

# The Roman Empire and the Persian Empire

## The Roman Empire

At the beginning of Christianity, the Roman Empire was spread in the regions around the Mediterranean. The vast Empire was divided into two parts: Eastern Empire and Western Empire. It is appropriate to explain the basis of this division. For, later, when the Christian Church spread in the Roman Empire, it was known after this political division: Eastern Church and Western Church.

### East and West

In 40 B.C. according to the agreement of Brundisium, the Roman Empire was partitioned. The Eastern region was given to Mark Antony. Octavian got the Western part. Lepidus got North West Africa. Syria, Asia, Cyprus, Greece and some North African regions belonged to the East. Spain and France belonged to the Western portion. Italy was kept as a neutral zone, not belonging to any of these portions. This dividing line was preserved during the subsequent centuries also. In 279 Emperor Diocletian made further partitions of the Empire. He accepted the division of East and West. He further divided the whole Empire into four *Prefectures*, thirteen *Dioceses* and 101 *Provinces*. The four Prefectures were: Italy, France (West); Illiricum and Oriens (East). In the place of Augustus Caesar, there emerged four rulers: two Augusti and two Caesars. Their term of office also was fixed. Diocletian became the Augustus of the Eastern Roman Empire with

Nicomedia as his Capital. He had under him the whole Oriens. Maximian became the Augustus of the Western Roman Empire with his Capital in Milan. He had under his direct rule Italy and North West Africa .Caesar Constantius got Spain, Gaul and Britain, with his Capitals at Treves and York. Galerius Caesar ruled over Illiricum, Macedonia and Greece with Sirmium as his Capital. In each Diocese there was a Vicar. The following were the 13 civil Dioceses: Spain, Gaul, Briton (Gallia Prefecture); Africa, Illiria, Italy (Italia Prefecture); Macedonia, Dacia (Illiricum Prefecture); Thrace, Pontus, Asia, Oriens, Egypt (Oriens Prefecture). The following were the civil Dioceses included in the Eastern Roman Empire: Thrace, Asia, Pontus, Egypt and Oriens. In 379 Emperor Gracian included also Dacia and Macedonia also in the Eastern Roman Empire. In 395 Emperor Theodosius included Illiricum (Dalmatia) also part of the Eastern Roman Empire.

With the rule of Theodosius, the division into East and West was completed. Arcadius, his son, got the Eastern part and Honorius his other son got the Western part. After 404 the capital of the Western Roman Empire became Ravenna. With Emperor Constantine the Capital of the East became Constantinople. In 476 the Western Roman Empire came to an end and the Eastern part survived till 1453.

#### The Oriens Prefecture

In the Eastern Roman Empire one Prefecture was known as *Oriens* (*East*). In the beginning it comprised many vast regions. It included the following Roman Provinces: Syria, Phoenicia, Arabia, Euphrates, Osrhoene, Mesopotamia, Cilicia, and Isauria. Eventually it became less and less. The Capital of Oriens was Antioch.

#### Antioch

The old city of Antioch was in the place of today's Antakia in Turkey. In ancient times, 16 cities in the Roman Empire were known as

Antioch. This one was known as Antioch in the Daphne to distinguish from the others of the same name. It was eight kilometers away from Daphne. It was known after several names: Great Antioch, beautiful Antioch, Athens of Syria, God's City (*Theoupolis*). At Daphne there were temples of Athena, Artemis and Apollo. There were royal high ways between Daphne and Antioch. The port of Antioch was Seleucia, 122 kilometer away from Antioch.

In B.C.300 Seleucus, one of the Generals of Alexander founded this city on the banks of the river Orontes. The Seleucid rulers made it the capital of Syria. In later times the city was widely extended and it appeared as a city consisting of four parts. So Strabo called it Tetrapolis. It emerged as the third biggest city in the Roman Empire, after Alexandria and Antioch. Under the Roman rule, the city was further beautified. In 47 B. C. Julius was declared as despot at the theater in Antioch. With this it became the capital of the Eastern Roman empire. It got the status of a free city (*civitas libera*). There were periodic earthquakes at this region. But all the Roman Emperors were keen on restoring it. In 526 and 528 there were two devastating earth quakes and in 540 the Persian King Chosroes I plundered it. But Emperor Justinian captured it back from the Persians, restored it and renewed it. He called it God's city (*Theoupolis*). Until the Arabic invasion in 638 it continued as the *Queen of the Orient*. After that it never regained its ancient prestige and glory. With the arrival of the Crusaders, the city came under them for some time, but eventually it came under the Moslem rule. After the First World War, it became part of the French Protectorate, Syria. But in 1939 it was annexed to Turkey and became the Capital of the Turkish Province Hatai. It is at present a Moslem town with less than 300 Christian families. There is just one Latin Catholic Church and a Byzantine Greek Orthodox

Church. There is no bishop, no Patriarch and there is no Syrian Christian community there.

#### The Other Chief Cities

The other chief cities in the Eastern Roman Empire were Alexandria and Constantinople. Alexandria was the capital of the imperial Province Egypt. Constantinople came into prominence only in later times. Emperor Constantine built a new city and gave it his own name *Kustantinos polis* (Constantinople) and transferred the capital from Nicomedia to Constantinople. It became the first city in the East and Second Rome or New Rome.

#### The Persian Empire

East to the Roman Empire there was also the Persian Empire. B.C. 247 – A.D. 651 there were two Kingdoms there. The first rulers were Arsacid Kings (B.C.247-A.D. 227) and the Second were the Sassanid Kings (A.D. 208-651). The ancient Persian Empire comprised today's Iraq, parts of Iran, Syria and Turkey.

#### Seleucia –Ctesiphon

The Capital of the Persian Empire was Seleucia-Ctesiphon, twin cities on the banks of Euphrates. Seleucia was a Greek city founded by the Greeks, while Ctesiphon was a Parthian city founded by the Parthians. Several of the Persian Kings were very cruel tyrants. Their policy was to deport the whole defeated population to a far distant place. They used to destroy utterly and devastate the defeated cities. Shapur I (241-272), Shapur II(309-379),Varahran V(420-439), Chosroes I(531-579), and Chosroes II(590-628) were notorious for such cruelties and atrocities.

#### Osrhoene-Edessa

Osrhoene was a buffer state in between the Roman and the Persian Empires. It is in today's Northern Iraq, Northern Syria and South Eastern Turkey. It was in Northern Mesopotamia, East of Euphrates.

In the beginning of the Seleucid rule, it was under Seleucus. When the Parthian(Arsacid ) Kings captured the regions East of the Euphrates from the Seleucid rule, Osrhoene became independent under a local ruler. From 132/1 B.C. -217 A.D. it was ruled by rulers of Semitic origin. Since the important trade routes passed through Osrhoene, both the Romans and the Persians wanted to bring it under their control and influence.

The population there was different from the Romans and the Parthians. They spoke Syriac a dialect of Aramaic. Even under the political turmoil, they preserved the Syriac heritage, language, culture and nationality. Edessa (Urhai)was its Capital. Today it is known as Sanliurfa in Turkey. During the early period, the Parthian rulers recognized the autonomy of Osrhoene. Trajan while attacking Persia in 116 A.D. did not attack Edessa. After defeating Trajan, the Parthians attacked Osrhoene. The alleged reason was that the population received and helped Trajan. The King of Edessa took refuge in Rome. In 165 the Romans brought Osrhoene under their influence. The subsequent peace Treaty made it a vassal state of Rome. In 213/4 the Roman Emperor Caracalla declared Osrhoene a Roman colony. He imprisoned the king of Osrhoene in Rome. In 243 Romans began to rule it directly and thus it lost its independence.

Nisibis

Nisibis was an important city in Persia. It was situated East of Edessa. There was a large group of Babylonian wealthy Jews, settled down in Nisibis. In 363 according to the peace treaty between the Romans and the Persians, the Romans handed over the city to the Persians. Until the Arabic conquest in 640, it was under the Persians. Today the modern Nusaybin is a small town in the Syrian-Turkish border. In ancient times, some important trade routes passed through Nisibis. Since it was a border town it was also a military centre. After

its cessation to the Persians, the Romans established their military headquarters at the neighboring place called Dara. After 363 the Roman Persian border passed in between Dara and Nisibis.

Fars

Fars was the birth place of the Persian Kings. The Arsacid Kings started their expansion of the Empire from Fars. They gave special prominence to it. The capital of Fars was Rev-Ardashir.

Other cities

Although Edessa was in the Roman Empire, together with *Nisibis* it influenced the life of the Semitic population. *Seleucia* being the capital, emerged as a prominent city. In the Eastern part *Rev-Ardashir* was an important city. *Arbel*, the capital of Adiabene, was also a chief centre. The small towns such as *Perat Maisan*, *Bet Lapat*(Gundishapur in Elam), *Karka de Bet Slok* etc. were not comparable to the Roman Cities.

## **Persian-Roman relationship**

There were occasional test of power between the Persians and the Romans. None of them could utterly defeat the other. They shared victory and defeat. In 116 Trajan crossed over to the Eastern parts of Euphrates and attacked Merv and Adiabene. When Trajan was defeated, the Persians attacked and plundered the Syrian regions of the Roman Empire. The Romans and the Persians had several battles for the control over Armenia. Although Jovian, the Roman Emperor made a peace treaty with the Persian King Shapur in 363, there were isolated and sporadic military encounters. In 532 Justinian made a Peace Treaty with Chosroes I, known as the *Eternal Peace Treaty*. But it did not last long. During the 7<sup>th</sup> century, both the Romans and Persians fought each other very vigorously. Both were weakened

because of the constant hostility, war and military encounters. In such a situation, it was easy for the Arabs to attack both the Persians and the Romans and capture the Provinces one by one. In 651 the last Persian King was killed by the Arabs. But the Byzantine Empire continued till 1453.

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# The Christian Church in the Roman Empire

### Introduction

The Christian Church was officially inaugurated at Jerusalem on the Pentecost day. It spread in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. And the Good News spread also outside Palestine. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. there was a rapid spread of the Good News outside Palestine. The Church spread from Jerusalem in the various regions of the Roman Empire, of the Persian Empire and of India. Here in this chapter we try to see very briefly the growth of the Church in the Roman empire.

### Background

God was preparing the Nations for the reception of the Good News. The Greco-Roman religions and observances could not satisfy the thirst for God in the people. But the Greek Philosophy led humanity to the belief in the one Godhead. In this context the river from Palestine began to flow to the whole world through the rivulets of Judaism. Since Palestine was part of the Roman Empire, the disciples of Christ in the beginning under the cover of Judaism could move around everywhere undisturbed. Judaism was shelter for Christianity for some time, because of some special privileges enjoyed by the Jews in the Roman Empire. The *Pax Romana* also helped for the free movement. Christianity was in the beginning considered as a Jewish sect.



The churches in the cities and their leaders

In the beginning Christianity spread in the big cities. The disciples who reached the big cities went first to the Jewish synagogues and spoke the Word of Life to the Jews who came there and through them to the non-Jews. It seems that it was the method adopted by all the Apostles everywhere (Acts 18,5-11). Before their death, the Apostles appointed their successors. They were to teach, guide and serve the flock of Christ, entrusted to them. They were known as *Episcopoi* and *Presbyteroi* meaning overseers. They were in the cities. As the community grew in the cities, there arose several worshipping centers. The number of the helpers of the leaders also increased. Eventually the Church spread to the areas outside the cities. There arose the need for ministers there also. All such centers recognized the leadership of the leader of the city. They too accepted the renovations in the liturgy and took part in the assemblies convened by him.

### **Three Churches**

The early Christianity comprised of various kinds of people.

1. the first Church was that of the Jews and the other Semitic population. They spoke the various dialects of Aramaic/Syriac. It could be called the first Church. It includes the Church in Jerusalem, which is the mother church of all the other Churches. The various churches in the Mesopotamian region and the Indian Church also belong to it.
2. The Greek Church from among those who spoke Greek. It could be called the second Church.
3. The Church which spread among those who spoke Latin in the Western Roman Empire. It could be called the third Church. It was Pope John Paul II who made such a distinction of early Christianity.

## Early growth and the oppositions

The Christian Church in the beginning had to meet with the various kinds of oppositions. The Greek Philosophers ridiculed Christ, the Christian teaching and the Christians. They spread calumnies against Christianity. They instigated the mob for insurgency against Christianity. It is said that the Jews in several places added fuel to the violence against Christians. Thus there arose the separation of Synagogue and Church. Some of the Roman Emperors were committed anti-Christians. There were ruthless persecution and some of them wanted to exterminate the nascent Christianity. The immediate successors of the Apostles, the Apostolic Fathers, bore patiently all the atrocities of these enemies of Christianity and of the Christians. Those who came after them, the so called Apologists, defended Christianity, making use of the Old Testament of the Jews, the Roman Law and Greek Philosophy. They demonstrated that the accusations were baseless and the calumny had no foundation. They questioned the Roman cruelties in the civil courts and defended the innocent Christians. But the persecution continued unabated. Christianity was persecuted for three hundred years in the Roman Empire. But in the midst of the persecution, the Church was rapidly growing throughout the Roman Empire among all the sections of the people. The situation changed with the emergence of Constantine as the sole ruler of the Roman empire. He recognized the existence of Christianity in 313 through the *Edict of Milan*. Eventually Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. Although every now and then there were sporadic persecution here and there in the Empire, in general, it was a period of peace, devoid of any threat from the political rulers. Together with the conversion of Constantine, the Church began to grow and

spread very rapidly. Then there arose the need for reorganizing the Church. So there emerged the structural evolution.

## **The Structural Growth**

The Christian Church adopted the political division in the Empire. It adopted the political titles such as *East and West, Diocese and Province*. But the significance of the expression varied. As we have seen, there were two parts for the Empire: East and West. There were Prefectures in each part. And the Prefectures were subdivided into Dioceses and further into Provinces. In each Province there was a chief city, known as the *Metropolis*. The ecclesiastical heads in the Provincial capitals(*Metropolis*) were known as *Metropolitans*. They were the chief leaders over all the bishops of the Province. All the bishops of the Province recognized the leadership of the chief bishop in the capital city. The successors of the Apostles were appointed in the chief cities such as Rome, Alexandria and Antioch.

### The Patriarchal Churches

The Churches and liturgies in the Roman Empire grew around these above mentioned Churches in the chief cities. The Antiochene Church and liturgy grew around Antioch. The Alexandrian Church and liturgy grew around Alexandria. In the same way the Roman Church and the Roman liturgy grew around Rome. There emerged also other ecclesiastical centers and liturgies. The bishops in the chief cities were eventually known as *Patriarchs*. Thus the bishops of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch were called Patriarchs. The Churches in the Roman Empire were grouped under the Patriarchates. All the churches were attached to a Patriarchate.

## The title Patriarch

The word *Patriarch* signifies *common father*. :*Patriarch* (*Patriarches*) is the leader of the family or clan. The term is biblical. It was used to designate Abraham (Heb 7,4), the twelve sons of Jacob(Acts 7,8), and David (Acts 2,19) . Till the 5th century, the chief Prefect of the Jewish Synagogue was called Patriarch. St. Jerome says that in the Christian church it was first used by the Montanists.

The Christian Church adopted the expression Patriarch only very slowly. As mentioned earlier, the bishops in the provincial capitals were called *Metropolitans*. In Africa they were known as *Primates*. At the Council of Nice(325) the bishops of Rome , Alexandria and Antioch were called simply *Episcopa*. After 325 the bishop of Alexandria used the title *Archbishop*. At the Council of Ephesus (431) the bishop of Antioch signed as *Archbishop of the Beautiful Antioch*. The title *Exarch* was a forerunner of the title *Patriarch*. The title Exarch was used to designate the bishop who had authority over all the bishops of all the Provinces of a civil Diocese. In a certain period, both the titles *Archbishop and Exarch* were used together. From the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards the title Patriarch was used to designate the bishop who had supra-Episcopal authority. In 449 Emperor Theodosius called Pope Leo of Rome, “Most Reverend Patriarch”. In 451 the Eastern bishops also used a similar expression to call the same St. Leo the Great. The word is seen in the Canons of Constantinople IV (869-870). It is used as a word already in use in the Church. It is seen as an authority even at the time of Nice(325). In short, although the title Patriarch was used only later in the Church, there were already much earlier bishops having the authority signified by the term.

## **The Council of Nice(325)**

The Council of Nice does not speak about the Patriarchates. But it speaks about the Church leaders having all the rights and authority of a Patriarch. The Canon(6) reads thus: “The ancient customs of Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis shall be maintained,, according to which the bishop of Alexandria has authority over all these places, since a similar custom exists with reference to the bishop of Rome. Similarly in Antioch and the other provinces the prerogatives of the churches are to be preserved.” At the time of the Council of Nice there was a schism in the Egyptian Church. The purpose of the Canon was to propose a solution to it. Melitius, bishop of Lycopolis, exercised Episcopal authority outside his eparchy and became an intruder resulting in a schism. Since he persisted in his disorder and schism, the Council formulated this canon and recognized the already existing authority of the bishop of Alexandria. The canon is not conferring something new to the bishop of Alexandria.

## **The Roman Patriarch**

The bishop of Rome was the Primate in Italy and Patriarch of the Western Roman Empire. The Council of Nice gives indication of it in its canon six. It was clear to St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Clement of Rome, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, St. Dionysius of Alexandria, St. Cyprian of Carthage, and St. Cyril of Alexandria that the Church of Rome had an eminent position among the Churches. In matters of conflict the Roman bishop used to intervene as mediator on the basis of mutual agreement. Ignatius in his Epistle to the Romans calls the Church of Rome as the Church “presiding in the chief place of the Romans”, and the Church “presiding in love”. That the Roman Church,

according to the view of St. Ignatius, had something special and had a more honorable position than the churches in Asia Minor, is clear from the Preface of the same Epistle. This indeed is the first reference of a non-Roman praising the Roman Church. The Epistle of St. Clement to the Corinthians is cited as an example of the manifestation of the preeminence of the Roman Church. It was part of the ministry of the bishop of Rome, to intervene in such cases of conflict when the unity of the church was threatened by strife. Clement intervened there because there was quarrel and strife in that church against the presbyters. Irenaeus calls this Church “greatest, most ancient and well known Church, founded by the two most glorious Apostles Peter and Paul at Rome”. By giving the list of the Roman bishops, he shows how the Orthodox faith was preserved there. The Roman Church preserved the Apostolic tradition intact. Hence, he says that the Roman Church is the criterion of Orthodoxy.

In certain cases the Roman bishops acted as mediators when there were conflicts among the bishop of Antioch, Alexandria and Constantinople. It was the representatives of the Roman bishops who signed first in the ecumenical councils. However, no Patriarch intervened in the patriarchate of another Patriarch. On the other hand, before the separation of the churches, the position of the bishop of Rome in the divine Providence was recognized by the other bishops. It is only after the separation, division and isolation that each church developed its own isolated ecclesiology and new attitudes and trends about the Church of Rome. The Roman bishop was known as the Patriarch of Rome and of the West. Just as the other Churches, the Roman Church also developed a one sided and isolated ecclesiology during the middle ages and developed a very centralized authority as one sees it today.

## **The Alexandrian Patriarch**

Alexandria was the second biggest city in the Roman Empire. After the bishop of Rome, the bishop of Alexandria had the second preeminence in Christianity. He too, like the bishop of Rome, was called Pope and even today he uses it. Alexandria is known as the See of St. Mark. Even in the third century the bishop of Alexandria appointed bishops throughout Egypt. He had the authority to appoint, transfer or remove them. He used to convene the Synods of bishops in Egypt and Pentapolis. He took even punitive measures against the disobedient bishops. This supra-Episcopal authority of the bishop of Alexandria was made clear by the sixth canon of Nice .

## **The Antiochene Patriarch**

In the beginning the rights and authority of the bishop of Antioch was not strictly determined. It was in the 4<sup>th</sup> / 5<sup>th</sup> c. that he rose into prominence. But he did not have so much authority as the one exercised by the bishop of Alexandria over the bishops in Egypt. In the beginning the whole Orient Prefecture was included in the Antiochene Patriarchate. The title of the bishop of Antioch was , “bishop of Antioch and of all the East”(Oriens in the Roman Empire). Palestine, Syria, some parts of Asia Minor and some Mesopotamian regions were included in Oriens. At the Council of Ephesus(431) Cyprus was removed from it and the church there became autonomous. At Chalcedon the Jerusalem Patriarchate was formed and the region was separated from Antioch.

## **Byzantine Patriarch**

Constantinople the city of Constantine was raised to the status of a Patriarchate by the Canons of two Ecumenical Councils: Canon three of Constantinople(381) and Canon 28 of Chalcedon(451): “Because it is New Rome, the bishop of Constantinople is to enjoy the privileges of honor after the bishop of Rome”(Canon 3); “The Fathers rightly accorded prerogatives to the See of older Rome, since that is an imperial city; and moved by the same purpose, the 150 most devout bishops apportioned equal prerogatives to the most holy See of New Rome, reasonably judging that the city that is honored by the imperial power and senate and enjoying privileges equaling older imperial Rome, should also be elevated to her level in ecclesiastical affairs and take second place after her.” (Canon 28). In the beginning Constantinople was a suffragan of Heraclea. It was not an ancient city, nor had it apostolicity to claim as the other ancient Sees. But when it became the Imperial capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, the Fathers in the Councils conferred it second position after the ancient Rome in Italy. Later the story was developed that it was founded by St. Andrew, the brother of St. Peter. Today in the Christian world, the bishop of Constantinople (Istanbul in Turkey) is the second greatest Christian leader after the bishop of Rome. He is also the first among all the Byzantine bishops and Patriarchs.

