

CHANDA MISSION - A UNIQUE MISSION

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Introduction

Sambhaje Mahi Diyani, "Sharing everything dynamically divine," in other words, consciously getting involved in the great process of redemption and development. With this Motto in their hearts and on their lips, the first six Missionaries from the Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), belonging to the Syro-Malabar Church of Oriental Rite, came to the newly erected Mission territory called Chanda, under the able guidance of his Excellency Bishop Januarius CMI, on 13 August 1962. In order to meet the new challenges and the great opportunities of evangelization and development of the Church in India the Holy See thought that the St Thomas Christians were vital. The history making event officially took place when Pope John XXIII by his apostolic decree "Ad Lucem Sancti Evangelii" established this new ecclesiastical Unit and entrusted it to the Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate on 31 March 1962, for pioneer evangelization work. The formal handing over of the territory to Bp. Januarius by Msgr. Cassidy, the personal representative of the Apostolic Internuncio, took place on Wednesday, 15 August 1962, at a simple but impressive ceremony in the Chapel of the Archbishop's house, Nagpur.

At this juncture, I feel that it is right and fitting to mention the meaningful words of late great missionary Bishop Eugene D'Souza, the then Archbishop of Nagpur, at a reception in the Archbishops House on August 23, 1962, to celebrate the formal and canonical

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erection of this ecclesiastical unit, which took place a week before that at Nagpur:

“East is East and the West is West; the twain shall never meet.” Thus quoting the famous saying of Rudyard Kipling His Grace continued: Yet like every other rule, I suppose, this one has its exception. Today marks the meeting in a very real sense of the East and the West; today the Church of the Orient with its rich and ancient liturgy comes to take its rightful place in the vanguard of the Church in the apostolate for the evangelization of this country

Somehow, however, we felt that an occasion like this could hardly be allowed to go by unnoticed. This explains the celebrations of today. For the first time in the history of the Church in India an ecclesiastical unit has been erected in the North with mission work (*Ad paganos*) entrusted to the Carmelites of the Oriental Rite. It is a unique event and, in a real sense, a red letter day for the Church of India. It lifts the curtain on to a wonderful vision of hope that rises up before our eyes. The sluices are opened and we can see the gushing torrent of spiritual energy that for generations and centuries has been bottled up and lying dormant. The vigour and vitality of the Oriental Church in the South will soon be harnessed in the task of evangelization.

....That the Holy See has chosen your Congregation for this responsible task is an indication of the high esteem it enjoys. The Congregation is flourishing today and down the years has established a splendid record of fruitful apostolic work in the church. It is the overflow of this strength and spiritual energy that the church and especially the mission will benefit from the years to come.¹

Thus the long cherished expectation and the dreams of the Christians of St Thomas the Apostle in India emerged and took formal shape in the virgin soil of Chanda. The missionary consciousness of the Syrian Church of Kerala found its fulfilment when Chanda was erected as the first and a new Syro-Malabar mission diocese.

Centuries of heritage inherited from St Thomas the Apostle came a long way through tests and struggles to reach the other territories beyond Kerala. The formation of the Chanda mission diocese and the entrusting of it to the Syro-Malabar Church accounts for the missionary zeal of the Church of St Thomas Christians.²

It was then known as the Ordinariate of Chanda, and its ecclesiastical head was called *Ordinary*, however with all the rights, duties, facilities and privileges of an Apostolic Exarch of oriental rites (Prot. No. 81/61, dated 12.06.1962). On July 1968 this unit was formally

¹*Carmela Sandesam* (CMI News Bulletin), 26 (1962) 3-6.

²Dr. Thomas Aykara, ed. *A Missiology for Third Millennium*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997, xii.

raised to the status of an Apostolic Exarchate and on 26 February 1977 by the papal Bull *Nostris Ipsorum* of Pope Paul VI this was raised into a diocese with the name 'Diocese of Chanda' and Msgr. Januarius was appointed its first Bishop. The august ceremony of his Episcopal Ordination took place during an august celebration in the small Cathedral Church at Balharshah on 3 May 1977.

The new ecclesiastical unit of Chanda was carved out of the Archdiocese of Nagpur, which was, at that time, considered to be one of the most flourishing mission dioceses in central India, under the paternal care of Archbishop Eugene D'Souza, one of the zealous missionary Bishops of India. This unit then consisted of three civil districts: Wardha and Chandrapur of Maharashtra State and Adilabad of Andhra Pradesh. According to the census of 1971 the population of this territory was 3,708,047 within an area of 48,081 sq. km. In 1982 Chandrapur district was bifurcated and *Gadchiroli* was made a new independent district.

Diocese of Adilabad

It was on July 16, 1999 the Diocese of Adilabad was established bifurcating Chanda diocese and Msgr. Joseph Kunnath CMI was appointed its first Bishop with his residence at Taluque headquarters, Mancherial. This was also a welcoming sign of recognition from the part of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches in Rome, of the wonderful works the missionaries were doing in the diocese of Chanda. In 1962 when Chanda was established there were only two churches in the whole area of the present Adilabad diocese (Bellampalli and Sirpur Kaghaznagar) for the use of the migrated Catholic workers in railways and factories. Due to the tireless efforts of the pioneering missionaries and their successors there are now more than forty churches and chapels serving the indigenous Christian communities. They are spread out in 110 villages. It comprises an area of 16,210 Sq. Kms and has a population of more than 20,80,231 among whom above 10,500 are Catholics. Adilabad diocese is now a suffragan of the Archdiocese of Hyderabad.³ When we speak of Chanda Mission today in this work, we mean certainly the undivided diocese of Chanda.

