

**The Syrian  
Orthodox Christians  
of St. Thomas**

**BY**

**DR. D. BABU PAUL**

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He was a member of the Indian delegation to the World Students' Conference held in France (1960), the U.I.T.P. Congresses in Finland (1979), Republic of Ireland (1981) and Brazil (1983) and the UN Seminars on Port Development Policies (Japan, 1984), and Port Pricing Policies (Australia, 1986) and was a member of UN Expert Group on Port-related legislation (1989-91). He has also travelled widely all over the world except China.

His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Zakka granted him the Decoration of the Holy Ghost with the title Bar Eto Briro in February 1982; he is the only recipient of this honour, now living, in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

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CHRISTIANS OF ST. THOMAS**

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(For private circulation)

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*DEDICATED TO*

*HIS HOLINESS MORAN MAR IGNATIUS ZAKKA,*

*Prince Patriarch of Antioch & All the East*

*Supreme Head of the*

*Universal Syrian Orthodox Church*

*“PROTECTOR OF PRO ORIENTE”*

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## INTRODUCTION

*This booklet has been compiled at the request of His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. J. Kelanthara, Archbishop of Verapoly on the eve of the visit of H. H. Pope John Paul II to St. Peter's Chapel, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Cochin on February 7, 1986. Essentially it is an adaptation of portions from my earlier books 'Veni, Vidi, Vici' and 'The Quest for Unity'.*

*Harbour House.  
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Cochin, India  
Feb.1, 1986*

*D. BABU PAUL  
Bar Eto Briro*



## *PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION*

*This booklet is being reprinted on the occasion of the Pro Oriente Regional Symposium at Kottayam. I hope it gives a helicopter view of our community*

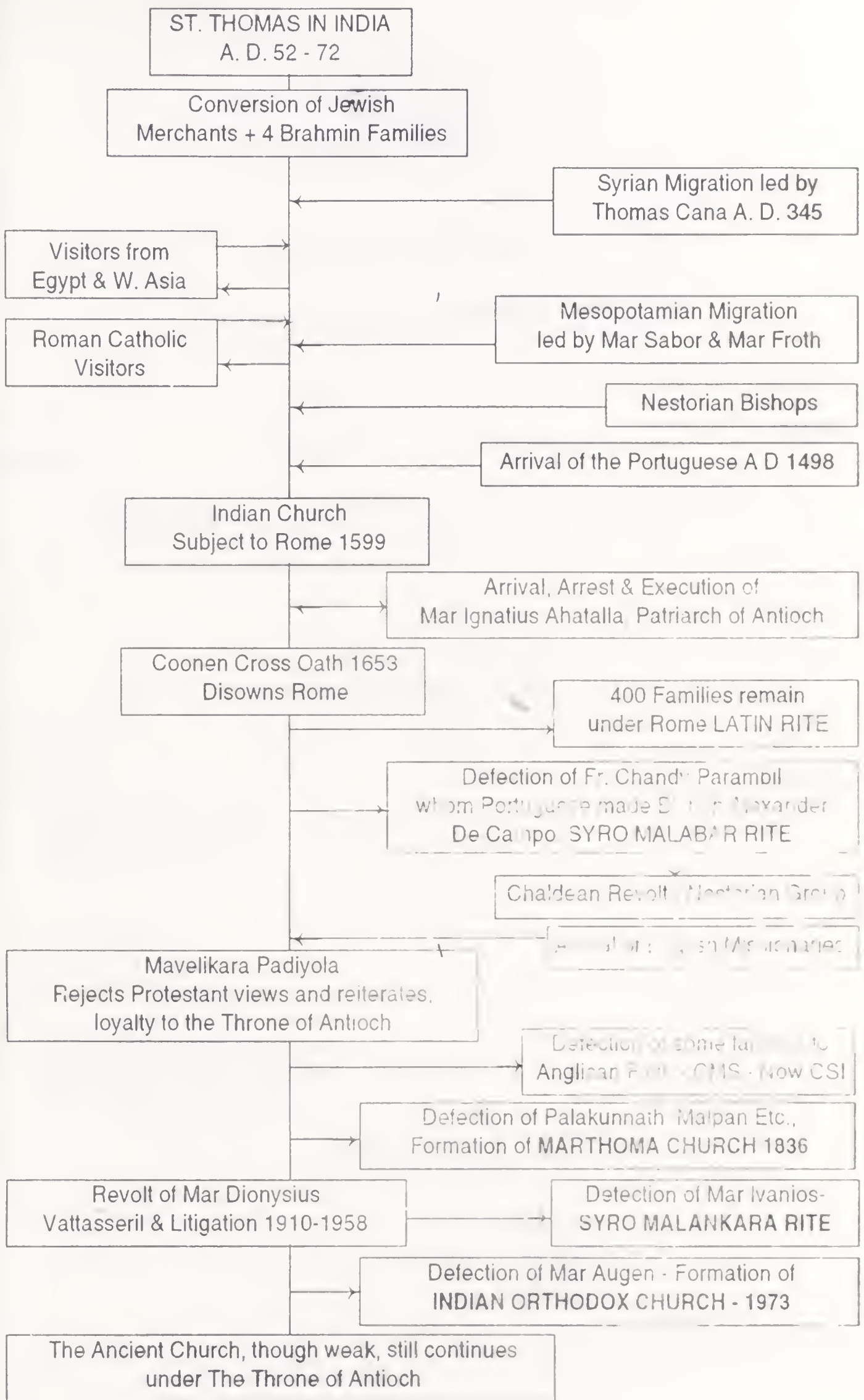
*I must say, in fairness, that my views are not likely to be accepted in toto by all the Syrian Christians in India. I have myself not stopped reading after I wrote this in early and mid eighties, but I am permitting the reprint for two reasons: (a) it reflects the declared position of our people and (b) where I have subsequently discovered new perspectives I am yet to reach firm conclusions myself because no view seems to be flawless.*

*The portion "Protector of Pro Oriente" is adapted from 'Quest for Unity' and is an addition made in this edition.*

Cheerothottam,  
Kowdiar, Thiruvananthapuram- 695 003  
30 September 1993.

**D. BABU PAUL**  
Bar Eto Briro







THE RISEN LORD  
DISCIPLES  
EARLY CHURCH

Conversion of Constantine  
&  
Councils of Nice; Constantinople & Ephesus

Antioch                      Alexandria                      Constantinople                      Rome

← All the four                      Thrones in full                      Communion →

Synod of Chalcedon  
First Division 451 AD

Antioch & Alexandria  
were anti Chalcedon

Constantinople & Rome  
Chalcedonian

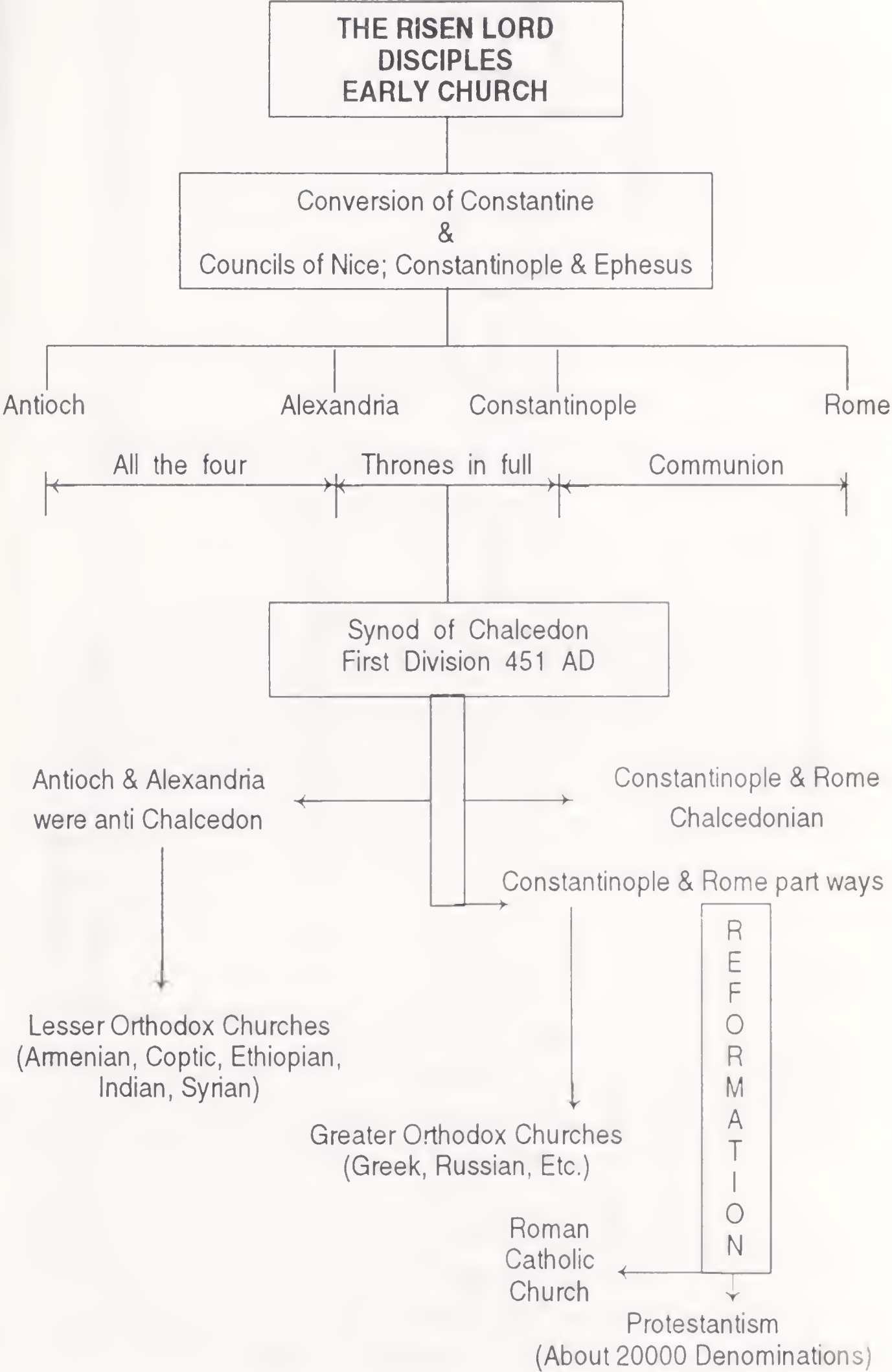
↓  
Lesser Orthodox Churches  
(Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian,  
Indian, Syrian)

