE HISTORICAL GROWTH AND THE CO-EXISTENCE  
OF LATIN RITE AND THE ORIENTAL RITES IN INDIA**

**BY**

**KAINIKUNNEL GEORGE Sdb**

**TUTOR: DR. LUIGI CLERICI**

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**Long Essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirement for Bachelor of Arts, Religious Studies**

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# STUDENTS DECLARATION

**I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for Academic credit to any other Institution: All sources have been cited in full.**

*Kainikunnel George sdb*

**Signed: Kainikunnel George sdb**

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

- NCE**            **NEW CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA**
- VJTR**           **VIDYAJYOTI JOURNAL OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**
- SMC**            **SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH**
- LG**             **LUMEN GENTIUM: VATICAN II DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE  
CHURCH.**
- AG**             **AD GENTES: VATICAN II DECREE ON MISSIONARY ACTIVITY.**
- OE**             **ORIENTAIUM ECCLESJARUM: VATICAN II DECREE ON EASTERN  
CATHOLIC CHURCHES.**
- UR**             **UNITATIS REDINTEGRATIO: VATICAN II DECREE ON ECUMENISM.**

## INTRODUCTION

The bringing together of Eastern and Western Christian tradition was one of the most urgent tasks of the time in which we were living before Vatican II, and yet even now in the aftermath of Vatican II the co-existence of both is not as rosy as it looks. There seems to be a need for mutual understanding which has to be much deeper in order to enrich one another. An element of the very first importance in this task is a genuine meeting and reconciliation between these great Christian traditions. Through the process of history they have lived for so long in ignorance and misunderstanding of one another and they seem unfortunately so far to be continuing to live one apart from the other.

It is in the Church's liturgy of worship, the official expression of her public prayer, that there is to be found the wealth of her tradition, stamped with the particular spirit of this or that civilization and history. In fact, Vatican II speaks of the Eastern churches, that, though separated from the West (Rome), they have the true Sacraments, above all because of the apostolic succession, the priesthood, and the Eucharist, which unite both in close ties, so that the relation between Eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion is somewhat obscured.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, nos. 14 to 18.

The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communities present themselves to everybody as true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but they differ in their mentality and go their different ways, as if Christ himself was divided(1Cor. 1:13)<sup>2</sup>

For nine centuries the Churches of the East and the West went their own ways, though a brotherly communion of faith and sacramental life bound them together. When disagreements in faith and discipline arose among them, the Roman See acted by common consent as moderator.<sup>3</sup> From their very origins the Churches of the East have had a treasury from which the Church of the West has drawn largely for its liturgy, spiritual tradition and jurisprudence.

The heritage handed down by the apostles was received differently and in different forms, so that from the very beginning of the Church, its development varied from region to region and also because of the varying cultures, differing mentalities and ways of life, and the lack of central Church Government. Adapting the liturgy to the culture of the celebrating community was what

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<sup>2</sup>. Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 1.

<sup>3</sup>. Ibid., no. 14.

happened in the earliest days of Christianity. And liturgy was celebrated according to the culture of the people. The various liturgical rites bear witness to this. These reasons and other plus external causes as well as the lack of charity and mutual understanding, gradually led in later centuries to divisions rather than communion.

But the Second Vatican Council finally and for the first time thanks God that many Eastern children of the Catholic Church preserve this heritage and wish to express it more faithfully and completely in communion with their brethren who follow the tradition of the West. The aim of this small presentation is to be a first introduction to this little-known world as it exists mainly in South India and other parts of India, and it endeavors to give its right place to each of the liturgical traditions of the Christian East and learn from each other and enrich by one another.

We all know that Christ's humanity is the instrument of salvation for every human being. The saving actions of Jesus reach us today in the visibility of the many particular Churches, especially by their liturgical celebrations. If we are receptive to God's action in the various liturgies, we can experience God and live an authentic life as disciples of Jesus in any of them. In this perspective we see that Christianity in India, particularly in South India, is entangled with the ways and means of salvation rather than the goal itself. In this paper I am first trying to

present the arrival of Christianity in India which is a good thing following the command of our Master and Lord, to preach the good news of Salvation to all nations. But once this is done, the unity of all Christians is not found due to some of the external factors like rites, territory, power plays etc, which bring division. After having exposed them sufficiently, some suggestions are proposed in the light of the Second Vatican Council.

## CHAPTER ONE

# WESTERN AND EASTERN VIEW OF THE TERM 'RITE'

### The Meaning of the Word "Rite"

A rite is a formal act constituting a religious observance. Therefore one refers to the sacrificial rites of the Old Testament or to the Eucharistic rite. Rites are a universal phenomenon to be found in all religions. In origin they are based upon human actions, e.g., washing underlies baptism, and eating and drinking the Lord's Supper. Hence rites have a natural meaning which has been amplified and enriched by religious associations, without the new and additional meaning being forced arbitrarily upon the original. In other words, rites are not artificial constructions but rest in the natural order and in the sphere of human activities, and unless this connection is preserved they can degenerate into magic or ritualism or intellectualism.<sup>4</sup>

The term "rite" also means the words to be said and actions to be done in performing a given act of religion, eg., the rite of Baptism, rite of Marriage, rite of Blessing Oils etc. It may further be used in a comprehensive sense to designate the worship

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<sup>4</sup>. Davies, J.G., A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1986), p.468.

of a particular Church (Roman Rite, Syrian Rite). We use it in this last sense for a distinct liturgical family, comprising all the liturgical rites and usages of a particular tradition or historic Church as a liturgical family. Rite is the cultural response of a Church community who is created by Christian faith.<sup>5</sup>

This broad meaning of rite comprises not only its external, ritual activities, but also and primarily the particular ethos that sustains the rite, and which the rite expresses. Without this spirit that animates it and that alone justifies its celebration, the liturgy of a rite is little more than superficial ritualism. In Pre-Vatican II Catholic usage, 'rite' in this latter sense was also used to designate the particular Catholic tradition to which one belonged. Since Vatican II Catholic documents prefer to speak of particular Churches.

At the basis of religious rites are four other concepts: that of symbolism, of consecration, of repetition and of remembrance. They are the media for preserving and transmitting the founded tradition of a Church community and at the same time for sharing its experience. This shared experience through the rites sustains the common faith and framework of understanding whereby the community is perpetuated and renewed.

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<sup>5</sup>. Donald Attwater, The Christian Churches of the East (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1948), P.9.

## Rite and rites in the Catholic Church

In present Church law the Catholic Church is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments, and the same government. Within this Universal Church, various groups of the faithful, held governmentally together by a hierarchy, form particular Churches or rites. Although differing among themselves in liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline, and spiritual heritage, they are by Vatican II declaration to be of equal dignity within the Universal Church and are entrusted to the supreme pastoral government of the Roman Pontiff, successor of St. Peter in the primacy.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand the Oriental Churches have kept the traditional self-governing or autocephalous system of patriarchates or major archbishoprics. Rome is but one of these.

The rites of Eastern and Western Christianity emerged in close association with developments and conflicts that took place within the history of the Church. In the East, the cities of Antioch, Alexandria and Edessa emerged as leading centers of influence for the early Christian communities. As such, they are considered as focal points or Mother Churches from which the various Eastern Churches with their rites developed.

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<sup>6</sup>. Vatican II, Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, nos. 1-3.

The emergence of rites associated with each of these places is a complex one. The origins of the various rites lie largely in the geographical, cultural and political diversity that accompanied the spread and development of the Church. It includes theological controversies, geographical, social and political factors, and the influence of diverse cultures. There was also great variety in liturgy and discipline in the various regions and provinces, and the differences were influential in the formation of particular Churches. A rich diversity of Eastern rites was the outcome of this process. The term rite came to be used not only in a liturgical sense, but also in a canonical disciplinary point of view, and a combination of both.<sup>7</sup>

#### Canonical Rite and its Specificity

A canonical rite is constituted when the necessary material and formal elements are verified.<sup>8</sup> The material element of a canonical rite comprehends a group of faithful with their own hierarchy, with their own discipline, both canonical and liturgical, and with their own homogeneous spiritual heritage. The material element of a canonical rite includes also the canonical and liturgical discipline that binds a particular group together. The liturgical discipline is often shared by several

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<sup>7</sup>. Peter, M.J.Stravinskas, "Rites", In Catholic Encyclopedia, (USA: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Company Division, 1991), p.833.

<sup>8</sup>. Wojnar, "Rites, Canonical", in NCE 12: 515.

canonical rites, and cannot, of itself, be sufficient to constitute a canonical rite.

The formal element constitutive of a canonical rite is the acknowledgment or recognition by the Church, either express or tacit, that a certain canonical rite is *Sui Iuris*, or autonomous. The autonomy of a canonical rite means that one rite is independent of another. The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the autonomy of the particular Churches or rites within the Catholic Church by the Decree on Catholic Eastern Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*.

#### Description of the Eastern and Western Rites

The number of various canonical rites has been the subject of much dispute, for example, the Ruthenians are the Bielruessian, and not Ukrainians, who have emigrated to the United States and Canada. Therefore, I suggest that the Ruthenian rite and the Ukrainian rite be considered as two liturgically distinct rites like the Bulgarian, Albanian rites are. It can be said that there are 18 canonical rites. Since it is required that a canonical rite within the Catholic Church be at least tacitly recognized as such by the Holy See, it is necessarily to study the various documents that have been issued. They can be classified in the following manner:

From the patriarchate of Alexandria two canonical rites are derived: the Coptic rite and the Ethiopian rite. From the

Patriarchate of Antioch (West Syrian) three: the Syrian rite, the Maronite rite, and Malankar rite [This church broke away from the Catholic Syro-Malabar community, and came back to the original Syrian liturgical and organizational structures]. From the East Syrian church [also an offshoot of the Patriarchate of Antioch]: the Chaldean rite and the Malabar rite. From the original Byzantine church nine rites: the Bulgarian, Greek, Georgian, Italo-Albanian, Melchite, Rumanian, Russian, Serbian, and Ukrainian (Ruthenian) rite. Neither the Armenian nor the Latin rite have daughter rites.<sup>9</sup>

The Latin rite of the church of Rome is the dominant rite of Western Catholicism and the one most widely used throughout Christianity. It is called "Latin" from the fact that since the fourth century its official language in discipline and liturgy was the language of the Roman imperial Capital in the province of Latium.<sup>10</sup>

#### Various Rites of the Oriental Catholic Churches

There are at present twenty-one Eastern Catholic Churches in full communion with the Apostolic See of Rome. Each of these churches possess its own rite. The most numerous Eastern Catholic

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<sup>9</sup>. Ibid., p.516.

