Placid Podipara´s Reflection on the Church
“St. Thomas Christians are Indian in Culture”

Verfasser
Lijo Joseph

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Dedicated to all the members of the Syro-Malabar Church
Acknowledgements

This is a master’s degree thesis investigate on Placid Podipara’s reflection on the Church “St. Thomas Christians are Indian in culture”. It is a humble attempt to know how Fr. Placid Podipara understood the birth and spread of Christianity through the preaching of St. Thomas the Apostle. With the passage of time, Christian religion rooted well, adapting itself to the customs and practices of the place. There was no attempt on the part of Christians to remain aloof from a given society or tried to remain a separate entity. The Church has accepted, absorbed, and assimilated itself to the good elements of Indian culture.

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 5

General Introduction ............................................................................................................. 11

1. Life, Works, and Contributions of Placid Podipara .......................................................... 12
2. The Thomas Christians are Indian in Culture ................................................................. 12
3. Ecclesiology of Fr. Placid .................................................................................................. 12

Chapter I-Life, Works, and Contributions of Placid Podipara .......... 15

1. Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 15
2. Birth and Early Life ........................................................................................................... 15
3. His Time in Rome ............................................................................................................. 17
4. Works .................................................................................................................................. 19
   4.1. Inspiration ...................................................................................................................... 19
   4.2. Classification of Fr. Placid’s Writings ........................................................................... 21
       4.2.1. History of the St. Thomas Christians of India ................................................... 21
       4.2.2. Laws, Customs, and Traditions of the St. Thomas Christians ......................... 23
       4.2.3. Rite, Liturgy, Extension of Jurisdiction, Pastoral Ministry of Emigrants, and
              Mission Work ............................................................................................................. 27
       4.2.4. On Church Unity ................................................................................................... 29
   5. Contributions .................................................................................................................. 32
   5.1. Restoration of the Syro-Malabar Liturgy .................................................................... 32
   5.2. The Territory of the Syro-Malabar Jurisdiction ............................................................ 34
   5.3. Member in the Vatican Council II ................................................................................ 35
   5.4. Contributions to Syro-Malankara Church .................................................................. 36
2. The Last Years of Fr. Placid .............................................................................................. 38
3. Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 39

Chapter II-The Thomas Christians are Indian in Culture .............. 41

1. Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 41
2. Definition of Culture ........................................................................................................ 41
   2.1. Cultural Diversity of India .......................................................................................... 42
3. The Cultural Adaptation of the St. Thomas Christians
   3.1. Family Life ................................................................. 44
   3.2. Birth Ceremonies .......................................................... 45
   3.3. Name-Giving Ceremony ................................................ 46
   3.4. Initiation Ceremony of Learning ..................................... 47
   3.5. Marriage Ceremonies ................................................... 48
   3.6. Dress Code .................................................................. 50
   3.7. Eating Habits ............................................................... 51
   3.8. Architecture ................................................................ 52
     3.8.1. House Construction .................................................. 52
     3.8.2. Church Construction ................................................ 52
   3.9. Art and Culture ............................................................ 53
   3.10. Socio-Political Life ....................................................... 55
   3.11. Occupation .................................................................. 56
   3.12. Spiritual Life ................................................................ 57
     3.12.1. Liturgy .................................................................. 57
     3.12.2. Family Prayer ......................................................... 58
     3.12.3. Observance of Fast .................................................. 59
     3.12.4. Other Devotions ..................................................... 59
   3.13. Funeral Ceremonies ..................................................... 60
   3.14. Church Administration .................................................. 61
     3.14.1. The Palliyogam ........................................................ 61
     3.14.2 The Desiyogam ......................................................... 62
     3.14.3. The Mahayogam ..................................................... 62
 4. Conclusion ....................................................................... 63
1. Introduction ...................................................................... 65
2. Identity ............................................................................. 65
   2.1. The Apostolic Claim of the St. Thomas Christians .......... 65
   2.2. The Ecclesial Tradition .................................................. 67
     2.2.1. Metropolitan .............................................................. 69
     2.2.2. Archdeacon .............................................................. 70
     2.2.3. Clerical Formation .................................................... 71
     2.2.4. Major Archiepiscopal Church .................................... 72
   2.3. Liturgical Traditions ..................................................... 73
General Introduction

The St. Thomas Christians of the Syro-Malabar rite, are one of the most vibrant Catholic communities today. There are two communities of St. Thomas Christians of India, who are united with Rome. One group is called Syro-Malabar Church (Chaldean liturgical traditions) and the other one is called Syro-Malankara Church (Antiochian liturgical traditions). Besides these two there are non-catholics (Jacobite and Orthodox Christians). Generally all the Christians, who possess the tradition of St. Thomas directly or indirectly are called the St. Thomas Christians of India.¹ The Syro-Malabar Church is the second largest among the 23 Eastern Churches, which are in communion with Rome. According to Indian tradition the disciple of Jesus Christ St. Thomas reached in Malabar (today's Kerala), the south west coast of India in 52 A.D. and preached Holy Gospel in India. He established seven Christian communities in India. That is the reason why they are called St. Thomas Christians of India. Till the end of the 15th century the Christians of India had relation with the Persian Church (the Chaldean Church), because the apostolic traditions of this Church also go to the disciple St. Thomas directly or indirectly. The liturgy of the St. Thomas Christians is also Syro-Chaldean.

With the arrival of Portuguese missionaries, the situation began to change. They found the Christians of India with defective theology and considered them as heretics, wishing to correct them. As a result, they lost their indigenous customs, their ecclesial traditions, and liturgy, which they had received from the Apostle. Portuguese missionaries interfered in the day to day affairs of the church and brought them under Roman bishops till the end of the 19th century. During this time, the church witnessed many divisions between the St. Thomas Christians of India both Catholic and non-catholic. The hierarchy was established for the Catholic fraction of St. Thomas Christians of India in 1923 and received from the western missionaries with the name Syro-Malabar Church. The word “Syro” signifies the liturgical language and ecclesial tradition of East Syrian Church. The term “Malabar” denotes Kerala, a state in South India.

Placid Podipara (1899-1985) was a priest who belonged to the first congregation of the Syro-Malabar Church, called (Carmelites of Mary Immaculate) C.M.I. Because of his contribution to St. Thomas Christians, he is considered as a father of the modern Syro-Malabar Church. He served his mother church as a professor in the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, as a member of the commission for the Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium, as a consultor for the commission for the Oriental Churches, and as a *Peritus* in the Vatican Council II.

1. Life, Works, and Contributions of Placid Podipara

One cannot understand Fr. Placid without knowing his background. He had deep love for the church and that is why he devoted his entire life for the development of the church. He conveyed his knowledge to his own people in their own language through his marvellous works. He wrote 128 books and articles in various languages. Fr. Placid was a person, who was an authority on Syro-Malabar church-subjects. The biographical details of Fr. Placid are explained in the first chapter.

2. The Thomas Christians are Indian in Culture

The Thomas Christians are the Christians of India with Indian culture. Indian cultures have their root in the most ancient culture of Indus Valley civilization. India has a variety of cultures and races. Fr. Placid observes that the inhabitants of Malabar (Kerala) are Dravidians, who were the dominant race in the southern part of India. The Christians adopted the elements of the Dravidian culture from the non-christian brothers and christianised in the law of faith². The elements of Indian culture that can be seen among the St. Thomas Christians throughout their life and faith are illustrated in the second chapter.

3. Ecclesiology of Fr. Placid

The ecclesiological concepts of Fr. Placid are the identity of a particular church and the communion with the universal church. The historical, ecclesial and liturgical

individuality, of the particular church St. Thomas Christians (Syro-Malabar Church) has to be seen under this title. Fr. Placid’s opinion is that for the accomplishment of church communion, the primacy of Peter and his follower Popes should be accepted and is inevitable. In the light of the Vatican Council II Fr. Placid agrees with the view that the Catholic Church is the communion of individual churches or particular churches. The writings of Fr. Placid reveal that the lack of the communication between the church of India and Rome in the early centuries was an obstacle to the communion with Rome. The ecclesial concept of Fr. Placid is analysed in the third chapter.

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Chapter I-Life, Works, and Contributions of Placid Podipara

1. Introduction

The first chapter throws light on the biography, personality, and the contributions of Fr. Placid, who was a Carmelite priest and a historian. Through his writings he paved the way to make the early Christians of Kerala, South India, who are called St. Thomas Christians, known to his own people and to the world. The classifications of his works and his ecumenical vision are also illustrated below.

2. Birth and Early Life

Placid Podipara was born as a son of Chacko and Rosa, a traditional family of Podipara, on October 3rd, 1899, in Arpookara, in the district of Kottayam, Kerala, India. He was baptized and received the name Joseph. His near and dear ones called him Kochauseppachan (= Little Joseph). When he was three years old, he was sent to a local Hindu asan (village teacher) who taught him the basics of his mother tongue Malayalam and the basics of Christian catechism. The village teacher, though he was a Hindu by religion, taught the Christian children the basic lessons of Christian doctrine. It was not because of the lack of Christian teachers, but it was the custom and the Hindu village teacher was accepted and respected by people of all religions. Fr. Placid lost his parents when he was a little boy. He was brought up by his aunt and grandparents in the typical tradition of St. Thomas Christian life, in love of God and devotion to Mary, the Mother of God.4

Placid Podipara had his primary and secondary education at Mannanam, run by the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate fathers (C.M.I). As Thomas Kalayil writes:

The community was the first indigenous congregation founded by the three illustrious priests of the Syro-Malabar Church to care mainly to the well-being of the St. Thomas Christians of India. After a preliminary training, Podipara Joseph was send to novitiate training at Ampazhakad, where he underwent a rigorous spiritual training. At the beginning of the novitiate training he was given the religious habit and a new name - Placid of St. Joseph to signify the putting on of a new man. At the end of the novitiate on September 15th, 1919, Brother Placid took the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Thus he formally

became a member of the Third Order of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate-C.M.I. After the religious training, Br. Placid was sent to St. Joseph’s Seminary, Manglore, for priestly studies. He was ordained priest on December, 3rd, 1927.\(^5\)