The Uniqueness of Chanda Event

The erection of Chanda Mission could be rightly called *a unique event* in the history of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, the Syro-Malabar Church and the Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). The reasons are the following:

³Bishop Gregory Karotemprel, *The Syro-Malabar Church, Journal of St. Thomas Christians*, 2, 1 (2000) 24.

1. It is the first instance in the history of the Propagation of Faith that the works of preaching the Good News in a virgin soil and establishing Catholic communities in a new territory is entrusted to indigenous people of the country.

2. It is the first attempt of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches in the *Missio ad Paganos* after perhaps the great expansion in the fourth century. By assigning the diocese of Chanda to the Syro-Malabar Church, the Holy See relaxed the centuries old restrictions imposed on her during the Latin colonial rule.

3. In this event the full theological content of *Missus* (Missio) has been brought to the fore front. Here the idea of *Missus* as being sent to a distant country with a different culture, is not so much emphasized, which usually carries with it several unhappy attitudes, but as of being ordained to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, that is to carry Christ and him alone to those people, who have not yet heard of him. In the past the emphasis was on: "go, teach, baptize and redeem." Hence even by adult baptism due importance was not given to the personal faith and conversion of the individual.⁴

More over, in the past, the missionaries, except a few brave men like Ricci and De Nobili, not only planted the Church in foreign lands but also actually transplanted it with all the social, administrative, cultural and religious structures with which they were familiar with in their home land. The missionaries were considered to be those people who went out of their country in order to preach the message of the Gospel to those who had never heard of it.

Here there are not much of differences in colour and culture between the one who is sent and those to whom one is sent. Hence, the problems arising out of superiority and inferiority feelings among the missionaries and the local people could be avoided rather easily.

4. This is the first ecclesiastical unit of the Oriental Rite outside Kerala, where there is a strong community of Syro-Malabar Catholics belonging to the Oriental Rite. The abundance of vocations to the priesthood and religious life has made her well known to the whole world. She is the most flourishing and foremost of the Eastern Churches today. About 70% of all the missionary personnel working in India is supplied by this Church.⁵

⁴Cf. W. Bühlmann, *Wenn Gott zu allen Menschen geht. Für eine neue Erfahrung der Auserwählung*, Herder, 1978, 247.

⁵Cf. Alex Paul Urumpackal; *Vocations in India*, Vol. II, Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Oriental Studies, 1988, 29.

Thus a good part of Missionaries, working in the Latin dioceses outside Kerala, hail from this apostolic community of St Thomas Christians. But unfortunately until 1962 she had not have a Mission territory of her own outside the limited space of Kerala. His Eminence Cardinal Lourdsamy, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches wrote to Bishop Januarius, congratulating him on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Chanda, saying:

... It was in the early fifties that the possibility was mooted of calling upon the flourishing Eastern-Rite Religious Institutes of India to assume the possibilities for independent missions outside of Kerala. Such a measure, it was felt, would not only help to meet immediate and urgent pastoral needs but would also provide a proper outlet for the *numerous* and *excellent vocations* the Syro-Malabar Church of the St Thomas Christians was capable of nurturing. On its part, this same apostolic Church was burning with missionary zeal and longed for an opportunity to fulfil without renouncing its ecclesiastical identity, the Divine mandate of implantation, first of all in the Indian Motherland.⁶

Born Unknown

In 1962, when the first and long expected Mission of the Syro-Malabar Church was born in Chandrapur (*Chanda* is the shortform of Chandrapur district) on a silent day; she was unknown both at home and abroad alike, Just like Our Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour of the whole world was born unknown, on a silent night in Bethlehem, 2000 years ago. In one of his reports Bp. Januarius recollects his old but happy experiences as he reached Balharshah to take charge of the new Mission territory:

Myself and my three companions reached this newly area at Balharshah on a hot summer in the afternoon. Balharshah was a small Railway station near to the town of Chandrapur, where only local passenger trains halted at that time. There was none to receive us or a place to lay our head on. Here we occupied a very old and abandoned house just behind an equally abandoned Church of the past history.⁷

On another occasion he wrote:

Our friends were some old Hindus, who came originally from Tamilnadu and a few drunkards, who were illicit distillers and dealers of alcohol in that area. Since years they had occupied the Church compound and the building there for this business, they were

⁶See D. Simon Card. Lourdsamy, to Mar Januarius Palathuruthy, CMI, 30 November 1987, *Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Chanda*, Balharshah: Committee for Souvinir and Publicity, 1988, 4-5.

⁷Bp. Januarius, CMI, *The Diocese of Chanda*, A short report prepared in connection with the CMI Mission Film, 11 May 1980, Balharshah.

not very happy about our arrival. But actually they did help us a lot in the beginning stage and guided us sincerely in our various needs.⁸

Neglected Region

Chanda was equally unknown and neglected by the government, social organizations, and also by the authorities of the Church, especially because of her particular geographical position. Chandrapur district was cut off from the main stream of civilization and development owing to the lack of proper road connections and because the area was covered by thick forests from all sides.