<sup>10</sup>. Ibid., p.577.

rites among them are (Statistical estimates in 1993 in round numbers): Armenian: 142,000); Byzantine: 8,840,000; Coptic: 152,000; Ethiopian: 118,000; Maronite: 470,000, and Syro-Malabar: 2,900,000; West Syrian: 100,000; Syro-Malankar: 280,000.<sup>11</sup>

As intermediate Church structures developed after the fourth century, uniting scattered local Churches of one geographical area into ecclesial federations usually called patriarchates or catholicosates: Catholicos was a kind of patriarchal delegate, ranking second after the patriarch. The diverse liturgical usages within these zones of Jurisdiction were gradually considered to form the present Eastern rites.<sup>12</sup>

Outside of the Roman Empire were the Churches of Armenia, Mesopotamia within the Persian Empire, Ethiopia, and the Malabar coast of South-West India. The East Syrian or Assyro-Chaldean Church of Mesopotamia separated after the Council of Ephesus in 431. The Coptic and Ethiopian Churches followed the move of their Mother Church, Alexandria, separating following the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The Latin and Byzantine Churches through a process of gradual estrangement separated formally in 1054.

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<sup>11</sup>. MacBrien (Ed.), "Rite" In Encyclopedia of Catholicism, (1995), p.1118.

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid., p. 445.

In the first seven centuries of Christianity, before the Islamic conquests, Eastern Christianity was preeminent intellectually and culturally, developing a rich and theologically sophisticated patristic literature especially in Greek, Syriac, and Armenian. The liturgies of these churches reflect the Trinitarian, Christological and Marian theological controversies and subtleties of that epoch, as well as the later influence of medieval monasticism.

### Characteristics of Oriental Rites

The "Oriental Churches" are so called because they originate in the Orient, more precisely in the Eastern or Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire, from the time of the separation resulting from the contested dogmatic formulas of the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451. In the first seven centuries of Christianity, before the Islamic conquests, Eastern liturgies underwent notable growth and development, paralleling the growth of the Church and the need to respond to the theological problems of the time. Western Christianity was much less dynamic in this early period, and its liturgies more conservative. The widespread notion that Eastern liturgies almost always reflect an older, apostolic form of Christian worship is unfounded.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>. Amato, "Oriental Churches", In the Dictionary of Fundamental Theology, (New York: The Cross Road Publishing Company, 1994), p. 179.

The sumptuousness of their symbolism, vestments and ceremonial- the beauty of their chant, and the rich iconography of their Churches- combine to make an overwhelming sensible impact on the worshipper. Eastern liturgies are notable because of their length, frequent use of incense, and they are always sung. Parts of the service are hidden from view within a sanctuary enclosed by all iconostasis, a curtain or barrier is another interesting fact.<sup>14</sup> On a deeper, interior level, these rites are characterized by their transcendental eschatological spirit and profound sense of mystery and awe; by the richly developed Trinitarian, Christological, and Marian theology of their prayers and hymns; and by their strong monastic stamp.

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<sup>14</sup>. Ibid.,

## CHAPTER TWO

### TWO MOTHER CHURCHES: EAST SYRIAN (ASSYRO - CHALDEAN) AND WEST- SYRIAN (SYRO -ANTIOCHENE)

#### The East Syrian Church and its Rite

The most ancient of the existent rites is the East Syrian rite, reflecting the same semitic strain in the New Testament Scriptures. This more Jewish strain kept the Aramaic of Jesus and ultimately centered in Edessa. This tradition is known as the East Syrian; Mesopotamian or Persian because its members were outside the Roman, and within the Persian Empire. The Edessene liturgy can with some linguistic truth claim to be the most closely connected with the first Jewish Christian in Jerusalem. It retained many of the semitic traits and was very little influenced by Hellenism.<sup>15</sup> But most of the ancient documents attesting to the above fact were destroyed during the Roman-Persian Wars.

The liturgical descendant of this ancient semitic rite is the present tradition of the Chaldean and Syro-Malabar Catholic Churches and their Orthodox counterpart in India, the Assyrian "Church of the East". The Mesopotamian Church was in antiquity centered in the catholicosate of Selucia-Ctesiphon on the Tigris

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<sup>15</sup>. Megivern: "Ritual Families", in NCE 8: 912.

River, about thirty miles South of Baghdad, in present Iraq. A Synod held there in 410 unified the liturgical usages of Mesopotamia to form the basis for this rite. It is rich in ecclesiastical poetry by famous Syriac fathers like Ephraem(d.373), Marutha of Maipharkat(d.ca.420), Narsai(d.502), Babai the Great(d.628). The most notable reform of the rite was under the catholicos Isho Yahb III at the Upper Monastery of Mar Gabriel on the Tigris, in Mosul, in 650-51.<sup>16</sup>

This Church, used to be called "Nestorian"(not any more now), separated from the other Churches over the condemnation of Nestorianism at the Council of Ephesus in 431. As early as the thirteenth century, Latin friars had been active among Assyrian Christians in Persia. This missionary effort led to a series of individual conversions of Bishops and brief unions with Rome, but no permanent community was formed. In the mid-fifteenth century a tradition of hereditary patriarchal succession(passing from uncle to nephew) took effect in the Assyrian Church and untrained minors were being elected to the patriarchal throne.<sup>17</sup>

When such a patriarch was elected in 1552, a group of Assyrian Bishops refused to accept him and decided to seek union with Rome. They elected the reluctant abbot of a monastery, as their own patriarch and sent him to Rome to arrange for a union with the

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<sup>16</sup>. McBrien, p. 447.

<sup>17</sup>. Ibid., p. 295.

Catholic Church. In early 1553 Pope Julius III proclaimed him patriarch Simon VIII "of the Chaldeans" and ordained him a Bishop in St. Peter's Basilica. The new patriarch returned to his homeland and began to initiate a series of reforms, but opposition, led by the rival Assyrian patriarch was strong. Simon was soon captured by the pasha of Amadya, tortured, and executed in 1555. This initiated a long struggle between Romans Chaldeans and non-Roman Assyrians in which the Romans, eventually got the upper hand. It is now estimated that the Chaldean Catholic Church is three times as large as the separate "Assyrian Church of the East in Iraq."<sup>18</sup>

The Chaldean catholics suffered heavily from massacres during World War I when four Bishops, many priests, and about seventy thousand faithful died. The three different groups that are surviving today as representatives of the East Syrian liturgy are the "Nestorians", the Catholic Chaldeans, and the Malabar Christians of South India and they are in communion with Rome.

#### The West Syrian Church and its Rite

The West Syrian rite is today called the Syro-Antiochene rite. It is the liturgical tradition of the Syrian Orthodox in the patriarchate of Antioch as well as and in India, of the West Syrian and the Syro-Malankara Catholics. The Patriarchal rite of Antioch, known today as the liturgy of St. James, is the product of a fusion

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<sup>18</sup>. Ibid.

of the primitive rite of Antioch and of the 4th century Jerusalem rite. Antioch and Jerusalem were the principal liturgical centers at the origins of the west Syrian rite. This rite consisted of Syriac hymns and other choral pieces, with material translated from Greek liturgical texts of the early Jerusalem and Antiochene traditions. This synthesis was the work of Syriac-speaking hinterlands of Syria, Palestine, and parts of Mesopotamia.<sup>19</sup>

These West Syrian Christians were organized into an independent Church under Jacob Baradai(d.578), after whom they used to be called "Jacobites". The Divine office of this rite is closely related to that of the present Maronite Catholic rite. Its Eucharistic liturgy, however, is based on the Jerusalem liturgy of St.James. "Jacobites" did not accept the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon(451) that in Christ there are two natures, one human and one divine. Today they form the Syrian Orthodox Church. In 1971 and in 1984 both the Patriarch and the Pope(Rome) of the respective Churches signed a joint agreement on matters of faith in which the old theological controversies have been resolved by a clear common proclamation of faith in Christ with two natures, expressing that both traditions, the Syrian and the Roman, had put the stress under Culturally, as well as political pressure, on one or the other aspect of Christs two natures.

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<sup>19</sup>. Ibid.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

#### The Early Existence

Antioch, and Alexandria, Carthage and Edessa were the great African and Eastern centers of early Christianity before the rise of Constantinople. They were the capital cities of the Asian and African provinces of the Roman Empire. Before the rise of Islam, Christianity was the religion of a large majority of North African and Western Asian peoples. Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Lybia, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco in North Africa were all Christian nations until about the eight century. So also in Asia, the great Syrian Church expanded to cover Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Iraq, Iran and Uzbekistan, and later as far as Mongolian China. The early Christians in India were called Syrian Christians because they followed the Syriac liturgy of their Mother Church of Persia, with which the Church especially in Kerala, India had ecclesiastical communion from the 6th to the 16th centuries A.D.<sup>20</sup>

Christianity in India employs a complex, multiritual worship of Mesopotamian origin. A significant community of Christians has

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<sup>20</sup>. Daniel, The Orthodox Church of India, (New Delhi: Paintaid Co., 1972) p. 101.

lived on the South West Malabar Coast of India since the fourth century.<sup>21</sup> They trace their roots according to a strong but unprovable tradition, to the Indian missionary activity of the Apostle Thomas. "Thomas Christians" existed for many centuries as self-contained and fully inculturated Church in India with strong ties to the (Nestorian) Assyrian Church of the East in What is now Iraq and Iran. It is said that the great Egyptian scholar, Pantaenus, later head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria was appointed as a herald for the Gospel of Christ to the heathen in the East, and was sent as far as India according to the testimony of the ecclesiastical historian Eusebius.<sup>22</sup>

If the India here mentioned coincides with our conceptions, Pantaenus must have reached it just before the end of the second century and, according to the same historian, found that others had preceded his coming, 'for Bartholomew<sup>23</sup> [sic], one of the Apostles, had preached to them and had left them the writing of Mathew in Hebrew letters, which was preserved until the time mentioned'. Whatever be the background tolerance and receptivity

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<sup>21</sup>. McBrien, p. 1237.

<sup>22</sup>. Atiya, A History of Eastern Christianity, (London: Methuen & Co Lts., 1968), p. 359.

<sup>23</sup>. A native historian and former secretary of a former Syrian metropolitan of Malabar, the late E.M.Philip, in his *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, ed. with suppl. by his son E.P.Mathew (Kottayam, South India, 1959), pp. 55-6, belabours the argument that Bartholomew is only a corruption of the Syriac Mar Thoma or Barthoma.



ST. THOMAS, THE APOSTLE

have been the characteristic of the Indian culture. It is, therefore, no wonder that Christianity was received well in India.