Fr. Placid was a man of prayer doing the liturgy of the hours daily before the Eucharist. He had special devotion to Mother Mary, too. The Christian virtues like humility, simplicity, poverty, and patience etc. shined well in his life and they had great impact in his spiritual life. He truly was a religious person. Throughout his whole life, he showed his love to the church and his loyalty to the Pope. \(^6\)

Fr. Placid was as courageous as St. Thomas. He stood for his convictions and was always opened to truth even in critical situations. He strived throughout his whole life to recapture and rebuild the past glorious history of the St. Thomas Christians. In this sense he was a true St. Thomas Christian, who followed the traditions and the spirit of St. Thomas very faithfully, what evidently is shown also in his writings.\(^7\)

The main topics of interest of Fr. Placid were ecclesiology, canon law, liturgy, and church history. He was versed well in many languages like Latin, Syriac, English, German and Italian. He could give homilies in Syriac, the liturgical language of his Mother Church. He had a special love of this Syriac language. After his higher studies in subjects like church history, canon law, and philosophy in Rome, he was appointed as professor in the Major Seminary of the congregation, in Chetipuzha in the diocese of Changanassery in the year 1930. According to the expectations of all, he proved to be the best ‘Guru’ for his students. ‘Guru’ is a word in Indian Sanskrit language, which denotes a teacher who not only imparts the acquired knowledge to his students but also is a guide with his life example. Fr. Placid truly was an example and always an inspiration to his students. His teaching methods and techniques were appreciated by his students. He made his students understand through simple examples. In those days the language to be used was Latin. Understandably Fr. Placid taught in Latin but explained the topics in English and Malayalam to make the points clearer. He listened patiently to


\(^7\) Cf. Thomas KALAYIL, Profile of a Prophet, 344-349.
the students and cleared their doubts and questions. He was an excellent professor with immense knowledge. 8

Many people both religious and lay, flocked to him for his spiritual guidance. He taught them to love the church and to be loyal to the Pope, the successor of Peter. Fr. Placid strongly believed in the teachings of the church and that the universal church is a communion of individual churches. He inspired many of his students to be staunch believers and later leaders in the local church. 9

3. His Time in Rome

Fr. Placid spent 30 years in Rome. The brilliant new priest began his studies one year after his ordination in the year 1928. His superiors wanted him to qualify to teach in the congregation seminary and to be a member of the formation team for the young priest aspirants. 10

His high intellectual capacity coupled with hard work enabled Fr. Placid to complete his studies in a short period of time. His three doctorates in Canon Law, Philosophy, and Theology from the same Gregorian University can be placed on record. In the prevailing system in those days at Roman universities neither a research period nor an extensive dissertation was needed to secure a doctorate in the above mentioned branches of study. 11

Returning to India, he engaged himself in teaching in the congregation seminary for many years. In 1952 Fr. Placid was called to Rome as ‘consultor’ for the Congregation for Oriental Churches. This appointment was the result of the interest taken by his Eminence Cardinal Tisserant, who was the secretary of the Congregation for Oriental Churches. Cardinal Tisserant studied the history of St. Thomas Christians and appointed Fr. Placid as a secretary when he visited Kerala, India in the year 1953. After his visit Fr. Placid was called to Rome again in order to prepare the projects for the development

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8 Cf. Thomas KALAYIL, Profile of a Prophet, 344-349.
10 Cf. Thomas KALAYIL, The Profile of a Prophet, 329.
11 Cf. Kurian PERUMPALLIKUNNEL, Fr. Placid Podipara, 24-25; Cf. Antony NARITHOOKIL, Fr. Placid Podipara, I.
of the Syro-Malabar Church. The congregations which are related to the oriental churches made much use of the capability, the knowledge and the quality of the hard work of Fr. Placid. When he was in Rome he contacted many scholars of international level and officials in the ecclesial administration. At that time he spent much time in the Vatican archive for his researches. During this time he published many books and articles in international periodicals. One of his dominant works was the translation of *Varthamanappusthakam* (a travelogue) from Malayalam to English in 1970. This work illustrates the journey to Rome and Lisbon written by an indigenous priest. The book *Varthamanappusthakam* describes the ecclesial system of St. Thomas Christians. It was a great contribution for the growth of the St. Thomas Christians.

The 19th centenary of the Martyrdom of St. Thomas was remembered in 1972 and Placid wrote the *individuality of the Malabar Church, Kerala Sābhāyade Vykhittuam, the Malabar Christians* etc., in the same year. Placid’s life time extends from that of Leo XIII to John Paul II, who has made significant contributions to the Eastern Churches. Pope Leo XIII with his *Orientalium Dignitas* (1893) laid the beginning of Eastern Church’s growth while Benedict XV created the Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Church with his *Motu Proprio Dei Providentis* (May, 1st 1917), and he took special interest in establishing the *Pontificium istitutum Orientale* in 1917 with his *Motu Proprio Orientalis catholici* (October, 15th 1917), where Placid taught from 1957 to 1972. Placid’s loyalty to the Pope can be seen explicitly in his books, such as: *Marppayude Pramadhikaravum Appramadittavum* (Primacy and Infallibility of Pope) 1935 and *Thrisabhayum Marpappayum* (The Church and Pope) 1935. As *Consultor* at the Pontifical Congregation for Oriental Churches from 1952 to 1972 he helped shaping the church in the most catholic and eastern perspectives, proving himself a true and loyal son of the Catholic Church.

Fr. Placid did much for his mother church as a professor at the Oriental Institute, at the Propaganda College, as rector in Malabar College (where the Indian students studied), and as a member of the Pontifical Commission for the renewal of the Syro-Malabar liturgy. From Rome Fr. Placid played a great role for the religious congregations for women in the Syro-Malabar Church. They came into existence in his time, like the Congregation of Mother of Carmel (CMC), Sacred Heart (SH), Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (SABS), Franciscan Clarist Congregation (FCC). Those

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13 Cf. Antony NARITHOOKIL, Fr. Placid Podipara, liii.
16 Kurian PERUMPALLIKUNNEL, Fr. Placid Podipara, 28.
congregations of Syro-Malabar Church were independent and each congregation was under the leadership of one General and they were entitled to enjoy their own rights and status. Fr. Placid served his church in Rome till 1980.17

4. Works

4.1. Inspiration

As I mentioned earlier Fr. Placid was in Rome mainly for studies and services. He secured doctorates in philosophy, theology and canon law. It was the time when his congregation launched a campaign to win over the non-catholics, who were separated from the Catholic unity due to the “Coonan Cross Oath” that happened in 1653.18 It is a promise which has his origin in the protest of St. Thomas Christians against the latinisation. “Coonan” is the name of a cross, which was situated in front of the Church of St. Thomas Christians in Mattancherry, Cochin, Kerala. A particular group of St. Thomas Christians gathered under the leadership of Archdeacon in Mattanchery church touching the cross and promising not to be under the influence of Portuguese missionaries but to remain faithful to the original tradition. This promise is called Coonan Cross Oath.19

As a result of this incident there emerged two fractions among the St. Thomas Christians. One group did not accept the authority of Portuguese missionaries and Pope and the other one accepted Portuguese missionaries and Pope. The group, who accepted the Pope, remained Catholic. Later they were called Syro-Malabar Church. The group, who did not accept the Pope, remained became non-catholic. But in the course of time one group of non-catholic became catholic and called Syro-Malankara Church. Later in the 20th century there was another division in the non-catholics part of St. Thomas


19 Cf. KODAPUZHA, Xavier, Thirusabhacharithram (Church History), Idukki 2008, 923-930.
Christians, the Syrian Jacobites, who were under the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and the Syrian Orthodox, who were under the Catholicos of eastern Kottayam, Kerala.

The Congregation of C.M.I. took steps to unite the non-catholic fractions into the catholic unity. As a member of this congregation Fr. Placid was the main person to champion this cause. He was the one who knew the history and identity of the St. Thomas Christians. As a scholar and writer he used his ability. He discussed the disputed matter, cleared doubts and prejudices with the separated groups. To build up the unity among St. Thomas Christians he wrote many articles to give correct information regarding history, liturgy, culture and traditions of St. Thomas Christians. For him the unity of the St. Thomas Christians was the unity of the Catholic Church.

He wrote:

The Catholic Religion teaches that the Pope of Rome is the Successor of St. Peter, on whom Christ the God-man built His Church, and as such he is the supreme Pastor who is to confirm his brethren and to whom all must be subjected, irrespective of political, racial, social, cultural, regional or ritual differences. Obedience to the Pope is the necessary condition of Catholic Communion, the rejection of which makes one similar to a heathen and a publican. But no one can be forced against his will to become a member of the Catholic Church.

On account of his hard work re-union was brought in first half of the 20th century. They are called Syro-Malankara Church. The church of Seleucia and its Catholic Roman Communion is a book written by Fr. Placid between 1942 and 1944 to clear the misunderstanding of the historians who were holding the opinion that St. Thomas Christians had the communion with Rome only after the coming of Portuguese missionaries. Till the 16th century St. Thomas Christians had their bishops from the Church ‘Persia’ and ‘Seleucia Ctesiphon’. They also had like St. Thomas Christians of India the East Syriac liturgy and traditions. After the coming of western missionaries the situation changed. From then onwards the western missionaries governed the St. Thomas Christians of India, Fr. Placid writes in his book.

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21 Cf. Thomas KALAYIL, Editor’s Preface, xi-xii.


The general belief among the historians is that the Church of Seleucia by succumbing to Nestorianism fell into open schism and was thus deprived of Catholic Communion. This in our opinion requires to be modified a little. For, the Church in question in its Nestorian days, especially before the sixteenth century, thought that it had Catholic (Roman) Communion. Fr. Placid pointed out that “The Church of Seleucia was to a very extent shut out from the rest of Christendom (especially Western Christendom) for geographical and political reasons. Even during its orthodox days the Church of Seleucia was not having any communication with Rome.” Fr. Placid came to the conclusion that St. Thomas Christians, who also have the East Syriac liturgy and traditions, accepted the Pope before the coming of western missionaries.

4.2. Classification of Fr. Placid’s Writings

Classification of his work is not an easy task, because each topic deals with not only one subject but a variety of subjects. After a thorough examination and study, an attempt was made to classify his works into four divisions or sections.

