

vol. 2, No 2, December 2008

BOOK-REVIEW

Dr Thomas Kalayil CMI, Editor, Collected Works of Rev. Dr. Placid J. Podipara CMI, Vols I — V, Sanjos Publications/Mannanam: 2007, lix + 1119; 672; 291; 862; 188 pages.

It is a common refrain that St. Thomas Christians are hopeless in preserving their history and heritage. Although proudly they proclaim the antiquity of their origin, miserably they failed to preserve some ancient churches or some ancient stone walls with inscribed hieroglyphics to substantiate their claims. Who then are these people? Are they the original inhabitants of this land belonging to the ProtoDravidian stalk or an assortment of migrant population in the line of the Aryans? The attempts to decipher the true history of St. Thomas Christians of India have been too few and too often undertaken under unfavourable conditions. St. Thomas Christians themselves often freely conflated their ideas concerning their past with their present context. The end result is a confusing mix of mythology with plenty of internal contradictions. Taken as a whole, the testimony would seem tainted and fraudulent.

Yet, we are fortunate to have some silver lines amidst the dark clouds which overshadow their history. However, those bold attempts to recapture and reinstate the lost history, status and traditions of St. Thomas Christians were always individual-driven initiatives and hence failed to survive the onslaught of time. St, Thomas Christians had to wait for almost nineteen centuries to have a visionary leader in the person of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara who envisaged the foundation of a Religious Congregation to survive the tyranny of time. The founding of the CMI Congregation changed the desolate condition of St. Thomas Christians once and for ever. Whether historians, both secular and ecclesiastical, are aware of and acknowledge it or not, the history of Kerala would not have been the same without Blessed Chavara and his Congregation. If somebody is still not convinced and is apprehensive about the veracity of this statement of mine and demands some compelling proofs, I invite him / her to read Collected Works of Rev. Dr. Placid J. Podipara CMI, a holy luminary in the line of the illustrious sons of Blessed Chavara. He dedicated his entire life to recapture and reestablish the past, lost history of St Thomas Christians.

Anybody who is interested in the history of Kerala or the history of Christianity in India should be indebted to Dr. Thomas Kalayil CMI, who edited the monumental works of Fr. Podipara in five volumes. All serious libraries, both the ecclesiastical as well as the secular, should procure copies of this publication in order to ensure that it is preserved for posterity. This is a 'must-read' resource book for all scholars of history and for anybody who is interested in Church history. The first volume of the Collected Works presents us with writings on the History of St. Thomas Christians of India. The second volume provides us with his writings on the Laws, Customs and Discipline of St. Thomas Christians. The third volume consists of his writings on Syro-Malabar Rite, Liturgy, Extension of Jurisdiction, Pastoral Care of Emigrants, Mission Work and Organizational Matters. Volume four furnishes us with his writings to Promote Church Unity. The fifth volume consists of his Miscellaneous Writings. An elaborate exposition of the contents of the above said volumes, which run beyond three thousand pages, is not within the purview of this review. Nevertheless, a special mention has to be made of the

Varthamanappusthakam which is included as No. 10 in Volume I of the Collected Works. This is an English translation of the first and extensive travelogue written in Malayalam in the 18th century by Cathanar Thomman Paremakkal. The author of the book writes about his long and perilous voyage by ship to Portugal and Rome in the company of the Rome-educated priest Joseph Cariattil to submit to the authorities the petition of the head of the dissident faction of the St Thomas Christians for the favour of his reception into the Catholic fold along with his entire dissident Church. This important travelogue contains an enormous wealth of other informations as well that are not accessible to the readers who do not know Malayalam. The above mentioned book is rather unintelligible even to the modern Malayalam speaking readers because of its archaic language. Thanks to Fr. Placid's English translation this problem is solved once and for all.

Though Fr. Josey Kollammalil, CMI 'deserves our accolades for his laborious task of collecting the works of Fr. Podipara from various sources and Fr. Thomas Kalayil, CMI deserves our gratitude for editing them into five volumes for the benefit of generations to come, we are still in need of someone with a vision and dedication like that of Fr. Podipara to translate into English many of his writings. In the first volume of the Collected Works there are seven Malayalam books included which contain information that does not appear in his English works. Similarly the second volume includes two articles