## **Jerusalem Patriarch**

At the Council of Chalcedon Jerusalem was raised to a Patriarchate. Until 451 it was a suffragan of Caesarea. In 135 A.D. Hadrian destroyed the ancient Jerusalem and scattered the Jews from there. He rebuilt it and named Aelia Capitolina and settled there non



–Jewish population. Thus Jerusalem sunk into oblivion. From the fourth century onwards it began once again to emerge into prominence. In 326 Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and visited the holy places. She found out the holy Cross. Slowly Jerusalem began to regain its prestige and prominence once again. It is in this background that Palestine regions under Antioch was separated and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem was formed. Juvenal became the first Patriarch. But this Patriarchate never rose into prominence as the other ancient ones.

Thus by the 5th century, the Christian Church in the Roman empire was known as Eastern and Western and were under the Roman , Byzantine, Alexandrian, Antiochene and Jerusalem Patriarchates.

### 3

## One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church

All the Apostolic Churches and some ecclesial communities recite in the Creed “of their faith in the one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church”. The Church as the body of Christ is one and it cannot be divided. It is the living body of Christ. It is holy because its head is holy and all the holiness of the Church comes from Christ its head. All are called to this holiness which comes from its Head. It is Apostolic, because it is founded on the Apostles, whose cornerstone is Jesus Christ himself. It is called also Catholic. Here in this article there is an attempt to explain the concept *Catholic*.

The Church of Christ was and is known as the Catholic Church(*katholike Ekklesia*). It was at Antioch on the Orontes in Syria that the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11,26). It was St. Ignatius, the third bishop of Antioch (+110) who used the epithet *Catholic* to designate the Church of Christ: “Where there is Jesus Christ, there is the Catholic Church”(Epistle to the Smyrneans, 8,2). After Ignatius, several of the early Fathers of the Church made use of the expression *Catholic* to designate the Church of Christ. In the *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, the Smyrneans write to “the Church of God in Philomelium and the holy Catholic Church in all places”. St. Polycarp is called “the bishop of the Catholic Church in Smyrna”. Polycarp before his martyrdom prayed “for the whole Catholic Church throughout the world”. Eusebius speaks about the “Catholic Church in Smyrna”. St. Cyprian of Carthage and many others called the Church of Christ, *Catholic*. Until the Council of Chalcedon (451) all the

Churches throughout the world were called the Catholic Church. Those who broke away from the Catholic Church were forced to adopt new names such as the Novatians, Montanists, Arians and the Apollinarians. One of the basic characteristics of the Church of Christ is Catholicity. St. Vincent of Lerins (5<sup>th</sup> c.) in his book *Commonitorium* says that “Catholicity, antiquity and unanimous consent are the three criteria which guarantee orthodoxy” (c.3). “We must hold fast”, he teaches, “that which is believed at all times, by all and in every place. It is the catholic teaching” (In ipsa item catholica ecclesia magnopere curandum est, ut id tenamus quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est. Hosc est etenim vere proprieque catholicum”(c.2). “Christian is my name and Catholic is my family name” says Pacian (4<sup>th</sup> c.) with pride (Christianus mihi nomen est, Catholicus vero cognomen. Catholicus ubi unum, vel, ut doctores plutant, oboedientia omnium nuncupatur, mandatorum scilicet Dei).

St. Augustine gives a resume of the motives for the credibility of the Catholic faith: “Aside from the sincere and genuine wisdom....which you do not believe exists in the Catholic Church(Augustine is speaking to the Manicheans), there are many reasons which hold me in her bosom. The concurrence of peoples and nations holds me, the authority established by the miracles, nourished by hope, increased by charity, strengthened by antiquity, holds me; the succession of bishops, from the very see of the Apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, after his resurrection, entrusted the feeding of his sheep, up to the present episcopate holds me; finally the very name of *catholica*, which not without reason this church alone has obtained, holds me... These bonds of Christian name-so many, so great, and so very gentle- hold the believer in the bosom of the Catholic Church, even if, owing to the slowness of our mind and the

unworthiness of our life, the truth does not yet appear.”(Contra ep.Man.4,5; see also Conf.6 11,19;De mor.eccl.cath. 1 7 ,12;De util.cred.14,30-17,35;Ep.137,4,15-16).

Augustine considers that the Catholic Church is the universal church which includes everything. It was not the case with the sects or separated groups. They cannot contain all and they cannot accept all. The catholic church is quite different from such sects or communities. The sectarian local churches are restricted to limited areas; they can include only very few and they teach only very few doctrines. They lost the integral evangelical vision. The term Catholic refers to the uniqueness of the true church. It is the Catholic church which undertakes the world wide missionary activity and the ecumenical service.

The name Catholic can be applied only to that community which preserves the unity or communion and the universality of the Church. It refers to that Church which is the body of Christ. It makes clear the truth and authenticity of Christ. That is to say, correct in faith and doctrines. According to this view, there can be non-Catholic churches. e.g. the churches of the former false teachers such as the various kinds of Gnostics and the Arians. Their churches were not the Catholic Church of Christ, but were heretical churches. In this sense , Catholicity was the norm of Orthodoxy.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catechetical Homilies* gives the meaning of the expression Catholic: “The Church is called Catholic because it is spread throughout the world, from end to end of the earth; also because it teaches universally and completely all the doctrines which man should know concerning things visible and

invisible, heavenly and earthly; and because it subjects to right worship all mankind, rulers and ruled, lettered and unlettered; further because it treats and heals universally every sort of sin committed by soul and body, and it possesses in itself every conceivable virtues, whether in deeds, words or in spiritual gifts of every kind”(18,23). St. Cyril includes the various dimensions of Catholicity in this phrase. But he insists more on one reality, namely the perfection of teachings and doctrines. In short, the expression Catholic signifies the following elements: That church which is spread over everywhere, contains everybody, is open to all and established for all times. Catholic church accepts all the good elements in humanity. It contains the fullness of doctrine and the means of sanctification.

After the Councils of Ephesus(431) and Chalcedon(451), those who accepted the Councils continued to call themselves Orthodox-Catholic Church. Those who rejected them were known by other names. Later during the middle ages when the Western and Eastern parts of the one Catholic Orthodox Church (the Greek and the Latin Churches) got alienated one from the other, the Westerners, namely the Latins, used more and more the expression *Catholic* and the Easterners, namely the Greeks, used the expression *Orthodox*. However, both were Catholic and Orthodox, but without the canonical communion and visible unity. In accordance with today’s ecumenical thinking, even those who rejected the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon were Catholics, in the sense that they maintained the same content of faith, the difference being only in terminology and forms of expression. They too make use of the Nicene expression, “we believe in the one holy Catholic land Apostolic church”. They too have not altered the content of faith.

The division among Christians diminished the Catholicity of the Church. But the Church did not cease to be Catholic. However, it cannot exhibit that quality which was existing before the divisions. Catholicity would be perfect only in the perfection of unity.

Before the Second Vatican Council there was a mentality in the catholic circles that only those churches in canonical communion with the Roman Church can be named Catholic. The members of the other churches were named non-Catholics and their communities were named, non-Catholic Churches. In this sense the expression Catholic was narrowed down to mean only the Churches in the Roman Catholic canonical communion. In the same way, the Greeks (Byzantines) also used the expression Catholic to mean only the churches in their canonical communion. Other churches also did in the same way. Today one can notice a change in this view and attitude. The one Church of Christ cannot but be Catholic. Since it is meant for the whole humanity, it cannot but be catholic. The command the disciples received from the Lord was “to go to the whole world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mt 28,19). “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself”(Jn 12,32). The angel told the shepherds, “Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people”(Lk2,10). All those who are baptized in Jesus Christ are the one body of Christ(1 Cor.12,27). He offered his life as a sacrifice for all. “And through him he reconciles to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven”(Col.1,18-20).Those who are thus united in Christ, cannot but be catholic. But the tragedy of sin of separation is that those who are united in Christ, cannot unite among themselves. Where there is Christ, there is the Catholic Church. There is the perfection of God(Col.2,9;Eph.1,22-23).

Catholicity is one of the basic characteristics of the Church of God. It is an all embracing quality. It wants to be united and it is the power which unites. It is however, not static, but dynamic. It is the unity of perfection. It is the power of Christ who draws all to Himself (Jn 12,32). The Catholic presence of Christ who said, “I am with you till the end of the world”, gives a spiritual meaning to Catholicity. It transcends all human limitations and inabilities. When *Lumen Gentium* says that, “the Church shines forth as a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”, it means that the Catholicity of the Church is Trinitarian in dimension. Catholicity is this quality which is inclusive in the spiritual presence and unity. Truth, authenticity and perfection dwell in Christ in their entirety. It is precisely the Catholicity. The ministry of unique mediation between God and men is its essence(1 Tim 2,5). Christ is the Head of the whole humanity( Col.1,19;Eph.1,22).Through this unique Mediator, the humanity enters into the life of God(Acts 4,12). Humanity should reconcile itself with God in this unique Savior. Since he was God and man, he has a unique relationship with both God and humanity. This relationship is the Catholicity of Christ. Church receives its Catholicity from the Catholicity of Christ. When the Church participates in the mission of Christ, it continues the Catholicity of Christ. The contrary diminishes it. It is the Holy Spirit who moves men to proclaim unceasingly the glory of God by joining the mission of Christ, who makes the Church Catholic. The Church at Pentecost was born as Catholic. It was not a later added quality of the Church.

Catholicity is first of all the internal quality of the church. But the geographical significance is not excluded. In the same way, there is a place for number and magnitude. Because, this too happened in the divine providence. In the same way, the inclusion of various cultures, languages, nations and peoples, are also to be reckoned

with. What is seen externally is the manifestation of the interiority. The smallest parish, the diocese under a bishop, the church under a Patriarch, the church under the Pope - all could be called the catholic church. The Church of Christ is at the same time local and universal. Wherever valid Eucharist is offered in the community of love, there exists the Catholic church. Each and every worshipping community is catholic in the full sense. But it does not exhaust the catholicity. It has to be in full visible communion with the other similar communities. Those communities not in communion with others cannot be named catholic. Those who maintain an attitude of self-sufficiency and sectarianism are not catholic. This exclusion, sectarianism and self alienation makes these churches non-Catholic. It is also true of those who do not proclaim the good news to others.

Thus the universal Catholic church is the communion of Individual Churches. Holy Eucharist is the decisive act which manifests the Catholicity(1 Cor 10,16-17). Holy Eucharist is the catholic act of the catholic Church. The Catholic Church is present in the full sense in each of these worshipping community. The Catholicity is made manifest in the participation of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, surpassing all sectarianism. The Catholicity is made manifest through the *episcopos*. The bishop does it as the head of the community, which is centered around the Eucharist.

Although catholicity is the gift of God, the Church does the mission of Catholicity by continuing the efforts to make all men and cultures, one body in Jesus Christ. Church must continue this mandate, as it is the one unique Sacrament of salvation. That is to say, Church can continue to be Catholic only through the continuation of the mission entrusted by the lord. Fulfilling this mandate is a obligatory



mandate from the lord. The Catholicity would not be perfect until the realization of this unity of all mankind.

The church by its very nature is catholic. Catholicity is the integral part of Christianity. Those who seek the truth, those who embrace the whole truth, those who are open to all and open to everything, and those who embrace all, are all Catholics. Those who remember and live accordingly that the Church is for all are Catholics.

The church must be Catholic by maintaining the unity and diversity. The churches remain catholic by presenting integrally the Apostolic traditions and handing them over to the posterity in its entirety. Only by maintaining the full and visible communion with other churches can the local or regional churches become catholic.

According to the view of the Roman Catholic Church, only those churches which maintain the canonical communion with the bishop of Rome as the successor of St. Peter, can be called Catholic in the full sense of the term. The Roman catholic church considers that this canonical communion with the bishop of Rome is part of the apostolic tradition. Consequently, the Eastern Orthodox Churches are not fully and perfectly Catholic as they do not have canonical communion with the bishop of Rome at present. These Orthodox churches have the same sacraments, the same Apostolic faith; their bishops are appointed by the Holy Spirit to look after a part of the flock of Christ. That is to say, the catholic church acknowledges the faith, sacraments and hierarchy of these Orthodox churches. Still it does not call these churches fully and perfectly catholic as the churches in the Roman Catholic communion. This is about the churches which maintained the content of faith intact, without alteration. Those who

have changed the content of faith are non-Catholics. i.e. All those who recite, “we believe in the only holy Catholic and Apostolic church” are not fully catholic; or are not Catholic in the same sense. They are walking towards its realization. All those who attempt at the full communion are walking towards Catholicity. The Gnostics and the Arians who poisoned the Apostolic faith were not Catholics. The same could be spoken of the various sects of recent origin, who uphold one or the other element in the apostolic faith and reject completely the rest of it. They lost a lot of the fundamental elements in the faith, handed down by the Apostles. They too should walk towards catholicity.

The Conciliar decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* points out that, “the division among Christians prevent the church from effecting the fullness of Catholicity proper to her” in all its dimensions(4). The human frailty and divisions became causes for presenting the gifts of the lord partially and even to diminish them. Each and every Christian and each and every Church must strive at perfecting the catholicity by regaining the perfect communion . And also by preaching the message of salvation to the areas not yet evangelized, the Catholicity should be made perfect. In the same way the churches would make an examination of conscience, whether they have in any way deviated from the Apostolic teaching or their teaching is the same as that of the Apostles. It is possible that certain elements of the Apostolic preaching may lay hidden in the churches, or not taken into very serious considerations or forgotten, or not given sufficient attention or not very well stressed as they ought to be stressed.

The gift of Catholicity demands us to accept the various forms of faith as legitimate diversity of the one faith, when there is no

diversity regarding the content of faith. The full canonical communion can be realized only when we are ready to surrender certain elements which hinder the full communion such as our prejudices, ways of expressions, practical jurisdictional matters, and evaluation of certain historical events. Then only we can fully express the catholicity in its entirety. All the churches and its members should strive at realizing the catholicity through living the elements connected with it.

## 4

# The Christian Church in the Persian Empire

## Introduction

There are several articles on the origin and growth of the Christian Church in Persia. I do not intend to repeat all those things here. Here the presentation would be very brief. Christianity spread in the Persian Empire chiefly among the Semitic people, through the medium of Aramaic/Syriac. The main Christian centers there were in the Euphrates–Tigris valley. Christianity was for a long time a minority religion in Persia. In the course of time the churches in the chief cities like Nisibis, Arbela, Seleucia, and Rev-Ardashir rose to prominence. Even though Edessa was in the Roman Empire, it had great influence in the growth of the churches in the Mesopotamian region, because the language in Edessa was Syriac. Syriac was the language of the Christians in the villages in Syria, especially in the Eastern regions and in Northern Mesopotamia. Even today there are several villages in Tur-Abdin, where the ordinary Christians speak various dialects of Syriac in their families. The Apostle of Edessa was Adai.

The origin of Christianity in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the Capital of the Persian Empire was rather slow and late. There is no early document which speaks of the presence of any of the first disciples of Christ there. The preacher in Seleucia is supposed to be Mari, one of the 72 preachers. Seleucia was known as the See of Mari.

But Rev-Ardashir, the capital of the Province Fars(Persis) at the Persian Gulf received the preaching directly from St. Thomas,

the Apostle of the Lord. The Christians there took pride in it. Whenever the other churches in Persia attempted to dominate, they protested and pointed to the Apostolic origin of their Church. As in the Roman Empire, the Churches in the Persian Empire also had their origin, centered around the cities. But the development of the hierarchical structure was very slow. There was definite liturgical structure in Persia also by the 4<sup>th</sup> /5<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their anaphora is known as the Anaphora of the Apostles, namely that of Mar Adai and Mar Mari, the Apostles of Edessa and Seleucia. We will discuss soon how the church at Seleucia emerged into leadership of all the churches in the Persian Empire.

### **The Various Names of the Persian Church**

Since it was the church in the capital of the Persian empire, Seleucia, it is called the *Seleucian Church*. It is called the *East Syriac Church* or *Chaldean Church* as it uses the East Syriac or Chaldean in the liturgy. It is called falsely the *Nestorian Church*, because it venerates the memory of Nestorius as a Greek Father. It is called the *Babylonian Church*, because it is the church in the ancient Babylonian region. It is also called the *Assyrian Church*, as it is in the ancient Assyrian Empire. Since it emphasized the humanity and divinity of Christ, it is called the *Diphysite Church in Persia*. It is called the *Mesopotamian Church*, as it is in the Mesopotamian region. But the members of this church call their Church *the Church of the East*. That is to say, East of the Roman Empire. This was the name dear to the members of this Church.

### **Relationship with other Churches**

The Christians in the Persian Empire maintained relationship with the nearby Churches in the Roman Empire. They had mutual contact whenever there was political liberty between the Roman and the Persian Empires. Often the political rivalry was a hindrance for the closer contact and communication. According to the later traditions, every now and then, the bishops of Antioch and Jerusalem used to ordain the bishops of Seleucia. But it is possible that when the political relationship was strained and communication became impossible, the Persian Church grew in its own way. At the same time, they kept a kind of relationship with the churches of the Roman Empire, especially with the churches in the Syrian regions. The Persian Church was not an isolated or sectarian church. They never thought that their church was an independent church, having no relationship or communion with other churches. Because of the geographical situation, the regional nearness, linguistic affinity and cultural relationship, their contact was with the Christians of the Syrian regions in the Roman Empire.

There was also another important reason . It was theological . It was the Antiochene theology that the Persian Church inherited. Their relationship at least for leadership was with the bishops of Syria. It does not mean in any way that the bishops of Antioch exercised their authority over the churches in the Persian Empire. The Persians called the bishops in the Syrian province, *Western Fathers*. They considered that the Western Fathers permitted the Persian bishops to ordain the bishop of Seleucia in Persia itself. They argued that it was because of the political hostilities between the Persians and the Romans.

### **The Persian Ecclesiastical leadership and the bishops of Seleucia**

The bishops of Seleucia did not rise to prominence as the bishops of the chief cities in the Roman Empire. Even according to the Persians, they required the letter from the Western Fathers in this

matter. When the leadership was established, one notices instances of non-cooperation and resistance from the part of several Sees such as Nisibis, Bet-Lapat and Rev-Ardashir. The leadership of Seleucia was recognized by all very slowly only. When ever the leadership of Seleucia was questioned by others in Persia, the Western Fathers intervened and persuaded others to accept it.

### **Papa bar Aggai(+329)**

The first Seleucian bishop who tried to take the leadership of the Persian Church was Papa. Miles, bishop of Sus (+341) opposed Papa. They raised several accusations against Papa. The following bishops also opposed Papa: Bishop Daniel of Perat Maisan, Gadiab of Gundishapur (Bet-Lapat), Abdiso of Kaskar, Yohannan of Maisan, Andraos of Mar Mare Monastery, Abraham of Thedar. Mari says that during the discussion in the synod, Papa was affected by paralysis of his right hand. The bishops considered it as a punishment from God. In 325 they deposed him in the Synod; instead they appointed Simeon (+341) as the bishop of Seleucia. The Western Fathers, however, knowing it, intervened soon, scolded those who deposed Papa and reinstated him in his post. They decreed that as long as Papa was alive, Simeon should be his Archdeacon. After his death, he should take up the leadership. They decided also that once a year the bishops should assemble under the leadership of the Seleucian bishop to tackle the various problems in the Church. They prohibited the convocation of synods without the leader.

The immediate successors of Papa nevertheless did not dare for centralization of authority. From 348-398 there was no bishop in Seleucia. The four bishops who governed after Simeon (+341) could remain only one year each. It is recorded in one document that instead

of Papa, Simeon participated in the Nicene Synod (325). No other document speaks of his participation in the Nicene Council. Therefore this later document cannot be a conclusive proof that he took part in it. In 341 Simeon was martyred .His successor Sahdost also was martyred in 342. Since four successive bishops were killed, for the next 50 years there was no occupant at Seleucia. It was also due to the hostility of the Persian king. This situation changed with King Yazdagerd I (399-420). In 399 Thomarsa and afterwards Kayyuma became the bishops. Both of them died in 399 and the same year itself Isaac became the bishop of Seleucia.

## **Mar Isaac**

The next bishop who attempted at centralization and leadership of the Persian Church was Mar Isaac (399-410). His move was opposed by Agapetus of Bet –Lapat (Elam), Mar Mari of Karka, Bar Sabta of Sus, Batai of Masmahig , a certain Daniel and a certain Silas. At that time there were more than one bishop at Bet-Lapat. The bishops rose against Isaac and petitioned the King to imprison him . Knowing the events, Mar Marutha of Maipherkatt in the neighboring region in the Roman Empire intervened immediately. He procured a recommendation letter from the bishops of Antioch, Aleppo, Edessa , Tella and Amid.