4.2.1. History of the St. Thomas Christians of India

There are 22 works including books and articles both in English and Malayalam language under this title. One of his major works among them is *The Syrian Church of Malabar: its Catholic Communion*. This work is to be considered the first book on the history of St. Thomas Christians written by Fr. Placid and published in 1936. In this book he says that the Pope is the successor of Peter and obedience to the Pope is necessary for catholic communion. He also mentions that during the first centuries the local churches enjoyed the freedom of autonomy and a law of their own, due to communication barriers, and geographical and political reasons. He says:

> It was quite possible that remote local churches could embrace heretical doctrines and practices without being non-catholic in the sense of losing catholic communion. But in order to be catholic, the readiness to receive any correction from Rome was absolutely necessary in those churches.

Fr. Placid says in the following “We cannot say for sure that a certain local church had no catholic communion then, unless we prove that she had not acknowledged the

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24 Placid PODIPARA, *The Church of Seleucia*, 47.
25 Ibid., 121.
papacy or had rejected it after acknowledging it.”27 According to Fr. Placid the hostility between Nestorius and Rome was not well known in Malabar. The supremacy of Peter or Rome was silently accepted by Seleucian Church and they were not against the primacy of the Pope. The bishops form the Church of Seleucia, who governed the Malabar, were not against Rome. That is the reason why the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar were not against the primacy of Rome. But their friendly attitude towards the western missionaries paved way for the communion with Rome.28 Such view of Fr. Placid throws light up on the catholic communion of St. Thomas Christians before the 16th century.

The translation of Varthamanapusthakam into English was one of the important works done by Fr. Placid. Varthamanapusthakam was a travelogue written in Malayalam language, which is the language of the state of Kerala in South India. The book Varthamanapusthakam describes the history of the St. Thomas Christians of India, their ancient ecclesial constitution, rights and privileges. It explains the events between 1773 and 1786 connected with a journey from Malabar (Kerala) to Rome by one bishop and one priest namely Mar Joseph Carayatil and Thomman (Thomas) Paremaakkal. This translation work helps the English readers of the world to know the historical events about the St. Thomas Christians of India.29

The Malabar Christians is the other prominent book written by Fr. Placid with regard to the history of St. Thomas Christians. This book gives concise information about the individuality of St. Thomas Christians. In this book Fr. Placid mentions that “from its very beginning the Malabar Church has been at home in Malabar, the south west coast of India. It is a particular church with its own hierarchy, liturgy, etc., and has, therefore, individuality distinct from that of all the other particular churches.”30

27 Ibid.
28 Cf. ibid.
The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church explains the historical growth and life of Syro-Malabar church from the existence till 1970. Fr. Placid pointed out that Syro-Malabar is not distinct from the ancient church of the Christians of St. Thomas, because according to the Indian tradition its origin is from St. Thomas. From the ancient time itself this church followed the Chaldean or the East Syrian Liturgy. The Syro-Malabar Church is also known under names like St. Thomas Christians, Indo-Chaldean or Chaldeo Indian, Malabarians, Syrians of Malabar, Malabar Syrians and Romo-Syrians. All the Christians of St. Thomas both catholic and non-catholic are called Syrians because they use Syriac in the Church Liturgy.  

The Rise and Decline of the Indian Church of the Thomas Christians reveals the sorrows and anxieties of the great lover of the church Fr. Placid about the St. Thomas Christians. Till the coming of western missionaries there was only one flock and one rite. After the 16th century it began to decline because of the interference from the missionaries, especially Portugese missionaries. The Portugese reached in India in 1498 under the leadership of Vasco da Gama for trade. Later the missionaries also came to India on behalf of the request of the Portugese crown to propagate the faith. The missionaries found that the Indian christians were schismatic and wanted to convert them to catholic faith. They exercised jurisdiction over the St. Thomas Christians and it paved the way for the unrest in the church.

4.2.2. Laws, Customs, and Traditions of the St. Thomas Christians

Fr. Placid’s book The Canonical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church serves as a solid foundation for the establishment of the particular laws for the Syro-Malabar Church and Syro-Malankara Church. The Vatican Council II paved the way for the publication of this book. The concept of the council was that the catholic church is a communion of churches. Different individual churches have different traditions and apostolic origins. The true knowledge of the traditions may narrow the vision about the catholicity of the church. Fr. Placid writes in this work that from the very beginning, before the dawn of the christian era, there were cultural and commercial contacts with Malabar (Kerala) and Seleucia, which is situated in the side of River Tigris. The other name of this church


is Persian Church. The patriarch of Persian Church exercised jurisdictional power in India also. Archdeacon was the chief and he is called the Metropolitan and Gate of all India.\(^{33}\) Fr. Placid writes:

The seleucian bishops who were at the head of Malabar Church certainly brought with them the collections of the seleucian canon law. These canon laws said to have been their norms of action whenever local laws (or usages) lacking in particular cases. In fact there existed in Malabar collections of the Seleucian cannon laws. In decree 14 of session III the synod of Diamper among other books condemned a book “De Synodis”\(^ {34}\)

De Synodis is an important canonical work, which included the canon laws of Seleucian Church and which was written by the Metropolitan of Nisibis. Fr. Placid says that how far the canon laws of Seleucian Church affected in the ecclesial affairs of St. Thomas Christians is doubtful and it is difficult to find an answer to this question. Fr. Placid notes that though the St. Thomas Christians were under Seleucian Church, they developed their own church laws on the basis of their political background under the light of Seleucian canon law.\(^ {35}\)

There are two main important sources of Seleucian canon law. The first chief source among them is the Antiochean source accepted by the Seleucian Church. They are pseudo-apostolic works\(^ {36}\) e.g. “Didascalia of the Apostles, Ecclesiastical Canons of the Holy Apostles, Apostolic Canons from the book of Addai,”\(^ {37}\) etc. The second important source of the canon law of Seleucian church are the canons passed by the synods and recognised by the Patriarch of Seleucia and they are to be considered as the rules and constitution of bishops and patriarchs. Under the Seleucian church heads the effective church administration was done in Malabar by Archdeacons. They were the social and political leaders and solved all the disputes among the community. But at the end of the 16\(^{th}\) century the church law of Seleucian Church, which was partially practised by the St. Thomas Christians and all the rights and privileges of the Archdeacon were abolished by the Synod of Diamper.\(^ {38}\)


\(^{34}\) Ibid., 587. 

\(^{35}\) Cf. ibid., 577, 587.

\(^{36}\) Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Canonical Sources, 576.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 576.

\(^{38}\) Cf. ibid., 610,619.
**Oriental Marriage Legislation** is an article written by Fr. Placid on the dispute about the beginning of the Lent season in the Syro-Malabar Church and the question whether the marriage celebration is to be conducted on the beginning day of Lent or not. Fr. Placid revealed that Lent season begins on Monday and there will not be any marriage celebration during Lent season. He came to this conclusion according to the Canon 97 of the Marriage Laws of the Catholic Oriental Churches promulgated on February 22nd, 1949. He says:

> The Orientals have no Ash-Wednesday, and for many of them not marriage solemnities only, but marriages themselves are to this day forbidden during their Quadragesima season; (Lent Season) and canon 97 of the Oriental marriage laws confirms this practice.\(^{39}\)

Fr. Placid wrote many articles and books both in Malayalam and English about customs and discipline of the St. Thomas Christians. One of the important articles among them is *The Syro-Malabarians—their Life and their Activities*. This article gives a brief information about the Syro-Malabar Church to foreign readers. This article was written by Fr. Placid on request of the editor of *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* from Switzerland.\(^{40}\) In this article the author tells that the name of the church stands for the church for the whole of India and the name signifies not the culture but only rite, because this church uses Syriac language for the liturgical services. The followers of this church are pure Malabarians and belong to Dravidian by race and language. The other names of the Syro-Malabarians were *Mar Thoma Nazranis* (= St. Thomas Christians) and *Nazrani Mapilas* (=noble Christians). This write up also talks about the ecclesiastical history of the church.

As a Church founded by an Apostle they kept their individuality through their peculiar social setup and the institution of Archdeacons who were their national leaders. During the long centuries that India was cut off from the West the Syro-Malabarians never denied the Roman Primacy, nor the necessity of being one with Chair of Peter. [...] In the 16th century the Portuguese opened the sea- passage that connected Malabar with the West. The Syro Malabarians spontaneously availed themselves of this opportunity to put themselves in direct constant touch with Rome.\(^{41}\)

The ecclesiastical territory of the Syro-Malabarians was the whole of India and the Head of the Church was called ‘the Gate Way of India’. After the imposition of the latin jurisdiction the territory became smaller and in 1896 it was limited to Malabar.

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\(^{39}\) Ibid., 507.


\(^{41}\) Idib., 516.
Syro-Malabarians had non-catholics and non-christian neighbours. The non-catholics were Jacobites, Anglicans, Nestorians etc. The non-christians neighbours were Hindus, Muslims, Jains, and Jews. They kept friendly relationship between the other religions. The Syro-Malabarrian boy married Hindu girl. But the Hindu boy never married a christian girl. The Syro-Malabarians were very active in the military services, commerce and agriculture. Each house situated in the middle of a plot of ground, which was meant for cultivation. The Syro-Malabarians did economically well.\(^{(42)}\)

Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship is a prominent article written by Fr. Placid. It says that St. Thomas Christians of India are perfectly Indian, having syriac tradition in worship and christian faith. Some of the historians of India say that christianity in India is the outcome of western missionaries after the 16th century and they had the opinion that this church should go further in matters of inculturation and the indigenisation of christianity. This article is a response to those people. Fr. Placid states that the St. Thomas Christians do have perfect Indian culture in their social, political and ecclesiastical life.\(^{(43)}\) In this article he points out that the St. Thomas Christians venerated Saint Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, who proclaimed the good news and converted the forefathers of St. Thomas Christians to christianity.

The liturgical and other books they had from Mesopotamia contained Nestorian formulas. But they did not know anything of the theological or controversial nature of these formulas; they were not in any way affected by the heretical aspect of such formulas, which remained a dead letter in their books.\(^{(44)}\)

In this article Fr. Placid says that the St. Thomas Christians accepted the Portuguese when they reached India and the other way round too. If the St. Thomas Christians were infected with heresy, they would not have been admitted into catholic.\(^{(45)}\)

\(^{(42)}\) Cf. ibid., 517-519


\(^{(44)}\) Placid PODIPARA, Hindu in Culture, 533.

