

BOOK REVIEW

Thomas Chirappurath, *Peripheries to the Centre: Launch and Growth of Chanda the First Syro-Malabar Mission - A CMI Initiative (1962-2014)*, ed. Benny Thettayil, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, pages xlviii + 804; ISBN: 978-93-84964-86-3; Price: Rs. 1,200 (India); US\$60 (Outside India).

Peripheries to the Centre, a work on the history of Chanda Mission is unique just as the CMI mission in Chanda was unique for the Syro-Malabar Church and the CMI Congregation. Both had no predecessors; they had nothing to imitate or to compete with; indeed, both remain a challenge of the times! Replicating the missionary style of Chanda as well as the missionary history narrative style of *Periphery to the Centre* would remain an impossibility. As more and more attempts at writing mission history would take place in the coming years, *Periphery to the Centre* would remain unique, as it sets a very high and unique standard in capturing the historical development of missions; for, it not only offers a recollection and retelling of the stories of Chanda missionary endeavours, but equally involves in offering a philosopher's distanced and critical scrutiny of the facts as well as a theologian's reflection on the events in the history of Chanda with a fundamental faith perspective.

Father Tomy Chirappurath, a missionary who is spiritually and emotionally involved in the evolving mission of Chanda through his own characteristic ways of contributions both as a missionary and a formator, has naturally spent years in dwelling into the inner recesses of the Chanda Event from its very inception. He has burned the midnight's oil in digging into the earliest records, dispersed in various locations and different types of sources, some of them so far untraced and unexplored; but, the dedication with which this project was undertaken merits our appreciation. It attests to the genuine commitment of the missionary zeal that Fr Tomy Chirappurath has; it attests to the unqualified dedication to truth that Fr Tomy holds dear to his heart; it attests to the inimical academic and research discipline that Fr Tomy has gathered over a period of time: indeed, all put together, this magnum opus of Fr Tomy Chirappurath will be a cherished possession of all those who are interested in mission of the Church in India, in Syro-Malabar Church, and very specially in the

lasting contributions of the CMI Congregation in the making of the Syro-Malabar Mission saga as well as the village-oriented missionary style that made the Chanda mission genuinely unique.

When the rich resources of the Chanda Mission were sequenced and interpreted by Fr Tomy Chirappurath and all those who associated with him in the process, its fine-tuned presentation for easy reading, scientific precision based on the documentation and listing of facts, and the literary finesse were ensured by the meticulous involvement of Father Benny Thettayil CMI as the editor of this monumental work. The generous involvement of Fr Benny Thettayil assured the final finish of the work. Interestingly, as Tomy and Benny joined hands together, supported by a whole lot of missionaries from Chanda or those who were associated with Chanda, the final content, style, and shape of the *Peripheries to the Centre* became so unique not only for its voluminous size but also for its fine and attractive presentation, factual and persuasive narratives, and detailed and scientific data that make this book what it is. When the missionary zeal of Fr Tomy, the Gandhian philosopher, may be compared to the zeal of Apostle Saint Thomas that made him reach out to the unknown peripheries of the Indian subcontinent with the message of the Gospel, we have in Fr Benny Thettayil, the Johannine theologian, the same zeal as it is epitomized in Saint Paul the Apostle, who stands out among the Apostles for his courage, unwavering commitment for truth of the Gospel, and inimitable oratorical and literary style that made his epistles unmatched classics in Christian literature. When Thomas and Paul together came to Chanda, its mission history was served in golden letters on a platinum plaque that is the *Peripheries to the Centre*. Congratulations to this philosopher-theologian combine: the Chanda Mission, the CMI Congregation, the Syro-Malabar Church and the entire Indian Church take pride in your combined effort in capturing and unveiling the history of the Chanda Mission, which will be retold to the generations to come with the support of the data gathered and presented in this work through your combined effort and commitment.

Indeed, *Peripheries to the Centre* tells us stories of missionaries and missions of Chanda that turned out to be trail blazers for the Christian missionaries in India as well as the rest of the Christian world.

