

Did St. Thomas Really Come to India

(A new approach to the old and solid arguments, their
progressive, cumulative and convergent presentation
through free and frank discussion in dialogue form)

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FR. M. CHACKO S. J.

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PREFACE

One more booklet on the Coming of St. Thomas to India! Is it necessary? Is it not superfluous when there already appeared within the last three decades a good number of books, pamphlets and articles treating on this subject? This or similar may be the reaction of some persons on hearing about the publication of one more pamphlet on the topic.

While admitting that strictly speaking there is no new argument given here about the subject, I can say that one who peruses the whole carefully and without bias will be able to detect here a new way of presenting the old and solid arguments. This new way consists not so much in the clear, concise and trenchant style of discussing the whole matter through honest presentation and evaluation of the various pros and cons of every argument as in the progressive, cumulative and converging arrangement of all the old and solid arguments. All uncritical and unconvincing arguments have been discarded. Every argument of some genuine value has been thrashed out by means of pertinent objections against it and cogent answers to the objections. To secure this end and to make the treatment more interesting and lively, dialogue method has been introduced. The two Characters of the dialogue Jim and Tom are imaginary though they correspond to the names

of the two original authors of this pamphlet.

In 1952 on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of St. Thomas and St. Francis Xavier I published an article on the same topic, in collaboration with my then student but now an eminent professor of theology in St. Augustine's Seminary, Ontario, Canada, Revd. Dr. Thomas Thottumkal, in the seminary magazine of St. Paul's major seminary, Tiruchirapally. As I happened to be the editor of the magazine I came to know from several persons that they really appreciated that article. Now after twenty three years I have thought of reprinting it with suitable improvements, for the benefit of the wider reading public.

The trouble with some of our writers and publications on this topic (I deliberately abstain from mentioning their names) is that they too easily mix up solid arguments with plausible ones, history proper with what is vaguely traditional bordering on the legendary and the fanciful. Arguments of this latter category may work as confirmatory ones for many Indians, more especially for most of the Keralites who already believe in the coming of St. Thomas to India. But they are powerless to convince especially foreigners who are sceptic about the whole matter. To convince them is needed a different approach and a shift of emphasis. It is this new

slant and emphasis that I have tried to bring out in this brochure.

What this new slant and emphasis is the readers might ask. No one can honestly deny that every argument presented in the body of this pamphlet has some degree of proving force or probability. Though the mere addition or accumulation of several such probabilities or of the arguments of the same kind need not produce certainty, still several arguments of different types but all converging towards the same point or pointing towards the same conclusion can produce certainty on any mind seeking truth with sincerity and without hiding itself within the walls of subjective prejudices. Due to various causes such subjective prejudices can exist in a person without his entertaining them deliberately or without his being aware of them fully. But when such prejudices do exist in a person they can prevent him from having an open and proper view of truth and due evaluation of arguments.

If some one asks why such cumulative and converging presentation of arguments is capable of producing reasonable certainty on any reflecting mind free from inveterate prejudices, the answer is that such a convergence, by the application of that basic principle of all valid thinking, namely the Principle of sufficient reason, cannot be explained

except by the factual nature of the conclusion to which those arguments point out. Any other explanation of the convergence is bound to prove unsatisfactory and unreasonable. Since this convergence aspect of all the arguments is the raison d'etre of the whole booklet it will be emphasised again and again till it is driven home to the reader.

Every quotation given in the pamphlet I have verified in their original source books especially the various volumes of Patrology.

Any reasonable criticism of the pamphlet will be gratefully received by the author.

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Did St. Thomas Really Come to India ?

(N. B. This topic is treated here in the dialogue form because this mode of treatment lends itself more naturally to a free and frank discussion of the question besides making it lively and interesting)

JIM: You know, Tom, that I am not a native of Kerala. But I have been travelling throughout this part of India for the last few weeks. I have seen the land dotted with Christian Churches, monasteries, Convents, Colleges, schools and charitable institutions and I have been much impressed by the sight. The vast majority of the Christians here of the Oriental Rites call themselves St. Thomas Christians. They claim that their Church was founded by the preaching of the Apostle St. Thomas. In many parts of the land they even celebrated what they call the nineteenth centenary of the arrival of St. Thomas. I should therefore like to know something about the coming of St. Thomas to India. Did he really come to India ?

Tom: I shall gladly help you, Jim, by giving you some informations on this topic.