\(^{(45)}\) Cf. ibid.
4.2.3. Rite, Liturgy, Extension of Jurisdiction, Pastoral Ministry of Emigrants, and Mission Work

One Rite for India is an article prepared by Fr. Placid, with the reflection on the idea of “One Rite”. The idea of “One Rite” was a movement by some of the priests and lay people of Kerala after the Vatican Council II. They argued that the tension and discords among the catholics is due to the existence of three rites namely Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara and Latin. They came to the conclusion that ‘One Rite’ would solve the problem among the Indian Christians. Fr. Placid tried to revolve with facts that not the existence of the rite is the problem but the refusal and unwillingness of the different communities to work in unity and harmony, what ultimately could solve all the problems. He wishes that one should make a clear distinction between rite and liturgy. This understanding of the difference between rite and liturgy removes elements of conflicts. According to Fr. Placid “Liturgy is one of the elements in a rite”, Vatican II says

The Holy Catholic, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are originally united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government. They combine into different groups, which are held together by their hierarchy, and so form particular church or rites. […] For the Catholic Church wishes the traditions of each particular church or rite to remain whole and entire, and it likewise wishes to adapt its own way of life to the needs of different times and places.

According to the vision of the council Fr. Placid argued that the holy Catholic Church protects the rites because it is the heritage of the church and the expression of the cultures and history of different places. The different rites show the unity of the universal church in diversity and it does not make any harmful effects for the Universal Church.

Reflections on Liturgy is an another prominent work of Fr. Placid, which deals with his reflections on liturgy. In this book he tells about the ancient liturgy of the St. Thomas

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47 Ibid., 73.
48 Orientalium Ecclesiarum, 2.
49 Cf. Placid PODIPARA, One rite for India, 71.
Christians, which is deeply rooted in the Bible, earliest traditions of the church and apostolic heritage.\textsuperscript{50} Fr. Placid writes:

In the Christian sense, Liturgy means, the public worship of the Church. The public worship of the Church is the worship of God through actions, words and gestures that are instituted by Christ, or by the Church, legitimately constituted for the purpose in the manner legitimately prescribed. Its aim is the public and official exercising of the virtue of Religion (i.e. the fulfilling of our duties towards God), and procuring of the sanctification and salvation of souls, by a lively expression of the faith of the church with everything that is included in that faith.\textsuperscript{51}

According to Fr. Placid liturgy is the source of spiritual inspiration and ecclesial experience. He points out that the St. Thomas Christians could be proud of having a liturgy, because this is a unique heritage of the churches founded by the Apostle St. Thomas. There are 16 chapters in this book. The first eleven chapters explain some of the important points with regard to liturgy, which were not carefully attended by a number of priests. The chapters twelve and thirteen give a brief explanation about the East Syriac Liturgy, as a background to the Syro-Malabar Liturgy. In this work he gives emphasis to the study of the liturgy language Syriac, which is necessary to know the liturgy of the Syro-Malabar Church. The book \textit{Reflection on Liturgy} throws light on the meaning of rites, because many of the people understood rite and liturgy as the same thing.

The word ‘rite’ signifies ‘ceremony’, ‘custom’ ‘usage’ etc. It can be taken as a mode of performing something. [...] The mode of performing a liturgical item or function is ‘liturgical rite’ of that item or function. The complexes of modes of performing all the liturgical items or functions is often called ‘rite’ In this sense ‘liturgy’ and ‘rite’ may be taken as synonyms.\textsuperscript{52}

\textit{Reflections on Liturgy} was written in 1983. This work of Fr. Placid is the best source to learn about the liturgical traditions of the Syro-Malabar Church and it paved way for further studies. Since 1992 the Syro-Malabar Church is a Major Archie Episcopal Church and in the course of time there were wide and deep studies about the liturgy and adequate changes were made with regard to the liturgy.

The spiritual care of the Syro-Malabarians in India outside their present ecclesiastical territory is a document, which was written in 1972 with the aim of giving exact

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 137.
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 139.
\end{itemize}
knowledge of the situation of Syro-Malabarians and the need of pastoral care outside Kerala. It tells about the ecclesial status of the Syro-Malabarians. Until the 16th century, the St. Thomas Christians lived under the Chaldean Patriarch of Mesopotamia. The title bishop was ‘the Metropolitan and Gate of all India’. It means that the bishops were entitled to enjoy the rights all over India. But after the end of 16th century the St. Thomas Christians referred to Latin rule and the jurisdiction power of the bishops was limited to Kerala. Fr. Placid accentuates in this document the rights of the particular church and the need to extend the judicial territory of the Syro-Malabar Church because many of the Syro-Malabarians were living outside the ecclesiastical territory. The extension of the ecclesial territory helps to preserve and practice the rite and to take care of the spiritual needs of the believers. As a result of his effort the Eparchy of Kalyan in Maharastra was erected.53

The Thomas Christians and their Syriac Treasures is a work of Fr. Placid, which illustrates the treasures and possessions of the St. Thomas Christians in syriac language. The author says that the mother tongue of the St. Thomas Christians was Malayalam, one of the Dravidian languages of India. But their liturgy celebration was in Syriac. The Syriac was the common language of christian communities in Mesopotomia and Persia founded directly or indirectly by the Apostle Thomas. With this work the author gives much information about the relationship of St. Thomas Christians with East and West Syriac Churches (both catholic and non-catholic), Syriac liturgies, Syriac canonical and ascetical works.54

4.2.4. On Church Unity

Fr. Placid was the profound leader who promotes church unity among the St. Thomas Christians. Many of the historical events brought divisions among St. Thomas Christians in India especially in Kerala. It was the dream of Fr. Placid to unite the St. Thomas Christians under a common platform for the welfare of the community. To achieve this aim he published lots about the church unity especially in Malayalam. His


writings were the substantial contribution for the development of ecumenical dialogues. I want to discuss some of his works regarding this topic.

*Mariology of the Church of the East.* It is a very short study about the Mariology of the church of the east. It is a great contribution of Fr. Placid for the ecumenical dialogue in Kerala because St. Thomas Christians followed the East Syrian liturgical tradition. The liturgy of the East is also called Nestorian liturgy, which was very controversial in the fifth century. In this work the author deals with Christology, Mariology of the East and Mariology of the St. Thomas Christians. Fr. Placid explains what is meant with Christology of the East. “The Church of the East holds that Christ is one, one Divine Son, the Son of God who is born twice, eternally from God the Father, and in time from Ever Virgin Mary who is Mother of God the Son.” His work illustrates the Mariology in the light of the liturgical prayers. The liturgical prayer is the official prayer of the church and the law of prayer is the law of faith according to Fr. Placid. In his work Fr. Placid describes Mary as Mother of God the Son, Ever Virgin, sinless and assumed into heaven with body and soul. He explains in this work that the Portuguese found it as a heresy, according to them Mary should be called as Mother of God. But later it was found out that St. Thomas Christians accepted the doctrine of Portuguese on Mary as Mother of God.

East liturgy dedicated Wednesday for the devotion to Mary, whereas latin practice fixed Saturday as the day of our Lady. St. Thomas Christians have a deep devotion to Mary. In honour of Mary they fasted eight days from first September to eight September. This tradition of eight days fast began with the seeking of protection from the invasion of Muslims in Malabar in the 8th/9th century, the women observed eight fast days in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and to seek the protection (for the chastity) against the enemies. This tradition is followed until today.

Fr. Placid thinks that the St. Thomas Christians followed the dogmas on Mary in tune with the teachings of the Latin Church. It is true that there was a controversy regarding

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56 Ibid., 28.
57 Cf. ibid., 27- 40.
58 Cf. ibid.
Christology and Mariology in the early centuries but it was due to the problem of the language and its translation.

*Antiochia Patriarchis* (The Patriarch of Antioch) is one of the other works written in Malayalam to promote church unity among the St. Thomas Christians. As a result of the Coonan Cross Oath the Thomas Christians were divided into two groups, namely Old Party and New Party. The Archdeacon of the Community of St. Thomas Christians was ordained, by twelve priests, laying their hands upon the Archdeacon. He was only a nominal bishop without a succession of bishop. His work as a bishop was not accepted by the Portuguese, his episcopal ordination was not valid. He was a leader of the New Party. After this incident a Jacobite bishop from Antioch came to India and ordained this Archdeacon as bishop and he got the episcopal validity and accepted the Syro-Antiochen ritual traditions. The old Patty (the Syro-Malabars), those who remained in their old beliefs, tried their best for the reunion of the community. As a result one group of the New Party under Bishop Mar Ivanios joined the Catholic faith and called themselves Syro-Malankara Church. The antiochien liturgy they followed, was recognised by Rome. This happened in 1930. Fr. Placid wrote his book with this regard. He said the Patriarch of Antioch is successor of Peter, not the Pope of Rome. The author tried to prove his views with effective evidences and documents. This work helped the people to impute the interest for the reunion in a great extent.59

*Pourasthya Sabhakal* is another work for church unity. It was written in Malayalam and the translation of Malayalam is ‘Oriental Churches’. According to the teachings of Vatican Council II, Fr. Placid states that Catholic Church is the communion of individual and particular churches. They have their own spirituality, discipline and modes of worship. But people misunderstand the Catholic Church as Latin Church only. It is a wrong understanding, Fr. Placid says:

Pope is the highest authority of the Church in terms of Liturgy on faith. It is not to dominate the eastern Churches but to protect them. It is in this view that if there is anything which are wrong among eastern Churches with regard to faith and Liturgy of the church, should be cleared. It is not possible to have the reunion without accepting the authority of the Pope, accepting the faith of the Church and the common liturgy.60


