

The Surprisingly Ecumenical Inception of Latin Christianity in Kerala: A Brief Study

Dr. Vigimole P S

ABSTRACT

Abstract body

"The Surprisingly Ecumenical Inception of Latin Christianity in Kerala" briefly explains the inception of Christianity in Kerala based on the St. Thomas tradition. The Latin Catholic Church was established in India in the fourteenth century. In about 52 AD, St. Thomas, an apostle of Jesus Christ, came to India and evangelized the land. Latin Catholicism had its origin when John of Monte Corvino baptized several people into the Catholic faith in Malabar. The Latin Catholics are a heterogeneous group of St. Thomas Christians, Anglo Indians, and those backward classes converted by St. Francis Xavier. The division of traditional Kerala Christians into "Syrians" and "Latin", only indicates the liturgical attachment of these communities. Kerala Christianity was invariably called Christians of the Serra Mountain i.e., Malankara, or Nazarene [Nasrani] or Tarsa, or Nestorian, and locally, Mappilas. The Latin Christians of Central Kerala were called Lateen Mappilas. Quilon [Kollam], was the first Latin Catholic Diocese formed in the state of Kerala, India. It is well known that Quilon was one of the most important trading centres that attracted European travellers and traders and had conducted its trade with foreigners for over three centuries before Christ, through Quilon port, with the support and encouragement of Rome. At present, there are 12 Catholic dioceses under 2 archdioceses: Thiruvananthapuram and Varapuzha. The Pilgrim activities began at Kollam, whereby it became the Catholic diocese in Kerala. Christian missionaries played an important role in promoting education, guided by humanitarian as well as religious motives, with no regard for castes or religions. The Latin Church is simply the vast portion of the Catholic body which obeys and submits to the Roman pontiff. The Roman patriarchate was distinguished from these Syrianized churches not only by the liturgies but also by customs, practices, and canon law distinct from those of the Eastern churches, and these provided them with a separate identity. At present, the Latin Catholics have been given special consideration in the constitution of India.

KEYWORDS

Ecumenism, Ecumenical, Inception, Evangelized, Heterogeneous, Serra, Nazarene, Nestorian, Roman pontiff

The ecumenical inception of Christianity in Kerala is based on St. Thomas, an apostle of Jesus Christ, who came to India and evangelized the land. He is considered to be an important witness to the resurrection of Christ. He first arrived in the North-Western part of India by the overland route, where there was a king named Gondopharnes who ruled that region. According to numismatic and inscriptional sources, it is believed that Gondopharnes reigned in the first half of the first century AD. Latin Christianity is the same as Roman Christianity or Papal Christianity. In the Latin Church, the priest is the universal Lord of the universal human conscience. Even though Christianity was introduced by St. Thomas in South India, Latin Catholicism had its origin in Kerala in 1291 AD. Marco Polo in 1292 declared the story of the Christian group under the Quilon (Kollam) Diocese. The Quilon Diocese was the first Latin Catholic community formed in Kerala, India. In 1330 AD, Pope John XXII appointed the priest Jourdain Catalani as the first Bishop of Latin Catholics in Kerala. But Bishop Catalani was brutally stoned to death by Muslim extremists in 1336 AD. Bishop Catalani, a Jordan priest, is considered to be the founder of the Latin Catholic Church and spiritual father of the Latin Church in Kerala, appointed by Pope John XXII.

The establishment of Latin Christianity in Kerala should be understood against this background. The division of traditional Kerala Christians into "Syrians" and "Latin" only indicates the liturgical attachment of these communities. The stigmas attached to different sects of Kerala Christians are due to the racial mixture and the consciousness of the caste complex filtered through the traditional society of Malabar. A group of Kerala Christians were deliberately called 'Syrians' for the first time by the Calvinistic Dutch Governor, Adrian Moens, in the 18th century to promote sectarianism among Kerala Christians and to divide the Catholics permanently. Until the 18th century, Kerala Christianity was invariably called Christians of the Serra (mountain, i.e., Malankara) or Nascarini (Nasrani) or Tarsa or Nestorian, and locally, Mappilas. The Latin Christians of Central Kerala were called Lateen Mappilas. As has already been pointed out, the early mediaeval Christians were only 'Christians' by name, and they worshipped the Lord in the Syriac language, which was imposed upon them by Syrian colonists and Nestorian ecclesiastical authorities. The Syriacization of the Kerala Church was, of course,

peaceful and without resistance, because there was neither any attempt at convection nor any royal patronage from the Syrian rulers to promote evangelization.

