



CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

COUNTDOWN TO 1999

400 Years of Agony and Action since 1599

Christian Musicological Society of India

Thomas Vellilamthadam



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Preface

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This is a companion booklet to my earlier *African Payal - Towards a Mental Breakthrough in the Latin Connection of Indian Catholicism* (1984). Owing to the 400 years of Latin connection, Indian Catholicism is at present in a state of disarray. The problem is not merely 400 years of sociological domination, but 400 years of religious domination. As everything under sun, Latin domination too has its end. As "the old colonial period in World history is collapsing" (R. Panikkar, "The Dream of an Indian Ecclesiology", in *Searching for an Indian Ecclesiology*, G. Van Leeuwen (ed), Bangalore: 1984, p. 25), colonial Latin domination will vanish.

It is more comfortable to live in a Platonic cave than to come out and contemplate the Sun. 400 years of 'cave-life' made the Thomas Christians of India blind and made them think that life in the dark cave is more salvific. Since 1599 they were travelling through a tunnel. It is an irony of history that it took 400 years to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Now they know that they are at the end of the tunnel. Still, they need an act of faith – and hope too – to fancy a glimmer in the darkness ahead.

I believe that 400 years of walking in the darkness was a Long Walk for the Thomas Christians of India and that it is time for them to contemplate the Sun, Jesus Christ, *Lumen Gentium*.

Kottayam
Dukrana 1985

T. V.

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to

Thomas Paremmakkal (1736-1799) and
Placid J. Podipara (1899-1985), two
great sons of Thomas Christians,
who through their scholarship and
daring spirit succeeded to make
their people contemplate the Sun.



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The St Thomas Christians in India are facing the most decisive hour of their history. It is time for them to reflect and act as authentic believers. Their reflections and actions would pave the way for their liberation by the year 1999. 1999 is the 400th year of the unjust and unchristian Latin domination in Indian Catholicism. A lack of reflection and action would make them permanent slaves of the Latin Church. The choice is up to the present members of the ancient and courageous Thomas Christians, especially up to those who are their leaders, whether they want liberation or slavery.

Gazing upon the debris of Indian Catholicism — the violated norms, declining ethical standards, formalism and juridicism in administrative rules and regulations, outmoded public relations, disregard for Papal and Council teachings from the part of the Latin Church in India — I wonder about the future of Christianity in India. I think we have reached a point in history where we have to look beyond the present euphoria.

It seems that the restoration of Indian Catholicism will demand initiatives of a kind that we have not been accustomed to. It is no use imagining that we can survive religiously with superficial functioning, eclipse of ethics and imitating Constantine modes of ecclesiology. The ethical crisis in the Latin Church is on such a scale that unless the authority of the universal Church makes up its mind to establish certain standards¹, Indian Catholicism will be beyond ethical and religious redemption.

1. The prospective visit of John Paul II to India in 1986 is of great importance. As the head of the Latin Church and the universal church he will get a chance to feel the Latin unchristian domination, Orientals' suffering and ecumenical blockade in India.



death, adopting the motto *Concedo Nulli* (I yield to no one)². That is why I am looking at countdown calendar on the wall. The countdown is on and it must sensitize everything: books, articles, prayers and celebrations.

Many subjects in life does not automatically arouse emotions of terror or pity. Such a subject is the domination of the Latins on the Orientals and the complaint of Orientals about the impossibility of getting any good help from the universal Church! This is the problem faced by the Orientals in India.

New problems crop up while old ones remain unresolved. In a way, established religion is like politics where interests of varied groups and sections constantly clash. This in turn blurs the ecclesial perspectives and Christian priorities. It is a pity but the fact remains that except in a very few cases religion is guided more by dominant groups than by real Christian considerations. What, however, worry most Orientals in India are the complex problems. Most of these are the legacy of the past — 400 years of Latin domination over the Orientals —, emanating from the fact that those at the helm preferred, and still prefer, not to take hard decisions for the sake of politico-religious expediency.

What is disquieting is that a religion like Christianity cannot afford mistakes at the last quarter of 20th century, especially in tackling vital religious issues. There are signs of hope. Some positive thinking is visible. Yet there are also concrete signs that show that troikas control the Latin Church in India. This points towards a fact that the universal

2. It is said that Erasmus (1466-1536), Dutch scholar and theologian, adopted this motto but these words were of the god Terminus, the ineluctable terminus of this mortal life (cf. R. H. Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*, London: 1969, 110). In that case, Oriental Churches cannot do anything but wait for the end of the world!



Church itself has become sick. When the physician himself is sick, his ability to cure others must be in doubt.

There are two kinds of religion: those who divide people into categories and those who do not. Latin Christianity is the first kind. It is difficult to understand how a sister church can betray the Christian ideals and remain indifferent to the suffering of the Orientals in India.

