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# AFRICAN PAYAL

**Towards a Mental Breakthrough in the  
Latin Connection of Indian Catholicism**

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# AFRICAN PAYAL

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## Prefatory Note

This is an enlarged version of a talk given at a Symposium on the Identity of the Oriental Churches, held at Paurastya Vidyāpitham (Pont. Oriental Institute of Religious Studies), Kottayam, on April 2, 1984.

The ideas expressed here are meant for those who know very well the history of what can be called the Latin Connection of Indian Catholicism.

'African Payal' is a kind of water hyacinth which is said to have reached India from abroad. It has now become an ubiquitous nuisance in tropical lagoons and canals.

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T. V.



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## African Payal

There is a need for an attitudinal change in the Church in India. The Orientals need much courage to reverse the historical coup, carried out by the Latin Church acting as the agent of the universal Church. A growth of an assertive religious consciousness in the Oriental Church vis-à-vis the Latin Church was begun by archbishop Joseph Kariattil and Thomas Paremmakkal, two great sons of the Oriental Church in India.

We must take into account the historical background to the Orientals' unquestioning acceptance of Latin dominance in the religio-liturgical spheres for a long time. First of all, there was the centuries-old hangover of the superiority once associated with the Europeans who colonized the Orientals and left their imprint on life and traditions of the people. The two-way process begun by the cultural and religious fusion of the colonization period still continues: Orientals provide missionaries but leaders come mostly from the Latins.

The Latin Church had the aura of imperial authority. The issues of moral, religious and liturgical spheres were decided elsewhere. There was not much change in the Oriental-Latin relationship even after 300 years. The Orientals continue to look up to faraway capitals for religious wisdom and guidelines of action, because the Latin Church continues to hold the whole world and all other sister-churches hostage to its dread. In a display of religious arrogance and selfish unconcern for the framework of global Christian cooperation, the Latin Church in India turns down all the major demands of the Oriental Churches. Thus the tortoise of Latin-Oriental negotiations does not



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move at all. The Latin-Oriental relationship in India not be seen in isolation from the global domination of the Latin Church. By coincidence or by design, this domination happens to be under a general freeze now.

It is our opinion that the latinized oriental psyche should liberate itself from its gigantic pathological Latin obsession. Due to the presence of troikas and Ettuveetil pillamars, the churches in India are getting locked into an unchristian conflict syndrome. The Latin empire is still world wide, despite the rise of world conscience and of Vatican II. The world has become a jungle pure and simple and in it the Latins have assumed the role of the panthers. It is time to get the animals off the road. Let us recall the story based on the puranic characters Bhima and Hanuman. In a dramatic moment of Bhima's meeting with Hanuman, Bhima says in a satirical tone —

O look here, damned monkey  
Who blocks my way, get away hence!  
What is your reason for lying  
Here to obstruct my passage?  
You are a wild old monkey,  
You don't know how to behave towards  
men of status.  
You were born in a species that lacks  
discrimination;  
Did your jump go wrong and make you fall ?  
Why is there no compassion for you ?  
Immediately clear the way, or  
You will have to pay the penalty\*

("നോക്കോ! നമ്മുടെ മാറ്റേ കിടക്കുന്ന  
മക്കോ! നീയങ്ങു മാറിക്കിടാ ശോ!  
ഊലട സ്ഥാനത്തു വന്നു ശയിപ്പാൻ നി-  
നക്കോ! തോന്നുവാനെന്തോ! സംഗതി?  
നാട്ടിൽ പ്രഭുക്കളെക്കണ്ടാലറിയാത്ത

\* quoted in V. S. Sharma, "Kalyanasaugandhikam", *Malayalam Literary Survey* 7, 2 (1983), 20.



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കാട്ടിൽക്കിടക്കുന്ന മൂളികൾക്കു നീ,  
ഒട്ടും വകതിരിവില്ലാത്ത വല്ലാത്ത  
കൂട്ടത്തിൽ വന്നു പിറന്നു വളന്നു നീ,  
ചാട്ടത്തിൽ നിന്നു വിഴിച്ചു പോയോ നിന്റെ  
കൂട്ടത്തിൽ മററാരുമില്ലാത്തതെന്തെടോ ?  
പെട്ടെന്നു നേരമു പോകായ് കിലാപത്തു  
പെട്ടീടുമെന്നു ധരിക്കു നീ വാനരാ!''

Though the Oriental Church has withstood severe onslaughts for almost half a millennium, it did suffer considerable decline. The lowest point was reached when the Latin conquistadors took over the priestly training in the 19th century and started destroying even the vestiges of glory for which Malabar Church had been known throughout history. However, the inner spirit and strength of Malabar ethos asserted once again and a time came when a galaxy of priests, historians and theologians transformed a dispirited people into fearless fighters for their respect, rights and values. Their exertions and exhortations resulted in the theological emancipation of the Malabar Church. The climax was reached in 1962 when the St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, now known as Paurastya Vidyapitham (Pontifical Oriental Institute of Religious Studies), Kottayam, was started. This is a period of religious awakening that can rightly be called the Malabar Renaissance.