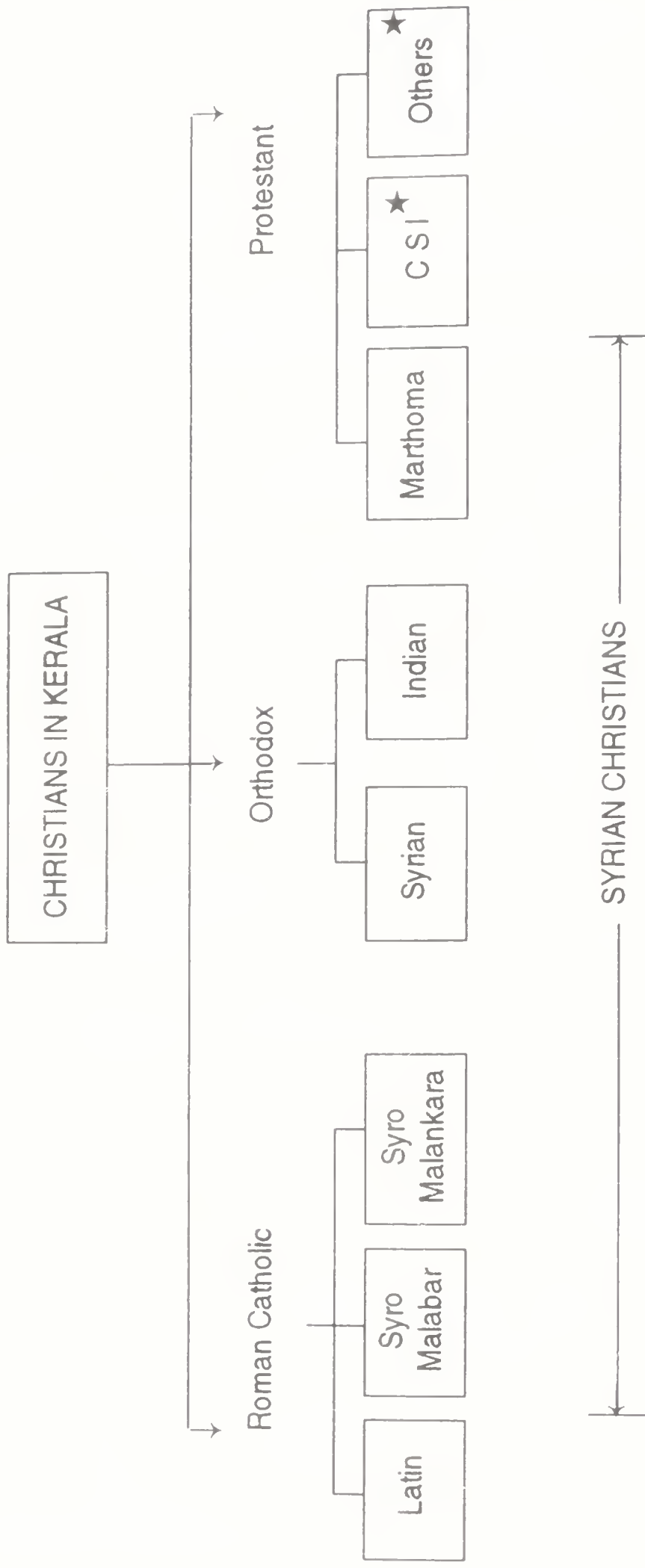
↓  
Greater Orthodox Churches  
(Greek, Russian, Etc.)

↓  
Roman  
Catholic  
Church

↓  
Protestantism  
(About 20000 Denominations)

R  
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★ The Madhya Kerala Diocese of CSI consists largely of Syrian Christians. There are Syrians in the last category also, which is mostly fundamentalist.

## CHAPTER I

# THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AN OVERVIEW

“The Syrian Church in India.... is the remnant of a once great and glorious Church, which extended its sway from Antioch on the shores of the Mediterranean right across Asia to India and China... its importance for Christendom as a whole remains very great, both because of the beauty and antiquity of its prayers and its rites, and because it is the one surviving link with the ancient Aramaic Church, which was the Mother Church of all Christendom.”

– *Fr. Bede Griffiths*

The Church is the mystical body of our Lord Jesus Christ. He did not found a church; He founded *the* church. The church was one in the apostolic times. There was no organisation then as now, but there was oneness and fellowship.

After the conversion of Emperor Constantine the church left its underground existence and ultimately in the Council of Nice (A. D. 325) it built around itself an organisational framework. Within two hundred years, however, it had split following the



Council of Chalcedon (A. D. 451). From the western church, which had remained as one unit in the post-Chalcedon days, the Greater Orthodox churches broke away marking the second major breaking up of Christendom. Then came Luther and Henry VIII and the proliferation of Reformed churches.

Although the Church was not yet an administrative entity in the apostolic times it had its patriarch, bishops, presbyters and deacons. St. Peter, the chief of the apostles, was the patriarch and the other apostles and those whom they so appointed were the bishops.

St. Peter established his throne at Antioch in A. D. 37. He has had his successors in the Patriarchs of Antioch. Moran Mar Ignatius Zakka is the 122nd Peter.

The Syrian Orthodox Church was the original church established in Jerusalem and grafted in Antioch by the Arameans and other gentile converts. Its liturgical heritage and theological and missionary record are unique. It is rich in all the best traditions of the undivided church of the first five centuries. Antioch was the centre of Christianity in Asia. It was at one time presiding over a flourishing church with 107 arch-bishoprics extending as far as China. Voobus, a Protestant scholar, has reviewed and recorded the story of this eastward expansion of Christianity. Fr. Bede Griffiths says:

“In the course of time the Syrian church with its liturgy in Syriac spread all over the East from Syria to Mesopotamia and Persia and even to China and India... with all its wealth of liturgical, doctrinal and spiritual life, the Syrian church possessed a spirit of missionary enterprise which carried it right across Asia to China and India and made it at one time the most widely extended church in Christendom”.

The monasteries of the church were at one time famous both for the number of monks and for their contribution to the life of the church. It is recorded that in the fifth century the church had 600,000 monks. There was a time when there were 90,000 monks in the 300 monasteries in the mountains of Edessa, 2,000 in St. Mathew's near Mosul and 6,300 in St. Basu's near Combs.

Among these monasteries perhaps the most significant was St. Mark's in Jerusalem. That is where our Lord had his Last Supper, the house of John Mark; that is where the Holy Quorbono was established; that is where Jesus appeared to the disciples after the Resurrection; and that is where His mother and disciples waited in prayer between Ascension and Pentecost. Later on that Upper Room was consecrated as a church dedicated to the Mother of God. A Syriac inscription of the sixth century discovered here in 1940 says; "This is the house of Mary, mother of John also called Mark. The apostles consecrated it as a church after the name of Mary the God-bearer. It was rebuilt in 73 A. D. after King Titus destroyed Jerusalem"

The Syrian church produced many scholars. Bardaisan, Mar Aprem, Mar Balai, Mar Yacoub of Srug, Bar Ebraya and Bar Haleebi are but a few of them. It is interesting to note that some of the western thoughts of later centuries had already been anticipated in their writings. "Man is a small world" said Herodotus. This concept of man being an epitome of the world was discussed by Mar Ahodemeh, Catholicos of the East, in the sixth century. Some of Galileo's theories of astronomy were treated in the book "The Cause of all Causes" in the tenth century. Even Nietzsche's theory of the superman was discussed in that work.

The later historical experience of the Syrian Church has been similar to that of its Master, of repeated crucifixions and



resurrections. The Patriarchate had to be shifted from place to place because of persecution. The survival of the church to this day is indeed a miracle, a work of God.

The Biblical heritage of this church is significant too. In 404 one Daniel translated the Bible into Armenian. In the seventh century the Syrian fathers translated the Bible into Arabic under orders of Patriarch John II, in response to a request by the Prince of Jessero, Abi Waqqos El Ansari. In 1221 John Joseph, a Syrian priest from Taflis translated it into Persian and in this century Corepiscopo Mathen Konat, the Malankara Malpan then, translated it into Malayalam. The accuracy of these translations can be guessed from an incident related to the Arabic translation. The Prince of Jessero wanted every reference to the Godhead of Christ, His baptism and crucifixion to be omitted from the Arabic version. John II said: "Even if all the arrows of your army were to pierce me I will not omit a single letter from the Gospel of my Lord." The Prince finally gave up and said, "Go and write what you know". It is worth recalling in this context that the most ancient manuscript of the Gospel available today is in Syriac, copied by one Yacoub in Edessa in A. D. 411. Another indication of the Syrian church's efforts in this direction in the past is the fact that among the pre-seventh century manuscripts there are only ten in Greek and twenty-two in Latin while there are fiftyfive in Syriac.

Nestor had an impact on this church for a while. He belonged to this church and had many influential sympathisers among its hierarchy. The church however condemned him and declared that the Lord who was born eternally from the Father He Himself was born in the flesh from the blessed lady the Virgin and the Virgin was therefore Theotokos. The church also accepted the expression, "union of two natures." St. Cyril said that the eastern concept of the union of two nature is the same as the

Oneness of the two natures and the same as saying that the incarnate God is one in nature.