Even after one year of stay in Balharshah, the missionaries could not do much for the betterment of their living conditions due to the lack of sufficient fund and proper planning, nor reach any remarkable success in the field of Evangelization or development. It is really overwhelming to read the challenging experience of one of the pioneer missionaries in the early stages of his stay at Balharshah:

I reached Balharshah on September 1, 1963. The "mission compound" at Balharshah presented an appalling sight. At that time there lived in the compound eight or nine families whose main business was the manufacturing and the sale of illicit liquor.... The residential quarters, the building in which the Bishop lives now, was in a dilapidated condition. I was put up in a corner of this building and the most obnoxious thing I remember was that there was no toilet in the building. A box and a bucket were provided; the scavenger used to remove the bucket every morning. The stench that the human excreta produced was unbearable. The Church building in the compound, built during the time British, was equally in poor shape. The glass windows were broken, which provided free traffic for sparrows and bats that found a heaven in the sanctuary of the Church.⁹

July 3rd is an auspicious day for the St Thomas Christian of Kerala because it is on this day that they celebrate the great feast of St Thomas, the Apostle, to whose apostolate their Christian origin is credited to. Hence Bp. Januarius as well as Archbishop Eugene D'Souza of Nagpur were very particular that the official handing over of the new Mission territory to the CMIs must take place, without fail on this feast day. But unfortunately it had to be cancelled, since Archbishop Eugene D'Souza had not received the papers concerned in right time from the Congregation for the Propagation of

⁸Bp. Januarius, CMI, "16 Years of Chanda Mission in the North India - First Experiences," Paper prepared for the meeting of the CMI Bishops and Major Superiors, Ernakulam, 28 November 1978, Archives, Diocese of Chanda, Balharshah.

⁹Dan Thottakara, CMI, "Memories of a Missionary: Chanda 1963-1971," Thevara, Cochin, 1987. Special Collections, Archives, Diocese of Chanda, Balharshah.

Faith in Rome. But on that day, as insisted by the Archbishop of Nagpur, Bishop Januarius celebrated holy mass in the Syro-Malabar rite in a military Chapel in Pulgaon to mark the symbolic starting of the Mission works of the Oriental Church in Chanda.¹⁰ Even when the official ceremony of the transfer of the newly erected diocese to the CMIs took place on August 15, 1962 in the Archbishop's House, Nagpur, only two CMI missionaries from Kerala and a handful of Priests from Nagpur Archdiocese were present to witness this unique and historic event of the birth of an oriental diocese, the first of its kind outside Kerala, in the central part of India.

Mission – A New Vision

The courageous and prophetic missionary bishop Januarius served Chanda diocese as one of the country's greatest apostles of love and simplicity. He embodied the Church's "option for the poor" and defined through his actions the intimate relationship between love and justice. He is counted as one of the shapers of the missionary Church in the twentieth century. Bishop Januarius came to the conclusion that charity was not enough. What was needed was social justice, empowering the poor to be the agents of social transformation.

Agonies and ecstasies, successes and failures experienced in the challenging decades of missionary life of Chanda shed lights into the opinion that Bp. Januarius had a new vision of Mission that was exactly in accordance with the reflections of modern missiologists like Prof. Remi Höckmann, who has beautifully explained the mission of the Church as follows:

Mission of the church is basically a *movement*, a movement originated in love, rooted in love and that engenders love, that is: its origin is love, foundation is love and its result (fruit) is love. It is a movement sustained by the mystery of God creating, God redeeming and God reaching out to save all (Wisdom 11:12; 1Tim 2:4).¹¹

According to Pope John Paul 11 it is the "logic of the great heart."

From being the God of creation he becomes the God of Covenant, to reach out to save all. This comes about in accordance with the logic, which from the beginning governs the whole of creation. It is the logic of love, which can perhaps be thought of as the logic Paschal spoke of:

¹⁰See Prasan Bahi, "Chanda Mission That Celebrates Silver Jubilee," *Carmelasandesam* (CMI Mission Bulletin), 84/11, November 1984, 3.

¹¹Remi Höckmann, O.P., "Theology of Christian Mission," Notes, Rome: Pontifical University of St. Thomas, 1989, 36.

“yes, the heart”. Throughout the description of Genesis the heart can be heard beating..... We stand in the presence of the great heart.¹²

As we know, the history of salvation is nothing but love going out of its way to seek and save what is lost (Mt 18: 12; Lk 15: 14; Jn 3: 17, 12: 47), a love that leaves the ninety nine and goes to seek and save the one that went astray. Lost does not mean damned or doomed. It simply means those who are socially, economically, culturally and religiously sidelined, out of the main stream; all those who find it difficult to lead a life worthy of human being. These people are to be brought back to their right place in the society. This means, we are bound by duty to give shape to a nation more attuned to the struggles of the poor for justice, and their needs of sharing and equality in our society, in our world. To reach this goal every culture and every religion has to enter into a new phase of fellowship and openness to other religious traditions and diversity of cultures following the simple example of God’s communication in creation and his self-communication by entering into human history. As radical disciples of a great movement initiated by Jesus Christ we must be on the move to more and more villages and towns, new cultures and diversities of peoples like pilgrims. Thus each one of us must become the *Good News* addressed to the poor, weak and oppressed section of the society – a movement of love that is founded in love and that produces love. God did it most of all by sending His Son into the world and His mission could be put in one sentence: *He went around doing Good to all.*

Even the very name *Jesus* manifests God’s will to save the world. “Jesus” literally means: *He who saves*.¹³ Thus the name Jesus touches deeply the mystery of man, as Vatican II has mentioned:

In fact it is only in the mystery of the Word Incarnate that light is shed on the mystery of Mankind. For Adam, the first human being was a representation of the future, namely, of Christ the Lord. It is Christ, the last Adam, *who fully discloses mankind to itself*, and unfolds its noble calling.¹⁴

This calling of mankind is precisely the supreme calling to become *children of God*¹⁵ which is being realized in the mission of the Son, namely Incarnation. Out of love for mankind God did it; we did not merit it.