The Orientals seem to sense in the Latins a tendency to assume an unusual measure of authority and domination. The Latin factor played a decisive role to mutilate the peace which the Indian Catholicism enjoyed since the apostolic times. The Latin tornado hit the Indian subcontinent 400 years ago. It was a real tornado, for it appeared all of a sudden by the advent of the Portuguese traders. A cyclone can be located but a tornado cannot be, for it develops all of a sudden out of a thunderstorm. Moreover, this Latin tornado was struck in a country which was highly prone to foreign invasion and domination. Now there is little that the posterity can do except clean up the debris.



Let us look straight at this problem. If we want to change this established violence (of the Latin Church in India) this cannot be achieved through prayer alone. We have to identify all the obstacles to peace, justice and reconciliation<sup>1</sup> and tackle them simultaneously.

Once called the community of the ancient Christians, the Malabar Church has become the guinea pig for the Latins (universal and local) to exhibit their religious sadism. The younger generation of the Malabar Church feels the Latins have to be warned that their time of unresisted adventuring and domination in the Oriental Churches in India is over. The Oriental Churches are on the point of making important decisions about their future policy. These are to deal with a necessity which is disputed by nobody.

The serious latinisation began with the Synod of Diamper in 1599, convoked by the Goan Archbishop Menezes. It brought the Orientals under Latin control. The canons of Diamper prohibited contact with the Hindu culture, creating anti-Indian indoctrination in the Indian Catholicism<sup>2</sup>.

De-latinisation drive is an urgent task to erase the Latin imprint on history. There must be a good reason why a vast majority of the Orientals are Latin addicts. Orientals have not evolved a theological culture and it is a fact that they are not terribly oriental-minded. How many Orientals read and study the history of their Church? Authentic eastern ideas are not easily understood or imbibed by the majority of the Orientals, especially when their minds are crowded and intoxicated with myths and blind faith in the Latin way of salvation. A majority of the Orientals have become the victims of the cargo mentality<sup>3</sup>.

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1. See the important study of V. F. Vineeth, *Justice and Reconciliation. The Sad but Living Story of a Church in Fetters*, Bangalore: 1983.
  2. Cf. C. Choondal, *Christian Folksongs*, Trichur: 1983, 27; Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, Bombay: 1970; A. M. Mundadan, *Traditions of St Thomas Christians*, Bangalore: 1970
  3. T. Vellilamthadam, *Maya Safari*, Kottayam: 1983, 36-37



The Latin Church may continue to subjugate the Orient through the possession of vast territory and huge cash and law but let it be known that this inhuman domination is not an eternal one. The Latins have the *raison d'état*, but the Orientals have the *raison d'être*.

The Orientals are like pilgrims captured and abused by unscrupulous highway gangs, and they, now released, belong to neither the Oriental Churches nor to the Latin Church! The Orientals have suffered so long under every conceivable religious, political and psychological disadvantages that they no longer believe in their own power to redeem themselves from the unchristian Latin domination. The Malayalee poet Kumaran Asan, (1873-924) says in his "Sita in Contemplation":

Perhaps the bird caged long  
Its wings' thrust forgets <sup>50</sup>.

(ചിരബന്ധനമാർന്ന പക്ഷിതൻ  
ചിറകിൻ ശക്തി മറന്നപോയിടാം.)

The Thomas Christians are prepared to wait till 1999, 400th anniversary of their complete latinisation. 400 years of religious slavery and political manipulation is nothing in the long history of salvation. The Thomas Christians in India have a sense of history — a history of domination. More than that, they have a sense of faith — a deep faith. It is not a faith imported from abroad. It is an inborn faith, heritage of a Church, implanted by an Apostle of Christ. Now for the younger generation of the Orientals, it is out of question to live under a dark age of 'latinitas'. Let the modern Menezes, Ettuveetil pillamars and brown sahibs do not have any illusion! Orientals fought and will fight religious imperialism and domination, in whatever form it appears. By doing this, they do not want to sever historical links but to transform them into a new relationship of friendship, cooperation and reconciliation.

50. Quoted in P. K. Narayana, *op. cit.*





Orientalists in India are well aware that "kings...have perished, those who come before, others beside them, and others still to come will vanish, as shall those who will succeed them. It seems as though the Earth is laughing, in the joyous outburst of her autumn flowers, to see these kings attempting (vainly) to undertake the conquest<sup>51</sup>. It is true that no human effort can weed out the African payal. Only the Lord Almighty can.

"Do not worry about the wicked,  
Do not envy those who do wrong.  
Quick as the grass they wither,  
Fading like the green in the field.

Trust in Yahweh and do what is good,  
Make your home in the land and live in peace;  
Make Yahweh your only joy  
And he will give you what your heart desires.

Commit your fate to Yahweh,  
Trust in him and he will act:  
Making your virtue clear as the light,  
Your integrity as bright as noon."<sup>52</sup>

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51. Cf. Vishnu Purana, Part IV, XXIV, quoted in J. Auboyer, *Daily Life in Ancient India from approximately 200 BC to AD 700*, London: 1967, 255

52. Psalm 37:1-6



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