

GEEVARGHESE CHEDIATH

## ARCHBISHOP MAR IVANIOS AND ECUMENISM

Archbishop Mar Ivanios of blessed memory (1882-1953), the first Archbishop of the Malankara Catholic Church (1930-53), was a man of great ecumenical vision and a great example and model for Church leaders of our times. He was a very daring personality indeed. He was a seeker of Truth and was courageous to follow the Truth. Just like the leaders of the Oxford Movement (1833-45)<sup>1</sup>, and the Malines Conversations (1921-1926)<sup>2</sup>, he stood for corporate unity, mutual recognition and mutual acceptance. In 1930 Mar Ivanios accepted His Holiness Pope Pius XI, as the Successor of St. Peter in Rome; and His Holiness the Pope in turn accepted the Malankara Church into full, visible, canonical communion with the Catholic Church. In 1932 the Holy Father established the Malankara Catholic hierarchy. Through this communion, the Malankara Church entered into communion with the worldwide Western and Eastern Catholic Churches. This ecumenical movement is known in history as the Reunion Movement and the Malankara Catholic Church is its spectacular result.

### 1. Background

Mar Ivanios was born and brought up in the Jacobite Syrian Church (or Syrian Orthodox Church, as it is known today). His ancestors belonged to the ancient St. Thomas Christian Church, using the East Syrian liturgical traditions. It was the one holy, Catholic and apostolic Church of Christ in this part of the globe. As a result of the contact with the Western Portuguese missionaries during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the ensuing ecclesiastical politics and turmoil, this ancient

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<sup>1</sup> F.L. CROSS (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1974, 1019-1020.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 862.

Church came directly under the rule of the Western Latin missionary bishops. Because of various reasons, the local Christians did not like the rule of the Jesuit missionary prelates and it resulted in the historic Coonan Cross Oath in 1653. Almost all the parishes of the St. Thomas Christians took part in it. Their oath was that they would never remain under the Western Jesuit missionary bishops. When the Pope sent Bishop Sebastiani, an Italian Carmelite, as their bishop, many returned to the missionaries. But some did not follow and they, under the leadership of the Archdeacon Thomas, remained a separated body. They got in touch with the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) bishop of Jerusalem, Mar Gregorios by name in 1665. Slowly this group established relationship with the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. As a result, the separated group was eventually forced to abandon its ancient liturgical traditions and ecclesiastical allegiances, to adopt the West Syrian liturgy and to become part of the Jacobite Church.

When this group adopted a new liturgy, and accepted a new allegiance, which was until then foreign to the Church in Kerala, it was known as Puthenkuttukar (people of the new allegiance). Those who continued under the Western missionaries, Jesuit or Carmelite, with the ancient liturgy, were known as Pazhayakuttukar (people of the old allegiance)<sup>3</sup>. In addition to the basic influence from the East Syrian Church, the Puthenkur community had the influence from the Roman Catholic Church (from 1550 onwards), the Jacobite Church of Antioch (from 1665 onwards), and the Anglican Church (from 1808 onwards).

The community was known here at that time as the Jacobite Syrian Church (Yakobaya Suriani Sabha). Since 1665 there were several divisions in the Puthenkur Community: 1) 1772 marks the beginning of the Thozhiyoor church. 2) 1836 marks the joining of a few thousands of Puthenkuttukar with the Anglican Church. 3) 1889 marks the beginning of the Reformed Jacobite Church (Mar Thoma Church). 4) 1912 marks the beginning of the Malankara Orthodox Church.

## 2. The contact with the Jacobite Patriarch and the resulting conflicts

The early contacts with the West Asian Syrian Jacobite Church since 1653 were smooth. There were just occasional visits of prelates from West Asia. It continued to be so, as long as the Jacobite Patriarch did not interfere in the life of the Church and demand any temporal or spiritual authority over the Church in India. The Jacobite bishops who came to India in 1751 tried to introduce the Antiochene liturgical traditions here and to some extent they succeeded in their attempt<sup>4</sup>. But it was in 1876 at the Synod of Mulanthuruthy in Kerala that the

<sup>3</sup> These two expressions entered into the civil and political literature in Kerala.

<sup>4</sup> In 1751 there came from West Asia, Mar Baselios Maphrian, Mar Gregorios, and Mar Ivanios: G. CHEDIATH, *Keralathile Chraistava Sabhakal* (=The Christian Churches in Kerala). Kottayam 1998, 83.