In 399 Yazdagerd made peace with the Roman Emperors. Before that there were hostilities among them. The result of the hostilities was the terrible persecution of the Christians in Persia. The situation aggravated especially when Constantine became a Christian and wrote to Shapur to protect the Christians in Persia. The Persian Kings considered Christianity as the religion of the enemy. There were



innumerable martyrs at the time of Shapur(309-379). The situation changed with Yazdagerd. In such a situation Isaac convened a Synod with the support of Mar Marutha of Maipherkatt.

## **Mar Marutha**

It is said that he participated in the Council of Constantinople in 381. He played a very decisive role in the synod of 410 of Mar Isaac. He came to Persia more than once as a leader of the delegation from the Roman Emperor to the Persian King. Isaac was the relative of Marutha. There is a version that when Kayyuma resigned because of old age, the bishops elected Isaac bishop. The mediation of Marutha helped to end the persecution in Persia, to get the approval of Isaac as the bishop of Seleucia and to rearrange the Persian Church and to renew the churches destroyed during the persecution, to get liberated the Christians in prison and to get the permission for priests to go around freely in Persia.

We must know that after 315 it was only in 410 that the bishop of Seleucia convened a Synod. That too with the support of the bishops outside Persia. That means the leadership of the bishop of Seleucia was not widely recognized. Even in the 5<sup>th</sup> c. it was the case. Several bishops in the chief cities continued to oppose him.

## **The Western Fathers**

Mar Marutha had the support of several bishops in Syria. They decided to bring order into the Persian Church, which lacked a proper leadership and proper ecclesiastical structure. Thus Marutha procured a letter signed by Porphyrius of Antioch(404-413/4), Acacius of

Aleppo(379-436), Pekkida of Edessa(398-409), Eusebius of Tella and Acacius of Amid. That letter encouraged the Persian bishops to accept the canons and the decrees of the Western Church (i.e. the Churches in the Roman Empire). The King Yazdagerd was sympathetic to the Christians and allowed them to convene a Synod. He instructed them that the Eastern bishops should listen to the Western bishops and make order accordingly in Persia.

### **The synod of Mar Isaac(410)**

At the beginning of the synod, the king communicated through his delegates two good news: 1.The Christian persecution is ended. 2. Mar Isaac is recognized as the head of the Church of the East. All the decisions taken by Isaac and Marutha will have the backing of the King. – it was in this synod of 410 that the Church of the East officially received the Nicene Creed of 325. It was also decided in the synod that the Easterners also celebrate the important liturgical feasts on the same day as those of the Westerners. They passed 21 Canons regulating the Church life. The Canons include also one related to the recognition of the authority of the Seleucian Patriarch. The bishops should visit the Patriarch after their Episcopal ordination for confirmation.(c.1). Once in two years the bishops should assemble under the leadership of the Seleucian bishop, in order to regulate ecclesiastical matters(c.6). Canon 12 gives the various names of the Seleucian bishop: he is bishop of Kokke, the Great Metropolitan of the Orient, Catholicos. – All the bishops agreed to obey the bishop of Seleucia.

The synod made a new arrangement in the Persian Church: the dioceses were reorganized under the following Metropolitans. Bet-Lapat, Nisibis, Maisan, Hadiab and Bet Garmai. However, the bishops

of Fars(Persis) , Qatar, Media, Razziqa and Abrasahar did not take part in the synod. Synod suspended all, especially a certain Bathi and Daniel, who were revolting against the Seleucian leadership. Seleucia was widely recognized as the first Metropolis in the Persian Church. The synod chastised also Agapetus bishop of Bet-Lapat.

## **The Title Catholicos**

The title Catholicos was used to designate some ecclesiastical leaders outside the ancient Roman Empire. The heads of the Georgian, Armenian and Persian Churches were known as Catholicos. But the heads of the Ethiopian and the Malankara Churches outside the Roman Empire were not called Catholicos in ancient times. Both these Churches had for a long time bishops coming from outside: the Ethiopians had from Egypt and the Malankara Church from Persia.

The title Catholicos is an ecclesiastical title used in the above mentioned three Churches . It means ecclesiastical head. Although the position of the Catholicos was below that of the Patriarch in later times, both were used almost as synonyms.

In the Roman Empire there was a civil servant called Catholicos. There are references to it since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. He had the jurisdiction over a precise geographical area. With the other titles , this too entered into the ecclesiastical realm.

In the Persian Church, the word is seen used since 410. It must have been the title of the head of that Church at least from that time onwards. The Armenians also might have used it around this period. The Georgian Church which was dependent on the Armenian

Church began to use it since 609. Later all these three Churches added the title Patriarch to the title Catholicos. Thus they use Catholicos-Patriarch.

The Catholicos has over his faithful all the authority which the Patriarch has over his faithful. The so called *Nicene-Arabic Canons* speak about the authority of the Catholicos. The Catholicos is the Supreme authority in the Catholicate. All those who are subject to him should obey him. He has authority over all the Metropolitans and bishops in Persia. None has the authority to judge him. He is the shepherd who teaches authoritatively. He is to take the ultimate decisions on matters of faith. The same is true regarding the liturgical matters also. He can institute feast days, and remove them. All should mention the Catholicos in the liturgy. His decisions will be final. He has authority to convene Synods, to confirm the bishops elected by the Metropolitans, to establish dioceses, to alter the borders and to transfer bishops. He has authority over monasteries. He is the custodian of faith. Thus he has all the authorities in his Catholicate just like the Patriarch has in his Patriarchate.

### **The Synod of Mar Yahbalaha (420)**

Ahai(411-414) and Yahbalaha(415-420) were the successors of Mar Isaac. There was opposition to the Seleucian leadership even at the time of Yahbalaha. In 417/8 King Yazdagerd I sent him to Constantinople as his special envoy. In 420 Acacius the bishop of Amid came to Persia as the delegate of the Byzantine Emperor. At that time he convened a Synod of the Persian bishops at Bet-Ardashir. Only two Metropolitans (those of Nisibis and Bet-Lapat )and eight bishops were present for the Synod. Although it had a low

representation and cannot be called a synod of the Church, it is recognized in subsequent collections of Canons as a Synod.

The Synod chastised those who were instrumental to separatism and quarrel in the Church. In the Synod, the Persian Church accepted the Canons of the Synods of Ancyra (314), Neo-Caesarea (314), Gangra (325/331), Antioch (341) and Laodicea (343/381). It was decreed that these decrees also should be accepted together with the decrees of the synod of 410. It is recorded that the Seleucian bishop has authority over 28 Episcopal Sees in Persia.

An analysis of the Synod reveals the following points: Even in 420 the Seleucian leadership was not widely recognized. There was strong opposition in several quarters. The bishops in the Roman empire helped for the acknowledgement of the leadership of the Seleucian bishops. i.e. Seleucia needed the assistance and recommendation of the Roman bishops for getting accepted its leadership. In other words, the leadership came into existence and was sustained with the support of the Western Fathers.

### **The Synod of Mar Dadiso (424)**

After Yahbalaha, Mar Mana(420) and Farabokth(420) were instrumental to a division in the Church. They were therefore deposed and afterwards Mar Dadiso became the bishop of Seleucia. He too had to meet the opposition from the part of his schismatic predecessors. They brought forward several accusations against Mar Dadiso. So the Persian King imprisoned him and put him into prison. But Acacius, bishop of Amid, intervened and Dadiso was released . Dadiso, however, did not want to continue to be the leader of the Church. He

resigned and went to a neighboring place called Markabta and resided there. It was at that time that 36 bishops assembled in a Synod there in 424. Those who opposed Dadiso were the following: Bati of Hormizd-Ardashir, Barsabta of Sus, Sabita of Sabe, Khaisa of Koni, Sarbel of Daskarta dMalka, Abner of Kaskar, Solomon of Nuhadra, Bar Haile of Tahal, Bar Yakpi of Belasphar, Pharbokth of Ardashir Kurah and Yzidbozed of Dubgrad.

The bishops who participated in the synod adopted a policy in favor of Dadiso . They unanimously requested him to continue as “Catholicos, Chief Metropolitan and Ruler of the whole Christianity in the East”. Agapetus, bishop of Bet-Lapat and Hosea bishop of Nisibis spoke in favor of Dadiso. Agapetus acknowledged the various assistance from the churches in the Byzantine Empire. He asked the permission to read the various canonical Epistles from the Western Fathers to the Eastern fathers and speak in front of the Fathers. When he got the permission, he read the Epistles and spoke in front of them. Then all of them stood in front of Dadiso and prostrated before him as a sign of obedience and submission to him. They decided that the subordinates had no authority to judge and remove the leader of the Church and that those who did not obey and showed signs of submission should be excommunicated from the Church. The Synodal document quoted from a letter of the Western Fathers. According to this, the Catholicos has to decide the Eastern matters. No one has the right to judge him. Let Christ, who appointed him in his post, be his judge. It is not permitted to make an appeal to the Western fathers against the Catholicos. So also, no one should dare to bring about a schism in the church or calumniate the Catholicos.

On the basis of the assurance from the part of the bishops, Dadiso agreed to resume the leadership of the Church as Catholicos. He intimated that he was prepared to receive back into the Church all those who came with true repentance.

## **Antiochene Theology**

There is no evidence to show that between 424 and 486 Synods were held in Persia. During this period there was severe persecution of Christianity in Persia by the secular rulers. There were several reasons for the alienation of the Byzantine and Persian Christians at that time. The Council of Ephesus(431) under the leadership of St. Cyril of Alexandria rejected altogether the Antiochene Christology; that Synod upheld the Alexandrian Christology as the only Christology of the Church. But all the bishops of the Oriens Prefecture under the leadership of their bishop John of Antioch rejected the Synod of 431. By this time the Antiochene theological tradition and exegetical methods had become normative in the theological schools of Persia. The Bishops of Persia did not participate in the Council of Ephesus. But they noticed that the whole Oriens Prefecture, neighboring to their country, rejected as a whole the decisions of Ephesus under the leadership of Cyril. So they also might have condemned the actions of Cyril in that synod. Ibas of Edessa(435-457) was an Antiochene theologian. At that time Edessa was in the Roan Empire. But its influence spread to several places in Persia. The second Synod of Ephesus of 449 (also known as the Robber Synod) was also stood solely for the Alexandrian Christology. The Synod of 449 deposed Ibas of Edessa, Theodoret of Cyrus and Domnus of Antioch. Just as the synod of 431 was guided by the monks, this one also was guided by fanatic monks. They had the upper hand in the synod. Eutyches,

the monk, found fault with bishop Flavian of Constantinople. Marcellus of Emesa and Simon of Antioch jointly accused Domnus. The accusation was that he spoke against the 12 Anathemas of Cyril. Twelve monks of the diocese of Edessa accused Ibas of heresy. Pelagius the monk found fault with Theodoret of Cyrus.

## **Antiochene Christology**

In the Council of Chalcedon(451) the Antiochene Christology was partially recognized. Ibas and others were reinstated, but it paved the way for a lasting division in the Church in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. One can say that at the time of Emperor Marcion, who summoned the synod, there was in general acceptance of the synod in several places. Chalcedon tried to make a synthesis of both the Alexandrian and the Antiochene Christologies. The Chalcedonian definition of faith was a compromise formula , but it could not bring about a lasting peace among the churches. The Emperors who succeeded Marcion in the Byzantine Empire either criticized Chalcedon, or belittled it or rejected it or maintained even an anti-Chalcedonian attitude. The formulations of the Emperors were often politically motivated and one sided. They were often compromise formulas, which could be interpreted in both ways. These formulas did not help for the unity based on faith, brotherly love and firm convictions. Such were the imperial documents: Encyclion, Henoticon , Ekthesis and Typos. Some openly and others secretly rejected Chalcedon.

The Christians in Persia were basically Chalcedonians. However they kept aloof from the quarrels and theological disputes and divisions of the Western Christians, namely those of the Eastern



Provinces of the Byzantine Empire. Moreover, there was also another reason: After the demise of Ibas of Edessa, the city became a centre of the non-Chalcedonians. Nuna(457-471) Cyrus(471- ?) and others were continuously opposing the Antiochene theology. In 489 with the order of emperor Zeno, bishop Cyrus(Qura) of Edessa closed the theological school of Edessa, from where the Antiochene theology was spreading . At that time several teachers and students migrated to Nisibis and other cities in the Persian Empire and started schools there. Barsauma bishop of Nisibis(459-491) made all arrangement for the continuation of the school of Edessa at Nisibis. Eventually the School of Nisibis became the centre of the Antiochene theological convictions.

### **The synod of Acacius (486)**

Although the synod of Dadiso decided that the Persian Church should remain united under one head, it did not last long. At the time of Catholicos Babowai, the successor of Dadiso (457-484), Barsauma the bishop of Nisibis convened a Synod in 484 at Bet- Lapat. All those who opposed the Catholicos participated in it. Barsauma realized that there was little chance for Babowai to get the support of the Western Fathers. The participants in the Synod deposed the Catholicos, whom the Persian king beheaded. He was succeeded by Mar Acacius, who concerned a synod in 486 at Seleucia. But Barsauma did not participate in it. The Synod discussed the problems in the Persian Church because of the anti-Chalcedonians in Persia. Without mentioning Chalcedon regarding Christology, they adopted the teaching of Chalcedon. Three Metropolitans and 21 bishops took part in the synod. Acacius was one of those fugitive who left Edessa after the death of Ibas. Four other participants also were of that type.

## **The Synod of Mar Babai**

Afterwards Mar Bawai became the leader of the Church(497-502/3). During this period also there were bishops in Persia who opposed the leadership of Seleucia. The leaders were Papa of Bet-Lapat and Yazdad of Rev-Ardashir. Although both Barsauma and Acacius died before this Synod, their mutual excommunication was lifted in this synod. It declared that the Seleucian Catholicos was the rightful head of the Church in Persia and that once in four years the bishops in Persia should meet in Synod to discuss ecclesiastical matters. During this period hostilities increased between the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire. It was an added reason for the mutual distrust. It had its echo in the ecclesiastical relations also.

After that Silas became the Catholicos(505-521/2). Before his death, Silas nominated his son in law to be his successor .those who opposed the move appointed a certain Narsai as the Catholicos. Thus there were once again two Catholicos at the same time in the Seleucian Church. With this the Persian church was divided into two groups. Narsai died in 535,but the division and split continued. In 539 the bishops deposed Elisha and appointed a certain Paulose who died soon. So in 540 they elected Mar Aba as the Catholicos.

## **The Synod of Mar Aba(544)**

At the time of Mar Aba(540-552), there was cruel persecution of Christianity in Persia. Before he became Catholicos, Mar Aba traveled throughout the Eastern parts of the Byzantine Empire and visited the churches there. During his travel, he collected the anaphoras known after Theodore and Nestorius and some books of Nestorius and brought them to Persia. He gave the lead to translate them into

Syriac. Thus it was at the time of Mar Aba that the works of Nestorius entered the Persian soil.

Mar Aba tried to reconcile the bishops who were revolting against the Seleucian leadership. He visited some of them personally. At that time, there were two bishops at the same time at Segesthan and he made reconciliation through discussions. In 544 Mar Aba convened a synod. It was decreed in the synod that Metropolitans and Bishops should not be ordained without the knowledge of the Catholicos. Laws were also enacted for the election of the Catholicos. – During this period, there was an epidemic in the whole known world, lasting about 3.5 years. The Persian king Chosroes attacked the Eastern Roman Provinces and deported a lot of people to Persia.

## **Ecumenical Discussion**

During this period, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian made several attempts to reunite the various Christian factions, namely the Chalcedonians, the non-Chalcedonians, and the so called Nestorians. He wanted to maintain the political unity by reestablishing the religious unity. Two were the most important meetings: one in 532/3 and another in 562/3. Although Justinian accepted Chalcedon, his wife Theodora protected the anti-Chalcedonians and kept them at Constantinople in an imperial palace. In order to please the non-Chalcedonians, Justinian condemned the *Three Chapters* in 543 by an imperial edict. The extracts from the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the anti-Cyrillian writings of Theodoret of Cyrus and the Letter of Ibas to Mari the Persian were known as the Three chapters. The fifth ecumenical Council of 553 ( Constantinople II) officially accepted this condemnation by Justinian. In 562 Justinian made a peace treaty

with Chosroes. So the Persian Christians also were invited to the ecumenical meeting of 562/3 at Constantinople. Neither Mar Yausep, the Catholicos, nor Mar Abraham the head of the School of Nisibis took part in it. Instead, the following delegation was sent: Mar Paulose bishop of Nisibis, Mar Mari of Balad, Mar Barsauma of Qardu, Isai from the school of Seleucia, Isoiahb of Arsun and Babai of Singara. Before any discussion, there was a demand that the Persians should condemn Diodore, Theodore and Nestorius. It was part of a project to placate the non-Chalcedonians. The Persian Christians however considered the above mentioned persons as fathers and saints. Because of this very reason, the ecumenical meeting could not bring about any tangible result.

By this time, the number of the anti-Chalcedonians increased in Persia. The Roman Emperors permitted the persecuted Christians in the Roman provinces of Syria to migrate to Persia. By 559 the non-Chalcedonians could appoint a bishop of their own in Persia. Some at least of those who rebelled against the Seleucian Catholicos joined the non-Chalcedonians.

### **The Synod of Mar Yausep(554)**

In this background the Persians saw that it was necessary to strengthen the autonomy of the Seleucian bishop. In 554 Mar Yausep convened a synod. Since the Byzantine ecclesiastical leaders had rejected the Antiochene fathers and their theology, it was difficult to cooperate with them. They declared that their Church was autonomous. For this they presented a fabricated document. They circulated the idea that the document was written much earlier. This is the letters of the Western Fathers. Accordingly it contains the following: The

Persians have the right to ordain their own ecclesiastical head; the conviction that he is the Patriarch; the declaration that against him no appeal should be made to the Western Fathers; the decision that the bishop of Seleucia will be the chief head of all the Persian Christians.

In addition to that, another incident also took place. It was Chosroes, the Persian King, who nominated Mar Yausep. Later the bishops met in synod and just approved the King's appointment. Documents testify that Mar Yausep guided the Church very well for three years. Afterwards he erred. He was accused of bribery, imprisonment of innocent bishops, confiscation of a royal document which was obtained without his consent, not showing sufficient respect for the Eucharistic celebration, conducted without his permission.

Even the synod of 554 was convened because of the insistence of the bishops. When the bishops elected Mar Yausep in 551, the one condition they put forward was that a synod should be convened immediately. After one year they renewed the demand once again. The seventh canon of the synod decreed that the Patriarch should act in consultation with others, although he has all the authorities. All the important matters should be discussed and decided in the synod. Even if all cannot be convened, at least three should be consulted. Even when the Patriarch is ordaining a bishop there should be at least three bishops to ordain. The bishops should not ordain anybody outside his own diocese. The ecclesiastical laws should be enacted in the synods.

## **Stabilization of the leadership**

Although the synod of 554(c.7) controlled the authority of Mar Yausep, he did not obey the Canons. So the bishops assembled to evaluate the situation. According to the synod of Dadiso, the bishops have no right to take any action against the Patriarch. According to the Arabic canons and the letters of the Western Fathers, it is the duty only of the brother Patriarchs to judge a Patriarch. But the synod of Dadiso removes this possibility also. They had only just one way out. The letter of the Western fathers gives its limits. It is a pointer to show that these letters were written during this period. It is possible if the secular ruler was a pro-Christian. The bishop could complain to the King about the Patriarch. Then the King could depose him and then the bishops could convene a Synod and remove him from his office. It was not because they had the authority, but because of the authority of the King. Since all authority comes from God, the issue that the King was not a Christian was not a problem. This could justify the action of the bishops. Ibn at-Tayyib who speaks about the letters of the Western fathers gives another solution. He says that it is based on an earlier document, but he does not name it. Let the bishops discuss humbly with the Patriarch. If he is stubborn, remove him from the Church.

The bishops summoned Mar Yausep to the Synod, but he declined to be present. Then they deposed him and excommunicated him. He did not take any heed of it. So they appealed to the King. They requested that the leader given to them by the King, should be taken back. The King was forced to listen to their grievances.

From this event it appears that the leadership in Persia in the beginning was not like the one in the Roman Empire. They had to

meet the opposition to their various moves, for the establishment of the leadership with the support of the Western Fathers. The main opposition came from the bishops of Rev-Ardashir(Fars), Nisibis and Bet-Lapat. The Church in Fars continued to argue that theirs was an Apostolic church, founded by St. Thomas, while the Church at Seleucia was founded by Mari, a disciple of St. Thomas. Therefore they did not want to be under the leadership of Seleucia. Very often the bishops of Fars did not participate in the Synods, convened by the Seleucian bishops. From the time of Mar Yausep(551-567) till Isoyahb III (+657/8) Fars was opposing Seleucia. But during the 7<sup>th</sup> century, there was the increased threat from the non-Chalcedonians in Persia. All were then convinced of the need for a strong leadership for the Church. But the Seleucian bishops could not control the opposition from some centers like Fars and the growth of the non-Chalcedonians. Moreover King Chosroes' policy of religious repression also affected their growth. Between 608-628 the Persian King did not permit them to appoint a Catholicos for their Church.