¹²Wojtyla, *Sign of Contradiction*, Slough: 1979, 22. (as quote in Remi Höckmann)

¹³John Paul II, “1991: Year of Church’s Social Doctrine,” Peace Day Homily, *Osservatore Romano*, 1, 7 Jan. (1991) 1.

¹⁴Vatican II, *GS*, 22.

¹⁵John Paul II, “1991: Year of Church’s Social Doctrine”, 1.

Hence, Bishop Januarius and the first missionaries were fully convinced, that mission of the Church is a question of a divine gift, it is the mission of God and we cannot take credit for it. “As the Father has loved me I also love you”, to which there corresponds a mission in which Jesus sees a consequence of his own mission: “as the Father has sent me, I also send you” to bring the Good News to the poor, and to proclaim to captives deliverance” (Jn 15:9; 20:21; Is 61:1). As the Father has sent me I sent you. The response to the sending love of God can only be a missionary response of love which moves to all men.

A Movement Anchored in the Mission of Jesus

The mission of Jesus transcended all other missions; Jesus’ way was “let move to the neighbouring villages,” (Mk 1:38) where everything was probably quite different from towns – here one could experience much more openness to the word of God, simplicity, mutual concern for others and so on. Jesus chose the apostles to go out into the world as he did. Moreover, New Testament notion of the mission is that of going and sending. Incarnation literally means *in carne natus*, born into the flesh which theologically stands for the sending of the Son of God into the world to save all men. Every movement of Jesus was mission oriented culminating on the cross on Calvary.

This purposeful movement of Jesus is particularly clear in Luke’s Gospel, where through ten chapters Jesus is quite ostensibly on his way to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51-19: 41). Geographically Jesus was moving towards Jerusalem, but missiologically speaking he was on his way to the whole mankind, for it was on the cross that his blood would be poured out for the salvation of all.¹⁶

Thus Incarnation also means God being born into the concrete world of men to identify himself with them. The Word of God was sent to talk to the people, to change people, to challenge people, to do things with the people and finally to lay down his life for the people. Incarnation is God’s commitment to a divine future, by which all may wake up to the truth about God and about man.¹⁷

Christian mission, therefore, could be well explained in the words of Vatican II where it is stated that it is a movement sustained in man’s search for God, anchored in his longing for the knowledge of his own destiny, namely God.¹⁸ It is a movement in search of an answer to the mystery of man’s existence – where he comes from, what is the

¹⁶Remi Höckmann, *Theology of Christian Mission*, 37-38.

¹⁷Cf. Remi Höckmann, *Theology of Christian Mission*, 37-38.

¹⁸Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

mystery of suffering and where he is going to, that is, his ultimate concern or end. It is a movement of man seeking to become whole, seeking to embrace life fully and integrally.¹⁹

“Hence, our mission is to meet other people as pilgrims who set out in search of God, not in building of stones but in human hearts and to show the way into it, which was made open on the cross. All we have to do is to help people to walk in it,”²⁰ said Pope Paul VI in his address to the representatives of non-Christian religions of India. Thus giving a meaning to people’s life, helping them to realize the life Jesus lived, we have to produce abundant fruits: the blind see, the deaf hear, the cripple walk, sinners get forgiveness and the people are made free (Mt 18:14; Lk 7:22; Is 61:1 ff.)

Thus the mission of the Church is God moving towards all men, transcending all boundaries of colour and creed, calling on all of them to come home. It is the continuation of the mission of God inaugurated at the Synagogue of Nazareth leading to the formation of the Kingdom of God, which is the ultimate aim. To lead them in their movement towards this goal is our mission. Christian mission is the power of the Spirit moving us to them all, unfolding the very mission of the Risen Lord.²¹ Prof. Höckmann has beautifully expressed this concept in other words when he wrote: “God entered the world in Jesus. Jesus enters that world, here and now, through us. It is only in that human, and yet most often dehumanizing world of today that the truth shows its real truth-value.”²²

A Movement Based on the Trinitarian Relation

It is the will of the Father that all men be saved and for this end Christ sent his life-giving Spirit upon his disciples and through him set up his body which is the Church as “the universal sacrament of salvation.”²³ Vatican II clearly states in the decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, that the Church on earth is by nature missionary since according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin and nature in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit.²⁴ It is the Holy Spirit sent by Christ from the Father who exercises inwardly his saving influence and promotes the spread of the Church. To quote the Council Decree:

¹⁹Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 1.

²⁰See Remi Höckmann, *Theology of Christian Mission*, 40.

²¹Vatican II, AG, 5.

²²Remi Höckmann, *Theology of Christian Mission*, 2

²³Vatican II, *LG*, 48; *AG*, 1

²⁴Vatican II, *AG*, 2.