The Council of Chalcedon (451) was a turning point in the history of the church. From then onwards the church lost its royal patronage. After the death of Theodosius II in 450, Pulcheria and Marcian came to power. They were hostile to Mar Dioscorus and arranged Chalcedon at the instance of Pope Leo. The Tome of Leo was accepted as basis of doctrine. Of course, it must be said in fairness that Chalcedon accepted the expression Theotokos.

The Syrian Orthodox Church rejected Chalcedon right from the beginning. Patriarch Maximus resigned on this score in 455. Chalcedonian patriarch Martyr was replaced by Peter II in 468, also on this account. Those who were separated by Chalcedon were described as Melkites-followers of the King and Bar Ebraya calls them Melkite Syrians.

There was another Council at Constantinople in A. D. 476 chaired by Peter II of Antioch and Timotheos II of Alexandria. It condemned Chalcedon and the emperor Basilicus issued as an edict the declaration signed by 700 bishops under the Patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria. There was another Council in A. D. 482 followed an year later by the Henoticon of Zeno, which also opposed the Chalcedon formula. In 488 Flavian succeeded Peter II. The Council of Constantinople held in 508 when Flavian was still Patriarch reaffirmed the anti-Chalcedonian stand. Flavian later inclined towards the Chalcedonian view and was ousted by the Council of Sidon (512) to be succeeded by St. Severios the Great. Six years later the church was persecuted by Emperor Justinian and Severios had to flee to Egypt. Justinian appointed one Paul as Patriarch. but the Antiocheans ridiculed him as Paul the Jewish ! There were two more pretenders during the life of Severios who passed away on February 8,538 to receive his



heavenly crown. He is remembered by the Syrian church in every Holy Quorbono as the one who taught that Mary was the Mother of God.

In a way all this talk of the dichotomy between our church and Chalcedon is a matter of semantics. (Please see the fifth chapter) Emperor Justinian himself maintained the expression "Theopaschites", the suffering God. What is more significant, Pope John II approved of this statement of Justinian. Similarly, Theodore, Thodoret and Hiba, whom Chalcedon upheld, were condemned by Justinian in an edict, also signed by some Chalcedonian patriarchs. Pope Vigilius too appears to have agreed with these views. The Constantinople Council of 553 which was presided over by Eutyches of Constantinople and was accepted by Vigilius of Rome declared, "He who separates God the Word who made miracles from Christ who suffered... (who) does not say that our Lord Christ the word is with Christ who was born of woman, or... the miracles are His and He himself suffered in manhood willingly is anathematised." The Syrian Orthodox theologians and historians see this declaration as a stab at Chalcedon and a triumph for the Syrian Orthodox position.

To rescue this persecuted church God raised St. Yacub Bourdana. He was ordained Metropolitan of Edessa in 543 by Patriarch Theodosius of Alexandria. Bourdana was also declared Ecumenical Metropolitan authorised to look after the persecuted orthodox churches in Afro-Asia.. His is a record: he consecrated two patriarchs (Sergis, 543-550 and Paul II after Sergis died); one Catholicos of the East (Ahodemeh); twenty-seven bishops and 100,000 priests. No wonder the church itself came to be known, among its foes, after his name as the Jacobite church. That is not a name officially accepted by the church but in India many of the faithful in their innocence and ignorance "proudly" call themselves Jacobites.

The doctrine of the Syrian Orthodox Church about the Incarnation is as follows. "The unique Son and Word of God, who is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, descended from heaven to the womb of Virgin Mary and was incarnate and made man of her by the Holy Spirit and born from her after nine months in an indescribable way while she remained Virgin for ever. The union of Godhead with manhood took place at the first moment when the Virgin conceived. That is, neither was Godhead in existence in the womb before manhood nor manhood before Godhead. Thus the incarnate Word of God has one compound nature without confusion, mixture or change. Since this Child is real God and real and perfect man His mother was Theotokos or Godbearer".

On the mystery of Redemption the church teaches as follows: "The incarnate Son and Word of God was really crucified and he suffered and died in manhood by the separation of His soul from His body and He was buried in the tomb, whereas his Godhead was separated neither from His soul nor from His body, while he was on the cross or in the tomb. On the third day He rose from the dead."

Fr. Bede Griffiths says: "The chief characteristic of the Syrian Church is its sense of awe and wonder before the divine Mystery. The Syrian liturgy is dominated by the scene in the vision of the prophet Isaiah when he saw the Lord on a high and lofty throne in the temple in Jerusalem, and heard the angels crying, 'holy, holy, holy' before him. In every Syrian church there is a veil drawn across the sanctuary representing the veil in the temple of Jerusalem, and the sanctuary itself is held to be the "holy of holies", the place where God himself appears in the New Covenant with his people. This scene is recalled at the beginning and the end of every office of prayer and the sense of wonder and mystery which inspires it fills the whole liturgy. Together with



this sense of awe in the presence of the holiness of God is a profound sense of human sin. As the prophet was led to cry out, 'Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips', so the Syrian liturgy is filled with this sense of human sin and unworthiness and one of the principal themes of the liturgy is that of repentance. But this sense of sin and the need for repentance is accompanied by, or rather is actually an expression of, the awareness of God's infinite love and mercy, which comes down to man's need and raises him to share in His own infinite glory. Thus there is a wonderful balance of dreadful majesty and loving compassion, of abasement and exaltation.

"It is, no doubt, a result of the monophysite tendency of this liturgy that there is a tremendous emphasis on the divine nature in Christ, which is nevertheless completely orthodox. Its Trinitarian doctrine, mostly derived from the Greek and even using Greek terms, is very firm and impressive, but its distinctive note is seen in the custom of addressing prayer directly to Christ as our God and not to the Father through 'Jesus Christ our Lord', as is the normal custom of the liturgy. The emphasis on the divinity of Christ is seen also in the immense veneration paid to Mary as the 'Mother of God', or more literally 'She who brought forth God.' This devotion is very profound and very theological. It is based entirely on a continued meditation on the fact that the person whom Mary brought forth was truly God. This is the source of endless wonder and at the same time of amazing paradox, which is expressed in poetic terms; in your arms you embraced the flames and gave milk to the devouring fire: blessed is he, the infinite, who was born of you'. This deeply Biblical and theological devotion deserves study as an example of how devotion to the Virgin Mary grew up in the Church as a direct consequence of belief in the Incarnation.

“Together with devotion to the Mother of God goes a devotion to the prophets, apostles and martyrs as members of the Mystical Body of Christ, those who proclaimed and those who died for the sake of the Gospel. Here again this cult of the saints needs to be studied in one of its purest forms, as deeply rooted in a Biblical view of life and springing wholly from devotion to the person of Christ and the authentic message of the Gospel. What is most evident throughout the Syrian liturgy is its biblical background. It is as though the liturgy sprang from the very same soil as the Old and the New Testaments. The saints of the Old Testament, Abraham, Issac and Jacob, Moses and David and the Prophets and in particular Job and Daniel and the three holy men in the furnace of Babylon, are as familiar figures as the apostles and are felt as living witnesses to the mystery of Christ, always alive within the Church. Even more interesting is the constant reference to ‘our father Adam and our mother Eve’ which takes the mystery of salvation back to the first man and woman, and sees Christ descending to Sheol, the place of the dead, at the resurrection to proclaim the message of salvation to all the dead and to raise up Adam and Eve. The feeling for the dead as waiting in Sheol for the resurrection at the second coming of Christ is also a theme which takes us back to early Jewish Christian theology. from which the Syrian theology so largely derives and helps us to see how devotion to the faithful departed grew up spontaneously in the early Church.”

Why is the church called Syrian? Some say that it is due to Syriac being the liturgical language, others hold that it is derived from Syria. Neither, to my mind, is the whole truth. The name was perhaps derived from Cyrus of Persia (559-529 B. C) who, after conquering Babylon in 539. B. C. liberated the Jews and allowed them to return to Judaea. The grateful Jews remembered Cyrus as their liberator and the name became synonymous with the anticipated Redeemer of mankind. We know from the Bible that



the disciples of our Lord were called Christians in Antioch, then capital of Syria. To the Jewish converts of Antioch Christ was the new Cyrus, the liberator: they described Christ as the "Cyrus of mankind". Consequent on this the gentile Christians called them "Syrians". It might also have started as a nickname, as the name Christian was, and like it "Syrian" also became established in due course. There is also a view that the term 'Syrian' was used in Syria to distinguish Christian Arameans from the non-Christian ones; 'Aramean' connoted heathens while 'Syrian' connoted Christians. Anyway, the church in Antioch was known as Syrian Church from very early times. St. Ignatius Noorono mentions it in his epistle to the Romans (107 A. D.)

Aramaic was the language of the Jews for about five centuries before Christ. Even some of their scriptures were written in that language as proved by the Dead Sea Scrolls. It must have been the language in which Gabriel spoke to Mary and the language she taught baby Jesus. The first liturgy of Christendom, the St. James' liturgy, still preserved by the Syrian Orthodox Church was in Syriac. Syriac was in fact the liturgical language all over the east despite differences of nationality. Even in India priests were well-versed in Syriac. The Armenian church, besides using Syriac, used the Syriac alphabet till Mesrob laid down the Armenian alphabet. Till the 10th century no liturgy was available in any other language; it was in A. D. 912 that the Metropolitan of Tigris, an Arab, celebrated Holy Quorbono in Arabic. In India the first Malayalam liturgy came in this century.

The priests in the Syrian church are generally married but one cannot marry after becoming priest. For that matter even a deacon cannot marry after he becomes a full deacon; he must make up his mind when he is a yavuppadeacon. The unmarried priests neither take charge of parishes nor hear the confession of women and married priests do not become bishops. The highest



position a married priest can attain is that of Corepiscopo, but a widower can become a bishop or episcopa.

The Syrian Christians are perhaps the only Christians who prostrate during their prayers, except on Sundays and during the period between Easter and Pentecost. It is in fact an old Jewish custom; another indication of its apostolic origins.