The inception of the Latin Catholics in Kerala in the 13th century was vigorous because of the support and encouragement from Rome to bring the Nestorian Christians into the Catholic fold. Latin Christianity is as old as the Church of Christ itself, though in the beginning, naturally, it was Judeo-Christian in character. The theological synthesis of the Catholic Church emerged in the Latin environment and crystallized by the second century with the earnest effort of Tertullian. But this Christianity, which is called the Roman Catholic Church, came to the East only in the 13th century. The pilgrim society of Christ, established by Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254), who realized the urgency of the evangelization of the East, sent the first Catholic missionary, John of Montecorvino, a Franciscan friar, who visited Quilon in 1291 and stayed for thirteen months in south India, on his way to China and the Far East. Fr. Montecorvino and his associate converted a good number of people at Quilon and baptised the Tarsa Christians whom he met there. This was the beginning of Latin Christianity in India. The Latin Church is simply the vast portion of the Catholic body that obeys and submits to the Roman pontiff. It is thus distinguished from the Eastern Churches, which represent the patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The Roman patriarchate is distinguished from these Suriany churches not only by the use of liturgies, but also by customs, practices, and canon law that are distinct from those of the Eastern churches, and which have given them a distinct identity.

The activities of the "Pilgrim Society for Christ" increased and became organized at Quilon when Pope John XXII constituted Quilon as an Episcopal See by a Bull "Ad Per Pertuam Rei Memoriam" dated August 9th, 1329. The Dominican Friar, Jordan Catalani of Severac (France), was appointed as the first Latin Catholic Bishop of Kerala. In his Magnum opus entitled 'Mirabilia Descripta,' Friar Jordan describes himself as Oriundum De Sevaraco, in India Majori Episcopum Columbensen, i.e., hailing from Severac, Bishop of Quilon in great India. He was a zealous missionary who brought a good number of people into the field of the Catholic Church in Travancore, Malabar, Karnataka, and Thana with the help of Dominican Missionaries before his ascendancy to the episcopacy. These early converts to Catholicism were mainly Nestorians who followed the law of St. Thomas. In his letter appointing him bishop of Quilon, the Pope said, "John, servant of God, to our venerable friar Jordan Catalani, Bishop of Quilon, greetings, considering that you, priest and professed of the order of Friar preachers, learned in the science of theology, have personally known the state and situation of the people in the course of your preaching to them the divine word and that you have won the souls of many faithful to our Lord Jesus, for whom the Zeal for the holy faith is a proof of sanctity." We have, in consequence, caused to be given to you the Episcopal consecration, by the hand of our venerable Brother Bertrand, Bishop of Tusculum. Wherefore, by these present apostolic letters, we order your fraternity to repair to your church with the grace of our benediction". Thus, Quilon became the earliest Bishop of the Latin Rite and the first Diocese of the Holy See of the Roman Catholic Church in India. Bishop Jordan took his pallium to his metropolitan, the Archbishop of Sultania, John of Cara. He delivered papal letters to the kings of Delhi and Quilon, as well as the chief of Nestorian Christians in Kerala.

Before setting out on his mission, the new Bishop went to Toulouse, where a General chapter of the order had met in 1328 at the request of Pope John XXII, and at which a hundred fathers had offered themselves for mission work among the Christian Schismatic and non-Christians of Kerala. Bishop Jordan sent several of them to the Nestorian centers of Malabar and the Konkan coast and converted many people to the Catholic faith. As Bishop, Friar Jordan reached Quilon in 1330. In a report, he states that with his companions, the Franciscans, and Dominicans, he has won over to the Catholic faith ten thousand schematics (these must be St. Thomas Christians) and unbelievers. The St. George Cathedral, established by Friar Jordan at Quilon, became his seat and the centre of missionary activities. The prelate was in his see for some years, and there is no justification for the allusion that he never reached Quilon as the Episcopal head of his diocese. That his labours among the Nestorians of Quilon were successful is proved by the fact that they received the papal Legate John de Marignolli with great enthusiasm and veneration after a few years. Bishop Jordan had to visit several of his mission centers, and while in Thana in Maharashtra, he was stoned to death by the Muslims. The year of his martyrdom was most probably 1336. We do not have any documentary evidence either for the continuance of the Episcopal See of Quilon or for the appointment of any successor to Bishop Jordan by the pope. The friar preachers' presence in India must have continued the evangelization work for some more time. It appears that because of the alarming insecurity for the Roman Catholic missions in the wake of Islamic expansion, the flow of Dominicans from the Archdiocese of Sultania was also stopped. Further, the emergence of the dreaded Mongol leader Timor in 1369, who unleashed a new reign of terror, resulted in the total eclipse of Roman Catholic missionaries in Persia, putting an end to their evangelical work in the new diocese of Quilon. It was thus that, with the blood and sweat of Bishop Jordan and his associates, the Latin Catholic Church was established in India in the fourteenth century.

