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BOOK REVIEW

N.A. Thomas, *One Territory – One Bishop? Or, Shall the Syrian Rites Die?* Kottayam: Denha Services, 2011 (second edition; first published in 1971). Pages: 179. ISBN: 978-81-88456-62-8

The book under review is the reprint of the book by the famous educationist and historian Dr. N.A. Thomas. Although it is a reprint, the second impression has a well-studied foreword by Archbishop Mar Joseph Powathil, messages by Mar Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, and Mar George Alencherry, Bishop of Thuckalay.

The author, an ardent lover of the Apostolic Church of St. Thomas Christians, argues throughout the book the legitimate right of this apostolic Church to have jurisdiction and missionary right all over India. The immediate context of the writing of the book was to protest against the “one rite movement” of 1970’s and in concrete to assert the legitimate right of the Syro-Malankara and Syro-Malabar Churches to exist in the territories where there is Latin Church. One Territory – One Bishop was a 13th century Western concept. IV Lateran Council (1215) say, “We altogether forbid one and the same city or diocese to have more than one bishop as if it were a body with several heads like a monster” (Canon 9). It was the result of medieval European feudalism. It is alien to the spirit of the Eastern Churches, where personal jurisdiction is given more importance than territorial jurisdiction.

The apostolic Church of St. Thomas Christians had all India jurisdiction and the spiritual leader of the community was known as the “Metropolitan and Gate of All India,” and the head of the community was known as “The Archdeacon of All India.” With the synod of Udayamperur and with the introduction of the Padroado jurisdiction, the St. Thomas Christians were territorially confined to limited territories and thus the missionary vitality of the Church was choked off. The Western mind of conquering for Christ resulted in the confinement of St. Thomas Christians to a limited territory.

This confinement of territory was introduced 400 years before and even today it is being continued. In spite of the beautiful and excellent teachings of Vatican II on the communion nature of the Catholic Church, the equal dignity of the individual Churches and the obligation of the Catholic Church to see that the pastoral requirements of the followers of each individual Church are met, the ground reality is far from truth. Catholic Church being the conscience of the message of Jesus Christ on earth, the negligence from the part of the Latin Church in implementing the teachings of the Church is a matter of grave concern. "Justice delayed is justice denied" is practically true in the case of the St. Thomas Christians.

The author in 46 points brings to light the subject which he wants to stress. "One territory - One Bishop" is the teaching of the 4th Lateran Council and after 8 centuries lot of changes have taken place in the Church and in the world. However, the Latin Church in India through a colonial mentality, still holds this teaching as valid, ignoring the latest teachings of Vatican II.

Although there are signs of improvements after the first publication of the book under review, lot more have to be done for the fuller implementation of the teachings of Vatican II. The pastoral care of the migrants of the St. Thomas Christians all over the world, the re-establishment of the All India jurisdiction and the Patriarchal status to the Eastern Churches in India are in the right direction of the organic growth of the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Churches. The Indian Church in order to be more authentic and faithful to the teachings of Christ and to the Indian realities, has to shake off all colonial outfits.

The book is very useful to those who are seeking the true face of the Indian Church and the injustice which are inflicted upon the Eastern Churches in India. The book would have been better appreciated if it were a revised version as lot of organic changes have taken place after its first publication, although lot more have to be done. A slight correction to be made is on page 26, where it is said that the Syro-Malankara Hierarchy was established in 1933, whereas it was established in 1932.

The re-publication of the book is on the 25th death anniversary of the author and his genuine spirit inspires and enlightens all of us, both Syrians and the Latins. Let justice be done to the Eastern Churches in India by allowing freedom of worship to all its members, which is the constitutional right of every citizen of India. Denha service deserves our special congratulations for the timely publication of the book. I wish wider reading of the book and the

ignorant minds be enlightened and an open heart be prepared to welcome the ever-flowing working of the Holy Spirit.

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