#### Tradition of ST. Thomas

The Syrian Christians hold that in 52 A.D. St. Thomas the Apostle landed in the port of Muziris, now known as Kodungallor, in the island of Maliankara, near Cranganore in the state of Kerala, in South India. The earliest account we have of St. Thomas's missionary work is in the *Acts of St. Thomas*, written in Syriac about fourth century. In the background of the extensive trade relations that existed between Kerala and the Mediterranean countries before the Christian era, there is nothing intrinsically improbable in the St. Thomas tradition.<sup>24</sup>

References to the missionary travel of St. Thomas are found in the works of church historians such as Origen (185-254), Eusebius (260-340), Hippolytus and the book of Doctrines of Apostles, composed about 250 A.D. All of them mention Parthian Empire at that time included Persia, Assyria, Armenia and countries about Babylon as far as the borders of present day India. The *Acts* tells the story of the Apostles dividing the regions of the world by lot, and each going to his allotted place to preach the Gospel. According to lot, India fell to Judas Thomas, who is also

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<sup>24</sup>. Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, (Trivandrum: Sree Saroj, 1987), p. 102.

called Didimus. Though he was reluctant to go the Lord appeared and said to him "Fear not, Thomas, go to India and preach the word there and my grace is with thee."<sup>25</sup> And as Thomas was in a predicament to go to India or not, it happened that a certain merchant was there who had come from India. His name was Abban and he had been sent by king Gundaphorus, and had received orders from him to buy a carpenter and bring him back to him. The apostle prayed and besought the Lord, and said: "I go whither thou wilt, Lord Jesus; they will be done."<sup>26</sup> And he went off to Abban the merchant.

However, the most eloquent Churches which bear witness to the activities of the Apostle, have been the Churches of Edessa and India. Some writers tried to reconcile these accounts by postulating a long land journey through Mesopotamia to Parthia and Persia and finally to India. From a small nucleus, the fruit of the missionary work of St. Thomas, the Church has grown into a magnificent and impressive edifice and rightly claims a position of respect and equality in Orthodox Christendom as well as among the commonwealth of Churches.

On arrival, St. Thomas is presumed to have preached the Gospel to the scattered Jews first as also to the local population - among

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<sup>25</sup>. Scheemelcher (Ed.), New Testament Apocrypha, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 443.

<sup>26</sup>. Ibid., p. 443.

high caste Brahmins were converted. We also see that there is no rival tradition for the origin of Christianity in Kerala other than that attributed to St.Thomas. The Malankara Orthodox Church Calendar indicates that the Apostle was speared on December 19th 72 A.D). For three Days St.Thomas languished before he succumbed on December 21 (72 A.D.) He was buried in Mylapur, over the tomb, the Roman Catholic Church raised in 1896, the splendid edifice- the San Thome Cathedral. The Acts are also the oldest witness for the Thomas' martyr death and the transference of his bones to Edessa(West). The transfer took place long before 233 AD, the date given in the Latin *passio*. The feast of the transfer is celebrated on July 3, and which date therefore, is observed as St.Thomas Day in Syria. The Orthodox Church in India also observes the 3rd July in memory of the event.<sup>27</sup> But then there some others claim from the Chronicles of Edessa that the sarcophagus of St.Thomas was transferred to the great church dedicated to him on August 22, 394.

In the book "Diary of a Pilgrimage" by Egeria about 380 AD there is the mention of the Shrine of Saint Thomas the Apostle, where his uncorrupted body lies, that is, at Edessa. When Egeria and party arrived at Edessa, she says, they hastened to the Church and the shrine of Saint Thomas. There, after they had prayed and had done all things that they customarily did at holy places, they read, in addition, some passages concerning Saint Thomas. The

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<sup>27</sup>. Daniel, p. 8.

Church there is large and very beautiful and of recent design and very worthy of being a house of God.<sup>28</sup>

#### Tradition of Knanai Thoma(Thomas of Cana)

There are many traditions of foreign immigration of other Christians who continuously preserved the tradition of Syrian Christianity. One such tradition is associated with the name of Thomas of Cana, the other with the foundation of Quilon which I am not looking into. In the latter case there is evidence of copper-plate records of grants to be considered, which refer to an already existing community of Manigramakkar, which may have been the remnant of a truly Indian Church evangelized by St.Thomas or others in the first century.<sup>29</sup> The first tradition describes the strengthening of the Indian Church by immigrant Christians of East Syrian stock, but the various versions ascribe different dates to this event. Most of the local accounts of the story place it in 345 AD and this is accepted without question even by so careful a writer as P.Cherian.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>. Gingras(Trans.), Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage, (New York: Newman Press), p. 77.

<sup>29</sup>. Brown, The Indian Christians of St. Thomas, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 70.

<sup>30</sup>. Cherian, The Malabar Syrians and the church Missionary Society, (Kottayam, 1935), p. 16-40.

The number of Christians on the Kerala Coast is reported to have been reinforced in 345 A.D. by an influx of Syrian immigrants consisting of 400 Christians from 72 families belonging to Seven tribes in Baghdad, Niniveh and Jerusalem under the leadership of the merchant Knanai Thoma i.e., Thomas of Cana.<sup>31</sup> They were deputed to Malabar by the Catholicos of the East Syrian Church said to have arrived the port of Kodungalloor(Cranganore) in 345 AD and the people of the Kottakkayal(Parur) community and representatives of the 64 Christian families received them and acknowledged Mar Joseph of Edessa as their Bishop. Knanai Thoma and his people built a town, a palace, a church and 72 houses in Kodungalloor. The natives called the town "Mahadevar Pattanam" which means the "Town of Superiors". Knanai Thoma called it the Kingdom of Cana.<sup>32</sup>

The descendants of Knanai Thoma's people lived on the South side of Kodungalloor(Southists or Thekkumbhagga) and the Descendants of St.Thomas Christians of the North side of Kodungalloor(Northist or Vadakkumbhagga). It is also mentioned the Knanayas are referred to as Southists since they came from the Southern Kingdom of Judha with two tribes. The Knanayas(Knanites) and the Syrian Christians(non Knanites) had separate Churches in the same village. Each group had ecclesiastical services from

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<sup>31</sup>. Menon, p. 100.

<sup>32</sup>. Korah, The Christians of Kerala, (Kottayam: D.C. Offset Printers, 1993), p. 35.

priests belonging to one's own group. Archbishop Menezes tried to integrate these two groups.

Knanai Syrian Christians believe that their customs and rituals are a continuation of ancient Jewish practices such as, the celebration of Easter during which Knanayas partake with unleavened bread, reminiscent of Jewish mazot and drink wine prepared from coconut milk and plums which is of a faint red colour like the wine drunk by Jews on Passover night.<sup>33</sup> All these customs and rituals are exclusively practiced by the Knanaya Syrian Christians and so distinguish themselves from the local Syrian Christians.

#### The Advent of the Latin Church in India

The Portuguese came to the Malabar coast in India at the end of the fifteenth century in view of their interest in the spice trade. The the Portuguese missionaries who came along with the traders noticed that the Christians who were there were different from them in rite, customs and hierarchical allegiance, so they eliminated all the Syrian Bishops by way of blocking them from entering Malabar. But Syrians continued entering Malabar all through the 16th century. Gradually the Portuguese missionaries forced the Syrian bishops to change some of the their rites and practices and to accept Latin ones. They introduced private confession, Latin vestments and Portuguese wine and unleavened

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<sup>33</sup>. Ibid., p. 38.

bread for the Eucharist. But on the other hand the Malabarians, who did not consider themselves a church separated from Rome, spontaneously welcomed the Portuguese as brethren in the faith, but they refused to be latinized.

The coming of the Portuguese also marked the beginning of extensive catholic missionary activity in India and the formation of a parallel Latin Catholic Church based in the areas under Portuguese control. The Jesuit Francis Xavier arrived in Goa in 1542 and gave strong impetus to the Latin Catholic mission, especially through publishing and educational activity. Several other Catholic missionary communities began work in the subcontinent and the rate of conversions peaked. Not only that despite the ban of the Hindu Kings, they converted thousands to Christianity from Hinduism in Cochin and its neighborhood.<sup>34</sup> The portuguese wanted to bring the St.Thomas Christians under the control of their own bishops. In 1598 Archbishop Menezes of Goa came down to Kerala, determined to bring the Syrian christians under the direct Portuguese jurisdiction and make them accept the Latin rite.

#### Latinization and Schism

This triggered a Schism between those who accepted these changes(now called the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church) and those who

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<sup>34</sup>. Podipara, "Malabar Rite", In NCE 9: 92

broke with Rome in 1653 and formed what would become the Malankara Orthodox Syrian church.<sup>35</sup> The Council of Diamper (Udayamperur) in 1599 was the most remembered attempt at the systematic Latinization of Syrian Catholics, which ultimately led to a Schism on 3rd January 1653 at the leaning Cross(Koonan Kurisu). According to tradition, the crowd made the oath touching ropes tied to a big granite open air cross that stood in front of the Mattancherry Church in Kerala. The number of people who took part in the Sathyam(oath) being large, all could not touch the granite Cross at the same time. Therefore, they held on to ropes tied to the Cross in all directions. After all these they declared independence from the Gracia, then Archbishop. The group that broke away are called Jacobites.<sup>36</sup> Those who remained in communion with Rome followed the East Syrian (Chaldean) rite and were subject to Latin bishops without a hierarchy of their own.<sup>37</sup> After centuries struggles and reactions from both sides, Rome in 1887 effected a ritual separation of the Syrian Christians from the Latin rite members and recognized a Church called Syro-Malabar Church. This trend was strengthened by the appointment of local bishops for the Syrian Christians and Knani Christians from 1665.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>. McBrien, p. 1237.

<sup>36</sup>. (No Author) Church History, (Shillong: Don Bosco Press, 1979), p. 75.

<sup>37</sup>. Dennis, "Syrian Church in India", In NCE 13: 899.

<sup>38</sup>. Korah, p.55.

## The Syro-Malabar Church and its Rite

Malabar is the South Western Coastal region of India extending from Mount Dolly in the North to Cape Comorin in the South. The Malabar church had its origin and development in this region. The tradition, strong and living, is connected with definite places and even families and is shared by the Hindus.<sup>39</sup> By the end of the 5th century Seleucia became tainted with a mitigated form of Nestorianism couched in subtle formulas. Still, Seleucian patriarchs alone were normally sending bishops to Malabar. Little is known about the Malabar church before the 16th century.

Malabar Church is called St.Thomas Christians because they claim Thomas the apostle as their link to the apostolic church. They came under the missionary influence of the Persian Nestorians until they were cut off from them by the advance of Islam. The St.Thomas Christians were re-discovered in the 16th century by Portuguese missionaries who tried unsuccessfully to impose the Latin liturgy upon them. These missionaries did succeed, however, in heavily latinizing the Malabar liturgy, a deed which is being recently undone.<sup>40</sup> Liturgical revisions begun in 1962 have restored the Malabar Eucharist to its Syro-Chaldean form, and translated it from Syriac into modern Malayalam. The liturgy of

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<sup>39</sup>. Podipara, p.92.