Jacobite Patriarch Peter III succeeded to a certain extent in bringing this Church under his jurisdiction and in making it part of the Jacobite Church<sup>5</sup>

Those who in 1653 refused to be under the Western missionaries and wanted to preserve the autonomy of the Church, the authority of the Archdeacon recognized and approved, and to have the ancient liturgical and other traditions integrally preserved, found themselves in 1876 in a situation which was never foreseen by the leaders who led the people to separation and split. They could not keep their autonomy, there was no more an Archdeacon, their liturgical texts were totally changed, and the Church became part of the Jacobite Syrian Church. Above all these, there developed in the community several groups with variant allegiances. Some stood for the introduction of full Antiochene tradition and others stood for total surrender of the Church to the Jacobite Patriarch. The community lost its autonomy and internal unity.

One can notice that factionalism or sectarianism played a basic role in the subjection of the Puthenkur community to the Jacobite Patriarch. Since its contact with the Anglican missionaries in 1808, one could find groups supporting the Anglicans and those supporting the Antiochene Jacobites. Leaders such as Mar Dionysius II (1815-6) and Mar Dionysius III (1817-25) of the Puthenkur community whole-heartedly supported the Anglican missionaries. But Mar Dionysius IV (1825-55), their successor, did not want to continue the undue interference of the Anglican missionaries in the life of the Church. This attitude brought him closer to the Syrian Patriarch. In 1836 at the Mavelikkara Synod, Mar Dionysius IV totally rejected Protestantism and leaned towards the Jacobite Patriarch. At the same time, the group with Protestant inclinations also turned to the Jacobite Patriarch to get a man of their sympathy, bishop, for the control of the Church.

### 3. Decisive period for the Jacobitism in Kerala (1843-1889)

They succeeded in getting ordained in 1842 by the Jacobite Patriarch Yacoub II in Mardin, a Protestant sympathizer, Mathews Mar Athanasios, as bishop. After several civil litigations with the then ruling bishop Dionysius IV, he began to rule the Puthenkur Church from 1853 onwards. When Mathews Mar Athanasios was governing the Church, the opposite group sent a certain Pulikkottil Yausep Malpan to Mardin to become bishop. The Patriarch ordained him as Mar Dionysius V in 1864 and sent him to Kerala with the necessary letters. But the civil authorities rejected his application and he had to live in retirement for some time<sup>6</sup> It was on this occasion that the Patriarch Peter III himself came here, deposed Mar Athanasios, installed Mar Dionysius V as the local

<sup>5</sup> G. CHEDIATH, *Paurastya Catholicos* (=The Catholicos of the East), Kottayam 1999, 95-97.

<sup>6</sup> Even though the Patriarch Peter III reinstated Mar Dionysius V in 1876, Mathews Mar Athanasios was the leader of the people, recognized by the civil authorities till his death. Mar Dionysius V had to wait to take up the leadership till the Royal Court Judgment in 1889.

head, held the Synod of 1876 at Mulanthuruthy and made certain arrangements for the Church in Kerala.

It was in fact, Mar Dionysius IV (1825-1855) and Mathews Mar Athanasios (1818-77) who were primarily responsible for opening the door for the interference of the Syrian Jacobite Patriarch here in Kerala. After these events, the visits of the Antiochene bishops to India increased and they tried to instill in the minds of the local people that the ordination and appointment by the Patriarch was necessary for the validity of the Episcopal authority in Kerala among the Puthenkur community. Many in the Puthenkur community moved much closer to the Antiochene Jacobite side. A false idea was circulated that the Church in Kerala, India, from time immemorial was part of the Antiochene Church and under the Patriarch. It was propagated in order to defeat the opposite group in the civil litigations. Both the groups falsified the manuscript of the *Hudaya Canon of Bar Ebraya*, which the Jacobites had here. Both sides were arguing in the civil courts that they were the true Jacobites. Mar Dionysius V's group called the other group Reformed Jacobites (Naveekarana Jacobayakkar). By this civil litigation between these two groups in the Puthenkur Church, both sides were giving the Antiochene Jacobite Church the authorities which it never had in the past in India over this community.

#### 4. Mar Dionysius V to Mar Dionysius VI

After the Synod of Mulanthuruthy and the civil litigations with the opposite group (1879-89), Mar Dionysius V realized that his authority was very much restricted and weakened and the authority of the Patriarch in the Puthenkur community had very much increased. He saw very strong groups enthusiastically supporting the Patriarch. Since he had to fight against the Naveekarana Jacobayakkar for years in the civil courts for the Seminary Case<sup>7</sup>, he did not have the time to establish his authority. This litigation dragged him, even though unwillingly, very close to and even to the point of subjection to the Jacobite Patriarch. In congruity with the prevalent mentality, he sent two priests, Vattasseril Geevarghese Malpan and Kochuparambil Paulose Malpan to Mardin in 1908 to get ordained as bishops. The Jacobite Patriarch Abdalla ordained both of them in 1908 as bishops with the names, Mar Dionysius VI and Paulose Mar Kurillos. When Mar Dionysius V died in 1909, Mar Dionysius VI became the leader of the Puthenkur community and the Patriarch approved it<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> The civil litigation between Mathews Mar Athanasios and Mar Dionysius V was known as the *Seminary Case*. This case had to decide who the legitimate authority in the Church was. The final verdict known as Royal Court Judgment was in favor of Mar Dionysius V. The other group eventually formed the Marthoma Church.