5. Contributions

5.1. Restoration of the Syro-Malabar Liturgy

At the end of the 15th century Portuguese came to India. They interfered not only with political and military affairs of the country but also with the ecclesiastical affairs of the St. Thomas Christians. Till the coming of Portuguese the St. Thomas Christians were under East Syrian bishops and had an East Syrian liturgy (Chaldean). The Portugueses wanted to change this liturgy into Roman liturgy (Latin liturgy) as they found it a Nestorian heresy and wanted to purify the East Syrian Liturgy of the St. Thomas Christians. It was very harmful for the traditions of the St. Thomas Christians. Since the Synod of Diamper in 1599, the liturgy of St. Thomas Christians took place in a latinised form. In 1923 the hierarchy of Syro-Malabar Church came into existence. Even though the church was under Latin domination, in 1930 the prelates of the Syro-Malabar Church prepared a Syriac version of Latin Pontifical and submitted to the Pope for the approval. But Pope Pius XI rejected it. And he wrote “It is not good to encourage Latinism among Orientals.” In 1954 Pope Pius XII appointed a Liturgical Commission for the renewal of Syro-Malabar Liturgy. Placid Podipara worked under the guidance of Cardinal Tisserant as an active member. Podipara wrote a memorandum to His Eminence Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, (the Secretary of the Oriental Churches). In this memorandum he says “The tendency to copy everything Latin should be discouraged. By restoring the rite to its original physiognomy it must be given scope for congenial growth in the different environments it may find itself in the various parts of India.” He writes about liturgy:

Liturgy holding them as the centre is the public and official worship of the church or the Rule of Prayer (Lex ordandi). Since the Rule of faith (Lex Credendi) under the magisterium of the Church, liturgy is the Rule of the faith under the magisterium of the Church, and

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61 Cf. Kurian PERUMPALLIKUNNEL, Fr. Placid Podipara, 34.
63 Ibid. 136.
hence its importance. In fact the context of the liturgy the Christian confession of faith acquires its full meaning and gets its official explanation.\textsuperscript{65} Fr. Placid, who studied the history of St. Thomas Christians, realised the miserable situation of the liturgy and wanted to restore it. It was not an easy task. The bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church were not well versed in Syriac. Fr. Placid acted as a messenger between Rome and the bishops. Later some of the bishops realised the importance of the language and learned it. In a short time the commission finished its work and presented the corrected text of Holy Qurbana (the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, who were the teachers of the East, was used in the text) to the scrutiny. The text was accepted by the Congregation of Oriental Churches (without the words of consecration). In 1954 Pope Pius XII approved it and sent it to the bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church. The restoration of the Pontifical like the rite of Ordination and Consecration of Churches ordered by Pope Pius XI was also approved by Pope Pius XII. There was only one Anaphora in the Missale i.e. the Anaphora of Mar Addai and Mari.\textsuperscript{66} After the approval Pope Pius XII presented it to a commission of cardinals and scholars for scrutiny and needful further recommendation. In 1957 it was approved and cleared for use.\textsuperscript{67} As an outcome of Vatican II, Malayalam, the native language of the people was introduced to liturgy. But there was confusion. Placid did not want to translate the latinised liturgy into Malayalam, he wanted to go to the original, which in his opinion preserves the spirit of original East Syrian spirituality.\textsuperscript{68} To a great extent Fr. Placid was successful and the first Malayalam mass was celebrated officially in 1982 by Pope John Paul II at Bharananganam in Kerala, when he visited Kerala. Two other important Anaphorae of East Syrian Church namely Anaphora of Theodore and Anaphora of Nestorius were approved by Pope Benedict XVI in 2011. Since then the East Syrian Liturgy is in constant renewal for use in the Syro-Malabar Church.


\textsuperscript{67} Cf. Kurian PERUMPALLIKUNNEL, Fr. Placid Podipara, 34.

\textsuperscript{68} Cf. Johnson VADAKUMCHERRY, The Marga of Fr. Placid, 980.
5.2. The Territory of the Syro-Malabar Jurisdiction

From 1599 till 1893, the ecclesiastical administration of St. Thomas Christians was taken care by the Latin Bishops amidst strong demand and protest for local bishops. But in 1893 three Vicariates Apostolic were founded namely Trichur, Ernakulam and Changanassery and all the Vicariates got Malabarian Vicars which had episcopal function. In the years that followed, there was a demand for more autonomy and the need for establishing Syro-Malabar hierarchy. In 1923 this dream of St. Thomas Christians was fulfilled and Syro-Malabar hierarchy was established. But it included only a small part of Kerala.

In the light of Vatican Council II, which said “Provision must be made therefore everywhere in the world to protect and advance all these individual churches. For this purpose, each should organise its own parishes and hierarchy, where the spiritual good of the faithful requires it”69, Fr. Placid argued for the extension of the Syro-Malabar jurisdiction within and outside Kerala with two reasons “1) for the care of the Malabarian immigrants in several parts of India and 2) for more extensive mission work among the non-christians of India.”70 There was a migration of people from the middle part of modern Kerala (also known as ‘Malabar’ in history and literature) to north and eastern part for producing more grains and for the betterment of life especially after the Second World War. Thus the St. Thomas Christians scattered in almost every part of Kerala. The Syro-Malabar hierarchy could not satisfy the spiritual needs of the faithful, because these parts of Kerala were beyond the official jurisdiction of the hierarchy. The spiritual need was done by the latin prelates of that region.71 Fr. Placid writes in the memorandum to Cardinal Tissarant

The present Syro Malabar territory is very small. It is only as extensive as the territory of the Eparchy of Thiruvalla, and is also shared by the jurisdictions of Thiruvalla, Vijazapuram, Cochin, Alleppey and Verapoly. It may, therefore, be extended to the north and to the south so as to cover at least the whole of Malayalam speaking areas of South India.72

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69 Orientalium Ecclesiarum, 4.
71 Cf. Thomas KALAYIL, Profile of a Prophet, 337.
72 Placid PODIPARA, Memorandum, 18.
Fr. Podipara tried to give a clear picture about the situation of the Church to Cardinal Tisserant. He was also successful to convince His Eminence of the need to extend the jurisdiction of the territory of Syro-Malabar Church. As a result the Cardinal visited those places in 1953 and reported to Rome. Within a short time the diocese of Tellichery came into existence. The Rome Pontiff enabled extension in the southern parts of Kerala, too. Another important event in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church was the erection of the mission eparchy in the northern part of India. As result of the hard work by Fr. Placid, the authorities of Oriental churches realized the need of the Mission Work of Syro-Malabar Church. 73

5.3. Member in the Vatican Council II

Fr. Podipara was an official expert of the Vatican Council. His contributions paved the way for the formulation of the Decree Orientalium Ecclesiarum for the Eastern Churches. In the session of the Council there was a discussion about the draft of the decree. The Archbishop of Agra argued against the extension of the jurisdiction of Eastern Churches in Indian soil. According to his opinion it makes divisions which will affect the mission of India. The bishops of Eastern Churches (especially Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara) got permission to reply. For that Fr. Placid prepared a paper, explaining the rights of the Oriental Churches in India for the pastoral care and the mission work in India and it was presented in the council by bishop Sebastian Valloppilly. 74 As a result of the excellent work done by Fr. Placid a decree, called Orientalium Ecclesiarum came into existence. No.3 of the decree Orientalium Ecclesiarum says:

Therefore these Churches are of equal rank, so that none of them is superior to the others because of its rite. They have the same rite and obligations, even with regard to the preaching of the Gospel in the world (cf. Mk.16:15), under the direction of the Roman Pontiff. 75

Fr. Placid raised his voice for the equality of the rights and obligations of the individual churches. He found that evangelisation and pastoral care are the two important rights of individual churches which should not be denied. 76 As the council session continued

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73 Cf. Thomas Kalayil, Profile of a Prophet, 337-338.
74 Cf. Xavier Kodapuzha, Fr. Placid’s Ecclesiology, 240.
75 Orientalium Ecclesiarum, 3.
with the discussion of the decree for oriental churches, a council father pointed out that the individual churches are the ornaments of the universal church. Fr. Placid made a study about the theology of the statement and gave a corrective statement. It should not be reduced to the status of an ornament but the individual churches are the part and parcel of the Universal Church. 77 According to Fr. Placid Podipara the universal church is the communion of individual churches.

5.4. Contributions to Syro-Malankara Church

Syro-Malankara Church is a particular church, which is following the Antiochian Liturgy. The language of their liturgy is West Syriac. Why are they called Syro-Malankara? The name Malankara is another name for Kerala, which means the land of hills. The name Syro came into being because of the liturgical language. Syro-Malankara and Syro-Malabar are two particular churches of St. Thomas Christians, both of these particular churches are born in Kerala, South West of India. In 1930 the Syro-Malankara Church came to catholic communion and erected a hierarchy under the leadership of Archbishop Mar Ivanios.

Fr. Placid played a great role for the reunion of Malankara Church to catholic community. When Archbishop Mar Ivanios decided to join the catholic church and to accept the primacy of the Pope, there were agitations and controversy among the Jacobites against the decision of Mar Ivanios. Fr. Placid supported them and made them understand the catholic faith. He acted as a mediator for the reunion and solved many problems. Those who come to catholic faith should be educated with the catechism of the Catholic Church. 78

After the reunion there was a need for religious instruction and catechism for the new members. To this effect Fr. Placid conducted theological classes for the priests and retreats for the lay people. He also offered valuable advices whenever it was needed. The interest of Fr. Placid made progress in Malankara Church. He codified the traditions and customs of the Malankara Church. As the president of the Oriental Churches Cardinal Tisserant visited Malankara Church in 1953. Fr. Placid accompanied and explained the particularities of Malankara Church. He published many books and

77 Cf. Thomas KALAYIL, Profile of a Prophet, 344.
78 Cf. ibid.
articles on the history and liturgical traditions of Antiochien Church, to which the Malankara Church had ecclesial communion after the Canon Cross Oath of 1653. Mar Baselious, the first Arch-bishop of the Malankara Church says:

The role of Fr. Placid in building up the Malankara Catholic Church and strengthening its great apostolate of Church-unity was more on the theological and inspirational level than that of practical and organisational. As he had been widely accepted in the Malankara Church as a great Churchman, he had been a constant consultant and adviser, especially of the Hierarchy of Malankara Catholic Church in matters of Theology, Canon Law, Liturgy and Church History. This was all the more useful and necessary in the early years of the organisational development of the Malankara Catholic Eparchies.