This plan flows from the “fountain-like love”, the love of God the Father. As the principle without principle from whom the Son is generated and from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son, God in his great and merciful kindness freely creates us and moreover, graciously calls us to share in his love and glory. He generously pours out, and never ceases to pour out his divine goodness, so that he who is the creator of all things might at last become “all in all” (1Cor 15:28).²⁵

Thus the Christian Mission is the continuation of the mission of Christ and as such has its origin in the heart of God himself, in the gracious decision to share his love, his life with other created things.²⁶

Hence, there are three missionaries: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, the mission with which we are concerned is God’s. Therefore, it is the mission of the Church in a secondary and derivative sense. The Church’s missionary activities are only a response to something that has already been done by God himself.²⁷

By its very nature and origin the Church, therefore, is missionary. It receives its origin from the *movement* through which God communicates himself to his creation, a movement which is realized in the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and thus has its origin in the communication of the life of the inter-Trinitarian procession. The Spirit is the *Prime Mover* as on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2:1 ff.). Basically the Church is therefore a movement of communication until everything that has been called to receive life will be filled.²⁸

It was the will of God to call men to share in his life and not merely singly, without any bond between them, but he formed them into a people, in which his children, who had been scattered were gathered together (Jn 11:15).²⁹

New Method of Chanda

From the very beginning till today Chanda has been very consistent in her methodology “from periphery to the centre”. Start from the

²⁵Vatican II, AG, 2.

²⁶John Patrick Brennan, *Christian Mission in a pluralistic World*, Middlegreen: St. Paul’s publications, 1990, 110.

²⁷See the quote in Stanley E. Downes, “The Renewal of the Church,” in *The Indian Church: Identity and Fulfillment*, ed. Mathai Zacharia, Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1971, 25.

²⁸Johannes Schütte, SVD, *Evangelization and Development in the Light of Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Theology*, in *Service and Salvation*, Nagpur Theological Conference on Evangelization, ed. Joseph Pathrapankal, CMI, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1973, 375.

²⁹Vatican II, AG, 2.

interior villages and remote parts of the diocese and slowly move towards towns with institutions in support of the new Christian communities.³⁰ Following the example of our Master Jesus Christ who gave the Church the missionary mandate “to go into all the world and to preach the Gospel to the whole creation,” (Mk 16:5; Mt 28:19) and following the example of the Apostles we thought it our duty to bring the Good News of Redemption to the poorest of the poor, and the oppressed classes of India, living with them in the remote areas of the diocese, instead of going to other countries for mission works. Bishop Januarius and the pioneer missionaries had a burning to reach out to the tribal and to those who are living in deep jungles, far away from the civilized parts of the diocese. Because it is the will of God that “all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth,” (1Tim 2:4) and when the fullness of time had come, He sent his Son, the Word made flesh, anointed by the Holy Spirit, to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart, (Is 61:1; Lk 4:18) and to be a bodily and spiritual medicine.³¹ Bishop Januarius writes: “The method that Chanda followed in its efforts of Evangelization is nothing but the repetition of what the Apostles did in their own time. We did not imitate or compete, Chanda was a challenge to the time, as Christianity was in its beginning stage.”³² His Excellency continues:

Our efforts were mainly people oriented. Our contacts were family to family, especially with small village groups. We started from the periphery, the abandoned and difficult areas to reach, and slowly moved towards towns with institutions later as a support of our new Christian communities. The method had its effect. We could establish a living Church, a people of God, spread out in the interior regions of the diocese.³³

This new approach to the practical side of mission work has a theological view different from the past. Before the Council, the theology of Mission was developed by the missionaries themselves. One needed to find meaning in what one was doing for the Church, in the light of the vision of that time. This was a view “from the centre to the periphery.”³⁴ The Council and the post-conciliar period have certainly brought welcome to the broadening and deepening of

³⁰Bp. Januarius, CMI, “25 Years of Chanda of Chanda Diocese,” in *Silver Jubilee Souvenir*, 12.

³¹St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Ephesios*, 7: 2, quoted in Vatican II, SC, 5.

³²Bp. Januarius, CMI, “25 Years of Chanda Diocese,” 12.

³³Bp. Januarius, CMI, “25 Years of Chanda Diocese,” 12.

³⁴Michael Amaldoss, SJ, “Mission from Vatican II into the Coming Decade,” *SEDOS Bulletin* 21, 11 (15 December 1989) 354.

perspectives on Mission. But the approach was more conceptual and abstract for an ordinary man, a view starting from above, from the Holy Trinity. We specify, on the other hand, the new point of view of Mission as looking from the 'periphery and from below'. From the periphery could also mean from the young Churches, which in the eyes of many still represent object of mission. From below could mean: approaching the mission not conceptually, but questioning it from the experience of contemporary reality, such as inculturation, inter-religious dialogue and liberation.³⁵

The research team of the CMI Congregation assisted by Sr. Magi Vazheparampil, CMC, conducted a study of the five mission dioceses of the Congregation and made the following positive remark on the missionary methods used in Chanda:

Their approach was quite relevant to the vast majority of people in the region, deprived, as they had been, of many of the benefits of the progress the country made, particularly in the States of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The witnessing of the missionaries' work in the remote villages, small towns were really useful to the people, helping them experience the God who cared for them.³⁶

Jesus the Villager

This method was followed by the missionaries in Chanda for the simple reason that Jesus was and lived like a simple villager. He was born in a village Bethlehem (Lk 2:6-7); he grew up as the son of the carpenter Joseph – as a villager (Jn 6:42, Lk 4:22); his public life was of a very simple man, who never travelled beyond his native country. Jesus never wrote a book and nothing extraordinary is narrated in his private life: "he took the form of a servant and was obedient to human beings unto death" (Phil 2:5-8).