Jim: Let me thank you for your assurance to help me in this matter. Please know I refuse to be satisfied except by clear and convincing arguments

Any presentation of vague and weak arguments I will certainly try to batter down by means of strong objections.

Tom: You are quite welcome to do so. Now coming to our subject proper we must distinguish in it the core of the problem namely the arrival of the Apostle in this subcontinent of ours and his evangelizing it, from the outward trappings or the attendant circumstances of the exact time, the particular locality and the manner of his arrival and work etc. I am for the present concerned here only with the central problem.

From the very first I must tell you that the whole strength of my proof consists in the cumulative evidence and converging force of various kinds of arguments each of which, if taken separately enjoys only some degree of probability.

JIM: You Tom, speak like a philosopher. But I understand you well. You mean to say that probable arguments from various sources pointing towards one and the same conclusion can produce certainty about that point or conclusion. Is it not so?

TOM: Exactly so. Now coming immediately to our central point I must begin by saying that there

is a tradition both in the East and the West about the preaching of the gospel in India by St. Thomas.

JIM: By "tradition" you mean a pious legend, I suppose.

TOM: Not at all. By tradition though I do not mean that Divine Tradition constituting an infallible source of our knowledge, I do mean that human and historical tradition expressed not only in written and oral word but also indicated by feasts, pilgrimages and other such ways. You know that tradition taken in this sense is the most valuable source of information, nay, often the only one about facts of the remote past.

JIM: I admit the value of tradition as explained by you. But show me which documents speak about St. Thomas in India.

TOM: First of all we have the various official documents of the Church about it. By official documents I mean the liturgical books. THE ROMAN MARTYROLOGY announces that, "the martyrdom of St. Thomas took place in India and that his relics were conveyed to Edessa, Mesopotamia and thence to Ortona in Italy." THE GREEK MENOLOGION says, "The seventh Thomas Didymus was pierced by lances by the Indians." The SYNTAXARUM of the Church of

Constantinople. has the following: "Thomas preached the word of God to the Parthians, the Medes, the Persians and the Indians and was pierced with lances by the latter." THE ROMAN BREVIARY clearly declares, "Thomas, finally betaking himself to the Indians, instructed them in Christian religion." Another document of great value called the "DOCTRINE OF THE APOSTLES" composed at Edessa (ie the modern Iraq) about 209-250 A. D. expressly states, "India and all its parts and those bordering on it, even to the farthest sea received the Apostles' hand of priesthood from JUDAS THOMAS who was guide and ruler in the Church which he built and administered there." Similarly there is another historical romance written more or less at the same time called 'ACTS OF THOMAS' explicitly associating St. Thomas with the names of GONDOPHARES and GAD now discovered through archaeological investigations and without any help from the Christian tradition. Not only the Catholic liturgical books but also the non-Catholic documents of Nestorians and Eutychians speak of St. Thomas as the Apostle of Indians.

JIM: I am glad to go through what you consider as apt quotations to prove your point. But I am inclined to question the value of these passages. It is a well known fact that the

Roman Breviary, especially in its accounts about the history of saints contains errors and inaccurate statements though they were introduced with the laudable purpose of edifying others. Similarly great historians like the Bollandists have proved that the Roman Martyrology too is not without a few errors. Can not the same be said of all other sources you have quoted to prove your point? What credibility can we attach to those documents and quotations?

TOM: I do not claim any strict infallibility for these documents. Nor do I say that we must place absolute trust in those passages. As many other historical and human documents, it is possible that they contain at times some errors. From the fact that it is possible for some passages to contain errors we can not conclude that they actually contain errors. To conclude from possibility to actuality violates universally admitted rules of sound reasoning. I will go a step further and assert that those documents and quotations are as reliable as, if not more reliable than, many other historic documents the veracity of which ordinary historians take for granted. I say they are more reliable than many other historic documents for the simple reason that being official and public documents they were written by competent and reliable

persons after proper study, investigation and verification. Hence unless we can show that those writers had an axe to grind or some selfish advantages to promote in making such statements, we can and must admit their assertions as correct. Thus we can not make light of their authority or call in question their veracity. From this it is evident that the quotation we have adduced must be considered as true unless and until one can prove the contrary. So the presumption in favour of these documents and quotations and the burden of proving their error, if there is any, lies with those who call in question their truth. Further, the point to be insisted upon here is this. All these documents, written in different places, in different languages and according to diverse traditions are unanimous in this point. No other sufficient reason for this unanimity can be given except that they are witnessing the same fact, asserting the same truth. Any other hypothesis that may be invented to explain away their unanimous agreement must necessarily be forced and much less probable than the one we have given.