Fr. Placid wrote two important books in Latin regarding the Canon law of Syro-Malankara Church, namely De Fontibus Iuris Ecclesiastical Syro-Malankaresium and Fontes Iuris Canonici Syro-Malankarenisium. In 1927 on behalf of the request of Pope Pius XI a commission was organised to codify the Canon Law for the Oriental Churches. Fr. Placid was appointed by the commission to make a study about the sources of the canon law of this particular church. His interest on this subject paved way for collecting the sources for the canonical discipline of Syro-Malankara Church. In 1937 after a serious study he submitted his first work to the commission with the title De Fontibus Iuris Ecclesiastical Syro-Malankaresium. This work has 7 chapters and they throw light upon the customs, traditions and laws of the Jacobites in Malabar (Kerala). In 1940 the second book was submitted with the title “Fontes Iuris Canonici Syro-Malankarenisium”, which was the milestone for the codification of the canon law of the Syro-Malankara Church. It consists of texts of the sources of the canon law of the Syro-Malankara Church. Both of these works were accepted by the commission and published in 1937 and 1940. These two works are the main source for the canonical studies about the Syro-Malankara Church. In addition to this Fr. Placid was acted as a deputed person for the commissions appointed for the St. Thomas Christians in India especially for Syro-Malankara Church. He was also appointed to form a constitution for the religious congregations of church both men and women. The great service of the


81 Cf. KALAYIL, Thomas, Editor’s Note, in: Placid, PODIPARA, Fontes Iuris Canonici, Syro-Malankaresium, Mannanam, 2007, 139-140.
churchman Fr. Placid helped the Syro-Malankara Church to spread far and wide within the country and outside.\textsuperscript{82}

## 6. The Last Years of Fr. Placid

Fr. Placid served his mother church for 25 years in Rome. He wanted to die there in the holy place Rome, where Petrus and Paulus got martyrdom. But he did not want to be a burden for others. At his old age he looked for help of others to move around. His provincial superior in Kerala wanted him to spend his last days in India. In 1980 he returned to India and came to Sacred Heart Monastery of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (C.M.I) at Chethipuzha. The congregation accorded grant welcome and looked at him with respect. He was a great personality, who championed the heroic works of St. Thomas Christians. He underwent Ayurveda medical treatment in order to improve his health. As a result he could move without the help of others. Even though his health was weak, he gave tuitions to the people who were interested in oriental matters.\textsuperscript{83}

Fr. Placid was the important person behind the foundation of the Apostolic Seminary Vadavathoor. In 1962 it was established as a result of the hard work rendered by Fr. Placid. This was the first formation institution for the clergy established by the Syro-Malabar Church. In 1983 the Pontifical Oriental Institute for Religious Studies in India was inaugurated and it was affiliated to the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome.\textsuperscript{84} According to Fr. Placid nobody among the priests will be able to know the identity of the Syro-Malabar Church without the exact formation. That was the reason why the St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary was founded.\textsuperscript{85}

The improvement in Health after his return from Rome kept Fr. Placid active for about four years. Thereafter a stroke rendered him bed-ridden for about a year till his death. His tongue was partially paralysed and therefore he could not speak distinctly. But he was fully conscious, could recognize people and understand what they said.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{82} Cf. Cyril BASELIO, Fr. Placid, 142.
\textsuperscript{83} Cf. Thomas KALAYIL, Profile of a Prophet, xlv, xlvi.
\textsuperscript{85} Cf. James KURIANAL, A Profile of Fr. Placid, lix.
\textsuperscript{86} Thomas KALAYIL, Profile of a Prophet, xlvi.
Some days before his death there was a Placid Symposium in Chethipuzha. At that time several church leaders spoke about his marvellous work for the Syro-Malabar Church. That was a pleasure moment in his life and he was satisfied with his efforts. He passed away on April 27th, 1985.  

7. Conclusion

Fr. Placid played a great role to shape well the Church of St. Thomas Christians through his writings. He thought that one cannot love the church without knowing her history and individuality. He ignited burning zeal in the hearts of the St. Thomas Christians for the love to the Mother Church. As an oriental theologian he was not easily willing to accept the latinisation of the Syro-Malabar Church but he strived to promote oriental theology and traditions. He played a vital role in the Vatican Council II where he contributed much for the Thomas Christians of India. As an enlightened promoter of the church unity he was involved in the catholic reunion of Syro-Malankara Church. Fr. Placid was a man of calibre and, made his mother church and the St. Thomas Christians of India known to the world.

87 Cf. Antony NARITHOOKIL, Fr. Placid Podipara, liv.
Chapter II-The Thomas Christians are Indian in Culture

1. Introduction

India is a cradle of many religions and cultures. The St. Thomas Christians are inhabitants of India and they have also inherited the culture of India. In the beginning of the 20th century the Hindu fundamentalists of India made the propaganda that the Christians of India are foreigners. The voice of the St. Thomas Christians Fr. Placid reacted that “St. Thomas Christians are Indian in Culture.” In his reflection he explains all the cultural and social practices of the St. Thomas Christians, which they adopted, from the non-christian brothers of India, especially from Hindus from time immemorial in all aspects of life of a man from birth till death. So he tried to prove that they are Christians from India itself not from outside. The second chapter discusses the adapted elements of Indian culture, which can be seen in the life of the St. Thomas Christians of India.

2. Definition of Culture

The culture of a man composes every aspect of human life. Culture is the total sum of human social relationship, attitudes, behavioural patterns, social systems, languages etc. Culture denotes the art and esthetical aspects of social groups.88 The Vatican Council II described culture,

The word Culture in the general sense refers to all those things which go to the refining and developing of man`s diverse mental and physical endowments. He strives to subdue the earth by his knowledge and his labour; he humanizes social life both in the family and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions; he expresses through his works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of men throughout the ages; he communicates and preserves them to be an inspiration for the progress of many, even of all mankind.89

This description of the Council gives a new understanding of the culture in an ecclesiastical level. The Council continues that the different styles of living and values are originated through the different ways of working, different ways of practicing religion, different ways of developing art and science. Each human community has its

89 Gaudium et Spes, 53.
own heredity from which the values are drawn up and this sustains the growth of humanity and civilization.\textsuperscript{90}

\subsection*{2.1. Cultural Diversity of India}

The diversity of races, languages, religions and philosophies of the population makes India a sub-continent. Most people think the culture of India is only Hindu religion culture. But the word ‘Hindu’ does not refer to a particular group of people, living in India. It is the name to the whole of India. The term ‘Hindu’ derives its origin from a persian expression meaning ‘Sindus’. The Persians did not have ‘s’ in their language. That is the reason why they used ‘H’ instated of ‘S’. So the river Sindhu (which flows in the northern part of India) was called as Hindu by the Persians. As time passed the people living at the shore of Sindhu river were called Hindus. The other name of the river Sindhu is Indus. The westerners called this river and the land, which is situated at the side of this river, Indus. The oldest civilization called Indus valley civilization (3000-1500 B.C.) was erected at the shore of the Sindhu river and the cultural heritage of India is also deeply-rooted in the Indus valley civilization.\textsuperscript{91}

The main races of India are Negritos, Austroloids, Dravidians and Indo-Aryans. The earliest inhabitants of India were Negritos. They were very few, discovered in South India and their contact with the world outside was very limited. The Austroloids lived in Central and Eastern India. The Dravidians were the strong and big group who dominated the ancient culture of India. They came to India from the Mediterranean through Mesopotamia around the 4\textsuperscript{th} century B.C. They reached India both by water and land and spread in the northern and southern part of India. One group of Aryans were settled in Mesopotamia before they migrated to India. Since they came to India they were known as Indo-Aryans. They settled in the northern part of India around the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century B.C. and gradually became dominant over the Dravidians and pushed them to the southern part of India. The term Dravidian used to signify the languages that were spoken by the people of South India. The languages of the Dravidian family are Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam. The astonishing aspect of their history is that they

\textsuperscript{90} Cf. ibid.

had a high degree of culture and civilization. The Indus valley civilization on the banks of River Indus, which is one of the oldest civilizations of the world, was built by the Dravidians. ⁹²

The Dravidians had trade relations with the other two independent civilizations; Egypt and Sumerian (present Iran). Many Indian and western scholars had the same opinion that the Sumerians and Dravidians have their origin in the same ethnic group of people. The excavation of Harappa and Mohenjadar (present-day Pakistan) shows that there were common elements of Dravidian and Sumerian culture. The capital city of Sumer was Ur and the Sumerian inscriptions are found in Indus valley. The Indian teak, which grows only in Kerala, the southern part of India, was discovered in the city of Ur, too. The word ‘Ur’ means town in Tamil and Malayalam. There are numbers of places in Kerala which end with the suffix ‘Ur’, namely Ollur, Trichur, Ettumannur etc. The majority of the people of Kerala in the first century followed the Dravidian culture. It was not the culture of a particular religion. The Thomas Christians are also Dravidians and the inhabitants of the southern part of India, Kerala. Their body features and languages prove that they are also Dravidians and that there is ethical relationship to Sumerians (Chaldean). ⁹³

3. The Cultural Adaptation of the St. Thomas Christians

The title “St. Thomas Christians are Indian in Culture” explains the growth and flourishing of St. Thomas Christians with the adaptation of cultural practices prevailed in India. Fr. Placid says:

The Indian Christians, it is said, must adapt themselves to their surroundings so that they may appear as real Indians, thinking, living and praying in conformity with the cultural heritage of India. The elements of truth found in Hindu thought and the Hindu way of life and mode of worship should be made the vehicles of Indian Christian thought and of Indian Christian way of life and mode of worship or liturgy. ⁹⁴

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⁹² Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Rise and Decline, 8; Cf. Abraham MATTAM, Inculturation of Liturgy, 6-11; Cf. VANDANTHADATHIL, Sebastian, Inculturation in Religious Life among the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala (India), [published dissertation Pontifica Universitas s.Thomae in Urbe] 73-74.