Moreover, he had associations with sinners or people of low strata and the sick. To identify with them Jesus received the baptism of repentance (Mt 3:13-16); he fasted, prayed and was tempted like one of the Jews (Mt 4: 1-11); he ate and drank with the marginalized and sinners of the world (Lk 7:34). He was tired after work and journeying, and sat near a well (in a village) for water (Jn 4:6); he felt hunger and thirst; he wept (Jn 11:35) and slept (Mt 8:24; Mk 4:38) like a poor man and became a man of sorrows (Lk 22:44). In short he was "like one of us in all things" (Heb 2:17).

³⁵Michael Amaldoss, SJ, "Mission from Vatican II...", 384,385.

³⁶Cherian Kochupurackal, CMI, *India Awaiting the Good News*, Cochin: CMI General Mission Secretariate, 7.

Hence our missionary spirit must be that of Jesus and Jesus community (the community of Jesus and his disciples) from which it originates. Origins are normative. We remain true to what we are; only by remaining true to our beginnings, we become what we are – the children of God. George Soares-Prabhu holds the view that it is important that we remain faithful to the spirit of the Jesus Community, explicitly presented to us in the New Testament, and conspicuously in Mathew, as a paradigm for the Church.³⁷

Option for the Poor

Thus Bp. Januarius began to put emphasis on grassroots development, education of the youth and conscientization of the people. He was certainly a challenge of that time when he started his mission of bringing the Good News of the arrival of the Kingdom of God from the periphery to the towns. His message of peace and love for the poor reflected in his simple style of Episcopal life and leadership as well. Unfortunately this mission of love inaugurated by Jesus, experimented in Chanda and now continued by the Church, is being misunderstood and challenged by the powers of darkness and selfishness, keeping many of our country-men in the stranglehold of ignorance, disease, oppression and poverty. We have to pray for a new outpouring of love from the divine Child in Bethlehem. We strongly believe and hope, as Archbishop Aruldas once wrote: “The anti-social elements in our country certainly cannot kill our joy and enthusiasm in continuing Jesus’ mission of love which is irresistible and urgent; and hence it will continue”.

Mission Meant to Give up and Giving More

Mission is ultimately a process of self conversion; it involves, according to Bp. Januarius, both giving up and giving more. A radical and true missionary is the one who makes the supreme sacrifice of thinking about oneself before others; it is a going out of one’s own self interests and security feelings. Religious conflicts, wars and violence are products of human selfishness, greed, fear and insecurity. Poverty and hunger are also outcome of these evils inherent in human nature. These forces of evil can be fought and overcome only with the help of unity among various religious groups and confessions and above all through a spiritual growth. The greed and selfishness of a few, the rich and the powerful, oppress and exploit the poor and the weak that are denied justice miserably. The seeds of greed and selfishness, injustice and violence lie within

³⁷George M. Soares-Prabhu, “Radical Beginnings: The Jesus Community as the Archetype of the Church,” *Jeevadhara*, 15, 88 (1985) 308.

human beings. Hence it is in the hearts and minds of men and women that the foundations of a culture of non-violence, preached by Gandhi, the Father of our Nation, prayer, peace, harmony and love are to be laid. This is the immediate function of religious and spiritual leaders like us. Political leadership is often helpless to bring about the inner transformation of the individual, without which we cannot transform the world.

Struggle to Exist and Struggle to Express

As the first Bishop of the diocese of Chanda, for about 28 years, Bp. Januarius had to travel through the desert of ecstasies and agonies of its growth which made him to think that the “struggle to exist and struggle to express” are the two struggles that constitute our life. The former leads to hard work, invention of new methods of production and so on. It also may set one in conflict with one’s neighbour. The struggle to express begins like the shrill cry of a new born babe. But like a mother who can easily read the language of the crying child, the missionary also must be to read the signs of a given situation and make peace with the neighbour in his struggle to express himself to them. Thus every missionary will have to meet the experience of this “struggle to exist” in the existential process of his “struggle to express” the Good News of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. He writes:

For us missionaries the struggle to exist starts with ones efforts to find a way to an unknown village to get acceptance among a strange and new people, to make a few good friends from among them. He persists in it till he makes a few disciples and a nucleus of the ‘people of God’. He continues his struggle to make a small abode for his God and for himself, as well as to find his daily bread. Then arise also confrontations with his much suspicious neighbours, false reporters, fanatics of other beliefs, even with some petty local officers and politicians, who perhaps find in him an easy prey to their greed and hatred. It is the same struggle as when Christ and the first Christians struggled with for their existence.³⁸

Children’s Homes

Children’s Home attached to almost all mission stations was also one of the uniqueness of Bishop Januarius missionary methodology. Most of the children come from either distant villages where there are no schools or from very poor families and stay in the Homes together with other children of different castes, colour and culture. They not only do attend the schools but also play a vital role in the active life of