The Syrian Orthodox Church is spread over all the continents of the world-except of course, Antarctica. The total number is small, only around five million. Of this about three million are in India, where we have nearly 1300 Churches.\* We run a large number of educational, health and social service institutions among which is the Mar Athanasius College of Engineering, the only engineering college run by Christians in India. Under the Patriarch there are twelve Metropolitans in India besides the Catholicos; there are also Metropolitans in West Asia, Europe and North and South Americas; one is to be shortly appointed to Africa. Mar Nicholaos was recently consecrated for the Indian congregations in U & S Canada.

The Church in India is one throbbing with life. Every parish has its own Marth Mariam Samajam (Legion of Mary) and Sunday School- the larger parishes have more than one; in my home parish, Kuruppampadi, there are eighteen- besides spiritual organisations for the students and the youth.

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\* This is divided into two groups: one which owes total allegiance to the Patriarch and the other which acknowledges him only nominally. The numerical strength is more or less equal, but the latter is more wealth and influential.

## CHAPTER II

# ST. THOMAS IN INDIA

“India was, it must be remembered, a country of many religions, in spite of the dominance of the Hindu faith in its various shapes and forms... Christianity.. had reached India probably during the first century after Christ... There were large numbers of Syrian Christians.. in South India and they were as much part of the country as any one else”.

– *Jawaharlal Nehru*

The Syrian Christians of Kerala trace their conversion to the visit of St. Thomas, disciple of Jesus Christ.

St. Thomas visited India in A. D. 52. St. Thomas came to India in search of the flourishing Jewish community. His conversion of 4 brahmin families of Kerala must have been purely incidental. St. Thomas died in A. D. 72.

It will be useful here to discuss the evidence regarding the visit of St. Thomas. Essentially we depend on four sources in our investigation of the St. Thomas tradition. These are the Acts of Thomas, secular historical evidence, ecclesiastical records and

traditions handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

Acts of Thomas is, of course, an apocryphal work. The authorship is attributed to Baredaisan the Syrian. There is no unanimity of opinion about the date of this work. Dr. W. Wright places it some time before the fifth century while F. C. Burkitt and the Catholic Encyclopedia place it in the second half of the third century. Walker states that it was known to theologians even in the first century.

The Syriac text in its complete form is said to be preserved in the British Museum.

The Acts of Thomas gives a detailed account of the missionary activities of St. Thomas. It is divided into nine parts. The first part titled "the First act of (Judas) Thomas, the Apostle" says that the Apostles met in Jerusalem and cast lots to decide the countries to which each of them would go. It fell to the lot of Thomas to go to India. Thomas protested and in spite of a vision from Jesus refused to be persuaded. During the time an Indian merchant, Habban, came looking for a carpenter. Christ appeared to Habban and promised to sell him a carpenter who was His slave. Jesus showed Thomas to Habban and after Habban approved of Thomas wrote a document. "I Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter, from the village of Bethlehem., which is in Judaea, acknowledge that I have sold my slave Thomas to Habban, the merchant of King Gudnaphar." After completing the deal Jesus took Thomas to Habban. Habban asked Thomas "Is this your master?" and Thomas said "Yes, he is my Lord and my God." "Your Lord and God has sold you to me outright." Thomas kept quiet. He knew the will of God and he prayed "Thy will be done." Next morning Habban and Thomas set sail to India and landed at a port called Sandrok Mahosa where they attended the wedding



of the local princess. The bride and the bride-groom were converted by Thomas.

The second act deals with Thomas completing a place for King Gudnaphar in heaven. When Habban presented Thomas to the King as a carpenter and house builder the King asked him to build a palace for him. The King left a large sum of money to Thomas and continued sending more money. Thomas instead of building the palace used this money to help the poor and the needy. When the King returned to see the palace Thomas told him that the King could see the palace only after his death. The King was annoyed and he imprisoned both Thomas and Habban who had brought this crazy carpenter from abroad. That night the King's brother died. As the angels conducted his soul to heaven he saw a beautiful palace and on enquiry he was told by the angels that it was the palace built for his brother by Thomas the Christian. The King's brother remembered that the King was about to execute Thomas. He sought permission to go back to earth. Permission granted, his soul returned to his body just before the time appointed for burial and King Gudnaphar was told of his heavenly palace. The King sought forgiveness and was baptized by Thomas. The next six acts of the book deal with miracles and conversions. Among these conversions was that of Tertia, the queen of King Mazdai. The King condemned Thomas to death. According to the Acts the martyrdom took place outside the city on a mountain where the apostle was speared to death by four soldiers: the Final Act - consummation-describes that.

Even if most of this is pious fiction there must be a nucleus of truth in it. From the nucleus available from this story, viz., the names India, Gudnaphar, etc. historians try to work out an acceptable theory.

India itself does not necessarily mean the subcontinent of India as we understand today, because in the early centuries

many countries surrounding the Indian Ocean from Africa to India used to be known as greater India. But the discovery of coins west and east of the Indus river proves the existence of a king by name Gudnaphar who belonged to a Parthian dynasty and who ruled the Indo-Parthian Kingdom comprising of the areas from Afganistan to Punjab between B. C. 95 and A. D. 50. The coin shows the Greek name of the King Gondophares. On the reverse of the coin there is a legend in ancient Pali language which can be rendered as "King of Kings, upholder of dharmas and follower of divine Lords." A stone tablet was also recovered towards the close of last century when an ancient Buddhist city near Peshawar (now in Pakistan) was unearthed. This stone 17" x 14½" is known as Takht-i-Bahi. It bears an inscription in Gandhara language deciphered as "in the twentysixth year of the great King Gudnaphara in the year three and one hundred, in the month Vaisakha, on the fifth day." From this historians compute the date of Gudnaphar's accession to the throne. The inscription says that the fifth day of the month of Vaisakh in the 103 was in the fifth year of Gudnaphar's reign. The era is not specified, but since the month is Indian the era should also be deemed to be Indian, viz., Vikram Samvat considered "the historical era of north India." Vikram Samvat started in 58 B. C. Therefore Vikram Samvat 103 would mean A. D. 45-46. This agrees roughly with the time of St. Thomas' arrival in north India. Gudnaphar died in A. D. 48 and the Indo-Parthian dynasty vanished from history with the Kushan occupation in A. D. 50.

There is another interesting fact about Christianity in north western India. Rev. R. A. Trotter has reported about a community of Fakirs in Sind (now in Pakistan) who are reported to be followers of Thuma Bhagat, that is, St. Thomas. Trotter says, "To support the contention that the Apostle Thomas came to Sind, there is a Fakir community living in Tatta, which has occasionally revealed itself. This Fakir group, to all appearances Hindu, calls



its small community by an Aramaic name, something like Barthomai, the sons of Thomas, and claims that it is descended from Christians baptized by St. Thomas himself and that in their secret society they own books and relics to support their position. Unfortunately no outsider, either Indian or European, has had access to the activities of this society and individual members are as hard as the Indian lion.”

So far we have discussed St. Thomas’s sojourn in northern India. There are historians who feel that Sandrok Mahosa was Cranganore in Kerala, Gudnaphar was Kadappara and Habban was Appanna, a common Telugu name for sailors. They interpret Sandrok to mean Chandra plus Oku or the abode of moon which is Siva (Hence the name Chandrachoodan, Chandrasekharan, etc.) Cranganore is Kodugallur in Malayalam and the protagonists of this theory say that Kodungallur is Kodilinga plus Ore, Kodilinga being Siva himself.

There is another view that while Sandrok Mahosa was in the south, Gudnaphar was from the north. Those who hold this view believe that the Apostle came to the south and proceeded to the north after attending the wedding feast of the King in Kerala. L. K. Anantakrishna Iyer, the noted anthropologist in his “Anthropology of the Syrian Christians” has referred to a similar tradition and has quoted the literal translation of an old Malayalam document. The only difference between the north India story and this one is that in this Cheraman Perumal, a South Indian King, first saw the beautiful palace in his dream, sent his merchant named Havan to look for an artificer, Lord Jesus appeared to him when he had reached Judea, Jesus offered to sell St. Thomas and the Apostle came to Mylapore near Madras in A. D. 52

On the whole we may agree with Bishop Medlycott who says, “It is impossible to resist the conclusion that the writer of

the Acts must have had information based on contemporary history. For at no later date could a forger or legendary writer have known the name. It is impossible to suppose that a later writer, drawing on his imagination for facts, persons, localities and incidents could have brought about the coincidence of two personages, one of whom was unknown to living history and time so aptly as occurs in this case. On this ground we maintain there is every reason to conclude that the Apostle Thomas had entered King Gondopharas' dominion in the course of his Apostolic career."

The visit of St. Thomas to India must also have been in search of Jews. There were Jews in northern India in ancient times. An Aramaic inscription in the days of Bindusara when his son Asoka was Viceroy of Takshasila has been unearthed. It may also be remembered that Habban is a semitic name; he was perhaps a Jewish subject of King Gudnaphar. There was a flourishing colony of Jews in Muziris (Cranganore, Kerala) too. These Jews are said to have arrived with King Solomon's first fleet. Sydney Mendelssohn says that they were "pure blooded Jews". Kerala's connection with the ancient Jews is well established now. Cinnamon which is indigenous to Kerala was prescribed for use in the oils in the tabernacle. I Kings 9:28 refers to the fleet of Solomon collecting gold from Ophir. This Ophir is said to be Poovar near Trivandrum or Beypore near Calicut. It is thus obvious that St. Thomas had enough reason to come to Kerala. All the churches established by him in Kerala are believed to have been near the Jewish colonies in the respective places.