### **The Epistle of the Western Fathers**

The Western fathers sent letters to Persia to reinstate Papa as the leader of the Church. In the same way, at the time of Mar Isaac, the Western fathers sent Mar Marutha with their recommendation letters to Persia. At the time of Mar Yabalaha and Mar Dadiso also the Western fathers intervened and sent letters and supported the Seleucian See. Agapetus of Bet-Lapat read out the letters of the Western fathers at the synod of Mar Dadiso.

These are the documents known as the letters of the Western Fathers and there are the so called Nicene Arabic Canons. Many

considered that the Catholicos in the Persian Church was established on the basis of these documents. The Persians too had such a belief. Let us discuss these letters. The first letter of the Western Fathers has two versions. 1. the Syriac version in the Nomocanon of Abdiso. 2. The longer Arabic version given by Amr. The Syriac version might be more ancient. In 424 in the Synod of Markabta, Mar Agapetus quoted a letter of the Western Fathers. In addition to these, we find two more fragments in Abdiso, of the letter of the Western Fathers written to Papa. The first one is the same in a shorter form of the words in the synod of Dadiso. It is possible that in later period there might have been falsification in the original letter of the Western Fathers. The one read by Agapetus was written around 424. The first and the third versions occurred at the time of Mar Yausep. Both Timothy II and Bar Ebraya too speak of the letters of the Western Fathers. Assemani quotes two letters. But the Chronicle of Seert does not mention them.

### **Background of the Letters**

Bar Ebraya explains the background of writing the letters. When the Seleucian bishop Mari died, Abrosius, ordained by the bishop of Antioch, became the Seleucian bishop. The next bishop of Seleucia also was ordained by the bishop of Antioch. But his successor Jacob received the imposition of hands from Jerusalem. At that time two priests, Ahadabui and Qamiso went to Antioch for Episcopal ordination. Qamiso was killed by the Romans on the assumption that he was a spy. Sliba, the one who received Qamiso at Antioch, was also killed. Then Ahadabui went to Jerusalem. When the bishop of Antioch knew about it, he recommended Ahadabui to the bishop of



Jerusalem. Mar Mathias bishop of Jerusalem ordained Mar Ahadabui and sent him to Persia as bishop of Seleucia.

It was on this occasion that the Western Fathers sent the canonical letter to the Eastern bishops: When the Great Metropolitan of the East dies, the bishops in Persia should elect one as Catholicos and Patriarch and ordain him there in Persia itself . It is no more necessary to go to the Western fathers for the imposition of hands. Bar Ebraya adds that it was not pleasing to the bishop of Antioch. Shahlupa(220-240) was the first one ordained in accordance with this letter. That too three years after the death of Ahadabui. Abdiso says that the letter of the Western Fathers was written at the time of Ahadabui. According to him, in this letter the Western Fathers made the Seleucian See a Patriarchate.

## **Letters-Apocryphal**

The reference of Timothy regarding the time of the writing of the letter of the Western fathers is incorrect. According to Timothy, it was written 400 years after the martyrdom of Peter and Paul and 280 years before the Nicene Council. If the Apostles were martyred in 68, it was in 198 that Ahadabui died. But according to Bar Ebraya, he died in 140. According to the Eastern tradition, it was written at the time of Ahadabui. According to Amr, he died in 217.

The successor of Shahlupa was not appointed immediately. The next leader was Papa(310). In the letter addressed to Papa, he was called Patriarch. It is difficult to believe that the designation not in use even in the Roman Empire at that time was granted to the Eastern leader. Timothy gives the names of those signed in the

document: Gaius of Rome (283-296), Peter of Alexandria (301-310), Paul of Antioch (260-278), Flavian of Ephesus(?), Alexander of Jerusalem(211-253) and Gregory Thaumathurgus (+265/270). These leaders lived in various times. Secondly the relationship of the Persian Church was with the neighboring Churches in the Roman Empire. Why should they have the permission of Rome and Alexandria for the establishment of the Patriarchate in Persia? Normally supra-Episcopal authorities are granted by the Ecumenical Councils. Even though Constantinople was politically the Second Rome, it was raised to the status of a Patriarchate through the canons of two Ecumenical Councils. Jerusalem was raised to a Patriarchate by the Council of Chalcedon. Cyprus was made an autonomous Church in the Council of Ephesus. If this was the method followed in the Churches in the Roman Empire, it is difficult to assume that the Western fathers adopted a different method for the Church in Persia. Moreover there is no reference to it in any of the Ecumenical Councils. So the above mentioned letter is apocryphal. Yohannan bar Phinkaye(7<sup>th</sup> c.) refers to the authorities granted by the Western Fathers at the time of Papa, but he does not clearly speak about it.

### **Three Problems**

1. When did the Persians start a supra-Episcopal authority, centered on Seleucia? The names of Ahadabui, Shahlupa and Papa are connected with it. The first letter of the Western Fathers is its basis. But that letter is apocryphal and is of later origin. One can perhaps say that at the time of Papa there was the beginning of the centralization in Persia.

2. When did the Seleucian bishop begin to take the title Catholicos? The title Catholicos was the title of a secular official in the Roman

Empire. It means one who has authority over a definite territory. The Persian bishop was called, “bishop of Seleucia”(Acts of Martyrs), Archbishop of Seleucia (Sozomen) and the great Metropolitan. According to the present version of the canonical collection, it is found even in the Synod of 410. It is however, difficult to say whether it was added later or it was in use since 410.

3. When did the Persian bishops begin to add the title Patriarch to that of Catholicos? In later periods, the Persian chief bishops used the double title, Catholicos-Patriarch.

According to the present form of the canonical collection, it is seen since 420. It is difficult to assume that during such an early period, it was in use. Perhaps from the time of Mar Yausep, the Persians might have started using both the titles.

The above mentioned view is not definite statements. Any way, the letters of the Western Fathers, by which the Persian used to say that their Church was autonomous, was not of very ancient origin. The situation in later period was pushed back and presented as it of ancient origin. The so called Nicene Arabic Canons too are of later origin. Although the Seleucian bishops had extensive authority, it was not recognized by all the bishops in the Persian Empire.

## 5

# The Persian Maphrianate

### **The Council of Chalcedon (451) and the Split in the Church**

It is with the Council of Chalcedon that there occurred a great split in the great Church in the Roman Empire. Those who were hesitant to accept the decision of the council broke away from the mainstream of the Church. Even in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. these anti-Chalcedonians could not control the main Church. Instead they had to accept the status of a separated church from the main line Church of the Roman Empire. They were then known as the Headless Ones (Acephaloi), those who had reservations in accepting Chalcedon (Diakrinomenoi) and so on. They were opposed to the formula of Chalcedon. In all other matters they maintained intact the content of faith. That is to say, they did not alter the essentials of the Christian faith and the Apostolic Kerygma. The difference was only in terminology or the difference was in the formula of faith. There was terminological difference and misunderstanding. After 451 many people in the Antiochene and Alexandrian Patriarchates moved to the non-Chalcedonian camp. Even at Antioch there were successive Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian bishops. This situation continued from 451 till 518.

### **The Syrian Orthodox Church Leaders**

The leaders of the non-Chalcedonian group realized the need of their own hierarchy for establishing an anti-Chalcedonian Church.

Their chief leaders were Severus of Antioch (+538), Jacob of Saroug(+520), Philoxenus of Mabboug(+523), Jacob Burdana(+578) John of Ephesus(+585) and John of Tella(+538). They worked hard to form an anti-Chalcedonian Church and hierarchy. Among these various leaders, Jacob Burdana was the ablest organizer. He was born in Tella and had his education in the monastery of Fesilta in Mount Izla in Tur-Abdin. After 527 he went to Constantinople with Sergius. There he stayed for 15 years under the protection of Theodora, the wife of Emperor Justinian and tried to strengthen the anti-Chalcedonian agitation. In 542/3 Theodosius, the anti-Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria ordained him the titular bishop of Edessa. Together with him a certain Theodore too was ordained bishop for the wandering Arabs. Jacob went around in disguise and organized the anti-Chalcedonian communities. He tried to bring together the divided anti-Chalcedonians. It was with him that the anti-Chalcedonians were known as the Jacobites. Severus and Philoxenus were the theologians of the non-Chalcedonian camp. Severus wrote against the various opposing groups in the anti-Chalcedonian camp. He wrote in Greek, but his writings survive only in Syriac translations. He opposed Chalcedon, but in all other things he was Orthodox. Interpreting the teachings of Cyril of Alexandria (+444), he considered himself as the authentic spokesman of Cyril and maintained the anti-Chalcedonian mentality. Philoxenus wrote several theological works in Syriac. He led the faithful of Mabboug to the anti-Chalcedonian camp and instigated the Emperor to close down the theological school of Edessa. Jacob of Saroug wrote in poetical form and is considered as the harp of the Holy Spirit.

The above mentioned non-Chalcedonians were not Monophysite heretics. They were however against Chalcedon, they

spoke and wrote against Chalcedon. However, they acknowledged the content of faith taught by the Council of Chalcedon, but rejected its terminology. John of Ephesus was a teacher of the remaining pagans in Asia, Charia, Phrygia and Lydia. i.e. His mission was to convert the remaining pagans in these provinces. It was Justinian himself who appointed him for this mission. John of Tella also went around and propagated the anti-Chalcedonian agitation. Today this anti-Chalcedonian Syrians are known as the Syrian Orthodox or in Kerala the Patriarchal group is known as the Jacobite Syrian Church.

Severus was expelled from Antioch in 518. After 518 there was no anti-Chalcedonian bishop at Antioch till 557/8. The Syrian Orthodox Patriarchal line starts with Sergius of Tella(+561). But they did not reside at Antioch because there was the Chalcedonian Patriarch already there. The Jacobite Patriarchs used to reside in the monasteries in Syria and guided the anti-Chalcedonian communities from there.

### **The Syrian Orthodox in Persia**

After 451 the non-Chalcedonians began to appear also in the Persian Empire. Some non-Chalcedonians, fearing the persecution in the Roman Empire migrated to Persia. Emperor Justinian accepted Chalcedon, but he could not convert the non-Chalcedonians. Although they were persecuted in Syria, they were allowed to migrate to Egypt and Northern Mesopotamia. Secondly the Persian King Chosroes attacked and plundered Syria and deported large number of the population and settled them down in the Persian Empire. Among them were also many non-Chalcedonians. At the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Chosroes II also deported many people from the Roman Empire to Persia. After the defeat of Chosroes in 628, Christians could

easily cross the border and go to Persia. As a result of all these, the number of the non-Chalcedonians became considerable in certain regions in Persia.

### **The Syrian Orthodox bishops in Persia**

When the number of the non-Chalcedonians increased in Persia, Jacob Burdana appointed Mar Ahudemme(+577) in 559 at Tagrit to look after their spiritual need. It was Christopher, the Armenian Catholicos, who ordained Mar Ahudemme. Before his appointment at Tagrit he was the bishop of Bet-Arbaye. It seems that he worked among the nomadic Arabs in between the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire, and not in the Bet –Arbeye Province of the Persian empire. Before 559 there might have been some anti-Chalcedonians in Persia. Together with Ahudemme, a certain Garmai was also ordained bishop by the same Christopher (538/9-544/5). Garmai was appointed for the Mar Mathai Monastery, Ashur(Ator) and Nineveh. John of Ephesus calls Ahudemme the Metropolitan of the East. There is no evidence to show that this title was used before that by the Eastern Jacobites. After Ahudemme, Qamiso (578-609) and Samuel (614-624) were the bishops of the non-Chalcedonians in Persia.

The regions around Tagrit and the regions around Nineveh adopted anti-Chalcedonism before 615. Many communities in those regions became Syrian Orthodox. Their center was Tagrit, so also around the monastery of Mar Mathai. It is doubtful whether the bishops before 628/9 were non-Chalcedonians. In the list of the bishops there is a certain Barsahde(+484/5), Garmai +(544), Tuvana (Mari), Isosakha,

Simon and Sahda. In 593 in Ba-Nuhadra , Mayalta one finds the first Syrian Orthodox bishops.

In the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> c. these non-Chalcedonians expelled from the Roman Empire came to Hira in Persia. The Seleucian Catholicos Silas(505-521/3) tried to bring them under him. By 549 a certain Sergius propagated the Julianist heresy at Hira. Even in the 7<sup>th</sup> c. it had its adherents there.

Although the Mossoul region was a center of the Church of the East, it adopted anti-Chalcedonian attitude because of the activity of the Syrian Orthodox Church. They had in Persia a few monasteries and monks. By the 7<sup>th</sup> c. they had there five theological schools.

The Syrian Orthodox Maphrian

When the Persian Empire crumbled in 628, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch appointed in 629 a certain Marutha, the great Metropolitan as his representative in Persia for the Jacobites. For that they convened two synods at the Mar Mathai monastery in Persia. Patriarch Athanasios I sent a certain John as his representative to Persia. He visited the Mar Mathai monastery . Christopher, the head of the monastery, convened a meeting and the Jacobites in Persia, who had so far no contact with the Patriarch, decided to establish communion and contact with him.

In 628/9 there was a Catholicos(Isoyahb II) and several Metropolitans and bishops of the Seleucian(East Syrian )Church . The vast majority of the Christians in Persia were with this Catholicos-Patriarch. At that time the Syrian Orthodox were comparatively few in Persia. In 629 they had just 12 dioceses there: 1.Bet-Arbaye-Tagrit.



2. Singar.3.Mayalta-Bet Nuhadra. 4.Arzun. 5.Gomal-Marga. 6.Bet Raman-Bet Vasik. 7.Karma. 8.Jazzira- Bahrain. 9.Sharsul.10.Hana-Banu-Taglib. 11. Peros-Shaput.12.Mar Mathai.

The Maphrian had his residence at Tagrit. Since Seleucia was the head-quarters of the Church for the East and the number of the Syrian Orthodox was nominal there, the Maphrian made Tagrit his head quarters. From the above mentioned 12 dioceses, the Maphrian had under him only the six Southern dioceses. The other six dioceses were under the superior of the monastery of Mar Mathai. At that time the bishop of Mar Mathai was Christopher. In addition to Mar Mathai, he had authority in Mosul and Nineveh. After the Maphrian, the Superior of the monastery of Mar Mathai was the most important person of the Syrian Orthodox in Persia. After becoming the Maphrian, Mar Marutha established three more dioceses: Segesthan, Azerbaijan and Herat.

### **Mar Marutha**

Mar Marutha the Maphrian was installed by Christopher, Ahathalla, Yasdapna and Aha. Marutha was from Sursak near Balad. He had his formation in the various monasteries in the Roman empire. After his return to Persia, he became a teacher and superior in the monastery at Seleucia, founded by Shirin. Marutha was a learned person. When Gabriel, the court physician died, Marutha moved to Aqla.

### **The Syrian Orthodox Synod(629)**

In the synod, the participants passed 24 canons. They established the canons regulating the relationship between the

Maphrian and the Superior of the Monastery of Mar Mathai: 1. The Metropolitan of the monastery shall be proclaimed together with the Maphrian in the monastery, in Nineveh and in the town of Mosul. 2. The Metropolitan of the monastery sits at the right hand of the Maphrian. 3. The Maphrian should not take any action against any bishop without the Metropolitan of the monastery. 4. When the Maphrian is absent in Tagrit, the Metropolitan will be in charge of the Maphriate. 5. the Maphrian should not enter in the places under the Metropolitan without the latter's permission. 6. The Maphrian has no authority to ordain, to consecrate the holy Myron and to give judgment or to excommunicate any body without the permission of the Metropolitan. 7. The Maphrian should not even take care of the spiritual matters of the faithful under the Metropolitan, or enter the churches without his permission 8. The Maphrian should not entrap the Metropolitan in one or another complex way. 9. The Metropolitan should not be judged either personally or in a Synod. 10. The Maphrian should not appoint bishops for the dioceses under the Metropolitan except by the mediation of the Metropolitan . – In this way they enacted clear norms regarding the relationship between the Maphrian and the Metropolitan of the monastery of Mar Mathai. Eleven bishops have signed the agreement.

### **Maphrian and the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch**

There was no definite canon regarding the relationship between the Patriarch and the Maphrian. When Marutha died in 649, the Orthodox in Persia elected the next Maphrian and the Patriarch Theodore (+667) conducted the imposition of hands. Thus Mar Denha became the second Maphrian. Even after that there were no definite canons regulating the relationship. So every now and then there were

problems among them. In a synod convened at Kafarthutha in 869 the Maphrian was given full autonomy in his Maphrianate. It was decided that unless specially invited, the Patriarch should not intervene in the Maphrianate. However, the mutual relationship was not very cordial.

## **Maphrian**

Maphrian is a Syriac word. It means one who gives fecundity, one who gives birth. It means: the one who has authority to install Metropolitans and bishops, the one who is able to produce several spiritual fruits. This ecclesiastical leader was known by several names, such as the Metropolitan of Bet-Parsaye, the Metropolitan of Tagrit and the chief bishop of the Orient.

## **Through the history**

At the time of Maphrian John Sliba I (1075-1106), all the Christians had to flee from Tagrit. The Maphrian Dionysius( 1112-1142) secured the permission from the Caliph for renewing the church at Tagrit. The Maphrian Gregorios Yacoub (1189-1215) resided only rarely at Tagrit. After Maphrian Ignatius III David (1215-1222) Tagrit became an unimportant city. In 1258 the army of Hulagu killed all the Moslems and Christians at Tagrit. When John Sliba I ran away from Tagrit in 1089, he settled down at Mar Zena church at Mosul. When Mar Dionysius died in 1142 at Bagdad, his body was brought to Tagrit. Ignatius Lazar(1443-1464) was at Bagdad for 10 years. In 1453 he transferred his residence to Mosul and it was recognized by the Synod of 1156. After that the Maphrians began to use the title, *the Metropolitan of Mosul and Nineveh*. Maphrian John IV (1164-

1188)resided at Mosul and died at Charachosh. He was buried at Mar Mathai monastery. In a document of 1175,the Maphrian is named the *Maphrian of Tagrit and Nineveh*. Those who came after him could not reside at Mosul. So they changed their residence several times. In 1222 Maphrian Ignatius III David became the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch.

### **Bar Ebraya(1264-1286)**

Abul Faraj Ben Aaron who was Maphrian from 1264-1286 adopted the name Gregorios Yohannan. Generally he is known as Bar Ebraya. He traveled only once to Tagrit. He resided at Mosul and Mar Mathai monastery. He wrote the history of the Patriarchs of Antioch and the Jacobite Maphrianate in Persia. He was the most famous Maphrian and was a very learned Syriac scholar. He was well versed in the various sciences. He died in 1286 at Maraga and was buried at the Mar Mathai monastery

The successors of Bar Ebraya also changed their residence several times In 1369 the Mongolians destroyed Mosul and Mar Mathai monastery . Therefore the Maphrians had to reside in other places. After 1523 the Maphrians began to reside again at Mosul. At that time the Maphrian was known as the *Maphrian of Mosul*. After 1523 the Maphrians began to add Basil(Baseliος) to their names. A certain Basil of Mosul became the rebel Patriarch.

In 1693 Basil Isaac Joubair was appointed Maphrian for the Syrian Catholics at Mosul. But because of the opposition of the Syrian Orthodox he could not continue for long; so he resided in Rome till his death in 1721. In 1730 Mar Gregorios Lazar who was the bishop of Mar Mathai Monastery became the Maphrian. He resided at Mosul

and at times at Mar Mathai Monastery. The following were the areas under his jurisdiction: the city of Mosul, and the villages Bar-Teli, Basiqa, Semmel and Saho. Basil Geevarghese, who became bishop in 1760, resided one year at Mosul. He was the delegate of the Patriarch in Persia for two years(1742-44). At that time there was no Maphrian. In 1762 he appointed his nephew Cyril Rasqallah as the temporary bishop of Mar Mathai monastery. In a document of 1762 we find the reference “the Catholicos of the East’ for the first time. In 1762 Basil Geevarghese became the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch.

### **Maphrian –Catholicos**

We see that Bar Ebraya, the Maphrian, added to his name, the title *Catholicos*. It was he who used it for the first time. When he took this title, the Seleucian Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East protested. The reason he gave was that it was their title for centuries and that it was so far not used by the Jacobites.

