

Dr. Placid J. Podipara

The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church,  
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Here is a book from a veteran historian, theologian, canonist and philosopher, Rev. Dr. Placid J. Podipara CMI, who is a professor in the Pontifical Institute for Oriental Studies in Rome, and a Consultor to the Sacred Congregation for Oriental Churches. He needs no introduction to the public both in the East and in the West, especially on the level of scientific study. All his writings are fully substantiated with essential documents. He is one fully dedicated to the cause of his Church, the Church of St. Thomas, the Apostle. The present work, *The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church*, is a clear proof of this commitment.

The Book deals with the origin, history, and the present state of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy. The author begins his historical survey right from the apostolic period, the period of formation which can be substantiated only from living tradition of the Thomas

Christians. Then he takes up "the Chaldean Period" of the Malabar Church, where the direct and indirect relations of the Malabarians with the Church in the Persian Empire are dealt with. "The Latin Period", namely, of Padrapado and Propaganda, comes next. There he discusses in detail, the distortion and mutilation of the original, indigenous, autonomous Church of St. Thomas through the octo-pianism of the western hierarchs and missionaries. He makes a special mention here of the suppression of "All-India Jurisdiction" of the Thomas Christians. The concluding part, i.e., the contemporary state of the Syro-Malabar hierarchy, clearly presents the paradoxical situation of this ancient apostolic Church. Owing to the western overdomination in Seminary formation, both the hierarchs and the clergy are far from the very ethos of their own Rite and Liturgy. Consequently, there exists a big gap between the faithful, who are more traditional, and the hierarchy which is more western. The effort of the author is to bridge this big gap. Moreover, he indirectly makes an appeal to return to the ancient decentralised administrative system of the Church, where even the bishop candidates were elected by a representative body of priests and laymen.

Considerable interest is evinced now-a-days in the field of oriental literature and Churches, particularly because they preserve to a certain extent the original synthesis of Christian faith and Church administrative system; to be more clear, a beautiful synthesis of the Charismatic and institutional aspects of the Church. Dr. Placid's *The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church*, is a source book for any student of the history and ecclesiastical administrative system of the Thomas Christians. The abundant documents cited in each chapter shows the author's familiarity with them, and the objectivity of his historical survey.

The purpose of the book, as the author himself states in the preface, is to help the present Syro-Malabarians esteem their venerable traditions and to make efforts for a timely revival of them. Dr. Podipara is anxious about the future of the Syro-Malabar Church, especially because he thinks that a few within the Church itself—without going deep into their own heritage—clamour for changes which are not in tune with the organic growth of the Church. He is against the unhealthy, superfluous, purely pragmatic and eclectic way of adaptation envisaged by some who have not taken the trouble of studying and understanding the genius, fertility and the liturgical tradition of the Church, which they want to indigenise and modernise. At the same time, he is fully in

favour of real indigenisation and modernisation in tune with the directives of the Church. He rightly claims that this apostolic Church, perhaps, is the unique instance in the whole Christendom where a perfect and unprejudiced indigenisation and acculturation was carried out. But that was marred during and after the 16th century by the influence of the western Christianity. He argues that this pre-sixteenth century Thomas Christian Church must be an example to the indigenisers today.

This work, especially the footnotes to each chapter, must be an essential reading for those, who are really engaged in the work of indigenisation and acculturation of any Church, especially of the Syro-Malabar Church. The excellent printing and the elaborate subject index at the end make for easy reading of the work. The beautiful cover, symbolising the present state of the Syro-Malabar Church, makes the book all the more attractive. The chapter titles sound too general. They could be made more specific and expressive.