<sup>40</sup>. Fink, "East Syrian Churches", In the New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), p. 1257.

the Nestorian, Chaldean and Malabar Churches is essentially the same.

Syro-Malabar Catholic Church deriving from the Christian community traces its roots back to the Apostle Thomas. Although the Thomas Christians were in full communion with the (Nestorian) Assyrian church of the East, they greeted the Portuguese as fellow christians and as representatives of the church of Rome, whose special status they recognized despite centuries of isolation.<sup>41</sup> But the Portuguese, with the assistance of catholic missionaries (especially), began to impose Latin customs and rituals on the Thomas Christians. This provoked widespread discontent in the community and finally culminated in a decision by most of them in 1653 to break with Rome. In response, Pope Alexander VII sent Carmelite friars to Malabar to deal with the situation. By 1662 the majority of the dissidents had returned to communion with the catholic church.

European Carmelites served as bishops in the Syro-Malabar church until 1896, when the Holy See established three Vicariates apostolic for the Thomas Christians (Trichur, Ernaculam, and Changanachery) under the guidance of Syro-Malabar bishops. In 1923 Pope Pius XI set up a full-fledged Syro-Malabar catholic hierarchy. This new autonomy initiated a string revival of the church.

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<sup>41</sup>. McBrien, p. 1237.

Now (1995) there are four metropolitan sees with equal rank and nineteen other dioceses in India both inside and outside Kerala.<sup>42</sup> Relations between the Syro-Malabar and Latin churches in India have often been marked by tension particularly regarding the question of the establishment of Syro-Malabar Jurisdiction in other parts of India to care for the many who have emigrated there. In 1987 the Holy See began to establish Syro-Malabar personal dioceses throughout India, even where Latin dioceses already exist. The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church today is headed by His Eminence Cardinal Antony Padiyara, residing in Ernakulam and His Grace Mar Joseph Powathil residing in Changanassery.<sup>43</sup>

#### Restoration of Oriental nature of the Syro-Malabar Rite

In 1934 Pope Pius XI initiated a process of liturgical reform in view of a restoration of the oriental nature of the heavily latinized Syro-Malabar rite. A restored eucharistic liturgy, drawing on the original East Syrian sources, was approved by Pius XII in 1957. Despite a reaffirmation of the main lines by the congregation for the Oriental churches in 1985, however, there has been strong resistance to this reform. The majority of the Syro-Malabar still cling to a rite that in externals is hardly distinguishable from the Latin Mass.

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<sup>42</sup>. Ibid., p.1237.

<sup>43</sup>. Korah, p. 106-107.

Syro-Malabar rite is a branch of the ancient Chaldean liturgy with many features of the Latin rite. In fact the primary *anaphora* (Eucharistic Prayer) is that of Sts. Addai and Mari, which is unique in that no words of institution are to be found in it. These words are inserted in the text by the Catholic Chaldeans and Malabarese.<sup>44</sup> By the end of the 16th century, however, two factors unsettled the Portuguese: The Malabar dependency upon the far-off Chaldean church, itself in process of uniting with Rome and renouncing Nestorianism; and the discovery of Nestorian errors in the Syriac liturgical books. Books containing Nestorian doctrines were burnt; the formula "Mother of God" was introduced wherever "Mother of Christ" was found; The Malabar Calendar of "Nestorian" Saints was rejected; and many latinizations were introduced into the Mass and Sacramental rites.

### Syro-Malankar Church

The Malankara Church began its attempts at Reunion with the Catholic Church from the moment of its separation from the latter. The successful reunion in 1930 under Mar Ivanios, the late Archbishop Metropolitan of Trivandrum was the culmination of its efforts for almost three hundred years. Two bishops of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church were received into full communion with Rome in 1930, forming the Syro-Malankar Catholic church. The

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<sup>44</sup>. Fink(ed.), "East Syrian Churches", In New Dictionary of Sacrament Worship, (Colleville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 1257.

first attempt for a reconciliation was made by Bishop Giuseppe Sebastiani after his arrival in Malabar in 1657 could not work as he had to leave Malabar by Dutch and many other attempts followed. The Christians became gradually prominent in the field of trade and commerce and before long they received several privileges and favours at the hands of the rulers who were there at that time.<sup>45</sup>

After the Second Vatican Council there have been some difficulties in the relationship between the Eastern and Latin churches in India because of the limitation imposed on the Eastern catholics concerning the establishment of pastoral structures for their faithful outside Kerala and the ability to engage in missionary activity in other parts of India. These limitations were removed by Pope John Paul II in 1987.

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<sup>45</sup>. Menon, p. 100.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

# **THE CELEBRATION OF EUCHARIST IN THE PRESENT LATIN CHURCH AND THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH**

**Celebration of Eucharist in a Latin Church as reformed by Second  
Vatican Council**

The Eucharist is celebrated in the Latin rite Church in a wide variety of ways. According to various countries it has its own distinctive ethos. And within each church there is a great diversity of style. But a western christian familiar with the Eucharist in his own Latin church will not feel too far from home attending a celebration of in another country or language. He is used to a form of service whose structure is simple and clear. A brief introductory section, often penitential in character, precedes the Ministry of the word, in which scripture readings and psalms proclaim the christian gospel. They are more often than not expounded in a homily. At least on Sundays the Nicene Creed is recited. Then the congregation intercedes for the church and for the world.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist Bread and wine are brought to the altar and set upon it, and the prayer of thanksgiving , the Eucharistic prayer is said, and nearly all present receive the

consecrated bread and wine in Holy Communion. The service ends with a brief conclusion and a dismissal. It is a short service lasting only an hour, even when celebrated solemnly with music and singing.<sup>46</sup>

Simplicity rather than solemnity is the keynote of the modern western Eucharist. Ceremonial is usually the minimum necessary for the performance of the service. Unnecessary movement or gestures are discouraged, lest the essential structure and movement of the service be obscured. The setting of the service, too, is usually simple. The use of special vestments is often restricted to the chief celebrant, while readers and others who may be closely involved in the service wear ordinary clothes.

The active participation of the whole church is a still more prominent characteristic of the modern western Eucharist. Worshippers are encouraged to join fully in a service which encourages congregational responses. The language of the modern rites is simple and straight forward, to satisfy the desire of intelligibility. Members of the congregation are often responsible for the readings and intercessions, and assist with the distribution of communion.

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<sup>46</sup>. Wybrew, The Orthodox Liturgy, (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), p. 1.

The new churches are architecturally designed, and older ones adapted, to associate the people as closely as possible with the altar and those serving it. The Eucharist must be visible as well as audible, for, even if some distinction still remains between priest and people, it is the whole church congregation which is the active celebrant of the service. Particular importance is attached to participation in the heart of the service, the sharing of the consecrated bread and wine. Participation in the Sacrament is not only an integral part of the Eucharist, but it is its climax.<sup>47</sup>

#### Celebration of the Eucharist in a Present Syro-Malabar Church

The divine liturgy, once it begins, unfolds with a degree of hieratic formality now decreasingly favored in western churches, and does so often with little apparent contribution to its progress from the congregation. Every liturgy is fully sung. It is performed largely or entirely by the clergy and the singers. Little in Syrian liturgy astonishes Latin rite christians more than the relative silence of the Syrian congregation. Latins have been brought up to think the participation in worship means joining in the singing and saying of hymns and prayers. While in some Syrian Churches in recent years the people have come to sing some parts of the service, in others it is still sung by choir or chanters alone. At the liturgy therefore, Western christians could learn other ways of taking part in the service.

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<sup>47</sup>. Ibid., p.2.

Eucharistic Liturgy was not so radically changed. The creed comes immediately after the Gospel as in the west; unleavened bread is used in the shape of host as in the Latin rite and communion of the faithful is under one species only. More important has been the insertion of the consecration prayer—translated from the Latin—at the Fraction instead of at the normal position before the Anamnesis and Epiclesis. This is altogether alien to every tradition christian liturgy. genuflections in place of the profound bows and elevations of the consecrated Host and Chalice are of Latin origin. Present Reforms being considered include: use of Malayalam throughout the liturgy, restoration of Oriental vestment and bowings instead of genuflections, and transfer of the words of Institution to their normal position before the Anamnesis.

Syrians too pray with their mind, as they follow the chants and the readings. To the prayer of eye and mind they can add the prayer of the body. For example incense draws their sense of smell into worship, music touches their emotions. But Western worshippers receive their greatest shock when few, if any, of the congregation respond to the invitation to communion. What is for Latins is the normal climax of the service, may be almost totally missing in Syrian Liturgies. The Western christian cannot help feeling that, while the liturgy may be celebrated for the people, it is not celebrated by them.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>. Dalmais, Eastern Churches, (New York: Hawthorn Books Publishers, 1961), p. 75.

The Paschal Rejoicing is the basic mood of every Latin Church at the Eucharistic meal. The hearts of the partakers in the meal are filled with nuptial gladness. In Acts 2:46 we are told expressly: "And breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God". The Communion with the risen Lord gives rise to gladness, for the communicant experiences the presence of the redeemer and is assured that he himself belongs to the kingdom of God. The Celestial wedding supper had begun, the kingdom of God was come, blissful communion with the Lord already existed. The Orthodox liturgies have preserved this early christian mood of rejoicing and spiritual gladness, but with rare participation in the meal.

The Syrian word "Qurbana" for the Eucharist denotes to the Indian mind what it means literally, that is, offering. It is strictly speaking, sacrificial in character and conception.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the most striking feature in Malabarese Christianity is that it was transmitted across the centuries to posterity through prayer and communal worship rather than systematic theology and Biblical polemic. They celebrated the holy liturgy and heard the Bible read to them in a foreign language which they did not know very little.

To a Syrian Christian the church building is the very center of spiritual comfort and the meeting place of all the families

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<sup>49</sup>. Atiya, p. 385.

living in a given area. Church-going on all possible occasions is a binding duty. To him christianity is a complete mode of life. The priest(Katanar), is highly revered by the Indian Community. In public life the priest precedes all laymen. He walks ahead of a procession, occupies the central seat of honour at any gathering, and opens a banquet after blessing the food.<sup>50</sup> In the Eastern rites the whole Eucharistic prayer is given substantial importance. Where as in the Latin rite epiclesis-laying on of hands is regarded as more important.

#### The Architecture of a Syro-Malabar Church

Western worshippers of the Latin rite enter a different world when they go into an Syrian Church to attend a celebration of the Divine Liturgy. They first enter a building whose shape and decoration but are considered to have a significance of their own, apart from the liturgy they have elaborated to house. Passing through an inner porch, or narthex, they find themselves in a nave, square rather than oblong, devoid of all but a few chairs for the elderly or weak. They look up into a central dome, from whose summit an image of Christ the Almighty looks down majestically on the worshippers below.