### **Catholicos and Maphrian are not one and the same**

The Catholicos –Patriarch of the Seleucian Church( Church of the East) and the Jacobite Maphrian(Syrian Orthodox) are not one and the same. The Catholicate and the Catholicos in the Church of the East originated in the original Persian Church. They believe that it was granted to them by the Western fathers to make their church an autonomous one. Seleucia was the center of their Church. But the Maphrian was a subordinate of the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. The Maphrian was appointed by the Jacobite Patriarch with his synod and had his beginning in 629 at Tagrit. He had his residence at Tagrit, Mosul and other places. The Maphrianate was dependent on the

Jacobite Patriarch .But the Seleucian Patriarch was not dependent on any Patriarch for his authority. He had his autonomy. The Antiochene Syrian Orthodox Patriarch had never asserted that he had any authority over the Seleucian Catholicos. But the Maphrianate was considered to be a part of the Jacobite Church. So also those in the Maphrianate considered themselves part of the Syrian Orthodox Church All the same the Maphrian had some autonomy in his Maphrianate.

The Catholicos of the Seleucian Church eventually adopted the title Patriarch. It grew as a Patriarchal Church, but the Maphrianate remained without further growth. Moreover it was terminated in the 19th century. The Seleucian Church was an autocephalous Church, having dependence on no other Patriarch, but the Maphrian depended on the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch and acted as his representative. The Church of the East in Persia had only very nominal relationship to the Antiochene Church. Some of the letters of the Western fathers were of later origin. And those letters too were regarding the Catholicate of Seleucia and not about the Maphrianate ,instituted by the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch in the 7<sup>th</sup> century at Tagrit.

The majority Christian community in Persia belonged to the Church of the East. Their allegiance was to the Christology of the Chalcedonians and the Antiochene Fathers, but even in Persia there was a minority which accepted the Christology of the Alexandrians and of Ephesus and maintained an anti-Chalcedonian mentality. The Maphrian of Tagrit was the leader of that group.

The Jacobite Maphrian of Tagrit was not the continuation of the Catholicos –Patriarch of the Church of the East. The line of the Catholicos-Patriarch of Seleucia continues even today. It is not objective to present the Maphrian as the continuation of the Catholicate

of the Church of Seleucia. On the contrary, the Maphrianate was instituted in the 7<sup>th</sup> century for the Syrian Orthodox in Persia as parallel to the Catholicos - Patriarch. But the Maphrian never enjoyed an equal status as the Catholicos –Patriarch. The extension of authority of the Maphrian was limited . He had authority over the Syrian Orthodox in the Persian empire. But the Seleucian Catholicos –Patriarch had authority in India, China, Siberia and Mongolia. One can show several documents proving it. But there is no document to show that the Maphrian had any authority in India. Bar Ebraya does not say anything about it. The other Syrian Orthodox historians also keep quiet about it. Bar Ebraya does not even mention of the existence of a church in India. Even Michael Rabo who wrote about the Greek, Roman, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian and Persian Churches extensively in his history book does not speak about the existence of a Church in India. The Syrian Orthodox leader in Persia was known by several names at different periods. The Great Metropolitan of Tagrit, the Maphrian of Tagrit, Maphrian and the Maphrian of Mosul. The title *the Catholicos of the East* is a later title in the Jacobite Church. It is wrong to consider it and the Catholicos of the East of the Persian Church as one and the same. Because of the similarities of name some thought that they are same and the circulated the idea through their publication.

Today in the Church of the East there are three Catholicos-Patriarch as the continuation of the ancient Catholicate: The Catholic Catholicos-Patriarch in Iraq, the Catholicos-Patriarch of the ancient Church of the East in Iraq(the so called Nestorian Church), the Assyrian Catholicos-Patriarch in Chicago. But the Maphrian had his origin in the Syrian Orthodox Church in the 7<sup>th</sup> c. and it terminated in 1860/3.

### **The termination of the Maphrianate**

There were in 1811 , three rival Maphrians in Mosul, and in Tur-Abdin: Yaunan, Bisara and Cyril Abd-al-Asis. The last one called himself, “the bishop of the East”. Till 1793 he had the title *bishop of Mosul and Mar Mathai monastery*. In 1852 Baselios Bahnam IV became the Maphrian. Since he acted against the Patriarch, the Patriarch suspended him. He died in 1859. In 1860/63 in a Synod of 17 Jacobite bishops at Deir-as-Safaran, the Jacobite Patriarch Jacob II(+1871) terminated the Maphrianate. This is the short history of the Maphrianate. In the Syrian Orthodox Church he was the second important person after the Patriarch. We have referred to the most important Maphrians only. In general, the relationship between the Patriarch and the Maphrian was rather cordial, but often there were clashes. When the Maphrian was powerful and the Patriarch, weak, he used to ignore the Patriarch. The Christians in the Maphrianate were terribly affected by the Mongolians and the Turkish invasion. Their number decreased considerably. Their influence became nominal.

### **The Orthodox writings**

Some of the Orthodox writers in Kerala considered previously that the Jacobite Maphrian and the Catholicos–Patriarch were one and the same. But the writings of the learned Prof. V. C. Samuel and some of the recent publications have started to correct this mistaken idea.



## 6

# The Malankara Church

It is the living tradition of the Thomas Christians in India that it was St. Thomas the Apostle who founded the Malankara Church. Just like the other Apostles, St. Thomas handed over the Apostolic tradition through the imposition of hands, introduced the liturgy, and formed the ecclesial community. In the absence of clearly written contemporary documents, it is difficult to say definitely the nature of the people at that time, their language, their traditions and liturgy. Still, one thing is certain: the Malankara Church was the one, holy, catholic and Apostolic Church. This Church had contact with the churches of the neighboring places. In fact, they had more contact with the Church in Persia. It is not true to think that this Church was not known to others and that it was an isolated community. St. John Chrysostom says, “He who is ruling in the Roman See knows that he that is in the distant India is his member”. That means this Church was known to others.

The Christian liturgies developed in the West in Greek and in the East in Syriac. Here in India also it is possible that the liturgy was in Syriac. It is the common understanding that the local language in those days was not Malayalam. In the same way it was an accepted fact that there was a Semitic influence in the population which became Christian. There is no indication in the early centuries that the Malankara Church was under the Persian or Antiochene or any other Church. That is to say, the Malankara Church was like the Roman, Antiochene and Persian Churches.

From the 7th century onwards, there are references about the Malankara Church in the Persian documents. But it is doubtful whether it could be interpreted as a hierarchical subordination. In fact, in the synods of the Persians and the Romans, there is no reference about the Malankara Church. There is no indication that the representatives of the Malankara Church took part in them. The Church here neither received nor rejected their decisions. It is still to be proved that the Malankara Church from the very beginning was part of the Antiochene or any other Church, no native became bishop, or the original Indian liturgy was in Tamil. One can make such assertions, but they have to be proved through historical documents. Since no clear evidence is shown so far, such views remain as opinions.

## **Middle ages**

There are some who hold that the eighth and the ninth centuries were the golden period in Kerala. There were study centers for various peoples at Kodungalloor. In those days there was a great migration from Persia. It could be assumed that this was the background of the close contact and ties with the churches in Persia. During the eleventh century there were great changes in the social and cultural fields in South India, because of the continuous war between the Kulasekharas and the Cholas. People turned their attention to military training. They neglected other branches of knowledge. The Brahmins made the caste system an established fact. The Chera Kingdom crumbled and there arose several local kings and feudal Lords. The Jaina and Buddhist religions disappeared from Kerala. Christians had great loss of property and personnel. Christians migrated in large numbers from centers like Nilackal, abandoning everything. The Archdeacon became a military leader also. It is because of the divine mercy alone that the Christian

community here continued to survive in spite of so many upheavals. It is because of the divine protection that this Church continued to exist, preserving the Apostolic tradition, when several very ancient Christian centers in West Asia and North Africa disappeared from the earth and when the Malankara Church did not have very close contact with other Christian centers.

From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards there were West Asian bishops in Kerala. In 1301 there was a Persian bishop named Mar Jacob at Kodungalloor. His title was *Metropolitan of the See of Mar Thoma Sleeha and the Church of the Christians of all India*. The question remains yet to be answered, why in those days the local people did not become bishops. Was it because of the presence of the Persian bishops? Nobody has proved so far that there was a continuous flow of bishops in Kerala from Persia and that all the bishops in Kerala were from Persia, and that none of the natives became bishops. Even in the presence of the Persian bishops, the real leader of the community was the Archdeacon. It is not clear whether it is an indication that the people in Kerala in those days had a different view regarding the Episcopacy. Any way, the system existing here was different from the system elsewhere. The people, the priests and the lay people and the leader of the community had definite role in ecclesiastical matters. It is doubtful whether the bishop had such a great influence in the churches. It is possible that the West Asian bishops, not knowing the language, might have remained as spiritual leaders. He who looked after the temporalities and the public affairs of the churches was the local leader, the Archdeacon. Each parish had parish assembly and the Church as a whole had Church Assembly. Important matters regarding the Church were decided by the representatives of the churches. But they never made an alteration in matters of faith. They handed over the apostolic tradition without any change to the posterity.

It is not possible to say even in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the Persian relationship was very intimate and that the Church was part of the Persian Church. We can speak of a Persian period in this Church. Since the Persian Church itself preserved the Orthodox faith, the Malankara Church also did not deviate from the true faith because of their influence and activity here. They did not dare to make this Church under their Church or make it part of their Church. Hence there was no difficulty for the Malankara Church to be in contact with them. Did these foreign bishops from West Asia ordain none of the natives to episcopacy or did the family of the Archdeacon keep away from becoming bishops? These are questions which could be studied seriously. One thing is certain. The Archdeacons were from the Pakalomattom family and this family tradition continues up to Mar Thoma VI for the Puthenkur community. But when we think today of that period, it cannot be said that it is an ecclesiastical perfection that there was no bishop from an Apostolic Church and that the leadership came from other churches. It is equally true that we cannot judge those days on the basis of today's standards. The people of those days perhaps had more liking than today to the bishops from Persia. The regional and nationalistic feeling of today might not have been widespread in those days. There is no indication to show that there was some kind of antipathy towards the Persian bishops as they had to the foreigners who came here in later periods.

### **Latin contact and its effects(1498-1653)**

The Malankara Church had several positive and negative effects because of its contacts with the Latin missionaries who came here from Western Europe. Those missionaries saw unity in uniformity in

accordance with the ecclesiologies and mentality of the Westerners in those days. Everything which was not Latin was heresy and schism for some of them. The Western policy was to keep the liturgical diversity of the Oriental Churches to some extent and make it in all other things like the Latin Church and make it part of the Latin Church. Latin missionaries had the intention to be the Lords of the Malankara Church, to get the authority over this Church and as far as possible merge it in the Latin Church. To achieve this goal, they made use of several means: they propagated that this Church was Nestorian; they controlled the coming of the Persian bishops; they convened a synod in this apostolic Church, over which they had no authority and there they enacted laws for it. They behaved as if it were their own church. They tried to make this one holy catholic and apostolic Malankara Church to be part of the Latin (Roman) Church. From 1599 till 1653 all the Thomas Christians were under the Latin bishops.

One cannot forget the positive elements which the Malankara Church received from the missionaries. We must remember with gratitude the good contributions of the Portuguese merchants. However it is not worthwhile to ask what would have been the situation of the Church if the missionaries had not come here.

### **The breaking of relationship**

It was the whole Malankara community which decided to break away its relationship with the Western missionaries. All the people, except a few people in some parishes, were against the Portuguese hegemony. In 1653 with the Coonan Cross Oath, the Malankara Church decided to break all ties with the Portuguese Jesuit missionaries. From 1500-1653(153 years) the Western missionaries effected several changes here. Several of them have become part of

the ecclesial life. There emerged a mental background to accept several new ways of thinking, customs and practices. Many such things were still in practice among the Puthenkur community even in 1836. Among the Pazhayakur community they are still widespread in several quarters. Many in those days could think that any foreign bishop except the Jesuits were acceptable to the Malankara people.

## **Split in the Church**

The Malankara Church which broke away its ties with the Western Jesuit missionaries in 1653 was split into two factions: one group which stood with the local leader, the Archdeacon; the other group which went back to the missionaries. Thus the one united Malankara Church became two parts. The main reason of the split was the activities of the Western missionaries. The part played by the natives also cannot be ignored. This painful split was one of the results of the contact of the Malankara Church with the Western missionaries. Even today it remains as a bleeding wound in the history of the Church. This division constantly pains all those who love the Church of Christ. There must be a remedy for it. The Western missionaries have their own version and the Malankara Church has its own version. However, the division in the Church is causing pain to all concerned. The Western missionaries tried for uniformity, subjugation, and merging, introducing uniform theology and destroying the Syriac heritage. They simply ignored the Archdeacon who is the head of the community, nor did they appoint a native as bishop. They were insistent on keeping the Church under their supremacy. They could subjugate this Church for about 300 years because it was the colonial period. But within these 300 years they could not merge it in the Latin Church. From 1653 till 1923 the Westerners did not permit to reestablish the native

hierarchy of the Catholic Thomas Christians. When the Syro- Malabar hierarchy was reestablished for the Pazhayakuttukar in 1923, it was restricted between the rivers Pampa and Bharatha puzha. Many people in this church were by this time subjected to blind latinization as a result of the 300 years of Latin rule. The chief reason for today's liturgical quarrel in the Syro-Malabar Church is the rule of the Latin church over it for 300 years.

With the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries in the 15/16<sup>th</sup> century, the Malankara Church could establish close contact with the Roman Catholic Church and to strengthen the canonical communion. It is definitely a positive result . But the missionaries made use of it for subjugation and over-lordship. They destroyed the autonomy of the Church. With the Oath the Church did not cease its contact with the Roman Church; nor did it fall into schism or heresy.

### **Archdeacon and Excommunication**

Those who accepted the leadership of the Archdeacon Thomas, elected him bishop on the basis of a fabricated document of a certain priest, Ittithomman Cathanar. This spurious document speaks of the permission given by the Pope to ordain a bishop by twelve priests. Accordingly 12 priests imposed their hands on the Archdeacon and called him bishop and gave him the Episcopal *insignia*.

When Rome knew about the Coonan Cross Oath(1653) it sent two delegations to know exactly the events and the situation and to reestablish peace in the Church. The first delegation was that of a Carmelite priest named Maria Sebastiani. He interviewed a lot of people and the report is still kept in Rome. The report reveals the

following: the Malankara Church would never accept the bishop Garcia and the Jesuit priests. It would receive anybody coming from any other religious group with the order of the Pope. Sebastiani made it clear that the letter which Ittithomman Cathanar presented was a fabricated one and the ordination of the Archdeacon by twelve priests was invalid. He insisted that the Archdeacon Thomas should lay down the Episcopal *insignia*. Then only there will be any discussion and negotiation with him. Those who sided with the Archdeacon requested Sebastiani to rectify his ordination and confirm him as their bishop and that he must be recognized as their bishop.

Sebastiani did not take any decision, but went to Rome and submitted his report. In the meantime the second delegation of Hyacinth also came and prepared his report. Sebastiani returned as a bishop and several people joined him. But since the Dutch captured the Cochin fort from the Portuguese, Sebastiani had to leave the country immediately. He did not regularize the ordination of the Archdeacon and entrust the care of the Church to him. On the contrary, he ordained Chandy Cathanar , a member of the same family of the Archdeacon and one of his counselors. He ordained Chandy Cathanar on the express promise that he would not ordain a successor. Before he left for Europe, Sebastiani excommunicated the Archdeacon .Hyacinth also repeated it. Then many people left Thomas Archdeacon and joined Chandy Metran. Out of the 110 churches in Malankara , 64 parishes fully and 20 partially accepted Chandy Metran. 26 Parishes accepted fully the Archdeacon Thomas(Mar Thoma) and 20 parishes partially recognized him as the leader. Thus the community was divided into two groups.



Even though there was split in the community, there was no actual distancing or alienation of the two sections one from the other. It was possible in those days to make some adjustment and rectify the ordination of Mar Thoma. Instead, the missionaries wanted to maintain the split. So they ordained Chandy from the same family and same parish of Mar Thoma as bishop. There would not have been a split if they had ordained Thomas Archdeacon instead of Chandy as the bishop of the Thomas Christians. The subsequent activities of the missionaries widened the split. Both Sebastiani, the Carmelite and the Jesuit Fathers were determined on merging this Church into the Latin Church and making it part of that Church. The division here in India did not at all pain them and affect them. They thought that at least some people would remain with them.

### **The Malankara Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch(1665-1808)**

Mar Thoma with his followers wrote to several ecclesiastical leaders requesting them to rectify his Episcopal ordination. But only a certain Gregorios, the Jacobite bishop of Jerusalem, did respond. He came here in 1665. From Mar Thoma I to Mar Thoma VI (150 years) twice or thrice one or the other Jacobite bishop came from West Asia. But they did not introduce any radical change in the doctrinal matters in the Puthenkur Church. There are two opinions regarding the rectification of the ordination: 1. that the West Asian bishops rectified the Episcopal Ordination of Mar Thoma I and of his successors. 2. that it was not done. But a certain Gregorios who came in 1751, reordained Mar Thoma VI in 1770. Then his name was changed to Dionysius according to the custom of the West Asian Jacobite Church. This event is recorded in contemporary documents.

Some see in this re-ordination an indication that the Episcopal ordination of Mar Thoma I to Mar Thoma VI was not valid.

Mar Gregorios who came here in 1665 did not introduce any of the Antiochene tradition here in this Church. After him it was in 1685 that two Jacobite bishops came from West Asia. After that for 50 years nobody came. In 1747-51 four bishops came. It was they who slowly began to introduce the Antiochene liturgy and traditions among the Puthenkuttukar. Until that time in most of the churches, the Chaldean liturgy in the version of Bishop Roz s.j. and the East Syrian language was in use. Several churches were used in common by both the factions by turn. There was no alienation of the faithful of both the groups. But there is no doubt that the growth was in two directions. The God-fearing faithful on both sides earnestly desired the reunion of both the groups as they were for 17 centuries. One can adduce ample proof for this from history.

It was by chance that the Malankara Church entered into contact with the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. They contacted only when there was the need for the rectification of Episcopal ordination. The Malankara faithful did not want to abandon the centuries old East Syrian liturgy. They were forced to receive the Antiochene liturgical traditions and abandon the East Syrian traditions which their forefathers used for 17 centuries. However, they did not abandon their basic faith. The change was just in the case of the liturgy and for that also it took centuries. Nor did they alter the administrative system of the Church. People happened to be in two camps. This is how the faithful who continued the use of the ancient liturgical traditions were called the Pazhayakuttukar and those who adopted the new Antiochene liturgical traditions came to be known as the

Puthenkuttukar. Documents testify that Mar Dionysius, who was reordained, tried for the reunion and he succeeded partially in his attempts. But there are diverse version about it also. However, it is not wrong to assume that from Mar Thoma I , there was the desire in many of both the factions to get united . That is to say, the Malankara Church fostered the ecumenical thinking. There may be periods of ups and downs in it. But the Western missionaries who subjugated one section of the Church was totally against such a reunion. It can amply be proved from the *Varthamanapusthakam* of Paremmakkal Thoma Cathanar. This travelogue explains clearly the earnest desire of both the groups for the reunion. The aim of the missionaries was to keep the Pazhayakuttukar aloof from the other group as far as possible, to tarnish them as schismatics, and to control the church. In this they have succeeded to a great extent.

### **The Thozhiyur Church (1772)**

The Antiochene bishop Mar Gregorios ordained Kattumangatt Remban in 1772 under the name Mar Coorillos. The activity of this Antiochene Jacobite bishop created a small group and split in the church. There exists near Trichur a small community named Thozhiyur church. At present they have the ordination from the Mar Thoma Church, but their liturgical books are Antiochene and not the deformed text of the Marthomites. Their ecclesiastical contacts are with the Anglicans. It is the Mar Thoma Church which is responsible for the present existence of this church as a community and cast. They do not try to make better contacts with the other communities in Kerala. In the present set up they are not capable of it.

## **The Malankara church and the Protestant Missionaries (1808-1836)**

From 1808 the Malankara Puthenkur community began to have contact with the Anglican Protestant missionaries. From 1816 they began to preach in the parishes and teach in the newly established Seminary. These activities created a new situation in the Church and it led to a new split in the Church.

The West Asian Syrian Orthodox bishops who came here in 1751 began to introduce the Antiochene liturgies and traditions. They succeeded to some extent in their attempts. Not only that, by ordaining Kattumangatt Remban bishop, they sowed the seed for a division in the Church. Because of the influence of Mar Thoma VI with the civil authorities, Kattumangatt Remban had to leave the Cochin territories. He therefore settled down in the neighboring state in a place called Thozhiyur. The Remban did not have much influence in the community. But there arose a few who supported him. They remained within the Church and tried to spread opposing tendencies within the church. It is in this context that we must consider the period after Mar Thoma VI. It seems that we should understand the questioning of the validity of the Episcopal ordination of Mar Thoma VII, Mar Thoma VIII and Mar Thoma IX by some in this background under the Antiochene influence. They wanted to put an end to the leadership of the Pakalomattom family, the family of the Archdeacons. Any how, there arose people with diverse mentality in the community.