Farquhar in his book 'The Apostle Thomas in south India' says, "There need be no doubt that the new field was selected for Thomas by Habban. He naturally knew India better than most men, certainly far better than Thomas. He probably expressed the opinion that the best thing he could do was to regard the extreme south of India as his field, to begin his work from Muziris,



Nelcynda, and the other ports on the west coast, and, at a later date to make a similar beginning from the three ports of the Chola coast. One language, ancient Tamil, was spoken throughout that section of India; and its compactness made it more manageable than any of the great provinces of the north. In Muziris on the west there was a very large foreign community, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Arabs, Jews and men from the Persian Gulf and North India, all educated in some degree and open to fresh religious influence. The mass of the people from Roman Empire was so great that there was a temple to the emperor in the city. Nelcynda probably did not fall far behind Muziris.

“He would readily find in Muziris an intelligent son of Kerala who could speak Greek and would thus be able to teach him ancient Tamil. To become a master of that language would cost some considerable time but it would not take Thomas the Jew very long to acquire enough of the colloquial to enable him to wander about among the people and talk with them. Then it is probable that he had the inestimable privilege of mingling freely with the teachers of the University of Taxila. From them he would learn the leading ideas and practices of Hinduism and would pick up many of those short pithy Sanskrit phrases in which the most important conceptions of Hindu philosophy religion and life are expressed. So he would be received by Nambutiri Brahamans as an extra-ordinary foreigner who was already something of a pandit. He was thus already partially prepared for the task on which his heart was set the leading of Tamil Hindus to the feet of Christ.”

Now let us see if it would have been geographically possible for St. Thomas to have attempted this journey in the first century. There was an old caravan route through India to the Middle East leading from China to Basra. But the over-land journey through Edesa has to be ruled out since the Christians of the area who

felt a very close connection with the Apostle never suggested that he had visited them. Prior to the discovery of Trade Winds by Hippalus in A. D. 45 the sea route traced the coastal line along Arabia, Persia, Baluchistan, mouth of Indus river and down south along the west coast of India. It is generally accepted by the scholars that the first journey of St. Thomas was along the coastal route. He would not have stayed very long in the country of Gudnaphar because he was summoned to Jerusalem to witness the Assumption of the Mother of God. In the second dispersion of the Apostles after the Assumption St. Thomas travelled to Socotra and thence to India. This journey was possible because Hippalus had already discovered the Trade Winds. It may be recalled that Socotra just outside the Gulf of Yemen has a St. Thomas tradition. There is also evidence that at least in the fifth century there was Christianity in the island of Socotra.

We shall now look at the ecclesiastical records. All Fathers of the Church except Eusebius refer to St. Thomas preaching in India. Eusebius refers to St. Thomas preaching in Parthia. But Parthia extended upto Indus river and therefore even his evidence supports St. Thomas's visit to India. 'The Doctrine of the Apostles,' written in Edessa, about 250 A. D. says: "India and all its own countries, and those bordering on it, even to the farthest sea, received the Apostles' hand of priesthood from Judas Thomas, who was guide and ruler in the church he built there." Another relevant fact is that 3rd July is celebrated as St. Thomas day both in Edessa and in India. Aprem the Syrian has written hymns which repeatedly refer to Thomas in India. St. Gregory of Nazianzen said, "What ? Were not the Apostles strangers amidst the many nations and countries over which they spread themselves.... Peter indeed may have belonged to Judaea: but what had Paul in common with the gentiles. Luke with Achaia, Andrew with Ephesus, Thomas with India, Mark with Italy?"



Similarly St. Ambrose (333-397), St. Jerome (342-420), St. John Chrysostom (fifth century) and Gregory, Bishop of Tours (sixth century) have all been aware of the fact that St. Thomas had preached in India. Dr. Mingana of John Rylands Library has been quoted by an Indian historian as follows: "It is the constant tradition of the Eastern Church that the Apostle Thomas evangelized India, and there is no historian, no poet, no breviary, no liturgy, and no writer of any kind who having the opportunity of speaking of Thomas, does not associate his name with India. Some writers mention also Parthia and Persia among the lands evangelized by him, but all of them are unanimous in the matter of India. To refer to all the Syrian Christian and Arab authors who speak of India in connection with Thomas would therefore, be equivalent to referring to all who have made mention of the name of Thomas. Thomas and India are in this respect synonymous."

Thus we find from the Acts of Thomas, and from secular and ecclesiastical evidence that it is reasonable to believe in the mission of St. Thomas to India. The traditions in Kerala handed down by word of mouth which speak about the visit of the Apostle are obviously not lights of imagination. Vincent Smith says, "It must be admitted that a personal visit of the Apostle (St. Thomas) to South India was feasible in the condition of the time and that there is nothing incredible in the traditional belief that he came by way of Socotra where an ancient Christian community undoubtedly existed."

## CHAPTER III

### THE SYRIAN CHRISTIANS

The early history of Syrian Christians in India cannot be described as well -documented.

Pantaenus. Governor of the School of the Faithful in Alexandria whom Eusebius described as “a man most distinguished for his learning” visited India towards the end of the 2nd century. In 300 A. D. Metropolitan Daud from Iraq is believed to have visited Kerala.

A major event took place in 345 A. D. - the famous Syrian migration. A Syrian Christian writer of the 19th century, Ittoop Writer, describes this as follows:

“This Thomas of Canae arrived at the Cranganore Bar and landed and saw, and from the cross they wore round the neck, recognized the Christians who were brought to follow Christ by the exertion of the apostle Mar Thoma, and who in spite of the oppressions of the heathens and heathen sovereigns continued to remain in the True Faith without any deviation. He struck their acquaintance and asked them about their past particulars and learned that their grievance was very hard on account of the want

of priests and that the Church was, owing to that reason, in a tottering condition. On learning these particulars he thought delay was improper and loading his ship with the pepper, etc. which he then could gather, sailed off, and by Divine Grace, reached Jerusalem without much delay, and communicated to the Venerable Catholicose of Jerusalem in detail all facts he had observed in Malayalam. And thereon, with the sanction of Eusthathius, Patriarch of Antioch, 400 and odd persons, comprising men, women and boys, with Episcopa Joseph of Uraha and priests and deacons, were placed under orders of the respectable merchant, Thomas of Canae, and sent off by ship to Malayalam with blessing.

“By the Grace of Almighty God all these arrived at Cranganore in Malayalam in the year 345 of our Lords, without experiencing any inconvenience or distress on the way”.

The next significant event in the history of Indian Christianity is the transfer of St. Thomas, relics from India to the middle east. Padmanabha Menon, a Hindu historian of Kerala, quotes an Edessan Chronicle written in Syriac to the effect that the relics were taken to the Cathedral of St. Thomas on 22nd August 394 during the days of Metropolitan Mar Kora and that it was removed to Uraha on 3rd July 394 in the days of Phalavianos, Patriarch of Antioch. Cosmos, a rich Christian trader from Egypt. who visited Kerala around 522 A. D. “found the church not destroyed, but very widely diffused and the whole world filled with the doctrine of Christ, which is being day by day propagated and the Gospel preached over the whole earth. This, as I have seen with my own eyes in many places and have heard narrated by others, I as witness of the truth relate.”

In the 9th century there was another migration from the middle east led by Mar Sabor and Mar Froth. There is a view that



these were Nestorians but there are also historians who challenge that.

The earliest Roman Catholic visitor was John of Monte Corvino who visited Kerala in the 14th century. In his book 'Mirabilia Descripta' Jourdan Catalini de Severac, another Roman Catholic visitor, says, "In this India there is a scattered people, one here, another there, who call themselves Christians but are not so, nor have they baptism, nor do they know anything about the faith. Nay ! They believe St. Thomas the Great to be Christ! There, in the India I speak of, I baptised and brought into the faith about three hundred souls." Obviously the Christianity that he saw was not Roman Catholic.

In 1498 Vasco Da Gama arrived in India. The first formal contact with the Roman Church was after the Portuguese established their control on the west coast of this country. Of course there are different views about the situation of the church here prior to that. Some believe that the church was independent, others that it was under the Patriarch of Antioch; there are students of history who consider the church here Nestorian right from the beginning of Nestorianism. What is clear is that there was no direct connection between the Pope and the Church in India until the Portuguese came.

After the Portuguese came the church here split into pro-Portuguese and anti-Portuguese factions. Some from the anti-Portuguese group defected to the other side without much delay. thus the Syrian Christians were divided into Roman Catholics and non-Catholics. Subsequent to the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British came with Protestant views. Of course they had no impact on the Roman Catholic factions but the Protestant views permeated in the non-Catholic faction. This led to a section joining the Anglican discipline and another section forming

themselves into an independent reformed church with Syrian customs and costumes but protestant theology. There was another split in the early part of the century based on the question of allegiance to the Patriarch of Antioch. Thus the ancient Christians of Kerala are today scattered in Roman Catholic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Madhya Kerala Diocese of the C S I, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar and the Indian Orthodox Church, not to mention innumerable fundamentalist and pentecostal groups.

The Syrian Christians of Kerala have always been a flourishing community. According to Rao Bahadur L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer, the famous South Indian Anthropologist, "they were numbered among the noble races of Malabar and were preferred to the Nairs. The Christians were directly under the King and were not subject to local chiefs. The Nairs who were the military clan regarded them as brethren and loved them exceedingly. To erect a playhouse (frascati) was the privilege of the Brahmins, and the same privilege was given to the Christians also. They were given seats by the side of kings and their chief officers. Sitting on carpets, a privilege enjoyed by the ambassadors, was also conceded to them"

There was a Christian dynasty of Villiarvattom. According to Villiarvattom pana, the Kingdom extended from the coastal island of Chennamangalam, Maliankara and others to Udayamperoor. Originally the capital of the Kingdom was at Mahadevapattnam in the island of Chennamangalam and later it was shifted to Udayamperoor. The Udayamperoor church according to tradition, was built by the Raja of Villiarvattom in A. D. 510. One of the inscriptions in the church mentions one Raja Mathulla (A. D. 900) and another speaks about one Raja Thomas.