JIM; Though I am not yet convinced of the coming of St. Thomas to India still I am ready to concede that there is a real point in your argument and that the theory has some probability about

it when it bases itself on the testimony of the official documents of the church. What is your next argument. I admit that according to these documents you have quoted St. Thomas did preach in India.

TOM: Well, Jim, I do not claim any more than what you concede. At this stage of our discussion I do not wish to claim any more than what you agree to. I thank you for seeing eye to eye with me on this point. My next argument will be from the testimonies of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. These persons as you know are men of great learning and integrity of character. So they will not assert anything very lightly or without sufficient warrant or justification for doing so. If the fathers who treat about this question assert the same thing, the obvious conclusion is that the fact they assert must be historically well-founded and true. Now let me quote a few typical testimonies. St. Ephrem who lived in the 4th century and who is the greatest doctor among the Syrian Fathers alludes several times in his poems to the mission of St. Thomas in India. In one place he depicts the devil complainin in the following way about St. Thomas. "The Apostle whom I put to death in India has

followed me to Edessa.”(1) In another place he apostrophizes the apostle himself in the following terms, “Blessed be thou, Apostle, whom the great king has charged to bring INDIA to the dignity of the spouse of His Holy Son”.

From among the Greek Fathers we have the authority of St. Gregory Naziansen (330-389), another great Doctor of the Church, who, when the people of Constantinople taunted him with the charge of his being a foreigner, replied, “And the Apostles, were they not foreigners.... Andrew in Epirus John in Ephesus and Thomas IN INDIA”(2)

From among the Latin Fathers we have the valuable testimonies of St. Ambrose St. Jerome, St. Gregory of Tours and Venerable Bede. St. Ambrose who died in 397 A. D speaks of the Apostles thus: “Even kingdoms shut in by rugged mountains were accessible to them,

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- (1) BICKEL “Sti. Ephraemi Syri Carmina Nisbena” p. 163 (Leipzig, 1866). Here is an allusion to transference of the relics of St. Thomas from India to Edessa.
- 2) “Oratio” XXXIII, Contra Arianos, II Migne, P. G. XXXVI col 227

as India to Thomas and Persia to Mathew.”(3) Again St. Jerome (420) says, “Christ dwells everywhere with Thomas in India and with Peter in Rome.”(4) St. Gregory of Tours (538-593 A. D.) declares, “St. Thomas the Apostle, as the history of passion relates, suffered martyrdom in India.”(5) Venerable Bede says: “Peter received for share Rome, Andrew, Achaia, James, Spain, and Thomas, India.”(6) Other ecclesiastical writers who allude to the mission of St. Thomas in India are St. Gaudenius (4th century)(7) St. Paulinus of Nola(8) and St. John Chrysostom.(9) The unanimous testimonies of these several Fathers living in different parts of the Church and therefore brought up in and echoing different traditions can not

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- 3) In Ps. XLV Enarratio, 21: Migne. P. L. XIV col. 1143
 - 4) Epistola LIX Ad Marcellam: Migne P. L. XXII col. 598
 - 5) Oloria Martyrum
 - 6) Collectanea
 - 7) Sermo XVII: Migne P. L. XX Col: 962-963
 - 8) Migne P. L. LXI, Col. 514
 - 9) Homily XXV In Habraeos, Migne, P. G. LXIII Col. 179

simply be ignored. On the other hand all these testimonies point out that the belief that St. Thomas had preached in India was widely prevalent in many parts of the universal Church of the early times. Such a belief can not be reasonably accounted for except by the historical fact of St. Thomas mission in India.

JIM: I see that there is a point in your argument. However before I can agree with you on your view point you will have to answer me satisfactorily several of my objections.

TOM: Please let me have your objections one by one.

JIM: The authorities you have quoted, though they are the Fathers and Doctors of the Church are human authorities and so are not altogether above error and deception. How then can we attach much importance to their testimonies?

TOM: It is true that the authority of the persons I have quoted in such purely historical matters as we are considering is merely human and as such is fallible. But they are as trustworthy as if not more trustworthy than ordinary historians about political or social or national histories. The reason is they are men of learning and high integrity of character and so will not stoop to make statements about important matters

without ascertaining first the truth of those statements. What I said about the official documents of the church is equally applicable here. As a matter of fact though the two arguments are sufficiently distinct from each other they are also interconnected and not completely separate.