The struggle for the enactment of human rights in the Church is an opportunity for the Orientals to show in practice that Gospel ideals are not dead. Orientals should tell Latins:

“You may multiply your prayers,
 I shall not listen.
 Your hands are covered with blood,
 Wash, make yourselves clean.
 Take your wrong-doing out of my sight.
 Cease to do evil.
 Learn to do good,
 Search for justice,
 Help the oppressed,
 Be just to the orphan,
 Plead for the widow.”
 (Is. 1:15-17)

Sentire cum ecclesia can well be understood by the Orientals but if *ecclesia* is identified with *ecclesia latina*, then *sentire cum ecclesia* has no meaning for the Orientals. Let us all understand the unchristian consequences of all that is happening now. Let the Oriental Church write a letter to the sister churches in the world, invoking Yahweh's help:

3. Pope John Paul II takes a keen interest in the fate of the Orientals in India. Himself a Polish, he knows well the suffering of the minority groups under a totalitarian regime. Authoritarian and totalitarian trends are not foreign to any established system, be it political or religious.



manner, especially when the universal Church and the Latin Church in India do not seem to understand the suffering of the Orientals.

At the same time Orientals are determined to cling to their apostolic faith and they are not going to let a few Latin addicts and the Latin Church make Christianity unchristian. The awakening of the Oriental Churches is evident in its attitudes. Perhaps its major achievement has been motivating Orientals to do what they want to do, not what the Latins expect them to do. Faith in Jesus Christ and His Church, yes. Servitude to the Latin Church, no. This is the growing attitude of the young Orientals in India. They are determined to keep their apostolic faith and discard the imported faith of the Latin Church in India – *Scarabeus aquilam quaerit*¹⁹.

The question is not whether we shall ever spread Christianity in India but whether we shall use our full potential for living an authentic Christian life. The Latin Church thinks that the growth is summed up in the increase of the number of church buildings, conversions, tons of cement used for building schools and hospitals, as if the difference between the Church of 1985 and that of 1999 will be in the volume of goods and bricks. For them, there is no question about the quality of Christian life. Latin lobby knows that it is next to nothing in this respect.

How closely the Orientals clutch the very chains that bind them! That is the result of the successful domination. That is why liberation should begin in the right thinking. Now it is time that Orientals think for themselves instead of letting the Latins think for them. There is no point in expecting the universal Church take a sharp U-turn in its

¹⁹. The Erasmian essay *Scarabeus aquilam quaerit* (The beetle seeks the eagle) plays upon the theme that God uses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty (cf. R. H. Bainton, *op. cit.* 106).



policy to support the Latins²⁰. But as a Christian I would expect it to have a Christian concern for the Orientals in India. It is true that despite their blatant violation of the laws, the troikas continue to operate under the protection of politico-religious patronage. Still, let us hope that the Latin Church which could restore, after 350 years, Galileo's image, can also restore, after 400 years, the true image of the Thomas Christians in India.

Things may change and get better. Then we can sing the music "When This Cruel War is Over" —

"Dearest one, do you remember
when we last did meet?
When you told me how you loved me,
kneeling at my feet?
Oh, how proud you stood before me
in your suit of grey,
When you vowed from me and country
ne'er to go astray
Weeping sad and lonely,
sighs and tears how vain!
When this cruel war is over
pray that we meet again."²¹

Victory is sure, provided the Orientals have faith in their heart, ideas in their head, food in their stomach. With strength they march towards the Promised Land: "Yahweh your God is bringing you into a prosperous land, a land of streams and springs, of waters that well up from the deep in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines, of figs, of pomegranates, a land of olives, of oil,

20. Rome has always followed a policy of Latinisation and extermination of the Orientals (cf. Victor J. Pospishil, *Ex Occidente Lex*, Carteret, N. J.: 1979, 13-79; also J. Madey "East and West" - Unity in Diversity", in T. Vellilamthadam (ed), *Paurastya Vidyapitham* 1984; The Portuguese in the 16th century followed the policy of Lusitanization or Latinization cf. Hubert O. Mascarenhas "St Thomas Christians of Goa", *The Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Tellicherry*, 1970.

21. M. Mitchell, *op. cit.*, 192



of honey, a land where you will eat bread without cost, where you will want nothing, a land where the stones are of iron, where the hills may be quarried for copper. You will eat and have all you want and you will bless Yahweh your God in the rich land he has given you." (Deut 8:7-10)

Orientalists know that they will be led to the Promised Land. At the same time they are aware that even though 1999 is approaching, the Promised Land is far. It is near, yet it is far. By 1999 the worst will be over!

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