<sup>8</sup> E.A. PHILIP (ed.), *Malankara Sabhayude Rahasia Petakam, or An Autobiography of E.M. Philip*, Kottayam 1993, 30-65.

### 5. Mar Ivanios (1882-1953)

Mar Ivanios' baptismal name was Geevarghese. He was born when Mar Dionysius V was having civil litigation with the opposite group. He grew up as a Jacobite and was educated in the English schools and Colleges and passed M.A. degree. Just before the journey to Mardin in 1908, Vattasseril Malpan succeeded in getting him appointed as principal of the M.D. Seminary High School at Kottayam. He was then only a deacon. When Mar Dionysius VI returned as bishop from West Asia in the same year, he ordained the young deacon as priest. Then he was called Fr. Geevarghese, but generally known as M.A. Achan<sup>9</sup>. He continued in the post as principal till 1913.

He knew as a young man the financial and other allied difficulties on both sides and the colossal waste of energy, drained off for no cause. He realized the spiritual decadence and the split in the Church after 1889, when the Marthomites separated themselves from the Jacobite Church. He saw how the parishes and families were divided. He knew how this Church had become Jacobite. He realized the preoccupation of Mar Dionysius V to keep the Church free from Protestantism. He realized the scandal arising from the civil litigations

### 6. The establishment of the Catholicate and the formation of the Orthodox Church (1912)

The Jacobite Patriarch Abdalla came to Kerala in 1909 and remained here till 1911. He knew that there was a group strongly supporting him. Therefore, he wanted to continue the policy of bringing the Puthenkur Church under his spiritual and temporal authority. His predecessors made the division of the community. He did not perhaps think that his presence and activity would mark the beginning of endless quarrels and litigations and eventual re-division in the community.

Immediately after his arrival in Kerala in 1909, the Patriarch demanded that all the bishops and parishes should give in writing both temporal and spiritual submission to him. Bishop Paulose Mar Kurillos submitted himself readily to the Patriarch. The Patriarch ordained Mar Athanasios and Mar Severios, two priests who submitted themselves to him, as bishops. Mar Dionysius VI and the group around him did not hand over the temporalities of the Church to the Patriarch. The Co-Trustees, Konatt Malpan and C.J. Kurian sided with the Patriarch. The Patriarch and his supporters tried to occupy and capture the Old Seminary<sup>10</sup>, where Mar Dionysius VI was staying. In 1911 the Patriarch

<sup>9</sup> Among the Puthenkur Syrian Christians in Kerala, he was the first one to pass M.A. Degree. So was known as M.A. Achan. Achan means Father.

<sup>10</sup> It is the Malankara Orthodox Theological Seminary.

excommunicated Mar Dionysius and appointed Paulose Mar Kurillos as Metropolitan.

Fr. P.T. Geevarghese (or M.A. Achan) was in the forefront of the receptions given to the Patriarch. But the excommunication and deposition of Mar Dionysius VI was disheartening to everybody and it created a very confused situation in the Puthenkur Church. In the conflicts with Patriarch Abdalla, M.A. Achan sided with Mar Dionysius. In the meantime, M.A. Achan contacted Abd msiha, the senior Jacobite Patriarch in Tur-Abdin, in West Asia, and invited him to come to Kerala to rectify the situation and establish a Catholicate here. Abd msiha consented and came here in 1912. He removed the excommunication on Mar Dionysius and his party and installed Murimattam Mar Ivanios as Maphrian or Catholicos at Niranam, with the name Baselios Paulose I. The Patriarch also visited a few parishes and ordained Kallasseril Mar Gregorios, Yovakim Mar Ivanios, and Geevarghese Mar Philoxenus as bishops. And in 1913 Abd msiha returned to West Asia. When the two Patriarchs returned from India, they had already divided the Church into two groups.

1. The Patriarch's group (Kurillos Kakshy or Bawa Kakshy): i.e. those who had Paulose Mar Kurillos as their local leader and who fully recognized the spiritual and temporal jurisdiction of the Jacobite Patriarch Mar Abdalla.

2. The local Metropolitan's group (Metran Kakshy): those who sided with the Malankara Metropolitan Mar Dionysius VI and who had a Catholicos. This group eventually adopted the name Malankara Orthodox Church.