On returning from China, the Papal Nuncio, John de Marignolli of the Latin Church, spent the years 1348–1350 in India. He arrived in Quilon at Easter 1348 and spent 16 months in the earliest Apostolic See of

Rome in India. He was lodged at St. George's Cathedral, the first Latin Cathedral in India, which had been decorated by him with paintings. During Marignolli's period, there were two sets of Christians in Kerala; St. Thomas (Nestorian) Christians and Latin Christians, and they maintained cordial relations. When the Portuguese, under Alfonso de Albuquerque, landed in Quilon, there were 25,000 Christians, of whom a good number were Latin Catholics. The arrival of Portuguese missionaries in the 15th century firmly established the foundations of the Latin Catholic Church of Kerala. Fr. Rodriguez was a priest in Quilon at the start of the Portuguese period. Homen, a Dominican, was in charge of the Latin mission. The Franciscan Jesuits and the Carmelite missionaries who laboured in Cochin, Cranganore, Calicut, and Cannanore instructed the non-Catholic Christians of the region in the Catholic faith and slowly convinced them of their fall into heresy and brought them to the fold of the Latin Catholic Church. Apart from that, we hear of the persecution of Christians in about 1500 AD and later. In 1502, a deputation of Cranganore-based Christians led by their Archdeacon, at the instance of Jacob Abuna, their prelate, complained to Vasco da Gama against "heathens and moors by which they were badly treated". They sought the protection of Latin Christians, who had the support of Portuguese power and readily embraced the Roman Catholic faith. Many of the pre-Portuguese Christians of Calicut and Quilon migrated to the Kottapuram and Cochin areas, which emerged as the citadel of the Portuguese and Latin church in Kerala. The Catholic schools and colleges were established by the Roman missionaries and Cochin, Vaippincotta, Sampalur, and Cranganore admitted many students from the already existing Christian community and trained them in Latin Catholic teaching and the doctrines of the Roman Church. While writing to Ignatius Loyola about his proselytization work among St. Thomas Christians, Fr. Antonio de Heredia observes: "Many Christians in Cochin and surrounding areas have many erroneous notions as a result of being instructed by two bishops who came from Persia; these Christians are lost due to a lack of workers to teach them the true way, and many of their sons are brought into the College of Frey Vincente. I went to two settlements of these Christians. Here I said mass and subjected them all to the Roman Church".

As Tavernier has pointed out, the Latin missionaries organized the best library at Cochin in the whole of Asia during the period. In an agreement between King Rama Varma of Cochin and Dom Henrique De S. Jeronyno De Tovar, the Bishop of Cochin Diocese, on September 4th, 1560, it was permitted to construct Latin churches wherever Christians were living in groups with a minimum of 30 members. Steadily, the Christian community of Kerala began to learn the teachings of the Roman Catholic church, and gradually the number of Latin Christians increased in this area with the admission of non-Christians from the coastal area of Kerala. As the eminent Indian historian Sardar K.M. Panikar has pointed out, the Latin Church in Malabar is as much indigenous and of the soil as any other form of worship prevalent on the West Coast. It is a church with a noble, uninterrupted tradition and has claims for wider recognition from all, not only because it has held fast to the rise of the Holy Catholic Church but also because of its close and intimate association with that great and saintly personality, Francis Xavier. The Quilon diocese was the first Latin Catholic community formed in Kerala, India.

It is well known that Quilon was one of the most important trading centres that attracted European travellers and traders and had conducted its trade with foreigners for over three centuries before Christ, through Quilon Port. As a result, it is easy to accept the tradition that St. Thomas established in Quilon, the second of the seven churches, in 54 A.D. Reputed historians like Mackenzie, Vincent Smith, K.P. Padmanabha Menon, Sardar K.M. Panikar, etc. have supported and strengthened this view.

It is believed that St. Thomas baptized over 1,400 people of all four castes and others of no caste. The great majority of them were from the Saiva Vellala community, who were highly educated according to the standards and were called "Mappila". Consequently, all Kerala Christians, the Kerala Nazranees, came to be known as Nazrani Mappila. The Nilakkal Church, one of the seven churches of St. Thomas, became extinct due to the Pandian invasion of Kerala and the consequent persecution of the people of Nilakkal and other border territories. The people, St. Thomas Christians mostly, fled westward and settled in various parts of the diocese: Quilon, Kadampanad, Kumpuzha, as well as other parts of Kerala. "India and all its countries received the apostolic priesthood from the hands of Judas Thomas." Tradition says also that the Apostle set up two presbyteries (Episcopate) in Kerala, one at Cranganore and the other at Quilon.

A terrible persecution broke out at the end of the second or beginning of the third century; all of the priests were executed, and the flock was left without a pastor for a long period. In the year 293, the Vellala converts to Christianity in Kaveripoompattanam on the east coast were persecuted by their monarch, thus 72 families abandoned their houses in a boat and travelled to Quilon. However, in 315, a magician named Manikka Vachakr appeared in Quilon and converted 116 persons and households to Hinduism, including both immigrants and local Christians. After learning of the plight of the Church in India through Persian merchants dealing with India, the patriarch of Babylon dispatched two missionaries to Kerala with the approval of the Holy See. Two Chaldean rite bishops who travelled to Kerala to supply priests to the church. These bishops introduced the Chaldean rite to India, possibly putting a stop to the Dravidian ritual of St. Thomas the Apostle. In 325 A.D., a bishop from here may have attended the Council of Nicaea. It is stated that Fr. Frumentius, considered the

second apostle of Malabar, visited Quilon in 400 AD, confirming the connection between Quilon and the Holy See.