The Indian customs as modified by the dictates of faith and modes of worship still continue. For instance the importance given to the brass lamp 'nilavilakku' is the same as that given by the Hindu. Married women wear 'Mangalya sutram' or 'thali', a small piece of gold tied around the neck of the bride at the time of the wedding. The Syrian Christians kept the same type of thali as the Hindus but super-imposed the form of a cross on it and added some prayers to the order of marriage for the blessing of the thali by the priest who solemnises the wedding. Similarly 'Mantrakodi' is peculiar to the Syrian Christians. Among the Hindus the bridgroom presents a set of clothes to the bride at the time of wedding. Mantrakodi corresponds to that, the only difference being the prayers which accompany it and the fact that the priest hands it over to the bridegroom after blessing it. In certain areas instead of the bridgroom, the priest himself covers the bride with mantrakodi. Pulikudi, a custom connected with pregnancy, annaprasanam, the first ceremonial feeding of rice to the infant and Pulakuli related to the pollution and purification following death in a family are all the same for Syrian Christians and Hindus. In modern times the number of people who observe these rituals has gone down among Christians as well as Hindus.

The Syrian Christian community in India, "Christian in religion, oriental in worship and Indian in culture" is a notable, though numerically small, segment of Christendom. They continue to play a significant role in all realms of human activity not only in Kerala but throughout the country.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE ANTIOCH CONNECTION

“It has been conclusively established that the Patriarch of Antioch is the paramount ecclesiastical authority over the See of Malankara, and that for a person to become a properly qualified metran of the See, the essentials are that he should be consecrated by the said Patriarch or by some bishop authorised by him. No doubt, there were certain instances where these essentials were wanting, ‘the exception roly goes to prove the rule’, and such exceptions cannot be treated as evidencing any desire on the part of the Syrian community to repudiate the Patriarch’s supremacy or the teachings of their church’

– *L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer*

That the church in India was under the throne of Antioch at least from 4th century is beyond doubt. Fortesque says when the Fathers of Niece met on every side were metropolitans ruling over provinces of suffragan bishops and high above all others stood the three great patriarchs of Rome Alexandria and Antioch. All Christendom before the Council of Constantinople in 381 was supposed to be subject to one of the three original Patriarchs of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch.



There was at least one Indian student of theology in Edessa in the early days. A Syriac commentary on the translation of an epistle retains a note: This epistle has been translated from Greek into the Syriac by mar Komai with the help of Daniel the Indian Priest. This was in A. D. 425.

Dr. Mingana in "the Early Spread of Christianity in India" points out that the ecclesiastical language of the Indian Church was Syriac. Mackenzie in his "History of Christianity in Travancore" says "the influence which the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch has exercised is considerable". It is admitted that Thomas of Cana was sent by a Catholicos who was an orthodox deputy of the Patriarch of Antioch. Fortesque, again, says, "No Bishop of Edessa ever thought of assuming the tempting title of Patriarch of Mesopotamia. Why not? Because at any rate they themselves were subject to Antioch. Edessa and its provinces, even its outlying mission in Persia, were part of the great Antiochean patriarchate. It seems true that the faith had been preached in Edessa before its conquest by Septimus Severus (193-211). As soon as these lands became part of the great Roman Empire their church entered into closer relations with the great church (Antioch). We have of one Palut who went up to Antioch to be ordained Bishop. Palut was ordained by Seraphion of Antioch... from this Palut the Bishops of Edessa traced their lines. And so the Patriarch of Antioch counted these East Syrian Churches as part of his patriarchate too. From Edessa the faith spread to Nisibis and ... the Christians of these lands still looked to the great Bishop in Antioch as their chief." There is also evidence that St. John Chrysostom who lived in Antioch in the 4th century has testified to the fact that the holy scriptures have been in his time translated into the Indian language while others have recorded that there were some Indian students among the disciples of St. Jerome who flourished at Antioch in 4th century. Archdale King in his "Eastern Rites of Christendom" refers to a text of the liturgy of St. James (West Syrian) found in Malabar (Kerala) in 6th century.



Dr. Neil says that an Indian priest was sent to Alexandria in 695 for ordination. Day, in his "Land of Perumals" says that a Jacobite Bishop had come to India in 965 as a result of the deputation which waited on the Patriarch of Alexandria. A question may arise here as to why the Indian church turned to Alexandria. Mar Isidoros a Coptic Bishop who was chronicler of the Alexandrian Patriarchate says, "the Indian Christians were governed by the Patriarchate of Antioch just as the Ethiopians are governed by the patriarchate of Alexandria. It was therefore their practice to pray to the Patriarch in Syria for Bishops. In conformity with this practice they sent a deputation in this century also (7th century). They could not enter Syria because of some problems. Therefore they went to Abo Simon who was the patriarch of Alexandria". Collins also says, "Nor can there be really much doubt that from the time, when Jacob Albaradi in the 6th century espoused the cause of the Eutichean Jacobites and enabled them to secure the Sees of Antioch and Alexandria, the Syrian Church in Malabar owned the Jacobite patriarch who was the most powerful bishop in the East, and were therefore Euticheans! They are also called after Jacob Albaradi, Jacobites.

Dionysius the Great presented to Claudius Buchanan, one of the early protestant missionaries who came to Kerala, a Bible in 1807. When he presented this to Buchanan he described it as a book considered to have been in Malankara for one thousand years. This book is said to be in the Cambridge University library now. It is a Bible copied during the time of Moran Mar Michael Rabo (12th century). It contained special Gospel portions for reading on the feasts of the Mother of God and the Gospel readings for the Holy Mass for Saturdays in Lent. There are in the notes contained in the book very respectful references to Mar Severios the famous patriarch of Antioch. All these would show that this book was not Nestorian because they do not venerate Mar Severios nor do they call St. Mary Mother of God. Obviously

this volume is another evidence of the early links between Antioch and Kerala.

Following Vasco da Gama's there was a second voyage to Calicut in 1501. A Syrian Christian named Joseph joined the Captain of this fleet at Calicut to travel to Lisbon, Rome, Jerusalem, etc. It is recorded that this Joseph told the Captian that his church was under the Patriarch of Antioch. He added, "whoever you the westerners might be we are followers of the true faith because we are from Antioch where the followers of the Christ were first called Christians." This Joseph also had a private audience with the Pope. From the book NOVUS ORBIS or the Travels of Joseph the Indian, quoted by Whitehouse, and translated by Dr. Kaniyamparambil it is seen that Joseph told the Pope that Apostle Peter rules the church from Antioch and that he was called to Rome when Simon Magus posed a challenge to the church there, that he appointed his successor before leaving Antioch and that then Patriarch was the successor of St. Peter.

## CHAPTER V

### THE VATICAN DECLARATION 1984

As already mentioned in the first chapter the christological difference between Rome and the East led to the end of the Nicene era when all the Patriarchal Thrones and the Churches under them were in full communion. The Council of Chalcedon is generally recognised as the water-shed marking this distinction. The controversy persisted until very recently. During the reign of the late Patriarch Moran Mar Yacoub III of blessed Memory a Joint Declaration was issued in Vatican on October 27, 1971 which said that the Holy Fathers (Mar Yacoub III and Pope Paul VI) were "in agreement that there is no difference in the faith they profess concerning the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become really man, even if over the centuries difficulties have arisen out of the different theological expressions by which this faith was expressed".

This was followed up in 1984 when Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Ignatius Zaka I signed a joint Communique which made the following points.

(1) First of all, Their Holinesses confess the faith of their two Churches, formulated by the Nicene Council of 325 A. D. and



generally known as the Nicene Creed. The confusions and schisms that occurred between their Churches in the later centuries, they realize today, in no way affect or touch the substance of their faith, since these arose only because of difference in terminology and culture and in the various formulae adopted by different theological schools, to express the same matter. Accordingly, we find today no real basis for the sad divisions and schisms that subsequently arose between us concerning the doctrine of Incarnation. In words and life we confess the true doctrine concerning Christ our Lord notwithstanding the differences in interpretation of such doctrine which arose at the time of the Council of Chalcedon.

(2) Hence we wish to reaffirm solemnly our profession of common faith in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Jacob III did in 1971. They denied that there was any difference in the faith they confessed in the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become truly man. In our turn we confess that, He became incarnate for us, taking to himself a real body with a rational soul. He shared our humanity in all things except sin. We confess that our Lord and our God, our savior and the King of all, Jesus Christ, is perfect God as to His divinity and perfect man as to His humanity. In Him His divinity is united to His humanity. This union is real, perfect, without blending or mingling, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without the least separation. He who is God eternal and indivisible, became visible in the flesh and took the form of servant. In him are united in real, perfect indivisible and inseparable way, divinity and humanity and in Him all their properties are present and active

(3) Having the same conception of Christ we confess also the same conception of His mystery.

(4) Since it is the chief expression of Christian unity between the faithful and between Bishops and priests, the Holy Eucharist cannot yet be concelebrated by us. Such celebration supposes a complete identity of faith such as does not yet exist between us.

(5) Our identity in faith, though not yet complete entitles us to envisage collaboration between our Churches in pastoral care, in situations which nowadays are frequent both because of the dispersion of our faithful throughout the world and because of the precarious conditions of these difficult times. It is not rare, in fact, for our faithful to find access to a priest of their own church materially or morally impossible. Anxious to meet their needs and with their spiritual benefit in mind, we authorize them in such cases to ask for the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick from lawful priests of either of our two sister Churches, when they need them. It would be a logical corollary of collaboration in pastoral care to cooperate in priestly formation and theological education. Bishops are encouraged to promote sharing of facilities for theological education where they judge it to be advisable. While doing this we do not forget that we must still do all in our power to achieve the full visible communion between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and ceaselessly implore our Lord to grant us the unity which alone will enable us to give to the world a fully unanimous Gospel witness.