JIM: I admit in general the highly trustworthy nature of the Doctors and Fathers of the church. However regarding this particular problem we are discussing there is bit of a difficulty. Suppose the testimony of one doctor like St. Ephrem formed the source and basis of all other testimonies and if that basic testimony can be proved as incorrect, then all other testimonies dependent on it and derived from it also would have been found erroneous. Is it not so?

TOM: What you say, Jim, is a mere theoretical possibility. To conclude from possibility to actuality involves a logical fallacy as I said before. In this question there are two possible alternatives. One is that the testimony of each Father and Doctor of the church echoed the tradition of the local or regional church of which he was a member. In this case the testimonies of different fathers were independent of each other. The other alternative is that they all borrowed from one and the same common

source like St. Ephrem or some other individual like him. The first alternative is more probable than the second. No one so far has successfully proved beyond reasonable doubt the point of complete dependence of the various ecclesiastical writers on St. Ephrem or any other single individual authority. It is true that all second hand and indirect testimonies must finally rest on one or more first hand and direct testimonies. But St. Ephrem's testimony obviously cannot be a first hand testimony on this question because several decades intervened between the Apostolic age and St. Ephrem's period and there must have been a tradition—oral or written—connecting the Apostolic age with Ephrem's period. It is extremely improbable that St. Ephrem or any other individual like him all on a sudden made a bold assertion about St. Thomas' mission to India. If he were to make such arbitrary assertion, Christians realising the startling innovation would have protested against such unprecedented and unheard of statement on an important matter like this in which the whole church was interested. Absence of any trace of such protests would show that people tacitly approved it.

Even if it is true that all ecclesiastical writers ultimately depended on the authority of St. Ephrem or any one else like him it will not

militate against our position unless it can be shown that the source in question was untrustworthy. To my knowledge no one so far has succeeded in showing that source as unreliable. If the source was not shown as untrustworthy the implication is that it was treated as trustworthy. All the faithful borrowings from a trustworthy evidence must be treated as trustworthy. Thus we come to the conclusion that the testimonies of all the ecclesiastical writers after St. Ephrem, even if they rest solely on his authority, are completely trustworthy and true.

Since some writers make much of St. Ephrem's testimony as the sole source of all subsequent testimonies a few more words may be profitably said about him and his report. Being a doctor of the church he was a man of high intellectual stature and great moral calibre. Such a person can not be easily gulled or duped into believing something important without adequate reasons. We cannot really conceive of such a high personality stooping to deceive others on important matters like the one we are treating about.

Further it is a law of moral science that no one speaks lies in a serious matter except for some definite advantage for himself or for

those connected with him. What advantage was St. Ephrem or any other individual gaining by speaking lies on a matter like this? On the other hand, as I said, before, there would have been strong protestations against such lies. The absence of such protests shows that people readily though tacitly agreed to such testimonies seeing that they were fully in agreement with the tradition they were having.

From all this we can safely conclude that it stands to sound reason to admit the truth of the testimonies of the various ecclesiastical writers we have quoted even if they followed St. Ephrem or any one else like him. Let me conclude this part with the forceful words of the well-known Syrian historian Dr. Mingana who made a deep and extensive research study on this problem, "There is no historian, no poet, no liturgy, no breviary and no writer of any kind who having had the opportunity of speaking of St. Thomas does not associate his name with India". Though the statement as such contains an element of exaggeration still the idea he wanted to drive home is clear namely that the vast majority of ecclesiastical writers and official documents were at one in affirming the mission of St. Thomas to India.

JIM: Well, Tom, I now see clearly your point.

Before I can express my own opinion in this matter I should like you to answer one more objection against this point of testimony of the ecclesiastical writers. Suppose the church writers different from those whom you have quoted speak of St. Thomas as having evangelised some other place without mentioning India as the scene of his apostolate then what value can I attach to the testimonies you have adduced. As a matter of fact Origen in the third century, Eusebius of Caesarea, Rufinus of Aquileia and Socrates all say that St. Thomas preached in Parthia and they do not connect India with St. Thomas. And communities of christians in countites adjoining north west of India have claimed St. Thomas as their apostle.