Quilon was the destination of the Persian Christian immigrants led by Mar Sapor and Mar Proth. They arrived with 60 brothers from Persia, who had a strong following and strengthened Christianity in Quilon. It should be remembered with thankfulness and admiration that the native kings and queens of Quilon were tolerant and helpful to Christians. The king of Venad, Aiyanadikal, who was happy with Quilon's success, awarded the Christians 72 rights. Furthermore, in 824 A.D., the King and Chieftains of the Land gathered to launch a new era—Kollavarsham. "The copper plate known as the second charter was awarded by King Sthanu Ravi Gupta in the same year."

Pope Innocent IV, a Franciscan and Dominican, formed the first society of missionaries for the East, Societies Peregrinantium pro-Christo (Society of Pilgrims for Christ), and sent down a few missionaries to the East about the middle of the 13th century. The Kingdom of Quilon had close ties with Kublai Khan, the Chinese ruler of the time. China's ties to Quilon were also mentioned by Marco Polo, who visited the city in 1293. These missionaries worked in China and Quilon to spread the gospel. As a result, the Dominicans and Franciscans, whose direct superiors were at Ormuz, began evangelising in and around Quilon as early as 1302 AD..

The history of the Archdiocese of Bombay acknowledges the fact of its evangelization and administration by Jordanus, Bishop of Quilon. Similarly, Mangalore, Mysore, Gujarat, Tana, Madras, etc. were also under Jordanus.

The next ecclesiastical period began with the settlement of the Portuguese at Quilon in 1502, together with their Franciscan Friars. Since then, the territory was under the Franciscan missionaries till 1553, when Quilon became a part of the diocese of Goa. The Bishop of Goa, Don Jon Alfonso Albuquerque, being a Franciscan, his influence was intense in vivifying Quilon. St. Francis Xavier had visited Quilon twice, in November 1544 and in March 1549. The purpose of the saint's second visit was to organize a seminary, then called a college, to train priests and educate the laity of the dioceses. St. Francis and his colleagues had contributed their share in building up the diocese. The first Indian to join the Society of Jesus was a priest from Quilon, Fr. Peter Louis.

After the Synod of Diamper, Alexius de Menezes, continued his visitations and came down to Quilon. In the correspondence that passed between the Jesuit provincials and their superiors in Europe, clear references were made to the areas from "Coulao to Caniacomari's."

In February 1557, when Goa was raised to an Archdiocese, Cochin was dismembered from Goa and made Suffragan to Goa. Quilon remained part of the Cochin diocese for the next 280 years. On April 28, 1838, Pope Gregory XVI suppressed the diocese of Cochin by his brief *Multa Praeclare* and attached that territory, along with Quilon, to the vicariate of Malabar. The vicariate was divided into Verapoly, Mangalore, and Quilon by the Holy See on May 12, 1845. Quilon was provisionally entrusted to the Belgian discaled Carmelite Missionaries and the Rt. Rev. Bernard Paccinealli was appointed pro-vicar. On March 15, 1853, apostolic Quilon was confirmed as a separate vicariate Apostolic and Msgr. Bernadine Pontanova was nominated as the first vicar Apostolic. He and his successor, the Very Rev. Maurice of St. Albert, died soon after this nomination. Msgr. Charles Hyacinth Valerga was appointed as Pro-vicar Apostolic on May 31, 1854, and made Vicar Apostolic on May 26, 1859. He was consecrated in Rome on June 5, 1859, and on August 11, 1864, he was succeeded by Msgr. Marie Ephrem Gareelon of the Sacred Heart, as Vicar Apostolic, who was consecrated in Tangasseri. He transferred the seminary to Tangasseri. He resided in Trivandrum and made all arrangements for founding a congregation of the third order of Carmelite sisters in France for their mission in Quilon. He had attended the Vatican Council in 1870. While in Rome, he was transferred to Mangalore and moved the sisters also.

Msgr. Ildephonse Broja, who was the next Vicar Apostolic, brought some of those sisters and started the first convent of the Carmelites' third order at Tuet, Quilon on May 16, 1875. He retired in 1883 and was succeeded by Msgr. Ferdinand Ossi, in the same year. When the hierarchy was established in India in 1886, Quilon became a diocese again on September 1, 1886, with Msgr. Ferdinand as Bishop Suffragan to the Archbishop of Verapoly. He shifted the seminary to Tuet. He was given a coadjutor, Msgr. Aloysius Maria Benziger. Who was consecrated at Kandy on November 18, 1900, with the demise of Msgr. Ferdinand at Ghent in 1905, on September 14, the same year, Msgr. Benziger was enthroned as the Bishop of Quilon. The Bishop's residence which was housed along with the seminary at Tuet was removed to the Portuguese Governor's building at Olikarli, close to Tangasseri the seminary too was shifted back to Tangasseri, the building which now houses the boarding section of Infant Jesus Anglo Indian School. While remodeling and equipping the house, Bishop Benziger took meticulous care to preserve and protect in pristine beauty and elegance the life-size statue of the Madonna and the Infant Babe installed years ago by the Franciscans who stayed with the governors. As coadjutor, he had established a minor seminary which was permanently shifted to Varuvayali in 1916. That building now forms part of the administrative and science block of Fatima Mata National College. A plot was brought for the Carmelite Religious at Cotton Hill in Trivandrum and was renamed Carmel Hill. A big