M.A. Achan was the key figure in bringing Abd msiha to Kerala and establishing the Catholicate here. He believed that the Puthenkur community should be autonomous. It was his conviction that it was never part of the Jacobite Church and the Patriarch had no temporal authority over it. But immediately new civil litigations started between the Metran Kakshy and the Kurillos Kakshy in 1913. The newly installed Catholicos died in 1913. The Metran Kakshy did not install another one till 1925, because of the civil litigations. Also because they might have thought that the installation must be done with the cooperation of the Patriarch. This civil litigation is known in history as the Vattippakkakes (1913-28)<sup>11</sup> This case was over the temporalities of the church.

## 7. Serampore – a turning point in the life of M.A. Achan (1913-1919)

In 1913 Mar Dionysius VI sent M.A. Achan to the Serampore University in Bengal (India) to teach Economics. There he got ample opportunity to look at his Church more objectively from a distance, and locate it in the wider Christian

<sup>11</sup> Some one deposited a fixed amount in the East India Company for the Syrians. The dispute was over the temporalities, symbolized in this amount. The civil court had to decide whether the Metran Kakshy or the Bawa Kakshy was the legitimate authority over the temporalities.

world. He read a lot of books of Church History and Christian Dogmas. He reflected over the Gospel and the Church of Christ and its mission in the world. He was disturbed at the sight of the divided Christianity. He took a lot of young men and women from his community to Serampore and other places in India and gave them opportunity for better education. He spent his huge salary for the education of these young students from Kerala<sup>12</sup>

As he prayed and reflected he realized: 1) That there was only one Church, the body of Christ. 2) That division among Christians was a grave sin. 3) That the Christian Church was for the salvation of the world; so the Church had a very serious mission to fulfill in the world. 4) That the baptized were God's people. 5) That monasticism gave vitality to the Church; it kept the renewal needed for the Church. 6) That for the effective mission of the Church, there should be an educated and enlightened clergy. 7) That Christianity in any country must be the light of that nation.

When he looked at his Church, he saw: 1) That it was a Church, having only a fragile relationship with just a separated Church in West Asia. 2) That it was not in full communion with the worldwide Eastern and Western Catholic Church. 3) That it was a small Church, fragmented, weak, marginalized and devoid of any inner vitality. 4) That this small community in a tiny part of the globe was entangled in sectarian litigations and endless quarrels over petit issues. 5) That there was absolutely no missionary activity from the part of this Church. 6) That the protracted civil litigations between brothers were a counter-witnessing to the Gospel values. 7) That it lacked an enlightened clergy. 8) That there was no monasticism either of men or of women in this church. 9) That nobody in the church was seriously thinking of the sin of division. 10) That it is not contributing anything substantially to the world Christianity.

He made the following conclusions: 1) Civil litigations among brothers of the same Church would bring them nowhere. 2) An internal conversion and renewal was absolutely necessary for this Church. That alone was the way to save this Church from the civil litigations, sectarianism and miserable situation. 3) This Church had to be prepared for an eventual wider communion with the world wide Christianity. 4) An educated clergy must be formed to give adequate leadership for this Church. 5) The laity must be spiritually motivated and oriented. Their attention should be diverted from civil litigations and factionalism to the wider interest of Christianity. 6) This Church must undertake the missionary obligations inside and outside India. 7) It should regain its honorable existence in the one Church of Christ. It should no more continue as a marginalized sectarian Church. It should fulfill its God-given mandate in this part of the globe. 8) It should give leadership for the reunification of all Christians in Ke-

<sup>12</sup> He got about Rupees 10,000 per year. In those days, it was a big amount. He spent his salary and the income from his family for the education of the young people from his community. Some of these young people eventually became leaders in the Church in Kerala.

rala and in India. It should give its ecumenical contribution. 9) For all these, as a preliminary step, a monastic establishment was absolutely necessary.

### 8. Bethany Monastic Movement (1919-1925)

As a result of his long meditations and reflections, M. A. Achan resigned his prestigious post as professor at the University of Serampore. Seeing that the desired renovation could be achieved only through monasticism, he started the Bethany Monastic Movement at Perunad in Kerala<sup>13</sup>. He dedicated himself to contemplative life, inviting like-minded young people, both men and women who would dedicate their whole life fully for Christ and His Church. Through Bethany, he started a spiritual reform movement in the Orthodox Church. It worked like a chain reaction. The Bethany religious spent their life in prayer, meditation and manual labor. They undertook several renewal programs in the Orthodox parishes, conducting retreats and conventions. They encouraged the faithful for a better sacramental participation, especially confession and communion. Thus, slowly Bethany could usher in a conversion process, a change of mentality and a better Christian life. The faithful who were accustomed to ritualistic worship and civil litigations together, began to realize that there was another type of Christian life, nobler and more in harmony with the Gospel teaching.