TOM: There is a difficulty in this I must confess. However it is not as formidable as it looks at first sight. Yours is an argument from silence. Because some writers and Fathers of the Church while speaking about the mission of St. Thomas did not mention India as the scene of his labour you conclude that according to them St. Thomas did not go to India. Such a conclusion is not quite correct because it is not warranted by the premises. If the writers had said that St. Thomas did not go to India or that he preached only in Persia and Parthia then the objection would

have been pretty strong. But as it now stands it is not strong. The silence of those writers could be explained at least in two more ways. They did not associate St. Thomas with India because for some reason or other they did not know about that connection. From their ignorance and silence, therefore, we cannot conclude to their denial of that of which they are ignorant and about which they kept silent. There is also another possible explanation of their silence. Sometimes we deliberately abstain from mentioning a fact which we judge as too well known to need any special mention. Thus these writers must have abstained from mentioning St. Thomas mission in India because they judged it to be too well known to need any special mention. I must admit that the conclusion you have drawn also is a possible one. Since there are at least three distinct possible conclusions that can be drawn from the silence of these authors, to suppose and maintain that your conclusion alone is the Valid one is illogical.

But another important consideration is this. The silence of a few writers cannot destory the strength of the positive assertions of many writers and official documents.

JIM. There is something in what you say in the first part of your answer, though it is not as

forcible as you pretend to make it to be. The second part of your answer is a little more satisfying to me.

TOM: I don't pretend that the first part of my refutation of your argument from silence is very forceful. However there is some force in it as you yourself admit it. The whole argument from silence is a weak one. I am glad that the second part of my answer has proved more satisfactory to you. What, then, is your final stand regarding this point of the testimony of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church?

JIM: Though I am not convinced of the coming of St. Thomas to India, still I concede the point that according to the testimonies of several Fathers and Doctors of the church St. Thomas came to India. From the first argument from the official pronouncements of the church I admitted that the theory has some probability. From this present argument it has acquired a new or added force and probability. Thus the theory has now become a little more probable than before but it does not yet enjoy any certainty.

Though from the writings of outstanding church men and from several records both official and non-official in the church, it is

clear enough that St. Thomas evangelised some country by the name of India, how can you show from these that the India in question is our India, Bharath, and not some other region that went by the name of India. My reason for this question is this. For some Western writers in the middle ages the term "India" was an indefinite geographical expression applied some times to modern Persia or Arabia or even Abyssinia.

TOM: To answer your objection satisfactorily I must speak a little about the history of the connection between the West and our India. It is a well known fact admitted by all historians that trade routes both by land and sea connected India with the countries west of it. We know from history that the Persians and then the Greeks came to India. In the centuries immediately before and after Christ the trade routes were in the hands of the Romans. Among the chief commercial commodities purchased from India by the luxury loving Romans included pepper and other spices grown chiefly in South India. In fact South India was well known to the Romans. Writers like Pliny (circ. 45 A.D.) and the Egyptian writers like Ptolemy (C. 150 A.D.) very well knew about India especially South India. Pliny the Elder makes special mention of South India in his "Natural History"

and other writings. Above all, the Roman coins recently unearthed from some of the sea ports of South India puts beyond all the possibility of any reasonable doubt the regular trade connection that existed between the Romans and the South Indians. Hence in the writings of the Romans, the Greeks and the Egyptians "who knew our India well, the term "India" meant first and foremost our India, Bharath. Hence the church writers who were acquainted with these writings of the Romans, the Greeks and the Alexandrians meant by India "Our India." Sometimes the term, "Great India" was used to designate India proper with its bordering territories. But it is to be noted that these surrounding regions got the name of India precisely due to their nearness to and relation with India properly so called which was the more famous territory.

JIM: If so how will you explain the mistaken notion of some of the mediaeval writers about our India, India proper?

TOM: That mistake can be explained by an examination of the history of the times. From the seventh century onward till the fifteenth Islam was conquering and holding sway over all land between India and some countries of the Western Europe. Free communication between India and

these countries was well nigh impossible. Consequently the Western writers of the middle ages did not have much direct knowledge about India. They relied mostly on vague and inaccurate reports of "travellers", some of whom never travelled in the countries they vividly described. The account of Sir John Mandeville the English, author of a book of Travel written about 1360, is a case in point. This gentleman fascinated the whole of Europe with his wonderful description of the sights and scenes he "came across" during his journey from the Indian Archipelago to Cathay (an old name for China). Later researches about the author and his work revealed the fact that he never proceeded beyond Tientsin where he died on Nov. 17, 1372. His book contained nothing but a product of his own imagination and a sprinkling of details from the accounts of some previous travellers (cf Catholic Encyclopedia). Small wonder if the Western countries misled by the writings of such travellers had very inaccurate notion about India. But the conditions during the first centuries of the Christian era were different from those of the early middle ages. India during the period between at least half a century before Christ and a few centuries after Christ was directly in touch with the various parts of the Roman Empire. So it was comparatively easy for people