monastery building and a big church rose on the spot somewhere about 1928. Bishop, at the request of His Highness the Maharajah of Travancore, brought down from Switzerland the sisters of the Crosse to serve as a nurse in the hospitals. Three centers were noted as important missions, Neyyanttinkara, Punalur, and Kattanam. The Kattanam mission was entrusted to diocesan priests, Fr. Panthaleon Persia and Fr. Lawrence Pereira. They encouraged Jacobite reunions which culminated in the reception to the Catholic Church of two prelates Archbishop Mar Ivanios and Bishop Mar Theophilus, by Bishop Benziger in his chapel on September 30, 1930.

Till then the diocese had only two divisions, the Northern with Quilon as headquarters and the Southern under a vicar-Forane at Kottar. Reorganization and re-arrangement became a desideratum because of the increase in the Catholic population, the number of Churches and other institutions, and the number of activities of the Bishop. The diocese was divided into eight divisions-six under the vicar Forane, seven under the parish priest of St. Joseph's, Trivandrum, and the last at Quilon directly under the Vicar General, the Bishop of rule. With the extensive diocese and so he submitted a proposal to Rome for the division of the diocese into three. Accordingly, he obtained the first decree dated May 26, 1930 slicing off the southernmost part of the diocese to form the new diocese of Kottar. Rev.Fr.Lawrence Pereira of the Kattanam mission near Mavelikkara became the first Bishop of Kottar.

Bishop Benziger retired due to ill health in 1931. Very Rev. Fr. Bernadine administrated the Diocese till February 2, 1936, when Msgr. Vincent V Diocese was nominated Bishop of Quilon. He remained in office only up to July 1, 1937. Then the diocese was further divided and the present diocese of Trivandrum came into being but they continued as the administrator of the Diocese of Quilon till Diocese 19, 1937, the foreign Carmelite Fathers also left Trivandrum.

The Roman pontiff, the successor of Saint Peter, the bearer of the keys of heaven and vicar of Jesus Christ, with paternal attention considered the nature of every place on earth and all the people found there, and he examined them diligently, as his office obliges him to do, he desires and seeks the salvation of each individual. Supported by heavenly authority, he orders and disposes of usefully and wisely, administering with counsel and rational judgments, with prudent maturity and reflection, what will be pleasing to the divine majesty, thanks to which he will be able to lead to himself in one sole sheepfold those sheep that put their trust in the truth. He will thus be able to lead those souls to the prize of eternal happiness who, since it is the Lord who multiplies them, will be able, more surely and evidently, to grow in the truth of the Catholic faith, beneficent learning, through which the splendor of the Divine Name may become more widely known and praised.

Undoubtedly, for many years both true fame and an account worthy of faith have joyfully accompanied the work of our apostolate. Indeed, many friars of the order of preachers aflame with zeal for the faith and with devotion, to bring eager souls to Christ, have traveled personally, usually with their superiors to certain regions of the orient, especially to the kingdom of greater India, inhabited by various schismatic and pagan people. They have visited many places in those regions and in that kingdom, not being overwhelmed by their labors, and they have stayed in those places for many years. Preaching the word of God with passion among those people and gently leading them to God, they have converted many of them to the Christian faith, bringing them out of the darkness of their sins into the truth and out of the eclipse into the light of their faith. Which those people had been lacking since devout belief generates hope and faith in the Lord, since those same friars have diligently pursued the work of learning in the faith that they had so laudably began among these people, a multitude of people, more numerous than words themselves, have been converted to God and accepted the faith announced to them we, therefore who are, though unworthy, the successor of saint peter and represent the voice of Christ on earth, even as we devoutly voice praise for such a numerous conversion under the guidance of divine Grace and the continuation of such profitable activity, entrust into the Lord and desire to strengthen and promote it with the protection of apostolic love.

Following careful meditation, both within ourselves and with our brothers, with conscientious discussion followed by a wise decision, at the suggestion of those same brothers and in the fullness of Apostolic Authority, to the praise and glory of the heavenly excellence, to the honor of his Holy Church, for the spread of the orthodox faith, in order to argument the cult of the divine Name and for the profit of souls, both now and in the future, to admire the mercy of the highest and for other beneficent reasons which have led our mind piously and rationally to this, in the name of the faith, in that kingdom, in a fitting and proper place of great distinction called Columbum, we constitute it as a city and designate it with the name of the city, and wish it to be so-called for all centuries to come.