Round the drum supporting the dome there are prophets and apostles, and a procession of angelic deacons, while on the Vaults

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<sup>50</sup>. Ibid., p. 383.

surrounding the dome, and on the upper portions of the nave walls, are depicted cherubim and Seraphim, the four evangelists, and scenes from the life of Christ. The altars are usually very richly covered. So different is the typical Syrian Church with its many oil lamps and votive candles, and pervasive odour of incense, from the surroundings in which western worshippers usually pray, that they may be less surprised to learn that Syrian Christians are accustomed to regard the church building itself as a sacrament. Far more than a utilitarian shelter for the congregation, it is an image of heaven on earth.

For while the lower portion of the nave signifies the visible world, the dome, and still more the sanctuary, are images of heaven, where the triune God is worshipped by Angels and Archangels and the whole company of heaven. There Christ offers himself to the Father in an eternal sacrifice of love and self-giving; and into that sacrifice the worshipper is drawn by participating in the liturgy which celebrates in spiritual reality what the church building proclaims in sacramental image.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONTEMPORARY CO-EXISTENCE OF SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH AND LATIN CHURCH IN KERALA

Discussions on the ritual question between Latins and Orientals always have become emotionally charged, for the obvious reasons that many are fully involved in it with a view to solve the dispute. The Oriental feels that they have been denied their legitimate rights and freedom for centuries. Besides, they think that they have been dominated, and subjugated by their big brother, the Latin church, for its own self-aggrandizement. Ever since the arrival of the Latin church in India, it has always had the upper hand due to its connection with the powerful Western church and the colonial rulers. Probably the Latins might react when they are now called "oppressors". The Latins feel that the Oriental version of the story is not fully true.

The Latin missionaries were cordially welcomed in India by the Oriental churches as their own benefactors and protectors as I have mentioned already. The Latins claim that they have really saved the St. Thomas christians from the verge of the Nestorian schism and heresy, and made that church grow with new vigour and dynamism by associating it closely with the Roman church and its rich resources. But now the Orientals have turned against their own

benefactors in a very ungrateful manner at the so-called new awakening of the oppressed.<sup>51</sup>

The Orientals say that according to Second Vatican Council each individual church has a right to her autonomy. They want full freedom to take care of their people anywhere in India. They also look for freedom to undertake evangelization in any part of India, irrespective of the present exclusive jurisdictional claims of the Latins. On the other hand, the Latins argue that such autonomy of the Oriental churches will negatively affect our common witness to the non-Christians and the unity of the Catholic Church in India. They remind the Orientals that the need of the hour is unity. Orientals on the other hand insist that unity is not uniformity, and should not be at the expense of legitimate diversity.

Cardinal Parekattil, the first son of the Malabar Church to be raised to the status of Cardinal, was the voice of the Malabar Church in Rome. In his intervention in the second Vatican Council on 27 November 1962, there was a strong emphasis on the individuality and dignity of each Oriental Church in the Catholic communion. "The Oriental rites are integral parts of the Church", he said, "and not mere ornaments or embellishments of the same, as it is stated - may be with good intention - in canon law and other ecclesiastical documents". Such powerful interventions influenced

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<sup>51</sup>. Pathil, "Vatican II and the Rite Question in India" Quest For an Indian Church, (India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1993), p. 118.

the formulation of the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches, especially number three which states that the Churches of the East and West are of equal rank and dignity so that none of them is superior to the others. They have the same right and obligations.<sup>52</sup>

When one looks objectively at these two churches, there are strengths and weaknesses on both sides. We do find some "hardcore Orientals" who might say that the "way of Thomas" and the "way of Peter" have nothing to do with each other. But we know that both Latins and Orientals share in the same Gospel, in the same Apostolic church, though with their own autonomy. They need to be constantly related in communion and mutual consultation. This relationship should not be shallow, but deep as I have pointed out that it is not yet so.

Some of the Latin bishops in India think that the emigrant Oriental Catholics should be kept under their jurisdiction, and that they can take pastoral care of them effectively. They also think that India is a Latin territory where the jurisdiction of the Oriental churches should not be extended further for pastoral care and evangelization. But I think that the freedom, equality and legitimate autonomy of the Oriental catholic churches in India should not be denied for fear of possible divisions and competitions. In fact, Vatican II speaks of the rights and

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<sup>52</sup>. Vatican II, Decree on Eastern Cath. Churches, OE, no. 3.

privileges to be restored in accordance with the ancient traditions of each and the decrees of the ecumenical councils.<sup>53</sup> Unity should not be understood as uniformity and administrative centralization, especially in the context of today's pluralistic society.

### Interecclesial Context and the Problems

The second Vatican Council is very clear on the notion of the Church and has rediscovered the nature of the mystery of the Church as a "Communion of different individual Churches". These churches are different not only in their liturgy and discipline, but also in their theology, spirituality, ministerial structures, organizational set-up. The One Church of Christ exists in the many Individual Churches, which are equal in dignity, rights and obligations.<sup>54</sup>

We said that one of the reasons for the conflict is the lack of freedom to undertake evangelization in other parts of India due to the exclusive jurisdiction of the Latin Church all over India. And the Latin Church is unwilling to accept any extension of the Oriental jurisdiction into its territory, holding firmly to the principle of "One territory, One Bishop, One Jurisdiction." We have already seen above how unjustly and arbitrarily the all India

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<sup>53</sup>. Vatican II, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, no. 2 & 3; *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 14 etc.

<sup>54</sup>. Ibid.

jurisdiction of the ancient apostolic Church of St. Thomas was suppressed and confined to a small area. The extension of its jurisdiction in the 1950s was only very marginal.

A Church becomes what it is by its mission; in other words, the *raison d'être* of the Church is mission.<sup>55</sup> Vatican II emphasized this point. So no Church can be indifferent to its mission and leave its obligation to other Churches. In India there is great scope and need for evangelization, whatever may be the meaning we give to evangelization. In this context the enormous missionary potential of the Syro-Malabar Church today is brought in.

In the past, for a Syro-Malabarian to become a missionary meant leaving his/her own Church and joining the Latin Church, which alone was entitled to do missionary work in India. And thousands of priests, brothers and sisters had to make such an exodus from their mother church, and join the Latin Church to fulfil their missionary vocation. Indeed, they did not regret it and the Latin Church in India is today what it is largely due to their selfless work. The Oriental Churches in India must continue to do this service with unreserved dedication and joy. But this should not be the only pattern of missionary work of the Orientals in India. They must be able to undertake evangelization work as a Church outside their own limited territories. The freedom and equal dignity of all the Individual Churches must be respected,

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<sup>55</sup>. Vatican II, Decree on missionary activity, *Ad Gentes*, no.2.

however small these churches may be. But the fact is that it does not seem to be so in India. Members from these churches are recruited as missionaries to give up their ecclesial identity as a pre-condition". And this situation looks contrary to the mind of Vatican II.

A second reason for conflict is comparatively new. It is the question of the pastoral care of the emigrants from the oriental Churches. Due to industrialization and the emergence of modern cities in India, big numbers of Oriental Catholics from Kerala are migrating to various cities. It is impossible to collect exact data about them, but it is well known that their numbers are quite sizeable in big cities like Bombay, Madras, Delhi, Bangalore, Calcutta. The spiritual and ecclesial well-being of these emigrants is an urgent concern of the Oriental Churches. Their problems and needs were presented by Archbishop Joseph Powathil at the Trichy meeting of the CBCI(Catholic Bishops' Conference of India) in 1982 as follows: Large sections of these emigrants are estranged from their ecclesial spiritual and liturgical traditions. They have no choice but to follow an alien liturgy, tradition and practice. Liturgy is not a matter of mere language. The particular ecclesial tradition is a serious latter.

It is estimated that 70% of the missionary personnel of India today come from the Syro-Malabar-Church in Kerala. It is alarming that there is a steep decline of priestly and religious vocations

among the emigrants. No proper assistance is given to emigrant families in solving their pastoral, socio-economic and cultural problems. The pastors from the Latin dioceses are not capable of discharging this pastoral care properly, as they are not familiar with the ecclesial, liturgical and spiritual traditions of these Oriental Churches.

One may be able to study the rubrics and mimic the liturgy of another Church, but he will not be able to live according to the genius and spirit of such a liturgy, and guide people accordingly. So proper pastoral care of these emigrants is a serious problem. According to Orientals, Latin Bishops and priests are not capable of providing these facilities. At the same time, the Oriental Churches are forbidden to do it as they will be encroaching upon the jurisdiction of the Latin Bishops.

#### **Contributions of Vatican II and Subsequent Developments**

Some Scholars on Vatican II would say that the most important contribution of Vatican II is in the field of ecclesiology. The Catholic Church has distanced itself from a pyramidal model of ecclesiology and moved on to a Communion model which is closer to the New Testament model of the Church. The Church is a mystery which becomes visibly and fully present in each Individual or Particular Church. It means that in each Church the whole Church is fully present. Each Church is not a mere part or fraction of

the Church universal, as if it were incomplete in itself. The mystery of Christ and the Church is fully and wholly present in these particular Churches. Unity of the Universal Church does not mean a relationship between parts and whole, nor does it mean a uniformity. Unity of the Church means communion. All the Churches share in the same faith, hope and love and they have communion in it which is visibly expressed in their mutual fellowship.<sup>56</sup>

The Church holy and catholic, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government and who, combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or Rites.<sup>57</sup>

Lumen Gentium also speaks about the historical formation of the different Individual Churches, their rich diversities, and emphasizes that such differences or diversity do not hinder unity, but rather contribute to it.<sup>58</sup> By divine providence it has come about that various Churches established in diverse places by the apostles and their successors have in the course of time coalesced into several groups organically united, which, preserving the unity of faith and the unique divine constitution of the Universal

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<sup>56</sup>. Pathil, p. 126.

<sup>57</sup>. Vatican II, Decree on Eastern Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, no. 2.

<sup>58</sup>. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23.

Church, enjoy their own discipline, their own theological and spiritual heritage.

### **The Controversy on the reform of the Syro-Malabar Liturgy**

Besides the inter-ritual problem, the Syro-Malabar Church has been troubled in recent years with controversy about the reform of its own liturgy. To understand the liturgical question of the SMC we have to set it in its historical and sociological context.