from Western countries, Palestinian and middle east territories to come to India and get first hand informations about this country. The discovery of the seasonal winds facilitated the vogages. Thus it is the difference in the facility of communication that explains well the difference in the accuracy of information of the foreigners about India.

JIM: What you have said so far brings out two things clearly: first, that according to the liturgical and other documents and ecclesiastical writers St. Thomas preached in India and the India they mention must be our India. If as you say St. Thomas preached in our India and converted the Indians here there must have been here a community of Christians from the very begining. Is there any trace of the existence of such a community in India?

TOM: This question of yours is a very logical and legitimate one. There has been in fact a community of Christians calling themselves St. Thomas Christians, existing in India from time immemorial. Scattered and fragmentary evidences about their existence are found in many documents. I shall try to trace them back from the 16th century. When the Portuguese came to India they contacted these Christians. No less a person than St. Francis Xavier, the papal legate, said

mass in their Churches and wrote to Rome about them in glowing terms. Before him visitors to India in the 15th, 14th and 13th centuries like Barbosa in 1518, Nicola Conti in about 1440, John Marignoli the papal legate in 1350, Friar Odoric in 1325, Haythonus in 1300, Marco Polo in about 1293 John of Monte Corvino in 1247 speak of St. Thomas tomb and Church of St. Thomas in India. In 1122 one Mar John from India received Pallium from pope Callixtus II. Going further back, King Alfred of England in the 9th century, according to Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, seems to have sent offerings to St. Thomas in India. Going still further back we see that in the middle of the 6th century one Theodore from Gaul visited India and found here "a monastery and a very large Church". Similarly cosmos in the 6th century speaks about a community of Christians in India. About 354 A. D. the Emperor Constantius sent a certain Theophilus to India, who we are told, reformed certain abuses that kept among the Christians in India such as "sitting during the reading of the gospel"! etc. We know also that in the first eccumenical council of Nicaea in 325 A. D, a certain bishop called Mar John representing the Church in Persia and India put his signature to the decrees of that council (cf Hisotry of councils by Mansi: the section dealing with

the council of Nicee). We know also of bishops coming from Persia to India to govern the church here. For instance, towards the end of the third century one Davd or David, Bishop of Bussorah on the Persian gulf, proceeded to India.(10) Philostorgius also in his "Historia Ecclesiastica" mentions one bishop named "Theophilus Indus." He seems to have been a real Indian by birth.(11) What is clear from all these is that already in the 3rd century a Christian community with priests and bishops was found in India. To have it in that advanced stage christianity should have been introduced into India long before the 3rd century. Thus if we retrace our steps along the testimonies of strangers and travellers, which are perfectly true and reliable though only a few and far between, we can surely and safely come to a community of christians which cannot but be that of christians converted by the Apostle himself. MIL

JIM: Could not this Church have been introduced by Nestorians especially since we know that the Nestorians were noted for their missionary spirit ?

10) Patrologia Orientails IV pp 292—293

11) Phocius Patriarcha. Bibliotheca: Migne, P. G. LIII Col. 547

TOM: Nestorians became strong and influential only towards the end of the 4th century or rather at the beginning of the 5th century. Hence the community of christians found in India in the 3rd century and represented in the Council of Nicaea could not have been Nestorian.

JIM: Could it have been Manichaeian?

TOM: Even admitting that Mani came to India and won a few converts to his sect (and there is a vague tradition in Kerala about a certain Sorceres Mani who had won some followers for himself) it is evident that Manichaeians could not have been represented in Nicaea. Moreover no one has ever found traces of Manichaeian doctrines in the Kerala Church. The same answer holds good with regard to the Kerala Church and any other heresy after the 4th century.

JIM: I admit the community of Christians in Kerala must have been Catholics. From this it does not necessarily follow that their origin as Catholics is from St. Thomas the Apostle. Could they not have been immigrants into Kerala?