⁹⁴ Placid PODIPARA, The Malabar Christians, 635
The St. Thomas Christians have the Dravidian culture because their native land is Kerala, situated in the south-western part of India. The shape and structure of the body of St. Thomas Christians indicates the relationship with Dravidians. The land Kerala is called `Malabar' because of the characteristics of the land by hills, valleys and forests. Malayalam, a Dravidian language, is spoken by the inhabitants of this area. They are called St. Thomas Christians because their origin goes back to the Apostle Thomas. The historical records prove that the St. Thomas Christians had constant contact and intimate relationship with the East Syrian Church from the early centuries. They are also called Syrian Christians of India, since they followed Syriac as their liturgical language and the ecclesiastical tradition of East Syrian. They followed The Law of Thomas, which means the East Syrian liturgy and christianised Indian customs. The Law of Thomas made them the typical sons and daughters of Indian soil. The tradition says that the St. Thomas Christians were considered to be a noble class and they continued the social political privileges just like their Hindu brothers. The social customs and ecclesiastical traditions of the St. Thomas Christians prove that the adaption of the Indian culture did not at all disturb their faith, it only enabled them to become true Indians.

3.1. Family Life

Indian society was patriarchal in nature. The father was the head of the family and he took the final decision in the family and his authority was not questioned. In a joint family the eldest is the head and all other members accept his authority. As a sign of respect the grown up children would not sit in the vicinity of their elders. Women

96 Cf. Xavier KODAPUZHA, Ecclesial Identity, 70.
99 Joint family is the classical system of family in India. It is far different form the western system of the family. In this system many generations (not only father, mother and children, but also aunts, uncles, grandsons) of the family are living together. The eldest man of the family takes decisions. The individual interests of the members of the family are not to be considered. Common good is very important in this system. The important characteristics in this type of family are their living together, cooking together, common property, common religion, joint responsibility etc. But this system exists very rarely especially in Kerala now.
mostly remained in closed doors and also in separated sections in the same house and at table, they always waited for the meals of the male members in the family to finish. As a mark of respect, the wives while talking to their husbands never called their husbands by their names. Rendering a helping hand to the elders in the family was considered to be blessing and the children promptly did it with generosity. The old ones narrated to the young ones in a form of a story the family history of the past generations. 100 “In order to keep up their family traditions they would not make their daughters heirs to their properties. If a man had no male child he would adopt a male related to him in the male line while the daughters would be married off with dowry” 101. Dowry is a common social system in India. It means the bridegroom gets money, when he marries a girl. The parents of the bride should pay money or land property or gold to the bridegroom. It is meant to be for the ornaments of the bride and for the marriage celebrations. It is also considered as the share that she gets from her family.

But today the situation has changed, if one has no male child, he makes one of his daughters as his heir, and she remains in his house with her husband.102 Family is the nursery where the traditions, discipline, moral values and prayer life is practiced and handed over to the other generations. 103

3.2. Birth Ceremonies

Some of the birth ceremonies were also similar to the Hindu ceremonies. It was a custom in those days, that the wife in her advanced stage of the pregnancy, was sent back to her family for delivery preparations by giving her maximum care and little household work. The birth of a baby took place in the house. The first birth ceremony of a new born baby took place in the house of the girl. The birth of the child is announced to the family of the husband by a messenger from the girl’s house. The feeding of the new born baby was done with gold, ghee and honey 104. Jatakarma’ 105. When the baby

100 Cf. Placid PODIPARA, Hindu in Culture, 531.
101 Placid PODIPARA The Malabar Christians, 627.
102 Cf. Placid PODIPARA, Hindu in Culture, 532.
reaches eleven months of age, it was fed with boiled rice for the first time and the close relatives are invited to this ceremony. The ornaments of the new born Christian baby were same as the ornaments of a Brahmin baby. Ornaments are made of the toe of leopard and teeth of mongoose fitted with gold and made in a shape of cross. The birth ceremonies of a new born baby made a common platform for the relatives of the family coming together keeping the sense of belongingness. It helped them to grow as one community.

3.3. Name-Giving Ceremony

The Brahmins of India, especially Kerala had a special ceremony for giving name to a new born child (Namakarma). But Christians did it only at the time of baptism. The sacrament of baptism is administered to a child 8 days after birth, at last 30 days after birth. It was left to the family to decide the time. Biblical names were given to the child. But there was a common practice of giving a baptismal name. The first male child of the family gets the name of the grandfather from the paternal side and the female child gets the name of the grandmother from the paternal side. The second male child gets the name of the grandfather from the maternal side and the second female child gets the name of her grandmother from the maternal side. The intention of this custom was to keep the traditions of the family and to give a model to the child and to assure help for faith formation. The St. Thomas Christians continue to keep this tradition till today. Biblical names, as found in the bible, are not exactly given to a child but they are adapted to the local expression in Malayalam language, which is the language of Kerala. For example the name ‘James’ is the name of an Apostle. It is a universal name. But in India especially in Kerala among St. Thomas Christians the name took different forms like Chackochen, Chakku, Chakappen, Jacob,Yahoob, Jim etc. Thomas, Thomi, Thomman etc. Anna, Annama, Annakutty etc. Several biblical names are used in India.

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105 Jatakarma is a Sanskrit word. The words ‘jata’ means birth and ‘karma’ means action or ceremony. It is a hinduistic ceremony which welcomes the baby to the world. The father of the new born baby gives ghee and honey to the tongue of the new born baby (according to Indian tradition honey and ghee are the heal elements) and reciting Vedic hymns. But the St. Thomas Christians recited Christian prayers.

106 Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Thomas Christians and Adaptation, 545.


108 Cf. AERTHAYIL, James, The Spiritual Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians, Banglore 1982, 44. [Hereafter, James AERTHAYIL, The Spiritual Heritage]
in different forms depending on the language and the culture of the state. It shows the inculturation of this community.\textsuperscript{109}

\textbf{3.4. Initiation Ceremony of Learning}

The initiation system of learning which was prevailed among Hindus is called \textit{Vidyarambham}\textsuperscript{110}. At the age of five the child was sent to an \textit{asan} (village teacher)\textsuperscript{111}. The first ceremony begins with a present (money) given to the \textit{asan}, the village teacher, as a sign of respect to him. The child writes with his index finger the first letters of the alphabet in the raw rice guided by his father or \textit{asan}. The Hindu children write and recite the prayer \textit{Hari Sri Ganapataye Nama}\textsuperscript{112}. The popular belief among the Hindu believers was that the intellectual powers were attained only by the blessing of God. After this initiation the child was sent to normal school for further learning.

The St. Thomas Christians also followed these practices. They modified it with christian prayers. Instead of \textit{Hari Sri Ganapataye Nama} the St. Thomas Christians recited \textit{Isho, thamburan thunakkuka, Guruve saranam, or deiva mathave sahajikane} (Let God help, I trust on my teacher God Jesus, oh Mother of God help me).\textsuperscript{113} After this initiation the child was sent to the local school for further education. Normally the Hindu \textit{asan} (village teacher) taught the Christian children the christian doctrines and prayers also.\textsuperscript{114} It reveals that the Hindu teacher was respected by all. Usually the child learns from \textit{asan} for a year only. Even after many years, the same \textit{asan} is invited to many occasions in the family to bless the child (like marriage). This custom is practised among the Hindus and Christians even today in the 21st century.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{110}{\textit{Vidyarambham} is a Malayalam word, which means the beginning of learning. It is the initiation of the child into the letters of the alphabet and it has a great religious significance. It is more or less one year. Cf. James AERTHAYIL, The Spiritual Heritage, 45.}
\footnote{111}{\textit{Asan} is a Hindu village teacher in Kerala, in the other parts of India he is called Guru. The children were sent to him and had their first time of school with him. He was accepted by the Christians also.}
\footnote{112}{\textit{Hari Sri Ganapataye nama} means I bow my head in front of the Gods Vishnu (Hari), Lakshmi (Sri), Ganes (Ganapati) for the blessing. These three Gods are the gods of learning according to Hinduisam.}
\footnote{113}{Cf. James AERTHAYIL, The Spiritual Heritage, 45-46; Cf. Johnson. VADAKUMCHERY, Placid Podipara’s Vision; 21-22.}
\footnote{114}{Cf. Placid PODIPARA, Thomas Christians, 349.}
\end{footnotes}
Another important lesson for the St. Thomas Christians was martial art. They underwent this training in order to help the military of the king. They underwent the same military training like the Brahmins of the day. They were trained in the use of shield and sword. A Hindu anthropologist, Anantakrishna Ayyar, observes:

The Syrian Christians were trained in the use of these weapons at the early age of eight years, and continued to exercise them till twenty-five which accounted for their using them with much dexterity. They were very active, and their bodies flexible, owing to the copious use of coconut oil with their joints were rubbed from infancy.

The whole training was focused in view of defence of the country and not for mere physical fitness of the individuals. Both Hindu and Christian youth participated in this art.

3.5. Marriage Ceremonies

The St. Thomas Christians like other non-christians followed the practice of pre-arranged marriage system. Once the marriage contract is fixed, marriage takes place in the church in front of the priest. This ceremony is called betrothal. After the liturgical ceremonies in the parish of the bride, both families will gather in the house of the bride. The parents of the bride will hand over dowry to the bridegroom and 10% of the amount of dowry goes to the renovation of the parish of the bride. The ceremony of fixing the marriage and the system of dowry was also prevailing among Hindus. The St. Thomas Christians adopted and christianised it. For the St. Thomas Christians the relationship between these two families was as important as the relationship between the bride and bridegroom. During the season of advent and lent there was no marriage celebration allowed as these times were considered to be fasting days.