#### **Historical Setting**

Beginning with the Systematic Latinization in Sixteenth century, sometimes even encouraged by Rome, a kind of inferiority complex was instilled into the Malabarese, as if their liturgy had to measure up to the 'standard' of the Latin Liturgy. Around the time of the Second Vatican Council, the SMC had to make a sudden Voltre-face for which she was wholly unprepared. She entered into a period of liturgical reform in an uncertain, confused and bewildered way. A commission of four members was set up already before the Council, on 10th March 1954. Its chief objective was the removal of the Latinization of the SMC liturgy by the restoration of the Chaldean heredity. The restored text of the 'Qurbana'(Mass) promulgated on 3rd July, 1962, on the eve of the Vatican II, could not yet profit from the rich experience and the eminently pastoral concern of the Council's reform of the Latin

Liturgy. The reasons were the timing of the promulgation, the limited objective of the commission, and the very composition of the commission.<sup>59</sup>

### **Polarization and diversity**

Today some reformers insist primarily still on delatinization and the restoring of the Chaldean heredity, while others stand for a forward march to greater Indian identity, inculturation and updating. The two resulting poles, represented by the two Metropolitan Sees of Changanacherry and Ernakulum respectively, have attracted divergent loyalties, not without the interplay of human interests, motives of local prestige, and conflict of personalities. This polarization has been exacerbated since the promulgation of the "Raza" text (Solemn form) on 8th February, 1986, seen largely as the victory of the minority group in the episcopate (Circa one third) led by Changanacherry, whose priority is delatinization and return to heritage, over two third majority group headed by Ernakulum, whose priority is Indianization and updating. The majority and minority represent two methodologies in or approaches to liturgical reform. Neither approach is holistic. While one underrates a precious patrimony in the name of

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<sup>59</sup>. Nedungatt, "Syro-Malabar Liturgical Reform in Focus", in VJTR, 53, (1989), 177.

incultration and aggiornamento, the other worships it as a sacred relic in the name of tradition and fidelity.<sup>60</sup>

### Sociological Differentiation

There are also considerable sociological differences between the two poles, changanacherry and Ernakulum. The former has its See in a small town with a Christian population that is almost entirely oriental by rite. Ernakulum has its See in a sprawling city Cochin. The faithful live intermingled with those of the Latin rite, with parishes of both overlapping territorially. However much one may be critical of such frantic city life, the fact is that one of the criteria by which the faithful in large cities judge liturgical services is brevity.

### Mass facing the People or the Altar

The Mass facing the people or the altar is a keenly contested issue in the SMC polarization. The Second Vatican Council in its constitution on the Liturgy(SC) did not say anything expressly on the question of the celebrant versus altare/populum; but even before the end of the Council the Holy See authorized the option in the Roman Rite.<sup>61</sup> Departing from a tradition of over a thousand

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<sup>60</sup>. Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>61</sup>. Instruction on the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 26 September 1964: "It is lawful to celebrate Mass facing the people"(95); and "The main

years, the new option recognized that the celebrant not facing the people was one of those changeable elements in the liturgy that did not affect the unchangeable essence of the eucharistic celebration. The option was authorized for the Roman Rite, but other members of the Latin family freely used it. Though the instruction did not apply to the Oriental rites, in some Eastern Catholic Churches (as the Maronite and Chaldean) the option slowly started becoming practice in ever widening circles, even as practice had preceded permission in the Roman rite.

In the Syro-Malabar Church the same practice caught on rapidly in the years following the Vatican Council and a diversity of opinion continues to exist. After the 1968 reform, it began to be criticized by the minority. In fact, some extremists even called it emotionally an "invention of Satan" and "triumph of hell" etc. The arguments for and against celebration versus populum were grouped under historical, theological and pastoral points of view. Some argue saying that in the West nowadays the versus populum position is being abused up to the erosion of the sense of the sacred. Others support the SMC reaching out for integral values and a sense of mystery. Since there is so much confusion on this question it might be of help for us to go a bit into its historical, theological and pastoral arguments.

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altar should be free standing, to permit walking around it and celebration facing the people"(91).

## Historical Argument

From the historical standpoint, it is often asserted that the versus altare position is a universal Oriental tradition, and that it is the only one the Syriac Christianity has known since the fourth century. The early Christian norms were concerned with people and priests alike facing the East during prayer. They did not raise the issue of the celebrant facing the altar or the people. So much so that in certain churches with particular architectural structure it did not matter that the people and the priests did not see each other during the celebration when they faced the East.

The arguments of liturgical theology proceed either from the nature of the Church or from the nature of the Mass. The Church is a pilgrim people, an idea that has the full support of the Second Vatican Council. Now, the Church is aptly represented when the priest and the people face in the same direction during the Mass. The celebrant then properly symbolizes Christ the Head Pilgrim, while the eucharistic assembly follows him forming the long pilgrim train though this argument contains a fallacy.

## Theological Argument

This takes us directly into the second theological argument based on the nature of the Mass itself. Mass is essentially a

sacrifice and sacrifice is best offered with the priest and the people facing in the same direction, for the priest is offering it to God and not to the people. But then it must be recognized that despite the NT theology of the eucharistic sacrifice, Christians have often tended to hark back to the OT temple worship. This is especially so in the Syriac tradition, which reflects most the influence of the Jewish Community. This tendency prevailed everywhere as a rationale for Christian worship conducted in churches built in grand style since the fourth century. The Roman basilicas furnished the model for these churches in the West. It is the conception of the Christian worship in its novelty and continuity with regard to the OT that is ultimately decisive both for church architecture and for the celebrant's position during worship. The West has recovered the novelty through the bible; the East is mostly keeping to the continuity.

### **Pastoral Argument**

The pastoral argument reflects the effect of liturgical experimentation. If the preference of the faithful has been ascertained through a reliable socio-religious enquiry, it should not be simply set aside. The results coupled with the experience of priests are said to favour the celebrant facing the people. Along with *versus altare* and *versus populum*, approved by the Apostolic See of Rome in 1988, is expressed rather indirectly like a concession. Thus Rome has registered a shift of position from

firm insistence on adherence on to the "Eastern tradition" to a free option.<sup>62</sup> Some observers see this as inconsistency and latinization again. There is a further consideration. In the interest of unity, a division between the Northern pole and the Southern pole on this issue has to be avoided. The present polarization will be hardened if bishops were allowed to curtail the above option in their dioceses. This will tend to split the SMC into two Churches because we have sufficient lessons from history where liturgical trifles have become war cries like the Avvakum and Nikon among the Russian Orthodox. Another clear example is of leavened bread and unleavened bread were able to divide the Eastern and Western Christians till the Council of Florence in 1439 declared that both azymus and leavened bread are valid matter for the Eucharist.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>. "Directives on the Order of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana(Mass) in Solemn and Simple Forms," In Christian Orient 9 (1988), 79-86, nn. 19, 64.

<sup>63</sup>. Nedungatt, VJTR 53 (1989) 249-263.

## CONCLUSION

Education and formation require not only the imparting of knowledge but also the inculcation of values and attitudes. Ignorance begets prejudice. On this the Second Vatican Council says:

The mission of the Church is to gather together in one Spirit all people of every nation, race and culture.....requires in the first place that we foster in the Church itself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, and acknowledge all legitimate diversity.... For the factors that unite the faithful are stronger than those of their divisions.<sup>64</sup>

Just as the Indian subcontinent is a mosaic diverse of cultural expressions, the Indian churches too, have their variety of ecclesial expressions which they have inherited from various evangelizing groups that have come to be missionaries in this huge country. The existence of the three Catholic rites the Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara and the Latin rite bear witness to this. Today there is an effort on the part of these rites to rediscover and reaffirm their individuality and identity in the whole country. "Legitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the Church's unity, but rather enhances her splendour and contributes greatly her mission."(Unum Sint, no.50) Whatever be the present controversies

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<sup>64</sup>. Vatican II, Decree on the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the World Today, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 92.

and tensions that we experience as a result of this revival of the rites, especially the oriental rites, there is a rich possibility to shape an ecclesiology for India that will enhance the image of the bride of Christ. There will be an interaction of Indian culture with all these varieties of ecclesial expressions, resulting in newer forms of Christian experience. The present tension may be seen as the birth pangs of a new reality which is beyond our capacity to envisage.

The Catholic Church in India has to become an authentically India Church with its own theologies, liturgies and spiritualities. The link with the universal church will consist in communion rather than configuration in externals. She will be the Sacrament of Christ living and fulfilling his mission in India. The Indian Sacramentality will facilitate the revelation and unfolding of the many riches of Christ hitherto hidden. It is here we need men and women who are ready to serve even without succeeding, contribute even without having the joy of completing the construction, and struggle without reaching the goal in their own life time. These are the missionaries who will build this new church.

Vatican II in a very special way emphasizes the supreme value of the heritage and traditions of the Oriental Churches, especially their liturgy, points out the rich variety among them, and invites all to understand, venerate, preserve and foster this heritage which belongs to the Universal Church, and thus to bring about

reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians. But will we find this coexistence in India?

It must be pointed out that the Council directly discussed the interecclesial problems in India, and gave clear directives with regard to both the evangelization by the Oriental Churches, and the pastoral care for the Oriental emigrants. Oriental Churches enjoy the same equal rights and are under the same obligations, even with respect to preaching the Gospel to the whole world<sup>65</sup> under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff.<sup>66</sup> All the commentators point out that this article of the Decree was written in view of the situation of the oriental Churches in India, where their freedom to undertake evangelization is restricted due to the exclusive jurisdiction of the Latin Church in India:

The real reason why the right to preach the Gospel, that is the right to engage in missionary activity, is especially mentioned among the rights and obligations of all the individual churches is to be traced to the situation in India, where the Malabar Church, which has surplus of priests, was until recently, only permitted to convert people to the Latin rite.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>. cf. Mark, 16: 15.

<sup>66</sup>. Vatican II, Decree on Eastern Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, no. 6.

<sup>67</sup>. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Edited by H. Vorgrimler, London: 1967, Vol. 1, p. 315.

This is the situation today in interecclesial controversy. The problems are not yet solved, as I have already mentioned. There is still much misunderstanding, suspicion, fear, lack of trust and tension between the Churches. At the same time, the pastoral care of the emigrants in many cities is a very urgent matter. I think the laity must be properly informed and better theologically educated. The missionary task of the Oriental Churches in India must be fully recognized and promoted, either by extending their jurisdiction all over India, or by assigning to them more territories. More study and consultations among the Churches are urgently needed, and the theological issues have to be sorted out and discussed more widely and at a much deeper level.

In the context of the three different Catholic Individual Churches in India the directives of Vatican II must be implemented wholeheartedly and by all three Churches concerned without any reservation. The unity of the Catholic Church and the Communion among the Churches, as well as the legitimate freedom and autonomy of the Oriental Churches, must be strictly maintained.