TOM: I am afraid you have missed the point in question. On the one hand according to the testimonies of many official documents of the hierarchical Church and of the individual Fathers

and Doctors of the same Church, St. Thomas preached in India. We have seen also that India in question is our India. Assuming the whole to be true we must naturally expect to find a church in India claiming to have been founded by St. Thomas. As a matter of fact we do find such a church in India. Hence the obvious conclusion is that our assumption must have been a corret one.

By giving this answer I am not dodging your question. I only wished to point out to you the exact position our discussion has reached. Now let me answer your question directly. To know whether these St. Thomas Christians are natives or immigrants we must examine their own ethnic traits, culture and tradition.

Though St. Thomas very probably preached in many patrs of India, the only place at present in India that claims him as their father who begot them in the gospel is Kerala and the communities founded by St. Thomas in other places, if there were any, now nolonger exist. Now these St. Thomas Christians of Kerala ethnologically belong to the same group as the high Caste Hindus of Kerala. Excepting their religious practices they have the same culture, language and for a long time the same privileges as their Hindu brethren had under the native Rajas.

Hence the hypothesis of immigration has no scientific foundation,

Moreover it is a generally admitted fact that between the 4th and the 9th centuries waves of immigrant Christians came to Kerala. They also claim themselves to be St. Thomas Christians and there is no difficulty in admitting their claim. They must have come from a place where St. Thomas preached before coming to India. Tradition in fact admits that St. Thomas preached also in the lands of Medes, Parthians and Persians. Even to this day this group of immigrants remain distinct from the native St. Thomas Christians. They are known by the name of Southists or Suddhists in Kerala and the present diocese of Kottayam consists exclusively of these people.

Further this immigration far from destroying the historicity of the presence of the native St. Thomas Christians only corroborates it all the more. These immigrants must have come to Kerala probably to escape from persecution or some economic hardship. Usually under pressure of difficulties we do not go to a distant land to settle down there unless we expect friendly welcome and help. From whom could they expect heartier welcome than from their

own brethren in Christ. Thus the fact of immigrant Christians in Kerala far from destroying the fact of native Christians, confirms all the more.

JIM: If the majority of the native Christians of Kerala are St. Thomas Christians there must be a strong tradition among them about this point. Is there such a tradition among them?

TOM: Most certainly. Very many Christians of Kerala style themselves St. Thomas Christians thereby affirming that they are the member of the same Church founded by St. Thomas and some of them at least claim themselves as direct descendants of the converts of the Apostle. They are proud of this title of theirs and justly so. They consider and call St. Thomas their great father in Christ. They definitely point out places, objects and events connected with St. Thomas' mission in Kerala. They keep alive his sacred memory through celebrations of feasts and singing of festive songs in which they narrate various deeds done by St. Thomas in our land. From very ancient times they have been undertaking pilgrimages long and full of hardship in those days to the place, Mylapore near Madras which they have been believing to be the place of his martyrdom and burial. Such a tradition fully written in the hearts of

men cannot be easily set aside or overlooked. It demands an adequate explanation and nothing short of the objectivity of St. Thomas' mission in our country can be its adequate explanation. Any other way of explaining it is bound to be unreasonable and disappointing creating as it does many more difficulties than it tries to solve. Strange enough even the Hindus of the place share in the tradition. Though in course of time many fanciful and legendary details might have grown round the various circumstances of St. Thomas' mission in India, still the core of the tradition is true and will appear so to any one who is prepared to sift all the evidences and examine all the arguments thoroughly and without prejudice.

JIM: If the matter is so clear as you think how is it some writers in the last century did not consider it even as probable.

TOM: They did not have at their disposal several findings and evidences which modern research and scholarship have brought to light. Today you will not find a single historian of note who having studied the question deeply and without bias dares to deny the mission of St. Thomas to India.

JIM: Why did St. Thomas come to India? When did he come to India? How many times did

he come to India? By which way did he come to India? What language did he speak in India?

TOM; You, Jim are bombarding and suffocating me with a volley of questions which at present I do not wish to discuss in detail or at length. However I shall speak a few words on each of the points you have raised.

Thomas came to India to fulfil the command of Christ to teach all nations and India was certainly one of the well-known nations of the period. The presence of the Jews here might have given him an added stimulus to come over to India.

