

The Church and the Catholicate

Among the ancient Churches in Christendom, the Church of the East (Persian Church), the Armenian Church and the Georgian Church used the title Catholicos to designate the Supreme Heads of their Churches. The title indicates that the holder is the Head and Common Father of that particular Church. He is the Father of the Fathers. It was used by the Supreme Heads of the above mentioned three Churches, situated outside the boundary of the ancient Roman Empire. Thus the title became part of the common heritage of the Church of Christ.

In the Roman Empire, in its place, the Chief Bishop was called Patriarch. Thus the bishops of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch were known as Patriarchs. The Bishops of Constantinople (today's Istanbul in Turkey) and Jerusalem were raised to the status of Patriarch by the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 and Chalcedon in 451 respectively. Regarding the juridical and canonical powers, both Catholicos and Patriarch have the same rights and duties. Both are Father and Head of a sui juris Church (particular Church). Eventually the above mentioned three Catholicoi added the title Patriarch to their names.

In Kerala/India it was in 1912 that the title Catholicos was introduced in the Syrian Jacobite (Orthodox) Church. Until that time the head of the Jacobite Church in India was known as the *Malankara Metropolitan*. The title Catholicos was established in India through the efforts of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese, a Jacobite priest (Archbishop Mar Ivanios in the Catholic Church since 1930), by the Senior Patriarch of Antioch, Mar Abd-al-Msiha, residing at that time in Tur-Abdin/Turkey.

The Church founded in Kerala/India by St. Thomas the Apostle remained united till 1653 as the one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. In 1653 there occurred a split in the community and one group eventually came under the influence of the Jacobite Church of Antioch. It was known as the *Puthenkuttukar* (people of the new allegiance). Those who continued to be under the Western Catholic missionaries were known as the *Pazhayakuttukar* (people of the old allegiance). The Puthenkuttukar came under the Anglican influence during the 19th century. There occurred several splits in this Puthenkur community: Thozhiyur Church (1772), Anglican Church (1836), and Mar Thoma Church (1889).

In 1876 the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, Peter III, through the Synod of Mulanthuruthy/Kerala, brought this Puthenkur Church under him and made it part of the Jacobite Church. He demanded that he is the Supreme head of the Church having authority over spiritual and temporal matters. There was opposition to this demand. In 1911 the Jacobite Patriarch Abdalla came to India and excommunicated those who did not accept him in all matters. It brought about a further split in the community. From the Jacobite community there emerged the Orthodox group, also known as the *Metran Kakshy*. The other group was known as the *Bawa Kakshy* (Patriarchs' party). This split was due to the undue interference of the Jacobite Patriarch Abdalla in the life of the Jacobite Church in India.

In West Asia at one period there were two rival Patriarchs. The senior Patriarch was Mar Abd-al-Msiha. The other one was Mar Abdalla. It was Abdalla who excommunicated Vattasseril Mar Dionysius, the Malankara Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church (*Metran Kakshy*). But this group succeeded in bringing to Kerala Mar Abd-al-Msiha and establishing the Catholicate here. The first Maphrian /Catholicos of the Orthodox Church in India was Baselios Paulose. He was installed at the Niranam Church on 15th September 1912.

In the decree of establishment Mar Abd-al-Msiha used two titles: Maphrian/ Catholicos. The Syriac title Maphrian was used since the 7th century by the chief bishop of the Jacobite Church in Persia. The title meant literally fruit bearer. That is to say, the one who produces spiritual fruits. He was authorised to ordain the bishops in the Persian Empire for the Jacobites. The Maphrian was similar to the Vicar General under the Syrian Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. The Maphrianate was suppressed in 1860/63 by a Synod presided over by the Jacobite Patriarch Jacob II. When it was suppressed in West Asia, the Jacobites in Kerala made a request to establish it in Kerala. But the reply was very negative.

The Catholicate in the Jacobite Church among the Orthodox in 1912 was the symbol of autonomy. The people in Kerala at that time did not have clear understanding regarding the expressions Catholicate and Maphrianate. Mar Abd-al-Msiha could reintroduce the Maphrianate only. But the Jacobites here wanted to have the Catholicate. Maphrianate was not an autonomous entity. But the Catholicate was, indeed in the ancient Church, an autonomous entity. That is why in the decree of establishment one finds Maphrianate /Catholicate. Eventually the group under the Catholicos adopted the expression *Orthodox*. It was used in their Constitution of 1934 and in the civil litigations with the Jacobites (those who remained attached to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch). This line of Catholicos continues in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church till today.

The Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch installed a Maphrian/Catholicos in 1975, with the name Mar Baselios Paulose II (+1996). His successor was installed only in 2002, when the group established itself as a separate Registered Society and separated itself from the other group. The name of this group at present is *Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church* or Jacobite Church. The present Catholicos is Baselios Mar Thoma I.

Thus the Puthenkur Jacobites have now two Catholicos: one group constitutionally accepts the Jacobite Patriarch but in all practical matters ignores him. The other group accepts the Patriarch as its Head in all matters, spiritual as well as temporal.

The *Malankara Catholic Church* re-established its communion with the See of Peter in Rome in 1930 under the leadership of the Orthodox Bishop Geevarghese Mar Ivanios of Bethany. In 2005 this Church was canonically elevated to the status of a **Major Archiepiscopal Church** and Cyril Mar Baselios was elevated to the dignity of Major Archbishop by His Holiness Pope St. John Paul II. Then the Church began to use the ancient title Catholicos. In the **Particular Laws** of the Malankara Catholic Church it was used with the **Recognitio** of Rome. Thus it has become part of the tradition of the Malankara Catholic Church. In his correspondence for Reunion in 1926-2, Mar Ivanios was requesting Rome to recognise the Catholicos and the Synod. It was realised only in 2005.

Major Archbishop is the Father and Head of a Church sui juris. Canonically and juridically he has all the rights and duties of the Patriarchs, with the exception that the Major Archbishop does not have the title Patriarch. (CCEO.cc.151-154).

The Catholicate of the Malankara Catholic Church is not the continuation of the Catholicate of the Persian Chaldean Church, nor is it the continuation of the Maphrianate of Tigris of the Jacobites. It is also not the continuation of the Maphrian - Catholicos of the Jacobite-Orthodox Churches in Kerala. It is Major Archbishop-Catholicos. He is canonically Father and Head of the Church equal to the Patriarch.

Today in Yerevan/Armenia there is the Supreme Catholicos-Patriarch. There are also at Istanbul, Jerusalem and Antelias/Lebanon, three other Patriarchs for the Armenians. There is also one Catholic Armenian Patriarch in Lebanon. The Georgian Church has one Catholicos in Tbilisi/Georgia. The

Church of the East (Persian Church) has two Catholicos-Patriarchs, one in Bagdad and another in Chicago. The Catholic Chaldeans also have a Catholicos –Patriarch in Bagdad.

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