In addition, so that it may be considered a mother by its children and designated with the little of the church of all the faithful, on the advice of all our brothers and in the fullness of our Apostolic Authority, we decree that a cathedral church be founded in that city and that on it be conferred an Episcopal title. The church which we have established in his city will have, God willing, its bridegroom, suited to the care of the apostolic see, which will lead her and take care of her.

We turn our hearts to matters that increase salvation, and with the assistance of the protection of divine grace, we consecrate our commitment and dedicate ourselves to them with care and effort, thanks to whose effectiveness souls will be able to attain the enthusiasm of the catholic faith, the cult of the divine, and an increase in salvation. Souls endowed with firm hope and devout belief can more effectively pursue those matters when the direction of the church is entrusted, as it should be to suitable shepherds and wise guides who with authority in word and deed by giving in themselves an example of wholesome life and by spreading a beneficent word prepare the hearts of the faithful for the knowledge of divine excellence both strengthen them and wisely rule the other churches entrusted to them guide them profitably and strive to direct them happily. Since a short while ago, to spread the Christian faith and the cult of the divine name, and also persuaded by other reasons, at the suggestion of our brothers and in the fullness of our Apostolic Authority we have constituted the distinguished locality of Columbum, in the Kingdom of grater India as a city and wish it to be so-called for all the centuries to come. Again at the suggestion of our brothers and in the fullness of our apostolic authority, we have decreed and established that a Cathedral Church is built in that city, to be honored with the little of the Episcopal dignity, and we have erected said church in the aforementioned city. So that this church may rejoice in the praise of its Head and exult in the gentle sweetness of its bridegroom, we have begun wisely and put at its head a suitable fit and well known individual and, after some deliberation, which we deemed it proper, together with our brothers, to make on you, master of the order of Friars preacher, steadfast in the dignity of the priesthood, educated in the Holy scriptures on you a true expert in other cultures because you have personally known their situation and nature and who, it is said, have already led the souls of many faithful to Jesus Christ by sowing the word of God, on you supported by the Zeal of holy religion, by the purity of life, by moral integrity, by wisdom in discernment and by other gifts and virtues, according to what trustworthy witness have said, on you we have set the eyes of our mind, which has considered everything with due attention. At the suggestion of our aforementioned brothers, we entrust the apostolic authority of your person to the aforementioned church, and we place you at its head as bishop and shepherd, fully assigning to you the care and administration of both spiritual and temporal matters.

As a result, at the hands of our brother, the venerable Bertrand, Bishop of Tusculum, we bestow the gift of consecration, being steadfast in the Lord our solemn trust in the aforementioned fruits of your studies, since you, who direct and accompany with goodwill the flock entrusted to your faith and assigned to your keeping at the command of the Lord, have begun the work of teaching and giving information about the orthodox faith in that region, so that, in the shadow of your name and thanks to your fruitful ministry and the right hand of the Lord which manifests its power in you, said the church might increase in salvation and joy.

For this reason, we have charged your brethren with Apostolic documents, so that, as you approach that church with the grace of our blessing, you assume its care with dedication and faithfulness, kindly and effectively teaching your flock with beneficent precepts, educating it and being of use both to yourself by the merits of your life and to others thanks to your example, so that you will obtain infinite divine mercy and like the faithful and wise servant who will receive hundredfold rewards, you will be worthy to receive the joy of eternal happiness.

Christianity may be regarded in two aspects, as the law of life and as a system of doctrine. Christians in Kerala had no written records of the ancient period but relied entirely on traditions handed down by their elders and to these, they were most tenaciously attached. The Latin Catholic community is heterogeneous one composed of St. Thomas Christians who had embraced Latin rite during the Portuguese regime, Anglo Indians, and those converted by St. Francis Xavier and others from the Paravas of Bharathas, Nadars, Vellalas, Mukkuvas or Arasar, Parayan or Sambavas, Pulayas or Cheraman, Sanars, Kerala Muthali, etc.

The term rite means the words to be said and action to be done in carrying out a given act of religion, e.g., rite of baptism. By extension it means a complete system of ritual and prayer to be used in the worship of God and the ministration of the sacraments, so we have the Antiochean rite, the whole complex of prayers and offices originating at or associated with the city and Patriarchate of Antioch. In time this gets modified, on the one hand into the Maronite rite. Counting the several variations of the Latin Rite as only one, there are ten rites in this last sense and each one is represented by a body of Catholics using it today of the Latin's and Maronite's, by much larger non-Catholic bodies as well. Each of these bodies is also sometimes called a rite, which in this sense bodies is also sometimes called a rite, which in this sense is equivalent to "church" and includes the manner of organization, proper canon law, customs, etc. appertaining thereto. Every child of catholic parents belongs to one or other of these rites. If his parents differ in the rite, he belongs to that of the father; if only one parent is a catholic, the child belongs to that parent's rite.