### 9. Mar Dionysius VI and the Civil Litigation

In 1923 there was a court verdict in favor of the Patriarch's group on the *Vattippanakkes* of 1913. Then Mar Dionysius VI made an attempt to make a reconciliation with Patriarch Mar Elias III. He went to Mardin and discussed with the Patriarch the terms of reconciliation. But the Patriarch did not show signs of reconciliation. When Mar Dionysius was at Baghdad on his way to the Patriarch, he had an opportunity to meet the Syrian Catholic bishop there. There was some kind of discussion regarding the possibility of eventual communion with the Catholic Church. According to some, this gave an impetus for the subsequent ecumenical discussions in Kerala<sup>14</sup>.

Mar Dionysius returned to Kerala and continued the civil litigations. At the same time, he and the other Orthodox leaders began to think of a possible full and canonical visible *communion* with any other ancient Church. In 1925 in the appeal case in the civil court, the verdict was in favor of Mar Dionysius VI. So immediately in the same year Yovakim Mar Ivanios and Kallasseril Mar Grego-

<sup>13</sup> Already at Serampore he started a kind of monastic life. Later it was transplanted to Perunad.

<sup>14</sup> TH. INCHACKALODY, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, 2 vols., Trivandrum 1957, 1971.

rios jointly installed Geevarghese Mar Philoxenus as Catholicos with the name Mar Baselios Geevarghese I at Niranam. On the following day, Fr. P.T. Geevarghese (M. A. Achan) was ordained as Mar Ivanios, bishop of Bethany.

The Second Catholicos died in 1928. In 1928 Vattippanakkes came to the end and the final court verdict was in favor of Mar Dionysius and the Metran Kakshy. So in 1929 Mar Dionysius and Mar Ivanios of Bethany jointly installed Kallasseril Mar Gregorios as the third Catholicos with the name Baselios Geevarghese II.

## 10. Reunion with Rome

The preliminary discussions regarding the communion with another ancient Church was in the mind of many well-intentioned persons in the Puthenkur community in Kerala. Of course, different people had different views regarding the communion. Their attitudes were conditioned by several factors. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1926 at a meeting of the bishops of the Orthodox Church at Parumala, there was a consensus to make inquiries about a full communion with any ancient Church. Mar Baselios Geevarghese I Catholicos, Geevarghese Mar Gregorios, and Mar Ivanios of Bethany took part in the meeting. Mar Ivanios was entrusted with the task of making the enquiries. Mar Dionysius VI did not personally take part in the meeting, as he was a party in the civil litigation. But he was informed of the meetings. During the first stages of contact, Mar Ivanios established contact with the Syrian Catholic Patriarch Rahmani in Beirut. The replies from Beirut were encouraging. But eventually Mar Ivanios started direct contact with Rome<sup>15</sup>

Mar Ivanios in his letter to Rome made the following conditions that: 1) Rome should permit the Malankara Church to continue its liturgical and other traditions. 2) The Episcopal Synod must be recognized and each bishop should be allowed to continue in his diocese. 3) If these conditions were verified, the Malankara Church was prepared to enter into canonical communion with the See of Peter in Rome<sup>16</sup>

In the reply, Rome answered that: 1) The liturgical traditions could be recognized; but the liturgical books had to be subjected to scrutiny. 2) The bishops would have authority over their own flock; but in the future, the priests must be unmarried. 3) Neither the Synodal system of government nor the office of the Catholicos could be recognized<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Either through Fr. Ribeiro, a priest who was residing at Mavelikkara or through the Apostolic Delegate Edward Mooni.

<sup>16</sup> S. KANJIRAMUKALIL, *Ecclesial Identity of the Malankara Catholic Church*, Kottayam 2002, 62.

<sup>17</sup> L. MOOLAVEETIL, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, Kottayam 1988, 43.

Again Mar Ivanios wrote to Rome, demanding for the recognition of the integral oriental tradition. He repeatedly asked Rome to recognize the position of the Catholicos. He explained to Rome that the Synodal structure was in accordance with the nature of the Oriental Churches. He pointed out that this was the tradition of the Malankara Church. Hence Rome should recognize all these. He asked how the Catholicos could enter into the communion, if Rome was not prepared to recognize him? But there was no positive reply from the part of Rome<sup>18</sup>

By 1928 the Catholicos and Mar Ivanios were the only two bishops, alive, who took part in the preliminary discussions. When Rome excluded the question of the Catholicos, the only person left in the field of ecumenical discussion was Mar Ivanios of Bethany. Mar Ivanios was very disturbed at the reply from Rome<sup>19</sup>

He wanted that the entire Malankara Church should enter into visible canonical communion with Rome, retaining the Synodal structure and the Catholicos, and that the Catholicos should give the leadership for the visible communion. And he thought that the integral Oriental traditions would be preserved in Roman communion. He wanted to preserve the Malankara Church as an Oriental Church with its structure and ways of life and with its real autonomy. He had a vision and it was a far advanced one, even ahead of the visions of some of the Roman officials. It was the result of his long study, prayer and meditation. One need not be surprised at the conspicuous absence of this post-Vatican vision in the pre-Vatican officials. One need not equally be surprised if one did not find this openness and vision in the other members of the Malankara Church also.

