

BOOK REVIEWS

A.M. Mundadan,

History of Christianity in India, Vol.I. From the beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century, Bangalore: TPI; 1984. pp.567 † xxiv.

This is the much awaited first volume of the six volume *History of Church in India*, a pioneer project of the Church History Association of India (CHAI). Since CHAI is an association of different Christian denominations in India, the attempt is a joint venture of the Indian Churches and in that way a praiseworthy contribution of our ecumenical endeavour. The first volume of this great ecumenical venture comes from the pen of the well known Church historian, Dr. (Fr) A. Mathias Mundadan, CMI. He has successfully pieced together the clear and clumsy documents of history along with the sunny and shady information he gets from legends, folktales, myths and traditions, with the rigour and research mindedness of a historian. He is clear in his statements and impartial in his judgements allowing himself to be led only by the light of facts as any historian should be. It is not easy to make a history of the beginnings, especially of a people "who were rather negligent in keeping historical records" (p.3). However, Dr. Mundadan has done it, and I would say, with marvellous success, with the result that now you can read the historical beginnings of the Indian Christians, Orientals and Occidentals, of earlier and later origins, all in one volume of 567 pages, fully documented from the first page to the last. Dr. D.V. Singh, the then General Editor of this multi-volume work (since his death in 1984 Dr. Mundadan is the General Editor) introduces the book with the following commentary:

The wealth of sources consulted and analysed is phenomenal, and the copious footnotes make the reading most absorbing. Fr. Mundadan has attempted the writing of this volume after years of research and reflection on the origins and the early history of the Syrian Christian Community, and the reader is likely to be more than rewarded by this comprehensive approach (p.viii).

After my careful reading of the book I am only glad to reiterate the remark made by Dr. Singh. The book is divided into ten chapters. In author's own words "chapters 1,2,4 and 5 are concerned with the most ancient Christians of India, the St. Thomas Christians; and

chapter 3 with the medieval (14th century) Latin missions in India" (p.xi). Chapter 6 presents the picture of the actual encounter of the Oriental Church of India with Latin Church from the West. Chapter 7,8 and 9 deal with the history of the origins of the new Latin communities in the coastal regions of Kerala, Tamilnadu and Goa respectively. The last chapter "makes an attempt to assess the results of this first encounter of East and West in India, of the Western Christians with the Eastern Christians, and with the people of India at large" (p.xi).

The book is written in total fidelity to the direction given by CHAI according to which "the History of Christianity in India is viewed as an integral part of the socio-cultural history of the Indian people rather than as separate from it." (p.vii). Hence you read in this volume not a chronicle of the ecclesial events in the Indian subcontinent, nor exclusive history of the Indian Christians. It is rather a cultural history of the Church, casting profound insights into the ways of life of the Indian people at large and Indian Christians in particular. Hence you see in these pages how the ancient people of India lived, dressed, prayed and played (p.148) and against the background of which the Indian Christians developed their own patterns of worship and celebrations (p.158). You are also told about the origin of Southern languages (p.148), of the Nayar Community in Kerala (p.148), the fast and feast of the people in south India and their religio-cultural celebrations. Perhaps many of us do not know that tapioca originally came from the West along with many other "non-Indian plants such as pappaya, cashew and tobacco. (p.153). But apart from these incidental yet interesting and informative references, the book throws much light on many dark sides of the Indian Church History. Mysteries surrounding the peacock city of Mylapore, the Christian community around the city, the tomb of St. Thomas, the Christian king of Villarvattam seem to unravel with unprecedented clarity as you turn the pages of this great volume of history.

India and the Indian Christians before the arrival of the Portuguese are well described in Chapter 5. The author starts with a birds-eyeview of the religio-political situation of the North India (p.216) and of the South (Bahmani kingdom and Vijaya Nagar empire) and then moves to Kerala, the scene of the actual encounter. You can see a pen-picture of the landscape and people of Kerala with their social, political and religious customs (pp.220-233). The language is lucid,

the description vivid that you feel like reading an interesting novel, though unlike any novel almost every page contains a series of foot-notes referring to relevant documents in defense of what the author says or guesses.

The life-style of St. Thomas Christians in Kerala is rightly described as "A Life in two Worlds" (Chapter 4) as St. Thomas Christians had liturgical allegiance to Persia and cultural allegiance to Kerala, India. "The Challenge of New Third World" (ch.5) which led the Portuguese to India ended up in "the Beginning of a long Struggle" (ch. VI) which effectively continues even today. In this struggle Mar Jacob, the then Metropolitan of the Oriental Christians in India was the fighter, martyr and victim. "Mar Jacob was good and meek and to some extent had given in to the Portuguese and had retired. Still his presence was a symbol of the relation of the Church of Malabar with the Persian Church—a symbol of the whole ecclesiastical life of the St. Thomas Christians" (p.347).

Though Mar Jacob the Metropolitan died, the Orientals were suppressed, new Latin communities originated in the coastal regions of Kerala (ch. VII). We come across the documentation of the 'rigour of mercy-policy' of the forced conversion in Goa (p. 462), the statutes (Compromisio) of the Holy Faith and the College of St. Paul established for the spiritual and temporal good of the converted Indians (p.464).

Indian Church history begins with the world church history. It had its ups and downs, bizarre and violent scenes of divisions and discriminations, dominance and servitude. Yet India is a promising land to Christianity growing to its self-awareness more and more and is called to project its own face of Christianity in India. The Indian church history became a history of constant confrontation with the West after the arrival of the Portuguese. The sum and substance of this unending confrontation was a mentality deeply buried in the heart of the Western Christians following Latin Rite. "The Latin Church is more equal than the Oriental Church; the former has higher rights and, in the exercise of these, the rights of the latter could be sacrificed" (pp.520-521). However, says Fr. Mundadan concludingly, that "it should in all fairness be mentioned that the modern evangelistic outlook of the Catholic Eastern Christians owes to the western missionaries, beginning with the Portuguese. (p.521). Whether the bequeathed sense

of militant mission is a boon or bane, he does not say. An approach of peaceful co-existence may not be combined with aggressive mission. The only possibility is to be open for free option as it was in the beginning of the Church of St. Thomas.

The book also contains a large bibliography, several maps of India illustrating the geographical and cultural situations of particular periods. Careful proof reading has made the book almost free of printing errors. There seems to be a confusion in numbering the chapters with Arabic (up to chapter 4) and the Roman numerals (the rest of the book). The book is certainly an enormous achievement and a milestone in the literature pertaining to Indian Church history which can hardly be over looked by any historian interested in the history of the Church in the world, especially of India.

V.F. Vineeth

CORRECTIONS

(Vol. X, 3, July - September, 1985)

Page	Line	Errata	Corrigenda
259	22	“to celebrate	to celebrate
259	24	to reconcile	“to reconcile
261	16	father	father: ⁴
267	18	Ps 134:4	Ps 138:4
270	4	in Psalms 1:10	in 1: 10
270	20	Ps 24-10	Ps 24:7-10
270	24	god	God
270	32	Revelation 11:15	Revelation 11:16
271	17	LK 2: 41	Lk 22: 41
271	24	LK 2:6-7	vv. 6-7
272	10	Ps 69:39	Ps 69:32
273	19	Ps 7:9-10	Rev. 7:9-10
274	3	In one, Yahweh	Yahweh
275	2	Present	future
276	7	Ps 86:5-6	Ps 66:5-6
278	8	V. 11	V. 15