³⁸ Bishop Januarius, “Exarch’s Letter,” in *News Letter*, 5, 1, (January-April, 1975) Balharshah: Bishop’s House, 1.

the parish. The integral training they get and the religious education they receive in the Children's Homes help them to become good evangelizers in their own villages. By living together, eating, learning, playing and praying together they make the true experience that they are all children of God, who does not make any unhealthy difference between different castes, creed and culture. Thus, for the effective formation of genuine Christians and to give shape to a mature society rooted in Christian ideals and faith, moral values and patriotism, the Children's Homes have proved to be the best means in a country like India, where the majority of its population is living in interior villages. These children contribute an important role in dispelling many of the caste-prejudices from the society. In one of his reports Bishop Januarius writes:

In the case of school-going children our policy is not to conduct schools of our own but to make the maximum use of the Government village-schools. We, however, concentrate our attention on our Children's Homes where the children are taken care of their health, Christian behaviour and studies. Here we give them a true Christian atmosphere of development in faith, moral life and character. The presence of these children improves the quality of the schools and the authorities concerned are happy about our service in this direction.³⁹

Seven Point Programme

The seven point programme of Chanda was certainly the expression of Bishop Januarius radical vision of evangelization. He visualized that the evangelized should become evangelizers in turn. It should be a growth from Family to Family because family is the basic unit of the society. Hence, in order to educate the new Christians in the fullness of life in Christ, to help the Christian Families well-rooted in the faith, he developed this programme which is nothing but the simple and popular expression of Christian responsibility, namely to share the message of Christ with others in and through the symbols of Christian Family or Christian identity and the symbols of Christian behaviour or Christian values.

The symbols of Christian family consisted of four material symbols which are the Cross, the picture of Christ, the Holy Bible and a lamp. These four symbols must be installed in every family. Every evening the family members will gather together in front of the picture of Christ, light the lamp, say the family prayers, read a passage from the Bible, perform the *arati*, and then venerate these four symbols. In order to keep Christ alive in them and to deepen their faith in the

³⁹See C. Kochupurackal, *India Awaiting the Good News*, 48.

person of Christ and thus become true disciple of Christ, this must become a daily practice of every family.

The symbols of Christian behaviour or Christian values are the *communitarian prayer* in the family as well as in the Church, *practice of unconditional forgiveness and love*, and the *sharing with and the caring for the needy brethren*. “Prayer is the index of man’s faith,” says Professor Dhavamony. “It is used commonly to signify the expression in thought and word of a man’s relationship to the divine, the attempt on man’s part to communicate with the divine,”⁴⁰ which will help him to enter deep into the mysteries of God’s love going out to seek and save. Consequently a radical change takes place in the person through which he gets the right to call God *Abba*, Father and he becomes the child of God, a brand new person interiorly (2 Cor 5:17).

Unconditional forgiveness means, accepting others as they are. It is an approach to people as our brothers and sisters. Its positive ideal is love not only your neighbour as yourself but also “love your enemies ... and pray for those who persecute you (Mt 5:44). Unconditional has a deep meaning of perfection and love. “... You have to be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy”, (Lev 19:2). Thus our relation with our neighbours must be one of openness and sincerity as the children of God.

Sharing what we earn and what we have with our needy neighbours is an approach to things as a family gift of our Heavenly Father. Thus when we “share everything dynamically divine” (the motto of Chanda Mission) with our needy brethren we share in the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ who emptied himself and became like one of us in order to share with us his infinite goodness of eternal life. Through sharing we become transformed into God’s image and thus we attain our own spiritual transformation.⁴¹

Thus a Christian family becomes a sign and inspiration for the whole village leading to an effective evangelization in tune with the expression of Mahatma Gandhi, who said: “There is no need for Christians to preach to us. Let them first live the Gospel; then we ourselves will follow them.” The life lived by us, the missionaries and the Christians, is the only Gospel that majority of non-Christians will ever get to live.⁴²

⁴⁰Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism, Documenta Missonalia 15*, Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1982, 206.

⁴¹For more details, cf. John Poovatholil CMI, *Chanda Mission: Orientations and Confrontations in Evangelization*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1998, 340.

⁴²Bishop Joseph A. Rosario, “The importance of Life-witnessing of a Missionary for the Success of Evangelization,” in Dr. Thomas Aykara, ed., 45.

Conclusion

Bishop Januarius' new experiments of forming faith communities in the barren soil of Chanda, the *saga of risking* all security consciousness and the efforts of integrally developing the subhuman fellow beings are all challenging and inspiring. His unique leadership, prophetic vision, dynamic personality, unique philosophy of proclamation and a life style of spontaneous simplicity were good inspirations and continuous encouragement for all the missionaries to exploit the favourable circumstances which prevailed in Chanda and to undertake any hardship for the spread of the Gospel of Christ. Consequently there was a substantial and sustained growth of the Church in the new soil. The build up of a mature and self supporting Christian community, deepening the faith and the Christian living of our new Catholics and making every mission station self sufficient were his main thrust. Today when we are celebrating the golden Jubilee of Chanda mission we acknowledge and appreciate all that he has done to this diocese through his dynamic leadership and prophetic vision, with profound gratitude and love.