written in Malayalam which are not the exact translations of the articles that he wrote in English on the same line. The third volume too contains two books in Malayalam, the first one is a compilation of articles he published on Syro-Malabar rite. The second one is the Malayalam translation of an ancient manuscript written in Syriac language. The fourth volume is more or less Malayalam in its content except for the first two articles written in English. Since they were written with a pastoral motivation with a historic, dogmatic, and polemic intent to inspire and inform the separated brethren to enhance their reunion with the holy mother Church, it was a need to write them in the local language. However, they are treasure chests of invaluable information regarding the history of St. Thomas Christians. The same is the case with the fifth volume as well. Out of the twenty articles included in it only the first two are in English. Though they are miscellaneous in nature, they too provide a lot of institutions into the personality, experiences and vision of this illustrious son of St. Thomas Christians. I do hope and pray that the publishers may take up that task at a later stage for the benefit of the people who are interested in the magnificent history of a Church, a precious pearl that remained more or less hidden in the annals of the bygone past. In fact, this Church has a lot to contribute to the ecclesiology of the universal Church since its structure and *modus operandi* were quite unique and praiseworthy. It was a laity-prominent church in its administrative setup. It is a pity that even those who cry foul and try to restore the ancient traditions of this ancient Church conveniently close their eyes to certain commendable and meritorious practices since that would take away certain privileges which they do not intend to part with.

The Catholic Church is a union of 23 individual churches of five different traditions and the Latin Church is only one among them. This is a fact that even today many do not know or pretend to be ignorant of. Fr. Placid, like a one-man-army, devoted his pen to fight the colonial attitude of the Latin Church in order to defend and restore the identity of the individual Churches. He insisted that each Church is an expression of the faith of a community that shares and lives according to the evangelical counsels. Therefore, each Church should be treated like an individual entity. Being an individual entity, each Church should enjoy equal dignity, privileges and freedom. He acknowledged that the throne of Peter is in the Latin Church. But this should not be translated into dominion over every other Church. The Bishop of Rome, the Pope, should be treated as *primus inter pares* (the first among equals) by the prelates of the other Churches.

Fr Placid conducted relentless researches to unveil the uniqueness, identity and the true history of the Oriental Churches. He was neither pro-oriental nor an anti-occidental, nor did he belong to certain syndicates with vested interests. He remained a proud and obedient son of the Catholic Church, who believed in the preservation of the identity and the uniqueness of individual Churches. Providentially, this vision of Fr. Placid was upheld by the fathers of the Second Vatican Council and is now the thought-pattern of the universal Church and its ecclesiology. The main areas of his interest were ecclesiology, Church history, liturgy, and canon law.

During his seminary days, young Placid quietly prepared a very scholarly book entitled *The Patriarch of Antioch in Malayalam* (included as No. 3 of the IV volume), which was written in a context where controversy over the primacy of the Patriarchs of the East and the West was raging in Kerala. This is a historic, dogmatic, and polemic writing, meant to prove the primacy of St. Peter and his successors. With more than 400 citations from the Scriptures and from the early Christian writings he proved Rome and not Antioch as the seat of the primacy of Peter. It was an ardent invitation to the separated Jacobite brethren of Kerala to return to the mother Church and to reunion with Rome. This book invites our special attention since it was penned down by a person who was often referred to as one with strong oriental feelings. This clearly demonstrates that his field of interest never bound him to any particular section. He dedicated himself totally to the wellbeing of the universal Church. He worked as an 'expert' in the Second Vatican Council. He was a consultant to bishops and a guide to many of the later scholars. He availed himself as a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Codification of Canon Law of the Oriental Churches and contributed his mite as a consultant to the Holy See. It is mainly because of his relentless work in Rome that the Oriental Churches in India could extend their boundaries outside Kerala and in particular the SyroMalabar Church is raised to the status of a Major-Archiepiscopate, functionally equal to a patriarchate.

Fr Placid's life which lasted for 86 years (1899-1985) was fruitful and holy. His ardent love for the Church, his devotion to the Pope, the visible head of the Church of Christ, his zeal for the unity of the Church, his life of simplicity, spirit of prayer, patience in suffering, patient waiting for the good of the Church and depth of knowledge of the Sacred Sciences are evident in his writings as well as in the writings about him. Hence he is worthy of being considered as a true scholar and a saintly religious.

The things I really admire in these volumes are the precision, the straight forwardness, the persuasiveness, and the clarity of thought of Fr Podipara. Fr. Podipara's writings are always insightful and it is a sheer joy to read them again and again. It touches a level of awareness in the reader that is both enlightening and enlarging. He accomplishes a splendid elucidation of the hidden treasures of the bygone past through his razor sharp analytical mind. It is worth mentioning that thanks to the editor's preface and scholarly notes attached to each work, the readability and the clarity of each work are facilitated and augmented significantly. Let this phenomenal contribution of Fr. Placid Podipara pave way to greater understanding and mutual respect among various rites and Churches so that the Kingdom of God may enlarge its horizons. This is the hope and expectation of this reviewer.

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