The newly arrived Anglican missionaries too influenced the separatists. They succeeded in getting ordained three successive bishops by the imposition of hands by the Thozhiyur bishops. All the

three took the name Dionysius. Among whom Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius and Punnathra Mar Dionysius permitted the Anglican missionaries to work in their church without any hindrance. The church in its turn had several advantages from the missionaries. They began to teach that there were several bad customs in the Puthenkur church and they had to be removed. Their plan was to convert the church to be a Protestant church and make it part of the Anglican Church. Some among the missionaries were over enthusiastic. In the first Mavelikkara synod in 1818, they even presented their views of the reformation. They made good use of the freedom they received to teach in the seminary and in the parishes. As a result several of the priests and faithful became Protestant sympathizers.

There were also some who questioned the validity of the ordination from the Thozhiyur bishops. They argued that it was uncanonical to be ordained by one bishop alone. Those who came from West Asia added fuel to it and encouraged factionalism. That is to say, even at a time when the Protestant missionaries were working in the Puthenkur church(1816-36), there arose divisive mentality and factionalism in the Church. It is because of this that some priests received re-ordination in 1826 from a certain Jacobite bishop from West Asia. Cheppatt Mar Dionysius (1825-55) did not support the missionaries whole heartedly. Those who came under the missionary influence opposed him. He in his turn deposed those who were re-ordained and prohibited them to teach any more in the Seminary. But the missionaries were acting as if they were the masters and leaders of this church. These Anglican missionaries acted in the church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, just like the Portuguese missionaries did in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Both ended in the split in the church. Among the 150 unmarried Puthenkur priests , 40 married under the influence of the

Protestant missionaries. They got 400 Rupees each as a gift from the missionaries.

Abraham Malpan, one among such priests, wrote against Mar Dionysius to Colonel Fraser in Madras regarding the evil practices in the Church. This document shows the traditions prevalent in the church in those days: The Crismation is done only in a later stage. The anointing of the sick is conducted by making use of the oil. At the time of the eight days of fast(*Ettunomb*), there is the recital of the Rosary. The relics of the saints are venerated at the altar. They keep the Ash Wednesday.- These and similar practices were the remnants of the Latin rule(1599-1653). Some others were the existing practices of the Malankara church before the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries. According to the reform thinking of Malpan, these were against Bible and the canons of the church. According to him they were aberrations in the Jacobite Syrian teaching. But in fact several of such practices were Orthodox practices, but truly not agreeing with the Anglican Protestant thinking of the missionaries.

During this period, there were people with diverse mentality among the Puthenkur community. Among the Puthenkur community there were various types of people who had varying degree of allegiance to Protestantism, because of their contact with them. There arose slowly a liking for the Antiochene Jacobite leadership. It developed when Cheppatt Mar Dionysius and others tried to keep a distance from the Protestants . They moved away from the Protestants and went closer to the Antiochene Jacobite church. The second Mavelikkara Synod (1836) was decisive regarding the Malankara Puthenkur community. In order to oppose the Protestant tendencies in the church, they sided with the Jacobite Patriarch and leaned towards

him. They decided in the above mentioned Synod that they would follow the Antiochene Syrian Orthodox-Jacobite teachings and traditions and would not accept anything else. According to some it is a very shameful declaration regarding the autonomous Malankara Apostolic Church. It was the pro-Antiochene group in the Malankara Church which pushed the Malankara Church to such a decision. The painful truth is that it is the Malankara Church, which; made the Antiochene Jacobites their overlords, where they had no authority what so ever in this church. In later periods making use of this opportunity, the Antiochene leadership tried by all means to split the community and establish their authority here. The subsequent history of this church is the history of such activities. It was indeed a historical mistake, because the Malankara church was an Apostolic autonomous church like the Antiochene church. It was, according to some a great mistake to have made this Church, part of the Antiochene Jacobite church, which had separated from the main body of Christendom in 451 at Chalcedon. It had in fact long standing consequences. It pushed this church into several divisions. The factionalism in the community was one of the chief reasons for the foreign interventions. One of the consequences of the Protestant contact was the acceptance of the unnecessary Antiochene supremacy and making this church part of the Jacobite Church.

### **The Cochin Award and the Trusty System**

The Trusty System in the Malankara Puthenkur community is not part of its ancient tradition, as some think and propagate. When the community entered into contact with the Protestants, they acquired some properties in common. When they got separated in 1836, three Europeans were appointed to make the partition of the properties. It

is known as the *Cochin Panchayath Kodathy*. They declared their award in 1840. It is known as the *Cochin Award*. Both the Malankara Puthenkur Church and the Protestants accepted it. Accordingly the Syrians got the Seminary, Vattippanam, the landed property at Kadamattom and some other properties. The missionaries got the landed property at Munro Thuruth, 20,000 Rupees which was given to the Seminary, the English School at Kottayam. It was decided in the award that the above mentioned temporalities of the Puthenkuttukar should be administered by the Metropolitan, a Priest Trusty and a lay Trusty elected by the assembly of the people. It is how the *Trusty System* emerged in the Church.

With the partition at Mavelikkara(1836) many Syrians of the Puthenkur community who had imbibed the Protestant ideas became Anglicans. But several others continued in the Church. They tried to get hold of the leadership of the Church and turn it entirely to Protestantism. For this they too turned to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch .Many made use of this method for their self interests and opened the door for the Antiochene interference in this Church. This is what the history of Mathews Mar Athanasios teaches us.

### **Mathews Mar Athanasios and the Antiochene connection (1843-1876)**

Many who came under the Protestant influence were not happy with the decision of the Mavelikkara Synod(1836). Mathews Mar Athanasios represents this group. But at the same time there was a powerful group which opposed very strongly the Protestant reformation. From 1843 till 1889 we see the history of this conflict and confrontation of the two factions of the Malankara Church. This



conflict also helped for the strengthening of the Antiochene hegemony over the Puthenkur community. Its culmination was the *Synod of Mulanthuruthy* (1876) and the excommunication of Mathews Mar Athanasios. The Malankara Church did not have much contact and relationship with the Antiochene ecclesiastical leadership till 1843. The Antiochenes also did demand any allegiance. When Cheppatt Mar Dionysius was the Malankara Metropolitan, Mathews went to West Asia and was ordained bishop by the Patriarch. He came back with the Staticon of the Jacobite Patriarch. In order to get his position confirmed, he adduced unhistorical reasons and pushed the Malankara Puthenkur Church to the side of the Patriarch. In his conflict with the ruling bishop Mar Dionysius IV, he succeeded to convince the civil authorities that for the validity of the Episcopal ordination of the Malankara bishops, the Staticon of the Jacobite Patriarch is needed. Those who opposed Mathews Mar Athanasios also took refuge in the Patriarch. Cheppatt Mar Dionysius could convince the Patriarch that Mar Athanasios was a Protestant sympathizer. Mar Dionysius declared to the Patriarch that he himself and those with him were the real devotees of Antioch. He requested the Patriarch to intervene and solve the problem. At his request, the Patriarch sent a certain Kurillos from West Asia. Mar Kurillos tried to take away the authority from Mar Dionysius and rule the Church. The subsequent civil litigation resulted in the defeat of that bishop. By 1853 the local civil authority recognized Mar Athanasios as the legitimate head of the Puthenkur community. It is Cheppatt Mar Dionysius and Mathews Mar Athanasios who paved the way for the unnecessary interference of the Patriarch over the Puthenkur community. The policy of the Patriarch was to create problems, intervene in the problems and establish his authority. But the local leaders could not recognize that it was against the history and tradition of the Malankara Church, its

autonomy and individuality. The quarrelling factions turned to the Patriarch for help, for momentary success and for the fall of his opponent. Mar Kurillos who was here till 1874 tried his level best to bring about the Antiochianization of the Malankara Puthenkur Church. He spread the idea that for the validity of the Episcopal ordination, the Staticon of the Patriarch was essential.

### **The Synod of Mulanthuruthy(1876)**

The Dionysius-Athanasios conflict reveals how the Malankara Church placed itself under the domination of the Antiochene Jacobite Church. The activities of Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius and his conflict with Mar Athanasios is its continuation. At that time there were two distinct groups, having diverse mentality during the period 1853-89 in the Malankara Church. With the Synod of Mulanthuruthy, the group of Mar Dionysius, which supported the actions of the Patriarch, got the upper hand. But that group could not take the control of the Church until 1889. The *Royal Court Judgment (1889)* expelled the Reformed Jacobites from the Church and the Malankara Puthenkur Church moved closer to the Antiochene side. This group propagated the idea that from the very ancient times the Malankara Church was part of the Antiochene Church and that it was under the Jacobite Patriarch. During this period the Antiochene liturgical traditions and the West Syriac script were widely propagated. They expelled the Reformed Jacobite from their communion and paved the way for another split. They made everything possible to make this church under the Antiochene Jacobite Patriarch. The group of Dionysius falsified the manuscript of the Hudaya canon in order to defeat the Reformed Jacobites in the civil litigation. They recognized an authority for the Patriarch which he never had previously. It was during this period

that the Antiochenes injected an anti-Roman Catholic attitude in the minds of the Malankara people.

### **The Malankara Association and the Managing Committee**

The activities at the Mulanthuruthy Synod did not help to strengthen the position of the Malankara Metropolitan. Patriarch Peter III was acting as if he were the legitimate head of this church. He divided the *Malankara Edavaka* into seven dioceses and appointed six bishops. All the candidates had to give written documents declaring the obedience to the Patriarch. He made use of the internal faction here in order to strengthen his position, increase his influence and divide the church. He did not do anything to unite the two factions nor to strengthen the position of the Malankara Metropolitan. He pushed the Malankara Church into another civil litigation, lasting for ten years(1879-89). It ended in the Royal Court Judgment.

All these events enabled them to forget the real history of the Malankara Church. The Patriarch succeeded in forming a group with total submission and obedience and allegiance to him. But at the same time, there was a group within the group which thought that the autonomy and individuality of the church should not be submitted to anybody.

The Patriarch formed a *Syrian Christian Association*, of which he himself was the Patron and the Malankara Metropolitan President. It had also the lay participation. It is a new creation of the Patriarch. He formed also a *Managing Committee* of eight priests and sixteen lay people, elected from the Association. Both these exist even today in the Puthenkur Malankara Church and is governed by these organs.

There are some who think that the intention of the formation of these two was to curtail the authority of the Malankara Metropolitan. But some think that these were formed to help the Metropolitan in the administration and in the civil litigation with the Reformed Jacobites.

Through this Synod the Malankara people falsely recognized the unhistorical fact that the Malankara Church from ancient times recognized the authority of the Antiochene Jacobite Patriarch. It was indeed a great mistake. It declared that the Malankara Church recognized the supremacy of the Patriarch and that it professed the Jacobite faith. All these were not in accordance with the Malankara tradition and history.

### **The Royal Court Judgment(1889)**

There were certain effects of the civil litigation with the Reformed Jacobite in the church. The group of Mar Dionysius argued that they were the genuine Jacobites. The civil litigation confirmed the authority of the Jacobite Patriarch which he did not have before. And that those whom the Patriarch recognized alone have nay authority in the church. Those who did not recognize it had to leave the church. Mar Dionysius took this stand in order to strengthen his position against the other group. But he Patriarch had the express intention of strengthening his spiritual and temporal authority here. But the civil court judgment did not confirm or declare it. During this period some of the Malankara people maintained the idea of getting established the Maphrianate here in Malankara, which was suppressed in 1860/3. Some made the request for its realization. But the Patriarch was totally opposed to it. At that time the Malankara people did not

have the clear distinction between the Maphrianate and the Catholicate. In short, the Patriarch was not prepared to do anything to strengthen the position of the Metropolitan or to maintain the autonomy of the Church. Through the Royal Court Judgment the Jacobites closed the door of unity against the Marthomites for ever. So they went in their won way.

## The Establishment of the Catholicate in India

### Background

Till 1876 there was only one diocese (*Malankara Edavaka*) for the whole Puthenkur community. It was Peter III, the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch who divided the *Malankara Edavaka* into seven dioceses under the leadership of the Malankara Metropolitan Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius at the Synod of Mulanthuruthy. Before the appointment of the bishops for these dioceses, the Patriarch asked for a written document, accepting the submission to his authority. In the Synod, the Patriarch formed the *Malankara Syrian Christian Association* of 133 members, consisting of priests and laity, and the *Managing Committee* of 24 members. Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius was officially appointed by the Patriarch as the *Malankara Metropolitan*. The temporalities of the Church came under a *Trust* consisting of the Malankara Metropolitan, a priest Trusty and a lay Trusty. This arrangement was already done earlier. The Patriarch recognized it and ratified it. In 1877 the Patriarch went back to West Asia.

Immediately those who supported the Jacobite Patriarch (the Jacobites) and those who supported Mathews Mar Athanasios (the Reformed Jacobites) started the civil litigation over the temporalities of the Church. Both sides argued that their Metropolitan was the legitimate Malankara Metropolitan and therefore he had the right to govern the Church and its temporalities. The final Royal Court of appeal favored Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius. The successor of Mathews

Mar Athanasios, Thomas Mar Athanasios was defeated in the litigation . they lost everything except the Maramon Church. These events helped the Malankara Church to go closer to the Antiochene Jacobite Church.

### **Patriarch Mar Abdalla( +1915)**

Mar Abdalla as a bishop with the name Gregorios was in India with Patriarch Peter III for he Synod of Mulanthuruthy in 1876 and was in charge of the financial affairs. When Peter III died in 1895, Gregorios was elected as his successor. But the Turkish Government did not give him the *Firman*. Therefore he could not be installed as Patriarch. Then the Jacobite bishops elected another person and he got the Turkish recognition. He took the name Abd-al-Msiha and was enthroned . Mar Gregorios in his turn joined the Catholic Church in 1896 and was the Catholic bishop of Homs for 10 years. In the meantime some bishops succeeded in influencing the Turkish Government for the acceptance of Mar Gregorios and in 1906 the Sultan withdrew the *Firman* given to Mar Abd al Msiha and gave it to Mar Gregorios, who resigned his post as the Catholic bishop of Homs in 1906 and became the Jacobite Patriarch. He assumed the name Abdalla. Abd al Msiha went to the Tur Abdin regions and was recognized by the people there and in some other places as the Patriarch.

### **Vattasseril Mar Dionysius(+1934)**

During his stay in India, Patriarch Peter III ordained six bishops and all except one died before the death of the Malankara Metropolitan Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius. Therefore Mar Dionysius sent two of his

priests to the Patriarch Abdalla, Vattasseril Geevarghese Malpan and Kochuparambil Paulose Malpan to be ordained bishops. In 1908 both were ordained bishops under the names Geevarghese Mar Dionysius and Paulose Mar Kurillos. They returned to India with a certain West Asian bishop Sliba Mar Ostathios. In 1909 Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius died and Vattasseril Mar Dionysius became the Malankara Metropolitan. The co-Trusties at that time were Konatt Mathan Malpan and C.J.Kurian Kunnumpurath.

Vattasseril Mar Dionysius was a man of great heart and unparalleled patience. Mar Ivanios of Bethany says, “God has given him a very strong heart to bear anything and eye and ear which will not be closed or perturbed at, when he sees or hears anything. He was of a very serious nature, but he was a very kind hearted man. He had a special ability to speak logically and reasonably and to accommodate his speech to the capacity of the audience and to speak with devotion and unction. He had the unique intellectual development, knowledge of the realities, strength of character, and balance of behavior at all times, and an ability to act in accordance with the time.”

### **Mar Abdalla in Kerala**

Before his arrival in Kerala, Mar Abdalla the Patriarch went to England and met the queen. He informed the Malankara Metropolitan of the date of his arrival in Bombay. Metropolitan Mar Dionysius, Konatt Malpan, Thamarapallil Abraham Cathanar, E. M. Philip, K.C.Mamman Mappila and Fr. P. T. Geevarghese were in the delegation to receive him in Bombay.



Patriarch Mar Abdalla had the intention of securing both the temporal and spiritual authorities over the Malankara Church and to defeat all those who opposed such a move. It seems that some of the Malankara people themselves, who were not in good terms with the Malankara Metropolitan, instigated the Patriarch for such a move. From Bombay Fr. P. T. Geevarghese acted as the secretary to the Patriarch. On a certain occasion the Patriarch asked him: "In case we have to disagree with Dionysius on any subject, will you be with me or with Dionysius?" The answer was: "Abun Mar Dionysius is my Master. I will not be with him in case he acts against Truth. If not, I will be with him only."

Many in the Malankara delegation who went to Bombay were anxious to see the Catholicate established in India. At Ootty there was some talk among them regarding it. But Mar Dionysius did not allow them to proceed, as it could be misunderstood and misrepresented. Abdalla arrived at Kunnamkulam Arthatt church and from there on 19<sup>th</sup> October he arrived at Kottayam Pazhaya Seminary, where we were accorded a very grand reception. One who participated in it says: "there was no such a grand reception accorded to any one like this at Kottayam before this. Fr. P. T. Geevarghese held the crosier in front of the horse cart of the Patriarch. Normally it was the prerogative of Konatt Malpan, being the Priest Trusty and second after Mar Dionysius in the administration of the temporalities. It did not please some of the Northern area". The Patriarch then went to Trivandrum and met the local King. He was given a royal reception there and everywhere he went. On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1909 he came back to Kottayam Pazhaya Seminary.

In a meeting at Pazhaya seminary in 1909, the Patriarch expressed his desire of securing all authorities in the Church, but he could not convince all the participants. Consequently he visited some parishes and received written documents as he wished. He then ordained Paulose Mar Athanasios and Geevarghese Mar Severios bishops after they gave such a document of submission. Paulose Mar Kurillos also gave the document of submission. Vattasseril Mar Dionysius was not prepared for submitting the temporalities to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. In 1910 the Patriarch published a circular: “After our arrival here, some of our children are dealing with us with pride and arrogance. Especially they speak about, that we have no temporal authority . Who can make the distinction between the temporal and spiritual authority? The Patriarchs, Maphrians and Metropolitans who came from the See of Antioch to this land has suffered a lot, spent money and have even shed their blood for the maintenance of this Church. We have no right to abandon our authority or hand it over to another one. How can a superior rule without the temporal authority?”

The two co-Trusties of Mar Dionysius, Konatt Malpan and C. J. Kurian left the Metropolitan and joined the Patriarch’s side. With their support , the Patriarch tried to take possession of the churches and the ecclesiastical institutions. Their first attempt was to take possession of the Pazhaya Seminary at Kottayam. On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1911, Mar Abdalla, bishops Ostathios, Kurillos, Athanasios, Yovakim Remban, Augen Remban two other West Asian Rembans and Konatt Malpan came to the Pazhaya Seminary and occupied all the rooms except those of Vattasseril Metropolitan and of some students. Here starts the so called “Seminary Samrikkes”. In order to win, the Patriarch thought that he should excommunicate Mar Dionysius.

## **Excommunication**

Both the groups, those of the Patriarch and those of the Malankara Metropolitan, were staying in the same Seminary in separate rooms with their leaders. On the 10<sup>th</sup> June 1911, the Patriarch sent a registered letter to Mar Dionysius, who was living in his neighboring room, excommunicating him from the church. There was no proper canonical procedure conducted in this excommunication. The view of those who witnessed the event was that, “it was openly contrary to Truth, Justice and the holy Canons”. Objectively speaking, the only reason for the excommunication was that Mar Dionysius did not submit the temporalities of the Church to the Patriarch. In fact, it is no valid reason for excommunicating the Malankara Metropolitan. The relevant section of the excommunication letter is as follows:

From

Patriarch Ignatius Abdalla II of Antioch and of all the East.

To Dionysius.

“I have come to know personally all your misdeeds, strife, evil designs, faithlessness and audacity.” (Then he gives 10 reasons). “In addition to these, since your hands are shaking, you cannot celebrate the holy Eucharist alone holding the chalice and pattern. Therefore, you are not worthy to continue as a Metropolitan in the Church of God. I was patiently observing the past two years. Hence I reject, excommunicate and put you off from the noble episcopacy. From the moment you receive this message, you are not a bishop or priest and you are not permitted and authorized to perform any Episcopal or Presbyterial act. You are not a priest or a bishop. I reject

you from among the priests and bishops. Know that what I have given you, I have taken back.”

1911 *Edavom* 26

### **From the Pazhaya Seminary.**

When Mar Dionysius read it, he remained calm and serene as usual. “Bawa made use of his last weapon”, he told Fr. P. T. Geevarghese. The Patriarch wanted to publish the excommunication during the holy Eucharist on the following day (1911 June 11). Since there were many supporters of Mar Dionysius also in the chapel, for fear of any riot, it was not publicly read in the church during the holy Mass, nor was it read in the churches.

In the meantime Paulose Mar Kurillos was appointed the Malankara Metropolitan. The two co-Trustees C.J. Kurian and Konatt Malpan changed sides and joined the new Malankara Metropolitan. In 1911 October 17, Mar Abdalla went back to West Asia and died in 1915 at Jerusalem. His visit paved the way for a very longstanding split and strife in the Malankara Puthenkur community.