Living amidst a culture and climate totally foreign to them, often in poor living conditions, distress and isolation, the valiant sons of the Syro-Malabar Church laboured hard to build up by their toil, sacrifice and living example many a Christian communities. Later institutions like Schools, Children's Homes, Dispensaries, House for religious communities and Churches, etc. propped up in support of these new Christian communities. All that they did was that they got themselves identified with the people of Chanda through their involvement in the great process of the integral developments of those people, who were anxiously waiting for a better life worthy of human beings.

To achieve this end the missionaries journeyed across wild tracts of land, plagued sometimes by wild animals, thugs and dacoits, on foot, cycles, bicycles and bullock carts. While leaving a margin for a fair share of human weakness, no one can deny that these missionaries had great success in their attempts to serve the Church and her people through their daring, selfless and sometimes audacious initiatives. Above all they put their trust in God. "In no part of India have I ever seen such an enthusiasm for evangelization as in Chanda," so remarked the late Cardinal Gracias of Bombay, after paying a visit to Chanda in 1970. It is worth quoting here the remark once made by Fr. Prabhudhar, SJ: "In many districts of Maharashtra State the Church is weak or practically absent. It is only in Chanda

diocese sound headway is being made with movement among all communities – a fast growing and also solid growing Christianity.”⁴³

To conclude this short work on Chanda Mission we would like to say that Bishop Januarius, through his unique approach to evangelization in his diocese, was proving to the world his deep conviction that we can reach the soul of India only in the villages. He considered many successes and gains which he might have achieved by working in towns and among the elite groups, as of little worth. His style of evangelization was, to put it in a nutshell, “preach the Gospel and that too to the poor”. He encouraged the missionaries to go deep into the interior places of the Region, and his special consideration always went to those persons who worked in villages.

Above all these, Chanda had a deep conviction that only when Christians share their new found faith with others, will they be confirmed in their faith and will it strike deep roots in them. That is to say, Chanda was forming Christian community, which is actually evangelizing. This was the goal of evangelization from the very beginning of Chanda mission.

All the missionary and development activities undertaken in Chanda, such as, starting from the periphery to the centre, identification with the poor, making evangelization a people’s movement, conscientization of the people, to live and work *with* and not merely *for* the people, formation of small village communities, adult and non-formal education, and many other development oriented programmes and so on, are all in line with the modern teachings of the Church regarding her evangelical apostolate in the world.

Thus, Bishop Januarius could see in his life time his own vision actualized, his mission largely accomplished and faithfully forging ahead under the new leadership of his successor Bishop Vijay Anand, CMI. He was content that he, together with his tireless missionary team, could convert the relatively unknown, deserted region of Chanda into a challenging “Oasis” of promises that attracted the attention of many young missionaries. His Excellency could certainly rejoice, by the time of his retirement in 1990, as the Archbishop Eugene D’Souza of Nagpur, rightly made a public confession of his conviction, saying: “Truly Chanda the desert has blossomed and bloomed.”

Bishop Vijay Anand, the former Prior General of the CMI Congregation, was then appointed the new Bishop of Chanda, by the Holy Father

⁴³Prabhudhar, SJ, *Indian Missiological Review* (January 1980) 187.

Pope John Paul II. His Episcopal Ordination took place in the Cathedral Church at Ballarshah, on 3 July 1990, the Feast of St Thomas the Apostle, the heavenly Patron of Chanda.

The motto chosen by Bishop Vijay Anand is "Universal Family," which signifies that pluriformity in the Church and the society is to be taken as a self-evident fact of our present-day world. Hence, by this motto he also means "multiplicity in unity". Let the people in their varieties bring in their own peculiarities into the common goal of creating a harmonious family. As a Bishop he would also like to go to the people of other religions and advocate co-operation and dialogue with them. Bishop Vijay Anand is fully convinced that like Our Lord, who wandered in villages and towns of Palestine and taught them, it is his duty, to bring together all the people in a peaceful and constructive climate and thus to make the Word of God available to all.

The concept of "universal family" too stresses the spirit of sharing as the central theme. We share because we belong to one family, irrespective of any cast or creed, assuming and assimilating different cultures and languages. Above all we share the joy of oneness in love, in universal brotherhood. Hence, it is certainly a movement of love. Thus the motto "universal family" will always remind us of our first and last duty as missionary 'to prepare the way for the Lord' (Jn 1:23).⁴⁴

But, at the same time, one should not let oneself go forward, the great need and challenge of 'living the Gospel', unnoticed. We, the missionaries have to be prophetic in all fields and should be able to read the signs of the time. The cry of modern man could be expressed in the simple message of the late Archbishop Eugene D'Souza of Nagpur: "To be able to be Ministers and Ambassadors of the Gospel one must live in the *Word of Christ*," quoting the message of His Holiness Pope Paul VI, to the Synod of Bishops assembled for *Evangelization in the World today*, he continued: "A reconciling presence in the conflicts and confusions of the present world is not possible if we, the missionaries and the Christians do not live a *life of Faith and prayer*, because we are inserted in the mission of the *Incarnate Word*. This is the burden of the message of Chanda Mission to you and to me, today and always,"⁴⁵ especially in this mission year of the Syro-Malabar Church.

⁴⁴Alex Thannippara, trans., "New Style of a New Bishop," in *Carmelasandesam*, 136 (January-February 1991) 16. This article was originally published in *Die Katholische Mission*, 109, 6 (1990) 187-188.

⁴⁵Archbishop Eugene D'Souza, "Foreword - Evangelization Today," in John Poovatholil CMI, vii.