We have many reasons to celebrate and be joyous and grateful to the Lord. As the celebrations continue, I believe that it is also time for a serious and critical review of our missions in our contemporary times; it calls for a genuine introspection on the part of individuals and

institutions to ensure that the mission endeavours of the Church in general and the Chanda Mission or all the CMI missions retain their original goal stipulated by the Lord himself and inculcated through the CMI charisma: that is, to preach the Good News of metanoia and to involve in establishing the Kingdom of God unconditionally.

Writing an extensive history for the first time is a decisive step. But that is only a beginning in the process of capturing the legacy of the missionaries and mission methodology or methodologies. More research should continue to take place if more nuances and details are to be captured. The grand narrative that Tomy Chirappurath has offered us in this volume could be further embellished and enhanced by offering many sub-narratives on the Chanda and Adilabad missions.

Moreover, critically dwelling on missionary achievements and failures would also give us opportunities to identify different models in mission, which would enrich Christian missionary legacy, especially based on the Indian experiences and experiments in establishing native Christian communities in villages.

Although Tomy has made strenuous efforts to ensure that *Peripheries to the Centre* is made to be as comprehensive as possible, there is a chance that some significant contributions of individuals or communities have not been given the prominence that they should have been given. I am sure that it is not purposeful on the part of the author and his team of collaborators, but due to human limitation originating from the fact that none of us is omniscient. Given this possible limitation, what is feasible in responding to this excellent work on Chanda mission history is to involve in a number of alternative narratives of mission experiences, which would try to describe and reflect upon the many stories that do not find a place in this work. I am sure that such attempts would not only complement the work of Tomy Chirappurath but would also make it possible to capture the mission history of Chanda Mission in the most comprehensible ways.

I am glad to understand from the opening statements made by many that a similar venture also is being planned to capture the missionary endeavours of the Adilabad mission, which was part of this Chanda Mission legacy. While I would look forward to such a work, I feel that similar initiatives must also be made by different religious congregations and other stakeholders, particularly also from the perspective of both the dioceses, who were involved in the development of Chanda Mission, as some of their stories will get their

due recognition only when they are told in a different context. Hence, as we celebrate the grand release of *Peripheries to the Centre* on the Chanda Mission legacy, with a special focus on the CMI contributions and the making of the Eparchy of Chanda and the Eparchy of Adilabad, my earnest request to all the major superiors of other religious congregations who have made their imprint in the making of the Chanda Mission is to retell stories of their missionary endeavours, which would naturally involve most of what has been described in the pages of this work, but would also bring in a lot of untold or unrecorded stories, complementing and supplementing this history of Chanda Mission by Father Tomy. Certainly, any such a move would call for quality investment of time and other resources by competent people; but it would be worth it!

Chanda has already made a ripple effect in the missionary endeavours of the Syro-Malabar Church, and everybody is proud of it. Let the ripples generated by the missionary endeavours of missionaries in Chanda continue to reverberate throughout the times; let the new generation missionaries learn from the achievements and failures of the first mission of the Syro-Malabar Church and that of the CMI Congregation. The mandate received by the Church remains the same and it weighs down upon us, those of us who are bestowed with the responsibility of preaching the Good News in the contemporary society. While we are proud of the achievements of our forefathers in mission, let us make our efforts more Christian and more other oriented so that we will be witnesses to the constant movement from the peripheries to the centre and from the centre to the peripheries at the same time.

On this unique day of celebrating the achievements of the Chanda Mission, captured in the pages of the *Peripheries to the Centre* by Fr Tomy Chirappurath, ably supported by Fr Benny Thettayil in its editorial work, and accompanied by the great support of the CMI Mar Thomas Province of Chanda, under the able leadership of Fr Benny Mukalel, the Provincial.

Saju Chackalackal CMI

For subscription you may write to
Dharmaram Journals, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram,
P.O. Dharmaram College, Bengaluru 560029, India
Telephone (office): +91 80 41 116333