### **Mar Abd al Msiha( + 1915)**

When Mar Abdalla showed signs of alienation from Mar Dionysius, Fr.P.T. Geevarghese his faithful disciple and friend contacted Mar Abd al Msiha, the senior Patriarch in Tur Abdin. He thought about the necessary things to be done, in case Mar Dionysius was excommunicated and did accordingly. Mar Ivanios himself speaks of it: “Although Mar Dionysius did not consider seriously that he would be excommunicated, myself and some others thought that it was not an impossibility. We knew already about Patriarch Abd al

Msiha. We thought that the events at the arrival of the Patriarch Abdalla , the reasons for the hatred towards Mar Dionysius and an eventual excommunication should be brought to the attention of Abd al Msiha. If Mar Dionysius is excommunicated, it can cause great tumult in the community, and in this situation Mar Abd al Msiha should help the Malankara Church, the Catholicate should be established here and if possible he should come to India . After a few days the reply came and there was signs of hope in his reply. We sent a telegram to Abd al Msiha, immediately after the excommunication. Soon we got a positive reply: “Blessed are Dionysius and those with him. The excommunication of Abdalla is invalid.”

Fr. P. T. Geevarghese went with the telegram to Mar Dionysius. He was unaware that a telegram was sent from here. After reading it he wept like a little child. Fr. Geevarghese and those around Mar Dionysius met at the M. D. Seminary and discussed the follow up program. In the meantime they got a letter from Mar Abd al Msiha, explaining in detail the activities of Mar Abdalla. By this time Mar Abdalla came to know that some are contacting Mar Abd al Msiha. He tried his level best to prevent his visit .but he could not succeed in his attempts. Fr. P. T. Geevarghese continued to write to Mar Abd al Msiha that he should by all means come to Malankara. The reply was positive and it was sent to a certain Eappen *Upadesi* at Mavelikkara, as directed by Fr. Geevarghese. The *Upadesi* brought it to Kottayam at night. In that letter Abd al Msiha made it clear that he would come here.

Subsequently he came up to Karachi by ship and from there by train to Bombay. Fr. P.T. Geevarghese and N. I. Pothen received him at Bombay railway station and brought him to Kerala. Abd al

Msiha first visited Kunnamkulam Arthatt church on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1912. People came to know of his arrival through the Malayala Manorama of 14<sup>th</sup> June 1912: “We have come to know that Fr. P. T. Geevarghese, the Professor of the M. D. Seminary got a telegram that Mar Abd al Msiha, the senior Patriarch has arrived at Karachi from Basra. Some people have already gone from here to receive him at Bombay.”

Patriarch Abd al Msiha visited some churches. After visiting Mulanthuruthy, he came to Parumala. Mar Dionysius convened the *Managing Committee*. Murimattom Mar Ivanios, who was on the side of Mar Abdalla, joined Mar Dionysius. Abd al Msiha sent a circular from Parumala, indicating that in accordance with the desire of the Malankara Church a Catholicos and some bishops would be installed. Accordingly the Manager of Parumala Seminary, Kallasseril Punnus Remaban was ordained bishop under the name Mar Gregorios.

On 15<sup>th</sup> September 1912 on a Sunday at Niranam church, Abd al Msiha installed Murimattom Mar Ivanios as Catholicos for Malankara under the name Baselios Paulose. And there was a great gathering there. The new Catholicos was felicitated by Puvathur Jacob Cathanar and Fr.P.T. Geevarghese. Then he ordained two more bishops. After a few days the Patriarch sent another circular. Later he sent on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1913 another one from Parumala seminary:

: “By the grace of God, and according to your request, I have installed a Maphrian, i.e., Catholicos under the name Baselios Paulose and ordained three bishops under the names, Geevarghese Mar Gregorios, Joachim Mar Ivanios and Geevarghese Mar Philoxenos”.  
Summary of the Circular

1. That he installed a Maphrian (Catholicos) and ordained three bishops.
2. When the Catholicos dies, the Metropolitan and the bishops have the right to install another in his place.
3. The Managing Committee under the leadership of the Malankara Metropolitan is the authority to decide over it.
4. Everything should be done in the loving relationship with the See of Antioch.

Conclusions drawn from it

1. The terms Maphrian and Catholicos were used as synonyms.
2. There is no mention of the Maphrianate of the Jacobites in Tagrit, nor of the Catholicate of the Chaldeans at Seleucia. There is no mention of it as a reestablishment of the one at Tagrit.
3. The Catholicate must continue as a permanent establishment in the Malankara Church.
4. Keeping the internal autonomy of the Malankara Church, the love relationship with the Antiochene Syrian Church should be maintained.

Mar Abd-al Msiha ordained at Chengannur on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1913 Vakathanam Karuchira Punnus Remban under the name Philoxenus and Kandanad Karottuveetil Joachim Remban as Ivanios. Although Mar Dionysius was not present at the installation of the first Catholicos at Niranam church, he was present together with Mar Gregorios at Chengannur for the above mentioned ordination of bishops. It was after this ordination that Abd al Msiha sent the above mentioned second Circular. He left India on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1913. Fr.P.T. Geevarghese accompanied him till Bombay. Those who sided with

Abdalla were known as the *Bawa Kakshy* or *Kurillose Kakshy* and those with Mar Dionysius as *Metran Kakshy*(*Catholicos Kakshy*). In 1913 there arose the civil litigation known as the *Vattippanakkes* over the temporalities of the Church. Mar Abd al Msiha returned to Dayar as-Safaran and died in 1915 and was buried there.

### **Fr. P. T. Geevarghese (+1953)**

Fr. Geevarghese(later Mar Ivanios) played a vital and leading role in the establishment of the Catholicate in Malankara in 1912. Nobody had the least doubt about it from 1912 till 1930. On the contrary, the representatives of the Malankara Church gladly and thankfully confessed in public forum that the Catholicate was established because of the earnest activities of Mar Ivanios as a priest. One could hear references to it even in 1925, several years after the event, at the valedictory meeting after the Episcopal ordination of Mar Ivanios at Niranam on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1925. In his reply speech Mar Ivanios said: “ You have heard from respectable persons that it is through my activities that Abd al Msiha is invited here and the Catholicate is established here in Malankara. It is not true. It is true that I too tried for it. I had contacted Mar Abd al Msiha. In our correspondence we had requested that the Catholicate with full authority should be established here. And Abd al Msiha fully consented to it. He promised us that he would come here and establish it for us. Nobody should think that it was done out of any force or compulsion. Truth is different. Even before his departure from West Asia, he had decided and promised us that the Catholicate would be established here in Malankara. After the establishment, he decreed that after the death of the first Catholicos, the bishops here should install the successor, and it should be perpetually established here. Nobody has any right or authority to hinder us from it. Abd al Msiha in his talk and in his Circular before his departure made it very clear.



During the time of Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius, and until the arrival of Mar Abdalla, Konatt Malpan made several requests for the establishment of the Catholicate here in Malankara. But when the Patriarch stood against Mar Dionysius, he joined the Patriarch's side. In this situation it was Fr.P.T. Geevarghese who promoted the idea of the establishment of the Catholicate and invited Abd al Msiha to install the Catholicos. Mar Dionysius himself in his Kunnamkulam civil litigation responded as follows:

Question: Who did invite Mar Abd al Msiha to Malankara?

Answer: Because of his own desire and the desire of many that he would be brought.Fr. Geevarghese informed him about it and he consented to come.

The telegram saying that the excommunication of Mar Abdalla was invalid was sent to Fr. P. T. Geevarghese . On the day of the installation it was Fr. Geevarghese who clarified certain difficulties of the Patriarch and gave him courage and strength. It was he who went to Bombay to receive the Patriarch and to send him off to West Asia. After the establishment of the Catholicate, it was he who made a very long speech about the relevance of the Catholicate. It is beyond doubt that through the establishment of the Catholicate the autonomy of the Malankara Church was made secure. In 1928 the third Catholicos was installed by Vattasseril Mar Dionysius and Mar Ivanios. But after his full communion with the Roman Catholic Church in 1930, some of the Orthodox seem to be reluctant in connecting him with the establishment of the Catholicate. In 1980 when they celebrated the *Sapthathy* of the establishment of the Catholicate, the absence of any mention of Mar Ivanios was noted by many. But history cannot but be history.

## **The Malankara –Antiochene Relationship in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

A few events in the Malankara Church in the 20th century paved the way for a closer tie with the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. They are: 1. The Establishment of the Catholicate(1912); 2.The Formation of the new Constitution for the Malankara Orthodox church(1934); 3.Civil Litigations (1913- ); 4.Formation of the Oriental Orthodox Churches’ Forum(1965). The following pages explain briefly these items.

### **1. The Establishment of the Catholicate(1912)**

Even Vattasseril Mar Dionysius, who gave the leadership for the establishment of the Catholicate was not prepared to break totally the Antiochene relationship. When he was a teacher at the Pazhaya Seminary, together with Konatt Malpan he translated more and more Antiochene Church orders from Syriac to Malayalam. In the order issued by Abd al-Msiha, the Patriarch who established the Catholicate, it was decreed that the Catholicate should remain in Malankara “in the fellowship of love with Antioch”. The civil litigations, known as the *Vattippanakkes* did not permit Mar Dionysius to go against it. Even during the litigation with the Patriarch’s party, he tried to make peace with the Patriarch. That is why he went in 1923 to West Asia to meet the Patriarch. After the death of the first Catholicos in 1913, the second one was not installed immediately. It may be because of

this attitude from the part of Mar Dionysius. i.e. it should be done with the support of the Patriarch of Antioch. In 1925 Mar Dionysius got a temporary victory in the civil litigation. It was then that the Second Catholicos was installed at Niranam Church in 1925. It was during this period that some of the Orthodox leaders put forward the idea of a communion with some ancient Apostolic churches. But the direct involvement in the civil litigation prevented Mar Dionysius from taking an active role in the front line in any ecumenical negotiation with any church. There might have been some people who thought that the Antiochene domination should be done away with, then only there can be permanent peace. That would have been the end of factionalism. But Mar Dionysius was not prepared for such a move. The establishment of the Catholicate enabled the Church to maintain its autonomy and individuality. But on the other side it paved the way for further closer ties with the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. It seems that the Malankara leaders in those days had very limited understanding regarding the individuality of the Malankara Apostolic Church. It was difficult for the one who went to West Asia to receive his Episcopal ordination to repudiate the Jacobite Patriarch immediately, even if the latter excommunicated him.

## **2.The New Constitution**

It was the Orthodox Constitution of 1934, which legally brought the Malankara Church under the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. The stand taken by the leaders who formed the Constitution was contrary to the history and tradition of the Malankara Church. This Constitution affected the autonomy, individuality and apostolicity of the Church. The Malankara Church was constitutionally made part of the Antiochene Church and was hindered

from taking decision of its own. The Church was bound to justify the theological stand of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

The various factions of the original Apostolic Malankara Church had to accept the historical and doctrinal backgrounds of the Churches with which they entered into contact and communion. Thus the Catholic section accepted all the doctrinal developments of the Roman Catholic Church. The Marthoma Church which came under the Protestant influence received the Protestant doctrines. The Malankara Orthodox Church received the Syrian Orthodox formulations and traditions. They accepted the anti-Chalcedonian attitude their own.

Through the various civil verdicts, the Constitution of 1934 became legally binding. But there was only a very limited period in their history that they did not have civil litigations among the various factions. Practically and realistically speaking, there were many who did not at all like to be under the leadership of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch.

Today with the present Constitution of 1934, the Malankara Orthodox Church cannot take any decision without the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch or it cannot simply ignore the Patriarch. Even if they are in constant conflict with the Patriarch, they are forced to justify the theological and historical stand of the Patriarch and act as part of the Antiochene Church. In other words, the 1934 Constitution has very much restricted the freedom of activity of the Orthodox Church and it affects also its ecclesial relations.

### 3.Civil Litigations( 1913- )

The factionalism and civil litigations in the Malankara Church were catalysts for changing the course of the Malankara Church history. The Trusty System is the result of the crumbling of the Anglican-Malankara relationship. The Trusty system aims at the administration of the temporalities of the Church as a Trust through three people: the Malankara Metropolitan, a Priest Trusty and a lay Trusty. The Managing Committee and the Malankara Association were the products of the Synod of Mulanthuruthy(1876). In the litigation which ended in the Royal Court of Appeal, the Canons produced in the civil courts were not the true Canons of the Malankara Church. Through the civil litigations, the fabricated or corrected Canons became the official Canons of the Malankara Church. It was the factionalism and the civil litigation(1879-89) that alienated the Marthomites from the Jacobite Church. Eventually they came under the Anglican influence and changed the liturgical prayers on the basis of Lutheranism. The leadership in those days did not do anything to prevent their excommunication from the Church and keep them untied in the Church and in the mainline. On the one side, there were some among the Reformed Jacobite who wanted to take a stand closer to Protestantism and on the other side, there were some in the Jacobite Church to excommunicate them from the community. The net result was the formation of a new Church: the Marthoma Church.

There was great tension in the community because of the civil litigation known as *Vattippanakkes*, followed by the establishment of the Catholicate in 1912. There was a section of the Puthenkur community which had some awareness regarding the autonomy and individuality of the Malankara Church. But they too did not have

very clear knowledge about the role of the Patriarch and the Catholicos in the church. Such leaders did not consider seriously about the heritage of the Malankara Church, its catholicity and its apostolicity. That is why there was demand for transferring the Maphrianate of Tagrit to this Church and the false thinking that the Maphrianate and the Catholicate were one and the same office in the ancient Church. In 1913 the two factions started the civil litigation. Since then in one name or other, the two factions were in constant litigation and both sides try to justify their stand before the civil servants. Even today they could not come to a peaceful settlement and establish a *modus vivendi*. It is a great scandal and counter witnessing, resulting in the erosion of faith. The leaders seem to be unconcerned about these factions and follow the line of civil litigation. It is true that because of the human element in the Church, there were human weakness in all the Churches. But it seems that nowhere can one notice such a long history of civil litigation and antagonisms among brothers of the same community and of faith as in the Malankara community.

The court verdicts have become practically the milestones in the history of the Church. As a result, the Malankara Church was forced to act within the court verdicts. Such a situation creates a long standing effect in the life of the Church. The Malankara Orthodox Church as it stands can operate only within the limits imposed by the court verdicts. As a Christian church, it hinders its growth and activities. As things stand, it cannot escape from this situation. Even according to the court verdicts, the Malankara Orthodox Church is part of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch.

#### **4.Oriental Orthodox Churches(1965)**

Some Malankara Orthodox theologians gave the leadership for the formation of the forum of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. In 1950's when Paul Verghis(later Paulose Mar Gregorios) was in

Ethiopia, he proposed to the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Salassie to form a forum for the non-Chalcedonian Churches. The Syrian, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian and Malankara Churches were having before that time, no serious contact among themselves and with the other Churches . i.e. they had a kind of isolated existence. And in fact there was even also hostility among themselves. The formation of the forum was aimed at better relationship among themselves. Only in 1965 did it come into existence. The main reason was the difference of opinion among the Churches. Since 1913 the Malankara Orthodox Church was in conflict with the Jacobite Church of Antioch and was having civil litigations. It came to an end only in 1958. In 1964 Patriarch Mar Yacoub III came to India and installed Augen Mar Timotheos as the Catholicos of the united Malankara Orthodox-Jacobite Church. The Coptic Church tried to keep the Ethiopian Church as its filial church without giving its autonomy. So there was tension between them. In 1954 the Coptic Church granted them some freedom of operation, but only in 1959 that it became autonomous. In the Armenian Church there are four leaders and they were not in full accord for a long time. Even after 1965 there was no closer understanding among them. Some change is noticed in recent years with the election of the new leaders with a more Christian openness and universal vision.

Only the Copts and Syrians participated in the Council of Chalcedon (451) and rejected its decrees and became anti-Chalcedonians. The Ethiopians accepted the Coptic position because of their close collaboration with them. The Armenians were influenced both by the Byzantine Chalcedonians and the Syrian Jacobites and accordingly they have changed their attitude towards Chalcedon. It is since 1876 that the Malankara Church began to adopt the anti-

Chalcedonian stand of the Syrian Jacobites of West Asia. Malankara Church is an Apostolic Church . It was not part of any other Church. Nobody outside this Church had any authority over this Church. It was the ecclesial leadership of the Malankara Orthodox Church that brought this Church under the banner of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and brought to a situation in which they are forced to justify the theological stand of the Syrian Orthodox and the Copts of the ancient Roman Empire. Today this ancient Apostolic Malankara Church has to justify the 5<sup>th</sup> century theological stand taken by the Copts and the Syrians. It seems that the leaders did not take into serious consideration the history of the Malankara Church. What did the Malankara Orthodox Church gain from this forum? Or what was the ecclesial contribution to world Christianity through the union? All the above mentioned Oriental Orthodox Churches have their own diverse historical, theological, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The Syrian and Coptic Churches could be spoken of as Arabic Churches. The relationship of the Malankara church has its beginning only in 1965. And that too only among some of the top leaders. Apart from that what is common to the Malankara Orthodox Church and these Churches. One can say that they all belong to the non-Chalcedonian Church family today. In fact, the Malankara leaders could have directed the course of action of the Malankara Church to better directions. Instead they all were building the house on sands. Since they belong to this ecclesial family, they are bound to justify all the theological positions of the non Chalcedonians. They cannot escape from this bond also. Actually there real evangelical mission was to get united all the various factions of the Malankara Church for a strong Indian Church and to take the leadership for stronger witnessing to Christ in India. Instead of that, they went after Egypt and Syria. They had in fact very able and world famous leaders, but it is a pity that



they could not reunite at least partly the various churches of the Malankara family, nor could they make a *modus vivendi* among the two factions in their own Church. On the contrary their statements and attitudes were adding fuel to the already existing tension among them.

In 1975 the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch excommunicated Augen Mar Timotheos, the Catholicos. It was after the formation of the Oriental Orthodox ecclesial forum. It was without consulting the Malankara Orthodox Church that the Syrians and the Copts entered into Christological agreements with the Roman Catholic Church. The Syrian Orthodox agreement for limited *communicatio in sacris* and *interchurch marriage agreement* with the Roman Catholic Church was done not after the consultation with the Malankara Church. For these things and for several other things the Syrians and the Copts did not ask for the permission or consent of the Malankara Church. Then what is the meaning of affirming that they are Oriental Orthodox? During the inter ecclesial theological meetings between the Malankara Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches, whenever there is a point of agreement, some of the Orthodox leaders used to repeat a slogan, “we have to ask the Copts”.

In recent years the Copts gave the leadership to form a small forum within the Oriental Orthodox family. It consists of the Copts, the Syrians and the Armenians in Lebanon. There are many in the ecumenical world who see this move as part of an attempt to keep the Assyrians from the ecumenical discussions and isolate them and prevent the progress of the Catholic –Assyrian dialogue. For this also these West Asian and African churches did not ask the permission of the Malankara Church.

## **Individuality and Communion**

The Church of Christ is a communion of Individual Churches. Both the individuality and communion are to be equally stressed, preserved and cultivated. Communion does not admit the superiority of one church over the other churches, nor the merging of one church in the other. Individuality does not mean isolation and independence. Instead, it demands interdependence, mutual recognition and respect. But there are always temptations and there are chances of falling into it and losing sight of one or the other, or overstressing one over the other. Thus a church, which is numerically not a big community, has the temptation to borrow indiscriminately the observances from a dominant church and to evolve a mentality which considers the bigger church superior and its traditions better than its own. It becomes more true when there is financial dependence on the bigger churches.

Very often many in the Eastern Catholic Churches, because of their Western oriented philosophical and theological education and aid from the Western Churches, consider the Western Churches superior and better suited to them than their own ecclesial traditions. During the pre-Conciliar period, the Western Churches also encouraged this attitude. In short, unity was considered uniformity and diversity was considered a cause of division. In the post-Vatican period, there is a tremendous change at least theoretically in these matters and all the churches have to imbibe the new spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

## **The Church in India**

The Church in India preserved its individuality till 1599. It was united, undivided and it preserved the East Syrian liturgical traditions. Through the Synod of Diamper, the Western missionaries tried to make this one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, Roman Catholic (Latin Church). According to the then mentality, they wanted to make this Church part of the Latin Church and merge it to their Church. They insisted on uniformity and reduced this Apostolic Church to a Rite in the Western tradition, by which they meant just the slight liturgical diversity. They did not at all take into any consideration of the Eastern mentality and the Eastern Apostolic tradition.