His Holiness Moran Mar Ignatius Zaka I said on the eve of his departure from Vatican:

“Our two Churches should come closer because the ecumenical unity can come only in stages. First, all churches with the same broad range of doctrines should come together. The Churches of Antioch and Rome share-very broadly of course -a doctrine and teachings. Therefore it is easier for us to come

closer with each other than with, for instance, extreme Protestant Churches. Today we have just signed a common declaration- the Pope and I. That is a good step. It contains very significant statements. Mainly there are four points. (1) Unanimity of the opinion in christology (2) Willingness to collaborate mutually in priestly formation and pastoral care, (3) Limited co-operation in sacraments- Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of sick can now be received from either Church under certain circumstances. And (4) Desire to continue contacts so that ultimately there will be full communion.

“The meetings this week are part of a series started in 1971 by Patriarch Yacoub II. The role of Cardinal Willebrands in bringing us together needs special mention. We are old friends- from the time he was monsignor and I a monk, an official observer for Second Council of Vatican. I must thank him particularly for all he had done.

“The Oriental heritage has to be preserved. Our traditions go back to Apostolic times. They are perhaps in weak vessels, but the contents are so precious that they should be preserved.”



## CHAPTER VI

### “PROTECTOR OF PRO ORIENTE”

On arrival in Vienna, in June 1984 His Holiness and his entourage were warmly received by His Eminence Cardinal Konig and representatives of Pro Oriente who were at the airport along with a large congregation of Syrians who had migrated to Austria from Turkey.

The next morning, Sunday, June 24 His Holiness celebrated Holy Quorbono at the Syrian Orthodox Church which was attended, besides the Syrian Congregation, by Cardinal Konig and representatives of various churches. In the course of the Sermon, His Holiness praised Cardinal Konig for the kind help he had given to the Syrian community in Austria during the last 10 years. On behalf of the Syrians in Austria, an Episcopal Sceptre was presented to the Cardinal by His Holiness.

During the week-long stay in Austria His Holiness met with Federal Minister Karl Blecha and the Federal President of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Rudolf Kirchschlager. His Holiness also visited the Augustine Regular Canons Monastery of Herzogengug on June 27 and the pilgrimage centre of Mariazell.

His Holiness signed the Golden Book of Visitors of the city of Vienna.

At a luncheon hosted by Pro Oriente, His Holiness said as follows:

“It is with profound joy and sincere gratitude that I stand before you now to thank H. E. Cardinal Konig and all his associates in Pro Oriente on behalf of my brother in Christ H. B. Mor Baselios Paulose II. Catholicos of the East, and other members of my delegation. As oldtimers here know I am no newcomer here. Thanks to the dynamic and visionary leadership of H. E. Cardinal Konig the Pro Oriente has been over a period of time the meeting ground of theologians from different parts of the world. I have had the privilege of addressing such gatherings of theological significance and Pro Oriente was generous enough to grant me its Fellowship.

“We all pray for the unity of the Church. While we do so we shall not forget that one of the factors leading to divisions in the Church was theological: real or apparent, superficial or fundamental. It is in this context and on this account that I consider the role played by H. E. Cardinal Konig and Pro Oriente in bringing together theologians of various hues to be one of the most significant steps in our march towards unity.

“Let us praise the Lord for the realisation that has dawned universally now that the faith we intend to proclaim is the same. Our faith is in the blessed and Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one true God, glorious and eternal, uncreated, self-existent, adorable and in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God the Father, the Word of God Incarnate, fully God and fully man, perfect in His humanity which is consubstantial with us, one divine-human nature and person, inseparably, indivisibly, unmixedly, unconfusedly united, our Saviour our Lord, our God,

and in one Holy Spirit, Lord and God, proceeding from the Father, adored and worshiped with the Son and with the Father, Life-giver and perfecter. What separates us and divides us are less than what unites us. In fact what separates has emanated from theological expositions conditioned by historical background, cultural context and linguistic differences. What unites us is on the other hand, derived from God, the fountain of all wisdom. It is our divinely-ordained duty in this last quarter of the 20th century to decide consciously that the unity desired by God shall not be allowed to be destroyed by disunity occasioned by human situations in ages past. Let us all pray that God may enable us so, for "It is only He who gives growth" (1 Cor. 3:7). Let us all pray that He may eliminate the scattered reservations that may exist here and there and help us overcome all doctrinal difficulties and theological obstacles. Thank You."

Referring to the summit in Rome, His Holiness said in one of his speeches in Vienna:

"I am moved by the gesture of Pro Oriente in according this warm reception to me.

"My association with Pro Oriente has been rather close from 1971 onwards. Pro Oriente and Cardinal Konig were gracious enough to invite me to the unofficial consultations between Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians here in Vienna. We have had very fruitful dialogues and discussions and these, in turn, have brought our two sister-Churches closer by removing misunderstandings.

"As you are aware I was in the Vatican last week. I met H. H. Pope John Paul II at two long meetings and we closed the present series of meetings with a joint declaration which says that both of us will do all that lie in us to remove the last obstacles hindering full communion between our two Churches. The joint



declaration is a high-water-mark in the dialogue initiated by my predecessor of blessed memory Moran Mor Yocoub III and the late Pope Paul VI of blessed memory, but it is, as Cardinal Konig told me the other day, more than that: it is the first declaration of its kind between the Roman Catholic Church and another ancient church. The declaration has set at rest the controversy about the Council of Chalcedon, declaring that the dispute arose from difference in interpretation but the faith intended to be proclaimed was one and the same: that God became man, full God in respect of His divinity and full man in respect of His humanity, without mingling and without the least separation. That was a big step taken in 1500 years. The declaration has accepted each other's sacraments and authorised the members of the two Churches to receive from lawful priests of either Church the holy sacraments of penance, Eucharist and anointing of the sick wherever a priest of one's own Church was not available or wherever access to such a priest was materially or morally impossible. Thirdly, the declaration exhorts bishops in both Churches to share the facilities for theological education. And finally, as I said in the beginning, it says that we must hasten our efforts to achieve full eucharistic communion.

"We have thus taken a very important step. I would like to place on record here this evening my awareness of the role played by Pro Oriente and Cardinal Konig in this endeavour. It is the Vienna consultation and the encouragement of Cardinal Konig that were responsible for the success of our dialogue as much as the work done by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and Cardinal Willebrands as the invisible architects of the mansion of unity that. H. H. Pope John Paul II and I have just erected through the declaration. And I would once again congratulate Pro Oriente and the Secretariat for promoting Christian Unity for providing the back-up support for Their Eminences.

“While what we have achieved is significant,, what remains to be done is important too. Let us therefore rededicate ourselves this evening jointly to the task ahead of us, namely, to remove the last obstacles hindering full communion, to demolish, for ever, the walls of separation, to witness together in a confused world, to bring hope to the forlorn modern man, to ensure that in us may be fulfilled our Lords prayer that “They may be one, even as we are one, You in me and I in You”.

Thank You.”

At the formal reception to His Holiness the Pro Oriente honoured His Holiness with the title “Protector of Pro Oriente”. Simultaneously the same honour was extended to Their Holinesses the Patriarchs of Alexandria and Constantinople. The President, Theodor Piffel-Percevic and Secretary, Alfred Stirnemann were present at this reception. In his reply His Holiness said:

“Man today is at the crossroads of history. Never before in the history of mankind has there been so much wealth, so much concern about environment, so much talk about world peace, and so much technological advancement, but never before has man been so bewildered about his progress. This is why I say that man today is at the crossroads of history. He does not know which way to turn. In his tragedy he is shuttling about aimlessly like a spacecraft that has lost control. Such a spacecraft has, we know, only two possibilities.. Either it will aimlessly float in outer space or it will get burnt. But man is the highest in creation. He is not inanimate spacecraft or soulless animal. Therefore he has another possibility. That possibility is to get back into proper orbit. And that possibility is realisable because God the Father chose to send His only-begotten Son to redeem man, created in His likeness. The mission of the Church today is to spread this good news; the gospel of hope for the forlorn man.



“Unfortunately the Church is handicapped in accomplishing this mission because of disunity. A divided church is a contradiction in itself because the Church is the Body of Christ and it cannot be divided into fragments. By tolerating the fragmentation of the Church we are mutilating the Body of Christ which even Pilate’s soldiers did not do. Therefore disunity in the Church is not merely a fundamental contradiction but also a grave sin, During the last quarter century or so a widespread realisation of this fact has been achieved through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches. That is a matter of great relief.

“The Second Council of Vatican the Vienna, Consultations and such other developments are a direct consequence of this realisation. Through all these and especially through the activities of Pro Oriente, it is now well-understood that the divisions were caused in the past by differences which were more apparent than real, more superficial than fundamental. The faith in the blessed Trinity, the faith in the love of God manifested in Incarnation, the faith in the Nicene Creed are all common to all of us. It was mostly the expression of these articles of faith which were conditioned by the historical contexts, cultural heritages and linguistic differences.

“With this realisation a major step has been taken. But though major it is only the first step. We have a long and tortuous way ahead of us to traverse. Contacts such as these are meaningful and positive steps in the right direction along that way. Such contacts help us to realise that, if the emphasis is shifted from second-level theology, which is investigative interpretative and critical to first-level theology, which is knowing Theos and bowing in humility to His will, we shall come closer much faster.



“I am very proud and happy about my association with Pro Oriente. I have, as you know, been privileged to attend many of its meetings and to present papers. Pro Oriente was also good enough to make me its Honorary Member. I am really one of you. And I feel as much at home in Pro Oriente as at the Seminary in Mosul where I studied in my formative years.

“Before I conclude let me present some mementos to the President and the Secretary of Pro Oriente to commemorate my visit today. I must once again congratulate Cardinal Konig and all his associates for the brilliant work they are doing to demolish the walls of hostility. May that day, when we can all truly say that we are one as indeed the first disciples were, dawn soon.

“On behalf of H. B Mor Baselios Paulose II, the Catholicos of the East, and the other members of the delegation and on my own behalf let me once again thank H. E. President of Pro Oriente and all his associates for the warmth and cordiality with which we are being received. May the Grace of God be with us all. May the love of the Father abide in us. May the example of the Son encourage us. And may the communion of the Holy Spirit guide us. Amen.