The effective pastoral care of the Oriental emigrants must be given top priority. To promote and foster the evangelization by the Oriental Churches, more and more territories must be assigned to them as a first step. The Latin Bishops must become very generous in these matters, taking into confidence their Oriental counterparts. No chance must be given to competition, rivalry and

prestige, and for this, a nucleus of national and regional interecclesial structures must be created to monitor and guide the interecclesial relationships and collaboration. It must be kept in mind by all that our ultimate mission is to prepare the way to the Kingdom of God, and not merely to extend the boundaries of our own Churches.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, Rite is for man, not man for rite. Rite is no absolute. A Catholic, whether Latin or Oriental, should be able to change it for good reason without too much of red tape or difficulty. What is today still reserved to the Holy See , a hangover of the old era of territorial catholicity, should now in the new era of cumulative catholicity become the competence (at least as a faculty granted or delegated) of the respective Ordinaries of the place or diocesan bishops. Church law and pastors are there to serve and guarantee fundamental human and christian rights. In consequence of the basic human right to religious freedom all may change their rites according to the dictates of their conscience. And let not our energies be wasted on these unimportant matters.

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<sup>68</sup>. Pathil, op. Cit., p. 139.

## APPENDIX I

[Source: Issues of L'Osservatore Romano, Dec-Jan 1996]

It was a coincidence that as I was about to wind up this little work of mine, the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church was held in Rome from 8 to 17 January, 1996. Therefore I thought of putting down in black and white something about the latest developments in this church. The Synod began on the 8th January with a Solemn Concelebrated Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. Cardinal Antony Padiyara, Major Archbishop of the SMC and numerous priests concelebrated. After the Mass the Synod was inaugurated by the Holy Father. The Major Archbishop, Cardinal Antony Padiyara, and Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, Prefect of the congregation for the Oriental Churches, addressed the Synod as well. The meeting ended on 17 January.

This Synod was very significant in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church. Imbibing the spirit of the Second Vatican Council this church also is trying to find its genuine identity as an Oriental Church. IN this process, naturally, there has been a difference of opinion regarding the restoration and renewal of the liturgy, with its repercussions in other fields, too. After the Church was raised to a Major Archiepiscopal Church, the Synod of

Bishops has been trying to achieve a harmonious restoration and adaptation.

Exerpts from the address which the Holy Father gave to the Bishops of the SMC on the morning of Monday, 8 January.

The Syro-Malabar Church, born into the faith from the preaching of the Apostle Thomas, *is one of the ecclesial families in which the rich variety of the Christian East is articulated.* The East Syrian tradition was distinguished for the presentation of the christian faith, sometimes at the price of relentless persecution, for its schools and academics where christian doctrine was explained and sung with marvellous inspiration, as well as for a missionary zeal which brought the Good News of salation in Jesus Christ all the way to your native India, and even to distant China. For many centuries you lived this ecclesial heritage with pride and enthusiasm, enriching it with specific and original aspects of your own cultre and sensitivity.

Even other Christians from the West reached your lands, you gave them generous hospitality. For you, they represented a new openness to the church's universality. At the same time, however, a lack of understanding of your cultural and religious heritage caused much suffering and inflicted a wound which has only been partially healed, and which totally requires a very high degree of holiness and wisdom on the part of the pastors of the church,

chiefly responsible of building peace and fellowship among all Christ's followers. The Synodal structure of the Eastern Churches is a particularly eloquent way of living and manifesting the mystery of the church as communion. Communion is a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is participation in the life of the Trinity. It therefore has to be the fruit of prayer, and requires great effort. It is built up day after day.

Cardinal Padiyara, Major Archbishop of the SMC, addressed the Synodal Fathers on the 8th January and said: "Today Thomas is meeting Peter. The law of Thomas meets the law of Peter. However, what matters is neither Thomas nor Peter, but Jesus Christ. We have our differences, of faith expression, of culture, of language, of race, but we are one with the Universal Church. We are united in the faith in Jesus Christ who became man to redeem mankind irrespective of caste, culture and colour. Great attention should also be given to the concepts and categories which we use when referring to the workings of this Synod. The terms "Majority" and "Minority" can often lead to the concepts of "Victory" and "Defeat", concepts which are foreign to and extremely dangerous for a fraternal communion. If winners and losers emerge from an encounter among parties in the church, then it is the church that loses and in such a situation there are, in fact, no winners."

As is known to all, the SMC is going through an important phase in her history. The pangs of growth and vitality is felt

everywhere. It has shown tensions and anxieties and sometimes it is pictured as a very difficult and critical situation. The table of Our Lord which is to be a table of unity and harmony of those who believe in him has become a bone of contention and great scandal in the name of tradition, identity, inculturation, and a host of other things. Probably, it is because each one is trying to go ahead with his or her own idea about the church, tradition, identity and so on, often without Jesus and the fellow believers. It is not only an embarrassing but also a frightening situation. The Bishops unanimously agreed that what is important now is to respect all those ideas and to blend them together in the right proportion.

One of the results of this Synod is the unanimous agreement of all the Bishops regarding the steps to be taken by all in order to foster greater unity in conceiving and celebrating the liturgy. They have also reached further consensus regarding missionary activity and the pastoral care of the faithful in other parts of India and elsewhere in the world. Holy Father also encouraged them to continue to work, in constant dialogue with the Latin-rite Bishops of India. Great openness and mutual understanding are required on the part of all concerned, in the knowledge that salvation of souls - *Salus animarum* - is the supreme law of pastoral action.

Cardinal Achille Silvestrini, prefect for the congregation for the Oriental Churches, concluded his talk and said that every church passes through times of trial, but the valley of tears becomes a harvest of joy if we accept the moment of crisis as a pressing invitation to strong communion. He concluded his talk by quoting Apostle Paul, addressed to the people of Ephesus:

"I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, exhort you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and meekness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, careful to observe the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph 4: 1-3)

Finally, Communion is a gift "from above", and as such it can only be obtained in the receptivity of prayer. And all must continually pray for this gift of unity. The SMC is the beneficiary of this rich inheritance. This Church has listened to the one message of salvation preached in the voice of the Apostle Thomas. It was Thomas, of course, who was concerned about the path of discipleship, and who asked the Lord: "How can we know the way?". To which Jesus answered: "I am the way....."

## APPENDIX II

*Christians in India 1985*

[Barrett: *World Christian Encyclopedia*, pp. 370, 377, 379]

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Orthodox Syrian Church of the East[=Nestorian]      1.5 mio

Protestants      11 mio

Roman Catholics      12 mio

[of which Syro-Malabar: Changancherry and Ernakulum: 2 mio

Syr-Malankar: Trivandrum:      200,000

Latins:      10 mio

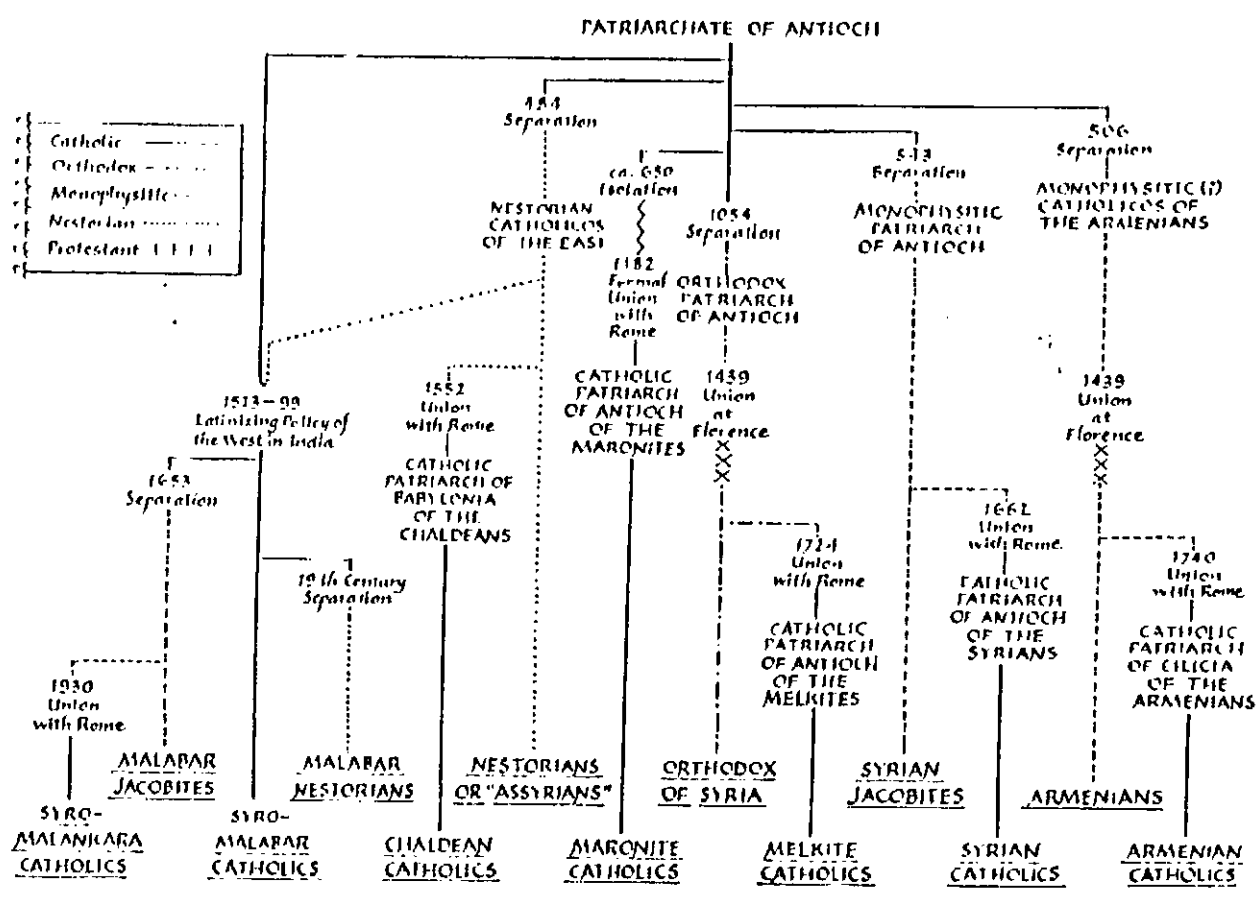
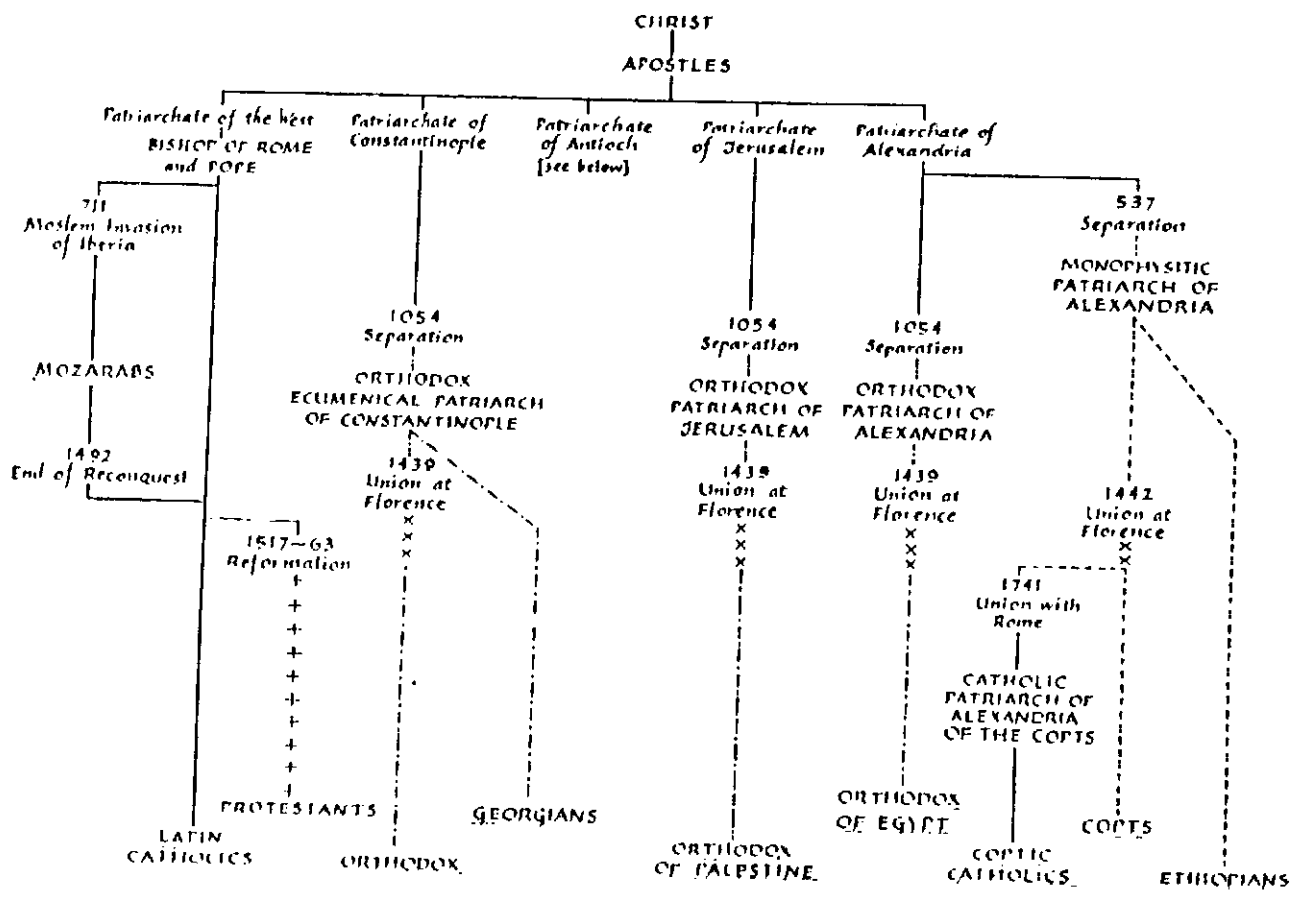
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Total Christians      27 millions = 3.9% of 700 million Population