In its faith, its religious dogma, and canons of conduct there is complete oneness in all parts of the Catholic Church. There is no room for either likeness or dissimilarity but is simple identity. But even in accidental matters of worship, discipline usage, mental habit, study, and examination, shown how often the same or similar ideas, framework, origin, etc. are behind the differing practice of east and west. Above all, it is the same 'enlightening spirit'.

This does not mean that the different characteristics of the Christian East and west are confined to what is external. Every people live the immutable truths in their way according to their history, culture, temperament, and personality. Within the common framework of the western church, there is such variety of mind and life that we can speak, and not improperly of a German Catholicism, Spanish Catholicism, and Irish Catholicism. So too the east and particular parts of the east have their own 'spiritualities' as we say, their theological emphasis their ways of approaching Christ's mysteries of living his faith. These things have determined and influenced the ways of worship and the rest, and be in turn influenced by them.

One of the most common misunderstandings about the Catholic Church is that it is uniform in all respects throughout the world. That is not true. The church has unity, that there is only one true church and she is one in herself, and she had uniformity of faith in things divinely revealed, when the touching dogma or the principles of right conduct, these things are matters of absolute truth and therefore necessarily uniform. There is not and never has been any principle of uniformity in Catholicism that requires all Catholics to worship with the same liturgical forms, in the same language, to be subject to identical canon law, to have the same customs, and usages the same religious temperament, spiritual approach, practice, and speculative emphasis. Most American and western European Catholics never assist any mass but the Roman Mass in the Latin tongue.

The mass is always and everywhere one, considered as the Eucharistic sacrifice; the true sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ made present on an altar, the representation and renewal of the offering made once for all on the cross of Calvary, the doing of that which our Lord at the Last supper told us, through his apostles to do, and that is what matters and all that matters essentially. But to say that every Catholic Church mass is celebrated with the same prayers and observances is not true. The Eucharistic sacrifice is one; the ways of offering it are many.

The prayers and observances of the mass were celebrated by a Dominican or Calced Carmelite friar are exactly not the same as those in the Roman missal; nor are those of Carthusian monks nor those used in the Archdiocese of Milan. The varieties of the Latin mass are more or less closely related to and resemble the usual Roman form. But there are other Catholics, some millions of them distinguished as Catholics of the Eastern rite, whose mass is altogether different in its prayers and externals from those with which we are familiar, who are subject to different canon laws, who may differ from us on almost every conceivable thing always excepting faith and morals.

From the earliest times, the primacy of the see of St. Peter in Rome was recognized by all other sees, though it was a long time before the full extent, implications, and prerogatives of that primacy emerged in their fullness. In the early centuries, the east played a prepondering part in Christian history and thought. Greek was the language of the Roman church until about the middle of the 3rd century. Latin was first used for the liturgical purpose in Africa. In the eyes of the same people, to belong to Latin rite stands for civilization and influence, for Latin rite stands for civilization and influence, for attractive ideas and progress, for prestige, education, commerce, and pseudo-Parisian clothes. Eastern rites are looked down on as being for mere peasants; too often easterners accept rather than oppose such wrong views.

A Rite, whether in the wide or narrow sense of the word is not something arbitrary. It is the religious expression of ages of the history of particular cultures and religious orientations. The Church as Church has never lost sight of the fact that variety is the correlative of Catholicity. It is one thing to "belong" to a rite and quite another to "frequent" it. Western Catholics are not only at liberty but strongly recommended by the Holy See to attend the Churches of eastern Catholics, and vice-versa, so that they may learn more about one another and strengthen the bond of mutual charity. Not only that, but the code of canon law expressly lays down (canon 866) that a Latin catholic may receive communion in a catholic eastern church out of devotion. Marriages should be according to the rite of the groom, and the bride is free to adopt her husband's rite either permanently or until widowhood, children follow the rite of their father even if through error or in an emergency they have been baptized by a priest and with the observance of another rite.

Pope Benedict XV says, "The Church is not Latin or Greek or Slavonic, it is Catholic, Ecumenical"; and catholicity includes everything that is not in any way sinful or in any way erroneous. Just as there is nothing secular but sin, so there is nothing foreign to Catholicism but error, ugliness, and disaccord with the right reason. The prevailing Latin uniformity of the Church today is simply the result of historical events. Catholicism is the religion of variety, the variety displayed by 700 million people and the best and simplest proof of this is the viciousness of divine worship as used by Catholics, the fact that the mass is one, but the ways of celebrating it are many.

The expression "Eastern church" is often met, bearing various meanings, but there is not in fact, and never has been a single unified eastern church corresponding to the western church over which the Bishop of Rome presides as Patriarch as well supreme pontiff. The "Eastern Church" now consists of four unrelated divisions of which the first two are esteemed heretical and consist of six separate churches; the third also is separated from Rome the Orthodox and consists of some fifteen self-governing churches, most of which are

national and all consists of several fully organized churches and several groups, one is catholic faith and the communion of the Holy See, known as the “Catholics of the Eastern Rite”.