### **The Coonan Cross Oath (1653)**

From the synod of Diamper(1599) till the Coonan Cross Oath(1653) all the Thomas Christians were brought under the direct rule of the bishop of Rome through the Jesuit Padroado bishops Roz, Britto and Garcia. As a reaction to their high handed activity, there occurred the tragic Coonan Cross Oath, in which almost all the parishes of the Thomas Christians unanimously took part. They elected the Archdeacon Thomas as their bishop. But the missionaries could not recognize the Archdeacon as the leader and bishop of the community . So they supported another priest of the same family and of the same parish, Chandy Cathanar and ordained him priest. As a result of this cunning programme the community got divided, the vast majority accepting Chandy Cathanar and rest accepting Archdeacon Thomas. The followers of Thomas chose 12 priests and they imposed their hands on him and declared him to be their bishop, on the basis of a

fabricated document by a certain Ittithomman Cathanar. There were negotiations to bring about a reunion of the two factions, but the Western missionaries were in no way supported such a move. In fact, they did all in their control to prevent the unity of the two factions of the Thomas Christians . As a result, eventually the group under Archdeacon Thomas drifted away from the full, canonical communion with the Roman Catholic Church and attached itself to the Syrian Jacobite Church(Orthodox) of Antioch. After the death of Chandy Metran, his followers did not get a native bishop. On the contrary they were ruled for centuries by Western Latin missionary bishops. They were also scattered under the various jurisdictions of *Propaganda* and *Padroado*. They came to be known as the Pazhayakuttukar. Those under the archdeacon Thomas tried to survive and they eventually were known as the Puthenkuttukar, as they adopted the West Syrian liturgical traditions and had a new allegiance to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. The Pazhayakuttukar maintained the canonical communion with the bishop of Rome. The Puthenkuttukar ,however, lost it. The purpose of the Coonan Cross Oath was to maintain the individuality and identity of this ancient apostolic church and to remove the Western missionary hegemony. But alas, one section lost even its centuries old liturgy, and had to accept the Antiochene hegemony and its liturgy and traditions.

By 1876 the West Asian Jacobite Patriarch in the Synod of Mulanthuruthy succeeded to make this Church part of their Jacobite Church of Antioch. Thus the Puthenkur community could not maintain their individuality. They abandoned the Roman Catholic communion and entered into the communion with the non-Chalcedonian Jacobite Church of Antioch. One cannot honestly say that by this new relationship the community had considerable gain and progress. It

did away with the 1653 years old historical and liturgical traditions and the community adopted a new course of action. Practically it became part of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch.

## **Orthodox and Jacobite Factions**

After 1912 the Puthenkur community was divided into two factions: the Catholicos' party and the Patriarch's party. The former wanted to maintain the individuality and autonomy of the Church, while the latter held the view that the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch had spiritual and temporal authorities over this community. They insist on the aspect of communion with the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. More than that, they seem to maintain that their Church in India is part of the Syrian Jacobite Church of Antioch. They seem to believe that with the communion with that Patriarch, their ecumenical obligations are fulfilled. One must be realistic in this. Today there are five Patriarchs, who claim to be successors in the original Antiochene Patriarchal line and the relationship of the Puthenkur community was with a small section of the Antiochene Church. In addition to the Jacobite Patriarch, there are the Maronite Patriarch, the Syrian Catholic Patriarch, the Byzantine Catholic Patriarch and the Byzantine Orthodox Patriarch. Is it not necessary to have communion with them also? The contact with the Jacobite Patriarch was just accidental. The Malankara Church was never part of the Jacobite Church, it was not founded by them. It was not their filial church. It was only in 1842 that for the first time a Jacobite Patriarch, Elias II, directly ordained a Puthenkur priest as bishop (Mathews Mar Athanasios). The particular relationship with the Jacobite Patriarch was not part of its Apostolic tradition. It is true that the Puthenkur community got the West Syrian Liturgy and traditions

and the rectification of the Episcopacy from the Syrian Antiochene Orthodox Church. While maintaining this communion, the Jacobite faction in Kerala can strive after establishing communion and contact and relationship with the other churches of the Antiochene tradition and also with the other churches including the Roman Catholic Church. As far as I could gather there is no serious attempt from their part in this direction. In the civil litigation with the Orthodox, the Jacobite faction joined the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch's side. There is among them in general an attitude which justifies the activities and stand point of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch. They are very highly influenced by the view points and thought patterns of the Syrian Jacobites. But the fact remains that the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch does not give serious consideration to the autonomy and individuality of the Apostolic autonomous Malankara Church. Why should the Malankara Apostolic Church continue to remain under the Syrian Jacobite Church as part of that Church or as its filial Church? There are serious historical errors which have to be rectified. If the Patriarch's faction is serious about the ecclesial principle of canonical communion with the other churches, it should not be stopped with the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. That is to say they have to be prepared to realize the catholicity in its fullness. Unless they are prepared to accept the history of the Malankara Church, they will not be able to take free and independent ecclesial decisions. Otherwise they will continue to justify the Antiochene stand. They have to reevaluate their ideas regarding the Antiochene Jacobite Church and what they teach the people erroneously about it.

Almost all the Churches that entered into contact with the Malankara Apostolic church were reluctant to accept its individuality and autonomy. It is true even in 1930. It is partly due to their ignorance

of the Malankara church history. This church was never part or appendix of other churches. Because of various reasons, it did not have close contact or full canonical communion with other churches always. Among the Malankara Puthenkur community, it seems that even today many do not have a clear vision regarding the individuality of the Malankara church. It is impossible to maintain or develop the individuality of the Church, when one is not prepared to recognize the canonical position of the Malankara Metropolitan and Catholicos. The ministry of unity of the Catholicos is above the bishops. In other words, nothing should take place in the church which can weaken the position of the Synod and the catholicos. But unfortunately, from several quarters of the Orthodox Church, one can notice a tendency to minimize his ministry or weaken his leadership. It does not go hand in hand with the authentic history of the Malankara Church.

In the same way the Orthodox should give more importance to the ecclesial principle of canonical communion. They affirm that they are in canonical communion with the Coptic, the Syrian and Armenian Churches. But practically what does it mean for the Malankara Orthodox Church? Has not the Orthodox Church longer and deeper communion and relationship with the rest of the Malankara Churches than with these Churches? Is there no contradiction in considering the brethren in the land as aliens and saying that they are in communion with those in the foreign countries, having no relationship what so ever? The Thomas Christians of all the various denominations are related to one another. Many in fact are blood relatives, they all had a common Church history till 1653, they all have the same culture and language, and they all profess one and the same faith in Jesus Christ. Still some Orthodox affirm that they are not in any way in communion with the native Thomas Christians and

that they are in communion with the Copts, the Ethiopians, the Syrians and the Armenians. This is also true of the other churches which maintain a similar view. Such statements are just a cover to continue in the division and disunity.

### **The Syrian Jacobite Connection**

The Malankara-Syrian Jacobite connection had its beginning in 1665, with the arrival of a certain Gregorios of Jerusalem. Even today the Malankara Church is not prepared to be part of the Syrian church, nor is ready to accept several of their positions. One section-the Orthodox- is totally opposed to them. The other section recognizes him as a spiritual head. The relationship of the Malankara church with the Copts and others began only in recent times, with the formation of the Oriental Orthodox forum in 1965 at Addis Ababa. And beyond that what is the relationship, contact and communion of Malankara with those non-Chalcedonians? Ecclesially, culturally, nationally, liturgically, theologically and historically what is our relationship with them? Malankara Apostolic Church neither accepted nor rejected the decrees of any ecumenical Council held in the Roman Empire in antiquity. It is neither Ephesene, nor non-Ephesene. It is neither Chalcedonian nor non-Chalcedonian. But the relationship with the churches of the Malankara tradition begins with St. Thomas the Apostle. This was the one , holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ in this part of the globe. This Church entered into relationship and contact with all the Churches which came here. As a result of it, there were loses and gains. From 1599 to 1653 it became part of the Roman Catholic Church. Later the Church witnessed several divisions. Is there no way to get out of this tragic division?



The various leaders of the Malankara communities should take the lead to reunite the various groups. What ever might have been the past history, we who live today in this part of the globe, have a great obligation to the Indian population and the world at large. This is very necessary today. We have no time to waste. The millions in the Indian subcontinent and China are beckoning us to go to them and to proclaim the good news of salvation, “Brethren ,come and help us”. We cannot ignore their cry. We have no more time for civil litigation and petit quarrels and demonstrations. We have no more time for self alienation and self sufficiency. We have a grave obligation to witness Christ unitedly. The canonical communion among the Malankara Churches should be reestablished and strengthen the already existing communion among us. We have to find out a church order based on diversity in communion and start a new way of living together in communion in diversity.

First and foremost, there should be an understanding among the Churches of the Malankara tradition regarding the change of membership from one community to another. Secondly there should be an agreement among the Malankara Churches regarding inter-church marriages. Such an agreement cannot be fully in accordance with the canonical traditions of each church. It is just an interim arrangement. The churches must be ready to give and take and respect international standards and values, and take into consideration the local traditions and customs. Thirdly, these churches should make an enquiry and see in what all matters they can agree regarding the content of faith. All must be prepared to reevaluate their former position and standpoint. The differences in terminologies should be distinguished from the content of faith. In the same way, no church should demand the other churches to accept their particular ecclesiology which they

formed in isolation . The isolated and one sided ecclesiologies may be sacred for each tradition, but for the unity and full communion and common good, it should not be imposed on the other churches.

If one thinks that the unity might be achieved after effecting 100% unity in all matters of faith, if one does not have the readiness for any change, readiness to reevaluate the terminologies and ways of expression, if one thinks that all others are mistaken, he alone is correct, if one continues to justify the stand of the far off churches, the unity of the Malankara churches would be a very far away reality. Only those who have liberated themselves from any kind of external force can plunge into the mystery of the unity of the church of Christ. Today which of the Churches is ready to take such an obligation?

Some people in the Malankara Church family blindly uphold an anti-Roman Catholic and an anti-ecumenical attitude. Some maintain always an anti Malankara Catholic attitude too and they make use of all the international forums to tarnish the image of this particular Church in the Catholic communion. Some maintain the old prejudices. As long as such attitudes and mentality prevail, no ecumenical discussion will bear good fruit on the Indian soil. It may be just an ecumenical picnic. It was since the Synod of Mulanthuruthy(1876), that the Antiochene prelates injected and spread widely an anti-Roman attitude among the Puthenkuttukar. Later, those who came under the influence of Western liberal Protestants and Russian atheistic communism maintained the same attitude. It is unecumenical to condemn the whole Roman Catholic Church in time and out of time in national and international forums, because of the mistakes of the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> c. Western Portuguese missionaries. Catholic Church has its own ecclesiology. If it is not acceptable, one need not accept it. Nobody is forced to accept it. Is it not ecumenically better to try to understand the Catholic Church rather than continue to find fault with it?

## The Malankara Catholic Church

It was those Orthodox who entered into canonical communion with the Bishop of Rome in 1930, that gave leadership to the formation of the Malankara Catholic Church. Through this canonical communion, what they had constantly professed in the Creed namely, “I believe in the one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” became a reality closer to objectivity. These Orthodox had the firm conviction that the canonical communion with the bishop of Rome was essential to the ecclesial perfection of the Church. The movement to which they gave leadership resulted in the full communion with the Catholic Church.

After the split in the Malankara community during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the desire for reunion was very alive in both the sections of the Thomas Christians. They were earnest in their reunion attempts throughout the centuries. But it was crowned with success only in 1930. Archbishop Mar Ivanios maintained alive the ecumenical thought, that the churches of the Thomas tradition should reunite and become once again one as they were for 17 centuries. He, in fact, made it clear in his speech after his Episcopal ordination in 1925 at the Niranam Church.

It was those Orthodox who could establish the autonomy and individuality of the Church through the establishment of the Catholicate, that introduced the idea of the canonical communion of this Church with the ancient Apostolic Roman see. The Bethany monastic establishment gave the lead for this new great ecumenical

venture. The Bethany monks aimed at the internal renewal through prayer and penance. All those who came under the influence of Bethany imbibed this spirit of renewal. Thus among those were renewed internally, and very purified and sanctified, God showered his gift of unity. It was definitely God who brought about the reunion of 1930. It was beyond the ability of frail human beings to achieve such a gigantic goal. All the reunions are divine actions. By reestablishing the canonical communion with the See of St. Peter in Rome, the visible symbol of unity in the Church established by our Lord, the Malankara Orthodox Church has entered into a new stage of its growth.

The Malankara Catholic Church through its full communion with the Catholic Church achieved the two ecclesial realities, namely the individuality and communion. The ecclesial perfection is achieved through the communion. Church of Christ is one and it is founded on the College of the Apostles, headed by St. Peter. After his resurrection, our Lord gave authority to all the Apostles, but he established only one Primatial Chair among them. In order to make clear the aspect of unity, the Lord gave it authoritatively one center of unity. Through the appointment of one person as leader, he wanted to show that his Church is one and indivisible. All the Apostles were shepherds, but through the appointment of St. Peter, our Lord showed that they had only one sheepfold to be fed. Those who had the firm conviction that the unity with the successor of St. Peter in Rome was essential to the ecclesiality of any Church and was in accordance with the will of the Lord of the Church, tried to spread the message of unity in 1930. Among the Churches in full communion, in the liturgical community where the Eucharist is celebrated under the leadership of the bishop, the Church is fully realized. But, alas, today, Christianity presents a

different picture to the world. The Christian world is divided into innumerable Churches and communities, devoid of full communion or canonical communion. Division is contrary to the very nature of Christianity itself. Christ the new man came to reunite the whole mankind. God in His Only Son established His Church as the body of His Son not as isolated groups without communion and concord. He knew that there should be a visible element of unity to unite all. That is the leadership of St. Peter. It does not mean that the other Apostles received the ordination and authority to serve from St. Peter. But it shows that the only one sheepfold of Christ had to be fed in mutual trust and concord.

The Church of the Thomas Christians in India was the one holy Catholic and apostolic Church. It had no share in the ecclesial disputes and controversies of the Churches of the Roman and the Persian Churches. Neither did it accept nor reject any of the Synods of those Churches. During the period between 1599-1653 it was brought under the direct rule of the Bishop of Rome through the Western Portuguese missionaries. The Western missionaries tried to make this Catholic church, part of the Roman Catholic(Latin ) Church. It resulted in its fractionalization . Eventually the Antiochene and Protestant contacts resulted in the loss of the canonical communion with the Roman See. The separated community witnessed several further divisions. It was in this context that some Orthodox leaders thought about the reunion of all the Thomas Christians as it was before 1653. The civil litigations among the two factions of the Puthenkur community also opened the eyes of some for a rethinking .

The community was miserably entangled in civil litigations. Those who were seriously concerned about the reformation of the church realized that it was practically impossible to renew the church in the midst of the civil litigations and isolated existence. They thought

of establishing a closer communion and contact with some other ancient churches, especially with the ancient Church of Rome. They thought also that this is the only way for peace and prosperity for the community and for the realization of God's plan for His Church. In order to achieve this objective, they had to abandon their allegiance to the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. They had to leave also their friends and relatives who were not prepared to follow them. But time has proved that the activity of those enlightened leaders of 1930 was correct and in accordance with the will of the Lord.

An unbiased reading of the New Testament show that in the Apostolic College St. Peter had a leadership role for the service of unity and for strengthening the brethren. It was meant not to terminate with Peter, but to continue in the Church through the successors of Peter. It was a divine arrangement that it should perpetuate in the Church till the end of time. The promise, "upon this rock I will build my Church" and he commandment, "feed my sheep", and "strengthen your brethren" are testimonies of this divine arrangement. Today this universal ministry of unity is done by the successor of St. Peter in the ancient See of Rome.

Our lord commanded his disciples to preach the Gospel throughout the whole world. It was the Roman Catholic Church which entered into a world-wide missionary activity and even today it continues that God-given mandate. The Malankara Catholic Church which entered into that communion also got this missionary dimension. The Malankara Catholic Church entered into a vigorous missionary activity since 1930 and it enabled thousands to know Christ and accept Christ, the unique Savior of mankind. According to the New Testament ecclesiology the Church is at the same time

local and universal. This is realized in the Roman catholic Church. On the day of Pentecost, the Universal Church was present in the upper room. The mandate to preach the Gospel was to all people. Many of the isolated and sectarian communities and churches seem to keep the light received under the bushel. To overcome this missionary stagnation and isolation communion with the Roam catholic Church is a must. This is the lesson which the Malankara Catholic church gives to our neighbors.

In the same way, it is the Roman Catholic Church which is engaged in the universal ecumenical service. No other church can undertake such a universal service. The disciples of Christ must be united in faith , sacraments and in the divine hierarchy. Through its communion with the bishop of Rome, the Malankara catholic church is united with the world wide Catholic Church. In this way the Malankara Catholic Church rose from the level of a regional or local church to the level of a wider universal level. It is indeed a great achievement. Christian Church is not meant to be restricted to any particular place or among one people alone. By nature the Churchis universal and Catholic. The Church of Christ cannot but be catholic. The Malankara Church regained its Catholicity in 1930.

Through the Reunion Movement of 1930 the door to integral truth of the gospel was opened. It was not possible for the separated Churches or communities of isolated existence. They cannot profess to be catholic, nor can they express the catholicity. So also they are unable to present the whole Christian message in its integrity. Those who became non-Chalcedonians accepted only the doctrinal developments up to 451; after that they had an isolated existence. Those who drifted away to Protestantism also lost several of the

apostolic elements of Christianity. But only the Roman Catholic church can integrate the various liturgical, spiritual and doctrinal developments and present a unity in diversity. Today the Roman catholic Church can make a distinction between the “content of faith” and “formulation of faith”. It believes also in the “hierarchy of Truths”.

The commitment of the Malankara Catholic Church is to proclaim the unity of Christians in accordance with the will of the Lord. Together with that in a united voice proclaim the Lord of Salvation to the masses and enlighten them with the light of the Gospel. We do not believe in getting a few people from other communities and increase the number of the faithful in our fold. We do not aim at merging the Malankara Church in the Roman Catholic Church. Rather we aim a the reunion of the Malankara Churches as they were one for 17 centuries and prepare the Malankara Churches for the untied proclamation of Christ in the vast Indian subcontinent and throughout the whole world and make the evangelical witnessing more effective: “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the end of the world.”

St. Ignatius of Antioch(+110) in his Epistle to the Romans praises the Roman Church very highly. He calls it the Church which presides in love and presides in the chief place of the Romans. Ignatius was in full communion with this Church. When the Malankara faithful entered into communion with the Church of Rome, they were just following the example of St. Ignatius bishop of Antioch and perfected the ecclesiality of this Church.

## **House on Rock**



Our Lord showed through the parable that he who builds up his house on the foundation of rock is the wise man. In 1930 some of the Orthodox selected the better part as Mary. Time has proved that their decision and ways of thinking were correct. In those days many understood and followed the leaders; but many others could not understand the implications of breaking the ties with the Antiochene Jacobite Syrian Church. Malankara Church was never part of that Church. It cannot be made a filial Church of any other Church. We must aim at a wider ecumenism, by entering into full communion with the Apostolic church of Rome. This is the only way for a permanent peace and prosperity of the Malankara Church. In other words, no permanent unity can be achieved ,if one tries to avoid the bishop of Rome. Today after several decades more and more Orthodox are realizing it and that is why they repudiate the authority of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch. But because of the 1934 Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church and the subsequent civil litigations with the Jacobite faction , they are in fetters. Even if they desire, they cannot free themselves from such burdens. Moreover in 1965 they put on another chain, namely the membership in the Oriental Orthodox family. Today they are obliged to justify the Coptic and Syrian Standpoints and continue as their appendix. As a result of these things, there is endless civil litigation, more acute than in 1930. It is clear that the foundation was not on solid rock.

### **Unity of the Thomas Christians**

It is very urgent that all the various groups of the Thomas Christians should reunite once again as they were for 17 centuries from the Apostolic times. The various leaders of the factions and their followers must be prepared for a change of attitude and should pave

the way for the wider unity. All the groups have to make a reevaluation of their positions and stand. The various factions of the one Malankara Church have gained a lot from their contact with the Latin, Anglican and Antiochene Churches. And these positive achievements should be combined in the Indian cultural background and shared among the various groups for a vigorous Malankara Church. We must learn the lessons from the past and aim at a strong Malankara Church. All the goods, coming from the diverse sources of East and West are the common good of all. We need not maintain an untouchability to any ecclesial tradition.

Since the Church of Christ is the communion of Churches, the particular traditions of each Church should be respected and recognized by all, they are to be maintained, preserved and cultivated. In case any Church has deviated from the authentic Apostolic tradition due to time and persons and circumstances and accepted traditions of partial significance or non-organic developments, there is necessarily the need of a return to the authentic sources and a renewal. We need not be custodians of the past. What is before us is to present Christ, the Savior of mankind, in a language understandable to our contemporaries. We must use all our energies to give Christ to the thirsting souls of India. We should live in the present. We should not continue as people looking always to the past and cursing the past. We must be a people of forward looking with the genuine Christian hope. In the past there might have been acts of injustice from the part of some of the Western missionaries. Our share in the mistakes cannot be ignored or neglected. We too are culpable. Unless some of us collaborated with the Westerners, those things would not have taken place. We all carry the burden of the past, we all carry a lot of meaningless observances, we all are in one way or other slaves of the

past, slaves of terminology, slaves of formulations and slaves of historical past. We fight for the past and we do not see the present in which we stand and walk We do not see the future, so we do not strive for the future. We must be ready to get rid of all kinds of burdens. We must give priority to the Gospel and to the Gospel values and to the interpretation given to it by the Fathers and the love and unity taught by them and practiced by them. We must be ready to remove every obstacle to the values. We must be ready for renewal and reunion.