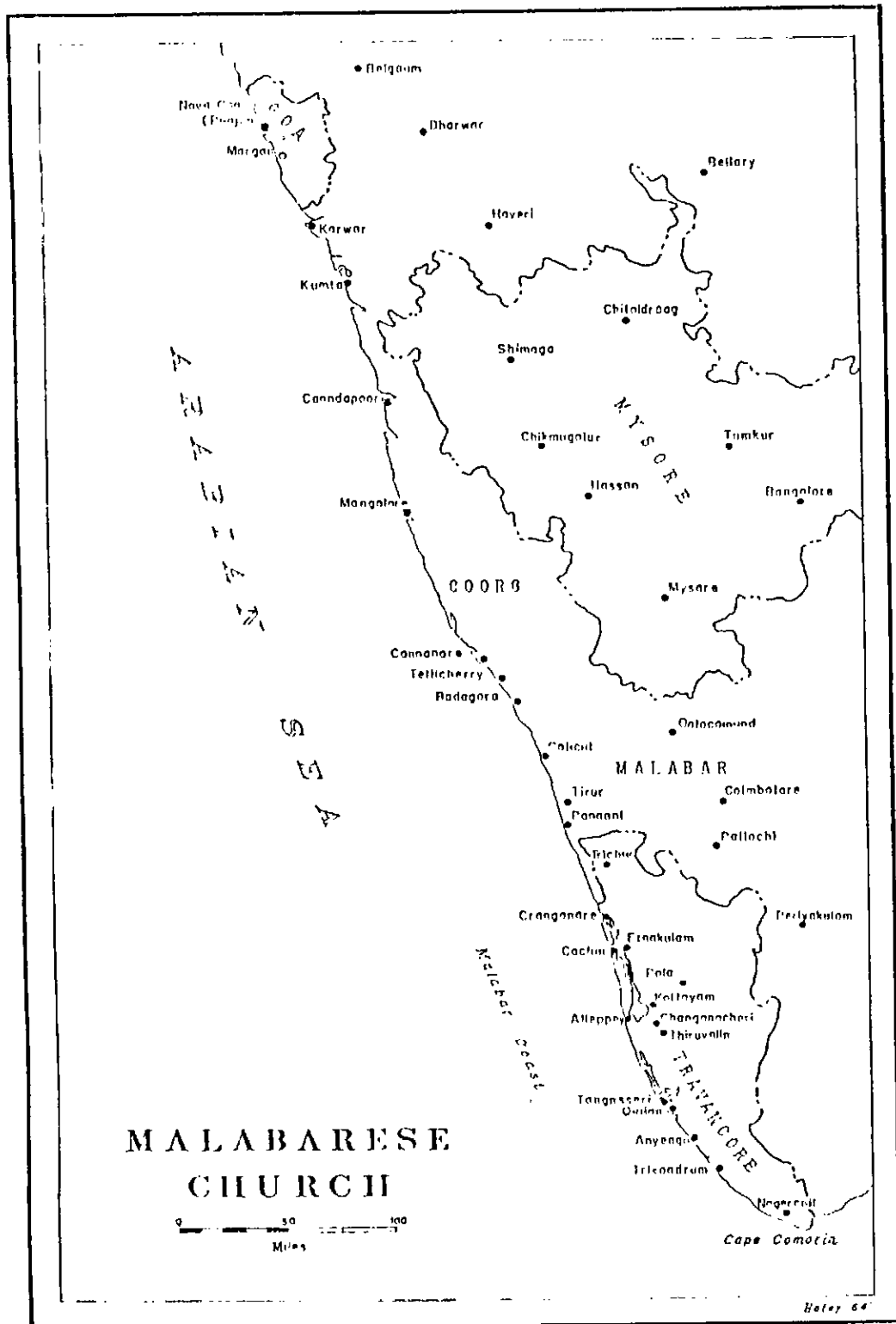
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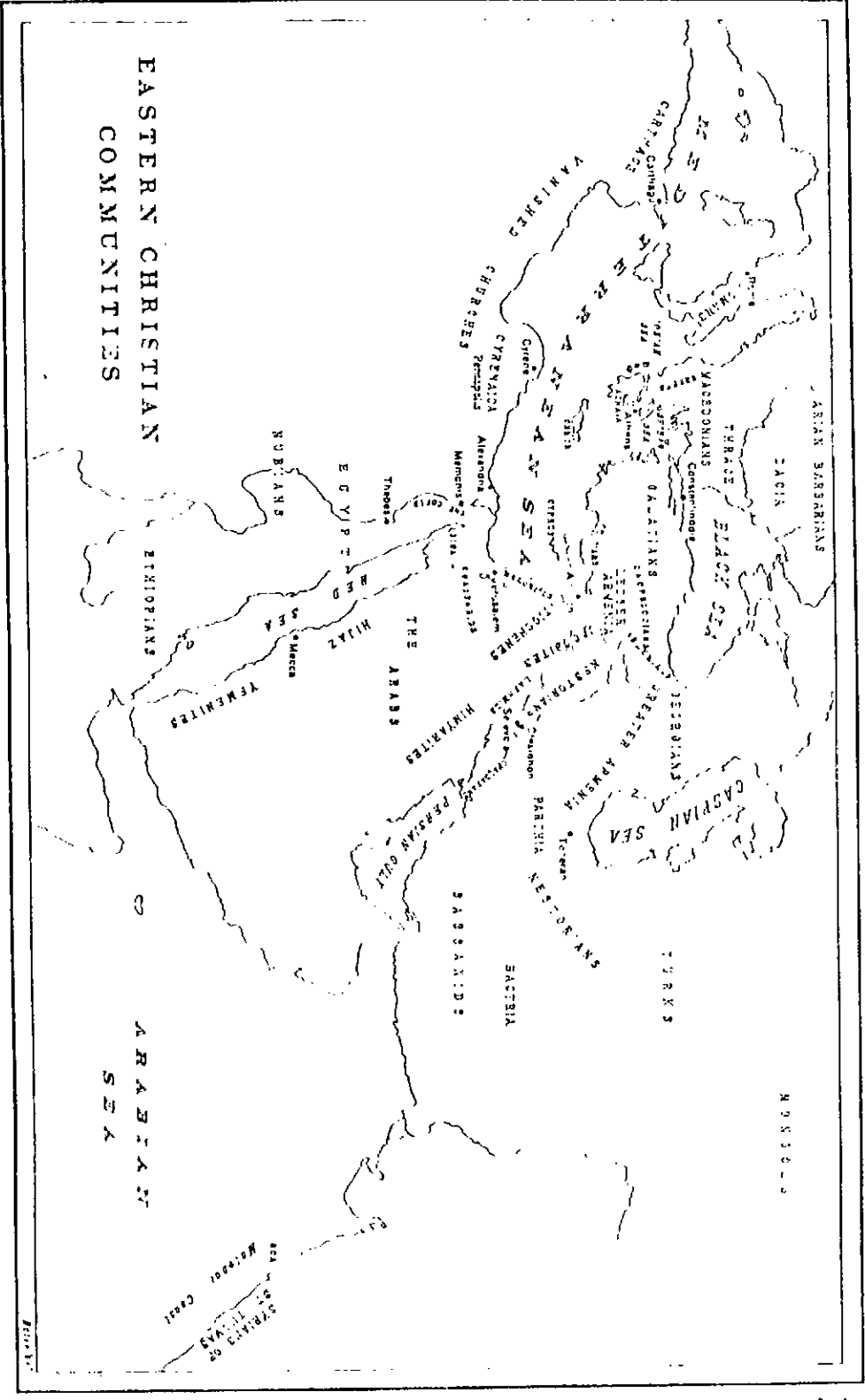
# Sects of Christians



\* Rogers, Francis M., *The Quest for Eastern Christians*, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 1962, p. 16.



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