The Catholics of Kerala do not form a homogeneous community. Kerala offers a striking example of the church's unity in diversity. They are divided into three different rites all three in apostolic succession and all three loyal to the Holy Father in Rome. But all of them are guided by certain common aspirations which have evolved from a common faith in the Gospel of Christ. The accretions of the stream of time have made numerous deposits in its ancient bed favoring, in some measure, the growth and dissemination of exotic notions. But the word of Christ is still the highest authority. According to their numerical strength they are classified in the census report of 1931 as Romo-Syrians, Roman Catholics, and Syro Malankara rite. The Roman Catholics may more appropriately be styled Latin Catholics. The Catholics of the Latin rite owe their origin to the adoption of this rite by a good number of Syrian Catholics during the Portuguese regime”.

The majority of the Christians in Kerala are called Syrian Christians. Originally some people of Syrian origin must have settled down on the Malabar Coast, though their number might have been very limited. Gradually their numbers increased by the admission within their ranks of the offspring of inter-marriages between the members of the successive batches of immigrants and the inhabitants of the land. It is stated by certain authors that “the members of the Church of Malabar are called Syrians not because they have Syrian blood in their veins but because they have Syrian liturgy, they are not of the Syrian nation but the Syrian rite”. The aim, in this case, is not an ethnological or geographical resignation but is purely ecclesiastical.

“The discovery of the Syrian Christians of St. Thomas on the Malabar coast was a fruitful source of perplexity to both sections of European Christians,” says Dean Stanly, who quotes a passage from Gibbon; “their separation from the western world had left them in ignorance of the improvements or corruptions of a thousand years, and their conformity with the faith and practice of the 5th century would equally disappoint the prejudices of a papist or a protestant”. The distinctive characteristic of the Syrian church in Malabar is its veneration for the text of the Gospel and the Syrian language in which it was revealed. It is said that “the Eastern church was, like the east, stationary and immutable, the western like the west, progressive and flexible”. This distinction is the more remarkable says Stanly, “because, at a certain period of their course, there can be no doubt that the civilization of the Eastern Church was far higher than that of the western”. While in the west the most attention was bestowed on the propagation of converting the heathens. The children of the Eastern Church who settled in Malabar desired only to keep intact the treasures that they possessed. In the west the principles of universal Church and universal empire combined to erect virtual despotism in matters of theology and church discipline, rendering the common people to unqualified submission to the clergy for several centuries. In the east, the public appears to have occasionally exerted influence in shaping the policy of the Church government.

In Malabar, the Christians of St. Thomas were in certain respects in a better position than their co-religionists in the ancient home for while in Syria and Persia the independence of the religious profession and practice suffered on account of imperial vagaries and Muslim intervention, the Christian of Malabar were able to continue their peaceful existence among a population tolerant and friendly under the protection of rulers who, though attached to their Hindu faith, appreciated the justice and the wisdom of permitting the immigrants and their descendants to follow their path of salvation.

The Latin Catholics were known as Latin Mappilas. Latin Catholics are a heterogeneous group of St. Thomas Christians, Anglo-Indians, and those converted by St. Francis Xavier and those from Paravas of Bharathas, Nadars, Vellalas, Mukkuvas or Arasar, Parayan or Sambavas, Pulayas or Cheraman, Sanars, Kerala Muthali, etc. Quilon was the first Latin Catholic diocese in India. The Dominican Friar Jordan Catalani was the first Latin Catholic Bishop of India at Quilon Diocese. At present, there are Twelve Latin Catholic Dioceses in Kerala under two Arch Dioceses – Trivandrum and Varapuzha.

References

- [1]. A.M.Mundadan, History of Christianity in India, vol.1, Bangalore, 1967, p.92.
- [2]. Bro. Leopold, The Christians of Malabar, (Mal), Manjummel, 1938, pp185-104.
- [3]. Cosmos Indicopleustes, The Christian Topography, Cambridge University, 1897, pp.118-119.
- [4]. Ibid; p.125.
- [5]. Ferdinand Kayavil, (ed.), Bishop Jerome, Kalathinte Karmayogi, Kollam, 1998, p.135.
- [6]. Ferdinand Kayavil, Sathyavicharadharsanam (ed.), Monsignor Kayavil Welfare Foundation, Kollam, 2011.p.297.
- [7]. George Mark Moraes, A History of Christianity in India, Vol. 1, Bombay, 1964, p.132.
- [8]. Ibid, p.133.
- [9]. Ibid, p.134.
- [10]. Jean Danielou, The Origins of Latin Christianity, London, 1977, General Introduction, pp.13-14.
- [11]. Julius Richter, A History of missions in India, London, 1908, p.39.