“Thank you”.

## CHAPTER VII

The significance of the Vatican Declaration is perhaps best explained in the Apostolic Encyclical of His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius

### **Syrian Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East**

By the Grace of God  
Ignatius Zakka I Iwas  
Patriarch of Antioch and  
All the East  
July 9, 1984

No. E 119/84

Apostolic benediction on our beloved brother in Christ H. B. Mor Baselios Paulose II, Catholicos of the East, Their Eminences our beloved Metropolitans, V. Rev. Corepiscopos, Rev. Priests and deacons, devoted monks and nuns, and our faithful in India

Our beloved spiritual children,

We write this to you at the end of our Apostolic visit to the Archdiocese of Central Europe.

We left Damascus on June 18 for Rome, our first stop in Europe. We stayed in Rome till Saturday June 23 as the guest of

H. H. the Pope John Paul II. During this period we had a series of meetings with the President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity H. E. John Cardinal Willebrands and two long sessions with H. H. the Pope himself. At all these meetings we were accompanied and ably assisted by H. B. Catholicos Mor Baselios Paulose II, Their Eminences Mor Gregorios Yuhanon of Aleppo, Mor Yulios Yesheu of Central Europe and our Vicar General Mor Saverios Ishac besides our Secretary V. Rev. Rabbna Benyamin Joseph Panakkal and layleaders Bar Eitho Briro Dr. Babu Paul and Mr. John Glore.

At the end of our meetings in Rome H. H. the Pope and I signed a joint declaration enumerating the common points where our two sister Churches are in agreement identifying the common areas where we could co-operate with each other better and pledging to do our best in removing the differences which remain so that the wish of our Lord that we may all be one, as He and the Father are one, may be fulfilled. As you all know, the divergence between our two Churches dates back to the time of the Council of Chalcedon. It arose from the difference in interpretation of the doctrine of Incarnation. In 1971, 13 years ago, our illustrious predecessor Moran Mor Ignatius Yacoub III and the late Pope Paul VI, Holy Fathers of blessed memory, declared that they had the same faith concerning the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become truly man. On that basis we declared on June 23 in Vatican that "He became incarnate for us, taking to Himself a real body with a rational soul. He shared our humanity in all matters except sin. We confess that our Lord and our God, our Savior and the King of all, Jesus Christ, is perfect God as to His divinity and perfect man as to His humanity. In Him His divinity is united to His humanity. The union is real, perfect, without blending or mingling, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without the least separation. He who is God eternal and indivisible,



became visible in the flesh and took the form of servant. In Him are united, in real, perfect, indivisible and inseparable way, divinity and humanity, and in Him all their properties are present and active” (paragraph 4 of Joint Declaration). At the same time we found that “Since it is the chief expression of Christian unity between the faithful and between Bishops and priests, the Holy Eucharist cannot yet be concelebrated by us. Such celebration supposes a complete identity of faith such as does not yet exist between us. Certain questions, in fact, still need to be resolved touching the Lord’s will for His Church, as also the doctrinal implications and canonical details of the traditions, proper to our communities which have been too long separated.” (paragraph 8 of Joint Declaration). However we felt that “Our identity of faith, though not yet complete entitles us to envisage collaboration between our Churches in pastoral care, in situations which nowadays are frequent both because of the dispersion of our faithful throughout the world and because of the precarious conditions of these difficult times. It is not rare, in fact, for our faithful to find access to a priest of their own church materially or morally impossible. Anxious to meet their needs and with their spiritual benefit in mind, we authorize them in such cases to ask for the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick from lawful priests of either of our two sister Churches when they need them. It would be a logical corollary of collaboration in pastoral care to co-operate in priestly formation and theological education. Bishops are encouraged to promote sharing of facilities for theological education where they judge it to be advisable. While doing this we do not forget that we must still do all in our power to achieve the full visible communion between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and ceaselessly implore our Lord to grant us that unity which alone will enable us to give to the world a fully unanimous Gospel witness’. (9 paragraph 9 of Joint Declaration). This does not, of

course, mean that members of one Church can receive Sacraments from a priest of the other, if a priest of his own Church is available. To illustrate what it means we may cite the instance of far-off places in India like Assam or Bihar or remote corners of states like Tamil Nadu in India where our people may have settled down, temporarily or permanently, to seek a living, where a Syrian Orthodox priest is perhaps not available: in such cases they are now allowed to receive the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick from Roman Catholic priests. Even in Kerala if a priest of one's own church is not readily available our faithful can receive these Sacraments from Roman Catholic priests and our priests can administer these Sacraments to members of Roman Catholic Church. if necessary. The statements contained in the Joint Declaration about collaboration in pastoral care and priestly formation also mean that subject to the approval of the local bishops the members of the two churches can study in the same seminary if it is necessary and priests and others of either Church may, if permitted by the local bishops preach in the other Church. Of course, as stated by H. H. the Pope and I there remain many differences between our two Churches. We exhort all of you to pray that the Holy spirit may enable us to overcome those differences also without delay.

From Rome we proceeded to Austria. At the capital of Austria, Vienna, we were received by H. E. Cardinal Konig and the representatives of Pro Oriente. The President of Austria received us with all honour and the Lord Mayor of Vienna gave a civic reception. Pro Oriente awarded us, along with Their Holinesses the Patriarchs of the other two ancient Sees - Pope Shenouda of Alexandria and Patriarch Dimitrios of Constantinople the title of Protector of Pro Oriente: we see this as yet another example of the good will of the See of Rome to the other three ancient Patriarchates.



After a week in Austria we proceeded to Brussels, capital of Belgium. Our people in Belgium were very happy to receive us as also representatives from India.

From Belgium we moved to Holland where in Losser we consecrated a new monastery. This monastery, named after St. Aphrem the Syrian, is the first monastery of our Church in Europe. It is located on the Dutch side of the German border and is spread over a vast expanse of nearly fifty acres of land. This is the headquarters of H. E. Mor Yulios Yeshou Chiecek, Archbishop of Central Europe, who had accompanied us to India in 1982. A large gathering of 15,000 people from all over the Europe, U. S. A. and Turkey, H. B. the Catholicos of the East, Our Metropolitans from States, Sweden, Turkey and the Middle East and Cardinals Archbishops and Bishops from other denominations were present.

Throughout our visit H. B. the Catholicos of the East Mor Baselios Paulose II, our beloved brother in Christ, concelebrated the Holy Quorbono with us and our beloved spiritual son Bar Eitho Briro, Dr. D. Babu Paul assisted us in the Madbaho. Their presence as that of our Secretary V. Rev. Rabban Benyamin Joseph Panackkal in our company was a visible declaration of the oneness of our Universal Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. As H. B. the Catholicos and Dr. D. Babu Paul return to India we send with them this Apostolic Bull, to which we add the Apostolic blessings as your Supreme Head.

May the benign God extend His invisible right hand along with our weak and sinful hand to bless all of you and all your good efforts. May the love of the Father be with you. May the grace of the Son encourage you. May the communion of the Holy Spirit guide you. Through the intercession of the blessed Virgin, Mother of God, St. Peter the chief of apostles, St. Thomas the patron saint of India and St. Elias II, messenger of peace. Amen.



## EPILOGUE

It would be appropriate to close this booklet with a message sent by His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, addressed to His Beatitude Mor Baselius Poulouse II, Catholicose of the East.

“We are glad to hear about your cooperation to make the Pope’s visit to India a great success. We are also happy to know from H. H. the Pope that he will be visiting Your Beatitude at the St. Peter’s Church, Ernakulam. As you are aware our relationship with the Roman Catholic Church is now very cordial. Frequent dialogues being held between the two churches, in India as well as in the West, will help us to come closer in course of time. The Pope and I are also thinking of formally constituting a Joint Commission to expedite this process. In this background, we are particularly happy about the Papal visit to India, where our Church is very strong. We have already sent our best wishes to the Pope in Vatican. Please convey to all our Metropolitans and others in India our appreciation of their ecumenical cooperation in this matter. Please also convey to the Roman Catholic Church in Kerala my felicitations on the occasion of the first ever visit of a Pope to your State. With apostolic blessings, Patriarch Ignatius Zakka.”

The Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India has also welcomed the visit of the Pope whole-heartedly. The Church looks forward to the pleasure and honour of receiving His Holiness Pope John Paul II at the St. Peter's Church, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Cochin,

St. Peter's Chapel has enshrined therein the holy relics of the forty martyrs of Sebastia. According to tradition, forty Christian saints who lived in the 4th century were asked by the pagan King of Anadol region in Turkey to renounce their faith and to worship the pagan gods. On their refusal they were condemned to death. The manner of execution was to leave them in a frozen lake. Just as they were about to die, one of them developed cold feet and retraced his steps. At the same time one of the soldiers of the king saw that forty crowns were descending from heaven to adorn each of the martyrs. Seeing this the soldier took the place of the Christian who had renounced his faith. St. Peter's Chapel, Ernakulam is the only place where the holy relics of the forty martyrs of Sebastia are enshrined.

THE END





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Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that (s)he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if (s)he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

1. ഒരു യാത്രയുടെ ഓർമ്മകൾ  
(Memories of a Journey)
2. ഉത്തരസ്യം ദിശി  
(In the North)
3. ഗിരി പർവ്വം  
(The Mountain Saga)
4. ക്രെംലിൻബെർലിൻ  
(Kremlin-Berlin)
5. ഈ പാറമേൽ  
(Upon this Rock)
6. നിപ്പോണ നൊ ഒമോയ്ദോ  
(Nippon no Omoyde)
7. Veni Vidi Vici
8. Quest for Unity
9. Splendours of Kerala (Co-author)
10. The Saint From Kooded
11. A Queen's Story
12. അച്ചൻ, അച്ഛൻ, ആചാര്യൻ (Co-author)  
(A Tribute to Paulose Corepiscopa)