There are not wanting in signs indicating St. Thomas' arrival both in Northern and in Southern India. Northern India he might have entered through Kybar pass after having travelled by land route from Edessa (Iraq) Via Hyrcania situated South of the Caspian sea. To South India he probably came by sea route. Having evangelised the island of Socotra he probably arrived at Muzuris (Cranganore) one of the most famous seaports of the South at that period. He must have gone to Socotra because according to the testimony of St. Francis Xavier the people of that island too considered themselves descendants of those baptized by St. Thomas. This double mission of St. Thomas in India

tallies with the other tradition that the Apostles after their dispersal immediately after Pentecost came together at the time of the death of B. V. Mary. Further, certain details about his mission in the North, as found in the "Acts of St. Thomas," an apocryphal work, are being confirmed by recent archaeological discoveries in Northern India.

According to some authors St. Thomas arrived at the Malabar Coast in about 52 A. D.

The problem of speaking a foreign language was not peculiar to St. Thomas. It affected most other Apostles as well. Those who were endued with supernatural powers from on High on the day of Pentecost would not have found the problem of speaking a foreign language an insoluble one. Even on a natural level we can solve this problem by saying that St. Thomas must have got the help of his Jewish brethren who acted as his interpreters. These Jews had come to India long before his arrival, during their dispersion at the time of the conquest and persecution of the Jews in Palestine by the Assyrians and Babylonians. They could have also come for trade purposes. Some of them must have settled down in India and learnt the Indian languages during the long period of their settlement here and so could have acted as Thomas's interpreters.

As I said in the beginning we are not concerned here mainly with the why, the when, the how and other circumstances of the mission of St. Thomas in India. About many of these we have only more or less probable arguments. Other authors may say they have historic certainty about them. I do not wish to question their subjective certitude, Only I fail to see eye to eye with them in these matters.

But the central fact of St. Thomas's coming to India is undeniable. About it we can get as great a degree of certainty as is usually possible with events of great antiquity. The various arguments we have brought forward to prove our point in their ensemble, in their cumulative and converging force is really capable of producing certainty and conviction in the mind of any intelligent and unbiased thinker.

JIM: Will you be kind enough to marshall your various arguments that I may see them in the way you wish me to see them.

TOM: With pleasure I shall do so. A study of the conditions of India and the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era, the discovery of the trade winds, anti-trade winds, moonsoon winds, all show that St. Thomas could have come to India with comparative ease.

That he actually preached in India is attested by many highly reliable documents and persons of the first few centuries. The India they speak about cannot but be our India. It is proved both by the fact that there was no other place known by the name of India during those early centuries and by the fact that our India was so well-known in the ancient world that the learned writers whom we have cited could not have possibly made any confusion or mistake regarding it. Further the existence of a well organised community of Christians in India dating back comparatively very near to the apostolic times, cannot in any way be explained except on the score of the apostolate of St. Thomas in our land. The positive and living tradition of that community to the same effect, a tradition shared by the non-Christians of the place and confirmed by foreigners who have come to the Apostle's tomb in India and the absence of a contrary tradition in any other part of the world, (in fact no country in the world other than India has claimed to have the place of martyrdom and burial of the Apostle), all go to show that the mission of St. Thomas in India cannot but be a historical fact beyond all doubt or dispute. There may arise many difficulties when one tries to reconcile the huge mass of apparently conflicting

details about the circumstances of the Apostle's arrival in India. In this connection worth quoting are the meaningful words of cardinal Newman, "Thousand difficulties do not make a single doubt".

It is the mark and duty of a true historian to hold fast to a well-known fact and try to explain the apparently conflicting details of it in the best way possible by further study of the question and not to doubt or throw over board the fact itself because of the many difficulties that seemingly beset it.

Let me conclude this discussion by drawing your attention to the fact that several sovereign pontiffs in their official writings, Paul V on the occasion of erecting the diocese of Mylapore in 1696, Leo XIII in his constitution, "Romani Pontifices" for his establishment of Syro-Malabar hierarchy, have echoed and endorsed this tradition about this apostolate of St. Thomas in India.

JIM: I thank you very sincerely, dear Tom, for having dispelled all my scepticism about this question by your clear, cogent, convincing and conclusive arguments.

TOM, Thank you for the compliments. If this discussion has helped you to get rid of your

own scepticism on this matter, I should suggest to you to help others to get rid of their own scepticism, by buying and distributing copies of this booklet to them. As you know there are still some doubting Thomases on this point especially among foreigners and non-Syrian Christians in India.

JIM: I shall gladly do so.

TOM: Thanks in advance, best wishes and good bye.



