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Book Review

Cosme Jose Costa, *Apostolic Christianity in Goa and in the West Coast*, Pilar: Xaverian Publication Society, 2009, pp. xxii+100, ISBN: 81-903898-07, price: Rs. 150/-

The present work under review is a systematic and scientific presentation of the traditional belief that Apostle St Thomas preached the gospel in the different parts of India, other than the traditional homeland of the St Thomas Christians, the Malabar Coast. The author makes an attempt to take back the roots of the Goan Christianity to the first century A.D. Recent archaeological discoveries, literary evidences and other sources strengthen the traditional view that there were Christian settlements in the different parts of India tracing their origin back to apostolic times. The testimonies of various visitors and authors including Pantaenus, Cosmas Indicopleustes, Marco Polo, John of Monte Corvino, Nicholas of Pistoia, Jordan Catalnai of Severac etc. were some of the visitors to India who testified to the Christian presence in different parts of India. Besides, the fathers of the Church and ecclesiastical historians including Eusebius, St Ephrem, St Jerome etc. also testified the Christianization of India through the missionary work of St Thomas. Kalyan, Thana, Broach or Baruch, Sopara, Udaipur, Ujjain, Mylapore, Sri Lanka, Takshasila etc. are the frequently referred Christian centres other than the Malabar Coast. Indian and foreign authors have evidences with them to prove the Christian presence all over India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka even before the arrival of the European missionaries in the 16th century. However, these Christians either lost their identity or became part of the Western Latin Church in their contacts with the European missionaries.

The immediate context of the writing of the present book is the discovery of a Phalavi inscribed Cross from Agassaim, from the lower banks of Zuari river, by the author on April 27, 2001. Popularly known as St Thomas Cross, these crosses are very common in the traditional settlements of St Thomas Christians. Already in the 6th century Cosmas mentioned that there were Persian settlements in Goa. Fr. Cosme argues that Goa had a long but often interrupted history of Christian presence in the first century of Christian era itself. The author analyses the trade circuits of the Indian ocean which enables him to convince the readers the entry of Christian religion in the Konkan region in the first century of the Christian era. The author convincingly argues that the Western missionaries formed the Christian community of Goa out of a group of people whose ancestors had already received the faith from the apostle in the first century itself. The arguments of Fr. Cosme is further

strengthened by the fact of the discovery of a cross from the walls of a destroyed building in 1510.

This book is an attempt to find out who could have first introduced Christianity in Goa and an attempt to answer some of the questions related to the apostolic activities of St Thomas and St Bartholomew (pp. 1-2). The author convincingly argues the physical possibility of the apostolic activities of St Thomas and St Bartholomew in India, basing his arguments on the trade routes. This book is also an attempt to disprove the claims of the historians that Christianity is the byproduct of colonization. There are evidences to show that there were Christians spread all over India even before the arrival of the Western missionaries.

There are many authors who argue that Christianity was not unknown in Goa before it was taken there by the Western missionaries. Ibn Batuta in 1342 spoke about the earlier Christian settlements in Goa. It is possible that these Christian settlements disappeared along with other Christian settlements on the Konkan Coast.

Rev. Fr. Hubert O Mascarenhas, one of the pioneers in this direction, through his rigorous research and scientific studies argue that there are Hindus in Goa who are called Thomase which means followers of St Thomas. He even speaks of a colony, close to Kalyanapuram near Mangalore, of these Thomases, both Hindu and Christian. This might be the people who fled from Goa during the early Portuguese centuries. They make pilgrimages to the holy places associated with St Thomas. Dr. Mascarenhas argues that both these groups of Thomase are followers of Apostle Thomas, i.e., St Thomas Christians. In the writings of St Francis Xavier, there are casual references to the attachment of Goans to St Thomas, whom they consider as their glorious apostle. To strengthen the devotion to St Thomas, St Francis Xavier asked the Pope to grant a plenary indulgence, on the feast day of St Thomas and its octaves, to the devotees. Fr. Mascarenhas even concludes that today's so-called non-Christians in Goa are those who refused to give up the Chaldaic rite and Eastern traditions in the make of Western colonialism.

The spiritual head of St Thomas Christian community was traditionally known as the Metropolitan and the Gate of All India and the leader of the Community was known as the Archdeacon of all India. This shows the all India presence of St Thomas Christians. However, the colonial powers confined the activities of the St Thomas Christians to the limited territories. As an individual Church the Syro-Malabar Church is denied of the freedom of preaching the Gospel. After many years of the conclusion of Second Vatican Council, which clearly speaks about the equal rights of all the Individual Churches, Syro-Malabar Church is still denied the freedom of evangelization and pastoral care as an Oriental Church. The book under review is a fitting reply to the claims of some of the Church authorities that the all India Christian presence in the different parts India is the result of the mission work of the Western missionaries. Besides, this book throws before us a great challenge

for further scientific study, research and excavations to substantiate the arguments of the author. Let both secular historians and Church historians, shedding away their prejudices, make a critical and scientific study of the Christian presence in the different parts of India even from the apostolic time.

The book is a well-documented one which is crowned with a foreword by the famous historian Dr. Pius Malekandathil. The pictures of St Thomas crosses at various places, inscriptions, detailed picture description of the background from where the cross was found, many other pictures and the various maps and sea route descriptions make the book more readable and attractive. The whole book is printed in art paper. I wish wider circulation to the book and let the readers be enlightened and let new discussions begin on the basis of this book.

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