Mar Dionysius VI was not very enthusiastic about the outcome. Since the final court verdict in 1928 regarding the Vattippanakkes was in favor of Mar Dionysius VI and the Metran Kakshy, one notices a change of attitude towards communion from the part of the other prelates. Mar Dionysius had his own vision of communion: if the court verdict of the Vattippanakkes was against his party, he thought of a communion. He was not a committed ecumenist. He did not have the opportunity to think about it nor the peace and tranquility of the prayer life, required for such a noble enterprise. He was immersed, like his predecessor, in civil litigation. So when he was sure of the success of the litigation, he suspended further establishment of new Bethany parishes. Although he blessed the establishment of Bethany as an independent movement, free from the control of the Jacobite Patriarch or of the other group, towards the end he wanted to control it also. He wanted to continue under the Patriarch, accepting some limited authority of the Patriarch. He did not want to break the ties with the Patriarch. The Jacobite Patriarch ordained him in 1908 and although he was excommunicated and suspended in 1911 by the same Patriarch, still he wanted

<sup>18</sup> TH. INCHACKALODY, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 328-330

<sup>19</sup> L. MOOLAVEETIL, *op. cit.*, 47.

to be part of the Jacobite Church. He believed that, this was the way for peace and prosperity and internal unity for the Malankara Church. That is why in 1934 when the Malankara Orthodox Church adopted a new Constitution for the Church, he included the Patriarch as the visible head of that Church.

Mar Ivanios was the only person who in his conscience wanted to have a total break with the Jacobite Patriarch and to establish the communion with the See of Peter in Rome. At that time he alone could think like that. He was enlightened and he followed his conscience in rejecting the subjection to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. The excommunication and the humiliation of Mar Dionysius VI and of his group including himself in 1911 was still vivid in his memory. He firmly believed that any further relationship would help only to repeat the events of 1911. He remembered vividly the events of 1876 and the excommunication of Mathews Mar Athanasios by the Patriarch Peter III and the separation of a section of the Malankara Church and the formation of the Marthoma Church. He never expected peace as long as the Malankara Church was subjected to the Jacobite Patriarch. He foresaw endless quarrels and litigations and factionalism down through the centuries. But the other leaders of both factions of the Puthenkur Church were not at all convinced of it. And in fact, they believed the contrary to be true.

Prof. V. C. Samuel gives the version of the reasons for the hesitation and withdrawal of Mar Dionysius: „Mar Dionysius refused to consider union with Rome mainly on account of two reasons. In the first place, he knew that the plan of Mar Ivanios would lead only to the absorption of the Church of Malabar by the Roman Catholic Church. This indeed was the very thing, which the Indian Church had all along been resisting from the 16th century. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, Mar Dionysius believed that the Malankara Syrian Church, as a section of the great Eastern Orthodox ecclesiastical tradition had its own contribution to make in the Indian context, and he did not want that be lost by being absorbed into the Church of Rome. Mar Dionysius VI was not opposed to Church union; neither was he unreasonably conservative to the point of being narrow-minded”<sup>20</sup>.

The observations of the learned Prof. Dr. V.C. Samuel have to be taken seriously. According to him, Mar Dionysius feared absorption. That is the substance of his statements. According to the pre-Vatican mentality, it was not a fully unfounded apprehension. One has valid reasons to suspect. But in spite of the pre-Vatican ecclesiology and mentality, did it happen in the case of the reunited Malankara Church as Prof. Samuel had asserted? Secondly Prof. Samuel says that the Church here had a God given mandate to fulfill. Did the Orthodox Church fulfill that mandate in the last 70 years? The last 70 years were a period of constant conflict between the two factions in the Puthenkur Church

<sup>20</sup> V.C. SAMUEL, *Truth Triumphs*, Kottayam 1986, 65.

and the leaders were fully immersed in the civil litigations. Sad to say, it continues even today without any solution.

1930 was a pre-Vatican period. Everybody acted according to the pre-Vatican ecclesiology. But according to the documents of Vatican II and the Papal pronouncements after the Council, there is a great change in the attitude of Catholic Church towards other Churches, especially towards the Eastern Apostolic Churches. Today there is no need for the fear of losing one's identity in the Catholic communion.

### **11. 1928-1930: Crucial years for Mar Ivanios**

Mar Ivanios had to undergo terrible hardships in order to achieve the visible communion with the Catholic Church. First of all, the reply from Rome regarding the Catholicos and the Synod was disheartening to him and far below his expectation of the unity between two Churches. He lived ahead of his times. But many could not understand him and there were very few who shared his vision during the pre-Vatican period. Secondly, he was thoroughly disappointed from the reaction of his own brothers in the episcopate in the Orthodox Church. From the very beginning Mar Dionysius VI kept a sort of distance. The third Catholicos, although he was installed also by Mar Ivanios, and sided wholeheartedly in the beginning for the ecumenical discussions, kept back and even more, began to work against Mar Ivanios<sup>21</sup> The news about the ecumenical discussions began to leak out and there was mixed reaction from the part of the Church. The leaders of the Orthodox Church turned to be his bitter enemies, accusing him of submitting to the Roman Church and forming a Rite, i. e. merging the Malankara Church with the Roman Catholic Church and absorbing it with it. But Mar Ivanios upheld the ideal he had, and he stood for the vision he received. In spite of the setbacks, he decided to travel further along the path of truth and the time has proved that Mar Ivanios was correct in his choice for truth.

### **12. Conclusion**

Mar Dionysius VI thought that he could achieve lasting peace and prosperity for the Jacobite-Orthodox Church in India by maintaining the communion with the Jacobite Patriarch. He thought that the unity within the Church and unity with the other Christian Churches could be achieved through this bond of communion and thus the Church would have an honorable position among the

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<sup>21</sup> Towards the end, that could be one of the reasons for the hesitation of Rome in not considering the case of the Catholicos in the ecumenical negotiations.

world Christianity. It was the way of thinking of the rest of the bishops with him and the leaders who kept back from the ecumenical decision. History proved them to be false.

In 1934 the Orthodox Church formed a Constitution and officially adopted the name Orthodox Church and accepted the Patriarch as the head of the Church. So the false claims of the Jacobite Patriarch was confirmed by the Constitution. But at the same time there were enthusiastic pro-Patriarch groups in the Church who wanted to give more authority to the Patriarch. They remained in the Church and started an agitation against the local church leadership. It reached its culmination in the second civil litigation known as the Samudayakkes (1938-58). The Church was again split into two factions and they fought one another till 1958. In 1958 the Metran Kakshy or the Orthodox group won the civil litigation and the Patriarch's party submitted to the decision and recognized the local Catholicos. The Catholicos in turn accepted the Patriarch. The situation continued for some time. But the group which enthusiastically supported the Patriarch of Antioch started factionalism and there was a split again in the 1970s. In 1974 they started the Second Samudayakkes over the temporalities of the Church. The old sectarianism rose again. They fought one another till 1995 and the Supreme Court of India proposed a *modus vivendi*. Both groups claimed that the Supreme Court decision was in their favor. Finally, in 2002, the Supreme Court recognized the Catholicos of the Orthodox Church as the legitimate head of the local Church and the Malankara Metropolitan. The Patriarch's party made an alliance of the supporting parishes and made it a registered society. They called it Yakobaya Suriani Christiani Association Church (Jacobite Syrian Christian Association Church) and formulated a Constitution for their Church and on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2002 the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Zakka Iwas I installed a Catholicos for the group at Damascus with the name Baselios Thomas I. The division into two groups has become a permanent reality through the installation of the new Catholicos by the Patriarch. The Patriarch's group fully supports the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and the other group supports the local Catholicos.

What did the history teach us? Was Mar Ivanios correct in his analysis of the history or were those who withdrew from the ecumenical field correct in their assessment? Was Mar Ivanios correct in his decision to enter into full visible canonical communion with the See of St. Peter in Rome? History proved that Mar Ivanios was correct, and that the canonical communion with Rome was the only way for lasting unity, peace and prosperity in the Malankara Church. But do we want peace and unity and united Christian witness, and through that, proclamation of the Gospel in the vast Indian subcontinent? Or do we want the protracted unchristian civil litigations, and counter witnessing to Christ and a stagnant, unproductive and sterile existence, devoid of any authentic Christian fruit? Our stand depends on our answer „yes” or „no”.

## Arcybiskup Mar Iwanios a ekumenizm

### Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia, na tle złożonej historii chrześcijaństwa w Indii, osobę, działalność i zasługi arcybiskupa Mar Iwaniosa (1882-1953), pierwszego biskupa Syro-Malankarskiego Kościoła Katolickiego (1930-1953). Mar Iwanios nosił chrzcielne imię Geevarghese. Wywodził się z prowincji Kerala, z rodziny, która we wcześniejszych pokoleniach należała do starożytnego Kościoła Św. Tomasa, o wschodniosyryjskiej tradycji liturgicznej. Kościół ten uległ następnie wielu podziałom i wyłoniły się z niego różne stronnictwa i obediencje. Geevarghese wychował się i wzrastał już w Jakobickim Kościele Syryjskim, zwanym dziś Syryjskim Kościołem Ortodoksyjnym. Po studiach i święceniach kapłańskich pełnił funkcję kierownika seminarium w Kottayam. W 1913 r., w związku z podziałem Kościoła w Kerali, spowodowanym przybyciem jakobickiego patriarchy Abdalla, zasługą Geevarghese było doprowadzenie do uniezależnienia skupionego wokół metropolity Mar Dionysiusa VI Malankarskiego Kościoła Ortodoksyjnego od patriarchatu Kościoła Jakobickiego poprzez ustanowienie katolikat, gwarantującego autonomię. Po śmierci pierwszego katolikosa, wskutek sporów, mianowanie następcy odsunęło się na kilkanaście lat. W tym czasie Geevarghese podjął pracę wykładowcy na Uniwersytecie Serampore w Bengalu. Okres ten posłużył mu do refleksji nad kształtem chrześcijaństwa w Indii. Rezultatem podjętej refleksji była rezygnacja z prestiżowego stanowiska profesora Uniwersytetu Serampore i zainicjowanie ruchu monastycznego Bethany, który zapoczątkował duchową odnowę miejscowego Kościoła Ortodoksyjnego.

Po ustaniu sporów, w 1925 r. ustanowiono ponownie katolikosa. W tym samym czasie Geevarghese został wyświęcony jako Mar Iwanios na biskupa Bethany. Okres przezwyciężania wewnętrznych trudności i podziałów stworzył korzystne warunki do dyskusji nad możliwością przywrócenia jedności z innymi starożytnymi Kościołami. Zadanie zbadania takich możliwości powierzono biskupowi Mar Iwaniosowi. Nawiązując kontakty z katolickim patriarchą syryjskim, Mar Iwanios równocześnie wszedł w bezpośredni kontakt z Rzymem. W liście skierowanym do Stolicy Apostolskiej określił warunki przystąpienia Kościoła Malankarskiego do jedności z Rzymem, domagając się m.in. pozwolenia na kontynuowanie dotychczasowej tradycji liturgicznej i uznania synodalnej struktury Kościoła. Odpowiedź z Rzymu przyzwoliła wprawdzie na stosowanie dotychczasowej tradycji liturgicznej, ale domagała się poddania ksiąg liturgicznych kontroli. Nie zaakceptowano natomiast synodalnej struktury, mimo kilkukrotnych prośb Mar Iwaniosa kierowanych do Rzymu. Autor artykułu ukazuje Mar Iwaniosa jako niezłomnego zwolennika oderwania się od patriar-

chy syryjsko-ortodoksyjnego (jakobickiego) i ustanowienia pełnej komunii ze Stolicą Piotrową w Rzymie. Źródłem jego pragnień – jak zauważa Autor – była pamięć o minionych konfliktach i upokorzeniach, jakich doznał Kościół Malankarski ze strony patriarchy syryjskiego. Mimo powszechności tych doświadczeń, Mar Iwanios pozostawał często osamotniony w swych poglądach i pragnieniach pełnej jedności z Rzymem. Przeciwnicy wskazywali na niebezpieczeństwo wchłonięcia tego Kościoła przez Kościół Rzymskokatolicki i utraty tożsamości. Ostatecznie w 1930 r. Mar Iwanios uznał papieża Piusa XI jako spadkobiercę św. Piotra, papież zaś potwierdził pełną, widzialną i kanoniczną komunie Kościoła Malankarskiego, skupionego wokół Mar Iwaniosa, z Kościołem katolickim. Dało to początek Syro-Malankarskiemu Kościołowi Katolickiemu.

Zdaniem Autora artykułu, uwzględniając myśl eklezjologiczną lat dwudziestych i trzydziestych XX w. obawy podnoszone przeciwko komunii z Kościołem rzymskim nie były zupełnie bezpodstawne. Mar Iwanios okazał się jednak człowiekiem wielkiej wizji, wykraczającej już poza ówczesną epokę. Przez wielu był jednak niezrozumiany. Wśród nich był nawet trzeci w historii Ortodoksyjnego Kościoła Malankarskiego katolikos, a także inni przywódcy Kościoła. Autor konkluduje jednak stwierdzeniem, iż czas potwierdził słuszność wyboru przez Mar Iwaniosa drogi prawdy i jedności.

R. Porada