115 Cf. Placid Podipara, Malabar Christians, 635.
117 The pre-arranged marriage system is a system of marriage prevailed in India. The parents choose the partner for their daughter and son. It is far different from the western concept of love marriage. It is more or less kept by the present generation also. Cf. P. Podipara, The Malabar Christians, 633.
118 Cf. Placid Podipara, The Thomas Christians, 353. The functions of the relatives at the marriage are notable. The maternal uncle of the bridegroom plays a great part at marriage and other ceremonies. It is his duty to take the money (dowry) from the relatives of the bride (uncle) and to give it to the father of the bridegroom. The paternal part of uncle plays a subordinate role only at preliminary negotiation for the celebration. Cf. Ananthakrishna. AYYAR, Anthology of the Syrian Christians, 117.
On the previous day of marriage it was customary to the couple to bath.\textsuperscript{119} Before bath the bridegroom should be shaved\textsuperscript{120} by a barber and receive gifts. This was followed by a solemn bath and \textit{Mayilanchiyidal}.\textsuperscript{121} Both the bride and bridegroom receive gifts and sweets after this ceremony. On the day of marriage the bridegroom and the bride, both in their own houses, receive the blessings of the village teacher. After that bridegroom and bride were presented with golden ornaments. Fr. Placid says:

The bride’s chief ornament was a golden covering for the forehead and those of the bridegroom a gold crown and a gold pectoral cross, which former could be substituted by an ornamental cap or turban. The bridegroom wore silk coat reaching down to his knees. He also wore a knife and iron style suspended on a silver chain tied round the waist. The jacket of the bride used to be of coloured silk. It was in the midst of instrumental music that they were to be conducted to the church. The boy and girl used to accompany respectively by a younger boy and girl festively dressed.\textsuperscript{122}

Sometimes the procession from the bridegroom’s house to the church is led by the sister of the bridegroom. She takes the \textit{Tali or Minnu}\textsuperscript{123} and the \textit{Manthrakodi}.\textsuperscript{124} The bride comes from her house accompanied by a procession led by her relatives.\textsuperscript{125} As Fr. Placid says:

It was on marriage occasions that the Thomas Christians displayed their high social privileges and the marks of their high social status more than at any other time. […] The use of a kind of Umbrella \textit{Muthukkuda}, which in former times was royal emblem belonging only to kings, Thomas Christians, and Hindu pagodas, was indispensable for marriage processions.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{119} Bath signifies the internal and external purity of man according to Indian tradition. The Hindus take bath before every religious function. The Thomas Christians continued these customs till now.

\textsuperscript{120} The reason behind this function is the understanding that as soon as the boy comes into the age of shaving, he enters into wedlock. Cf. Johnson \textit{VADAKUMCHERRY}, Placid Podipar’s vision of the Church, 23:

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Mailanchi} is an aromatic plant. The juice, from this plant is \textit{Mailacchi} and it has a red colour. Both the hands and feet of bridegroom and bride smeared with this juice. It is a sign of sexual attraction.

\textsuperscript{122} Placid PODIPARA, The Social and Socio, 482.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Tali or Minnu} is a marriage symbol, which is a cross, made with 21 golden balls. The cross that can be seen in Tali distinguishes with the \textit{Tali} of Hindus. There is a custom among the Thomas Christians regarding \textit{Tali}. Married women (widows excepted) would never take off the \textit{Tali} from their necks. At their death it would either be buried with them or deposited in the treasury of the church. Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Thomas Christians, 354; Cf. Johnson \textit{VADAKUMCHERRY}, Placid Podipara’s Vision of the Church, 23; Cf. James AERTHAYIL, The Spiritual Heritage, 47.

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Manthrakodi} is the bridal veil, which is the \textit{sari}, the cloth of Indian women. \textit{Manthrakodi} is a symbolic gesture, that forms that moment onwards the man takes care of his woman and he has the responsibility to care for her

\textsuperscript{125} Cf. James AERTHAYIL, The Spiritual Heritage, 47.

\textsuperscript{126} Placid PODIPARA, The Thomas Christians, 354.
During the Holy Mass the bridegroom ties the *Tali* or *Minnu* which is blessed by the priest, around the neck of the bride and he covers the head of the bride with *Manthrakodi*. There is a deep connection between *Manthrakodi* and *Tali*. Fr. Placid writes “the thread on which to hang the *Tali* has to be taken out from the bridal veil *Manthrakodi* as is done among Hindu Brahmins”\(^\text{127}\).

After the ceremonies in the church they go to the house of the bridegroom. The couple is welcomed and blessed in front of the house with the signing of the cross by the mother of the bridegroom. The mother holds paddy and water, which signifies life. She receives the bride with a lamp called *Nilavilakku*\(^\text{128}\). After this ceremony the mother of the bride gets a present from the bridegroom. Usually it is a *Sari*, the typical Indian cloth for women. The new couple will be offered sweets and the whole community celebrates with music and dances. The first three days the couple spends its time in the house of bride. The bride puts on the dress, which was presented by the family of the bridegroom and the bridegroom puts on the dress which was presented by the family of the bride.\(^\text{129}\) On the fourth day after marriage there is a function called *Adachutura*.\(^\text{130}\) All these were the customs of the non-christians. But the St. Thomas Christians christianised those customs of Hindu Brahmins.

### 3.6. Dress Code

The St. Thomas Christians were dressed not very different from their Hindu brothers. On solemn occasions the male wore *Mundu*\(^\text{131}\) and another small cloth\(^\text{132}\) over the shoulders. Other times, they wore *Mundu* like cloth but coloured. Those days, they did not put on shirt. Later the fashion of putting a loose shirt came into being. Those who went at the tomb of St. Thomas kept their hair long. As a privilege the bridegrooms

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\(^{127}\) Ibid., 365.

\(^{128}\) *Nilavilak* is an Indian lamp, made out of copper. The lamp of St. Thomas Christians was differentiated from Hindus with a cross at the top of the lamp, as a sign to the St. Thomas Christians. It means that the bride is the light of the family and the leader of the family.


\(^{130}\) *Adachuthura* is a ceremony of shutting and opening, which takes place in the house of the bride. The bridegroom and the friends of the bridegroom are shut in a room and the mother in law calls the bridegroom for bath. He does not come until she promises to give him gold or some other presents.

\(^{131}\) The *Mundu* is a long piece of cotton cloth, which is tied above the waist and reaches the ankles. On solemn occasion men wear the white *Mundu*.

\(^{132}\) The small cloth is called towel, which men always wore and which was used to wipe out the sweat or to cover the body, when needed.
wear a flower of gold attached to the tuft of their hair. Fr. Placid says Till the year of 1599 the Syrian Christian males invariably grew a tuft of hair on their heads and wore also earrings. They could be distinguished from their non-Christian brethren by the cross which they sometimes fast end to the locks of their hair.

The St. Thomas Christian women dressed more modestly than the Hindu women. They normally wore jackets which reached from their necks below the waist, beside a long cloth descending from thigh nearly touching the ankles. The number of folds or firings looked like a fan appendices behind, making their dressing modestly and fashionable. When they went church, they used to cover their head with a muslin scarf which left only the face visible. The St. Thomas Christian women had several kinds of ornaments for ears, arms and neck. But they do not have an ornament on the nose like Hindu women. Fr. Placid quotes the remarks of Joseph Sebastiani that “they were more modest than the portuguese ladies who lived in Malabar in the 17th century”.

### 3.7. Eating Habits

The St. Thomas Christians adapted mostly vegetarian food habits, consisting of rice and vegetables. They did not eat meat like their Hindu brothers. The boiled rice was the main dish. They had three meals a day, each meal with rice and vegetables. In the afternoon they drank coffee and tea with some edibles, which are made from rice flour. They did not consume alcoholic drinks because it is considered as a bad thing for their health.

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133 Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Social and Socio, 484.

134 The Synod of Diamber took place in the year of 1599. This synod was named by the portuguese missionaries to christianise the Thomas Christians of India. From that onwards the Thomas Christians lost their privileges through the passing out of laws. They periodically had to shave their heads and clean their faces. Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The social and socio, 484.

135 Placid PODIPARA, The Social and Socio, 484.

136 Cf. ibid.

137 Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Thomas Christians, 350. But nowadays the women use the Šarees, the typical cloth of Indian women in the church and they cover themselves with the saree itself, because it is long enough. Only the women, who are aged 80 and above use the traditional cloth, explained above.

138 Joseph Sebastiani is a Portuguese Carmelite missionary, who came to India in the 17th century for missionary activities.

139 Placid PODIPARA, Hindu in Culture, 532.
social status. They ate with fingers like all other Indian people. Instead of plates they were using plantain leaves to serve the food. All these customs are adapted from their Indian fellow citizens.

3.8. Architecture

3.8.1. House Construction

The St. Thomas Christians followed the Hindu style of architecture in a certain extent. The Hindu carpenters were mostly engaged in the construction of houses and followed the rules of Hindu architecture. They were expert in the selection of sites for houses and on the details of the structure. The Christians did the same. A plot of land which is meant for a house is divided into four parts. The north east or the south west portion of the plot is selected for the house. There was special space for well, cow shed, botanical garden and for other purposes. There was a courtyard in front of the house. The house was built with stones or wood. The floor of the house was painted with cow dung. The selection of the house plot depended on the effect of the monsoon.

3.8.2. Church Construction

Another important construction for the life of the St. Thomas Christians was the church. The churches looked much like Hindu temples. The only distinction was that the church of the St. Thomas Christians showed a cross on the roofs in front in the open air. The church was built by the faithful themselves with stone or wood and the floor was also painted with cow dung like all other houses. The building was in rectangular shape and facing the west the hind part raised a little bit from the rest of the building. The church was divided into the sanctuary, choir and nave. There was a veil between altar and the table of the word of God. There were side doors with a main opening to the

140. After the arrival of Portuguses and Britains they used alcohol and ate meat. They also adopted the western culture. The consumption of alcohol is a serious problem in India now even among St. Thomas Christians.


143. Cow dung painting-cow dung is a sacred signification, since cow is a sacred animal for Hindus

west. The porches at the doors of the church were used as places for the weapons of those coming for mass. There was no proper façade instead, on the front wall there used to be embossed figures of mermen or other animals which in some cases could be seen on the back, too. Figures of elephants, lotus, flower, etc., were to be seen carved both inside and outside the churches. Over the roof both at the eastern and western ends there were crosses, the one at the east end being smaller and often encircled by a ring. Men and women had separate places for sitting. The left side of the church was meant for women and the right side of the church meant for men. In the church there were many Christian symbols. The lamps, the umbrellas and the musical instruments were the same as those used in Hindu temples. The churches of the St. Thomas Christians used *Muthukuda* \(^{146}\) as a royal emblem for the procession. During the feasts in the churches the elephants of the temples were used to enhance the solemnity of the processions. \(^{147}\) The churches like Hindu temples also had a flagstaff in front of the church to hoist the flag during parish feasts. The permanent flagstaff constructed in front of the church corresponded to that of the Hindu temples, the cross at the top of the flagstaff was the difference. On feast days of the parish the people offered money to the church, and the devotees received in return some eatable items like fired rice or cakes just like Hindu tradition *Prasad*. \(^{148}\) The coming together of the faithful for the construction of the churches enabled a community feeling and belongingness among themselves and this led to deeper experience of God.

### 3.9. Art and Culture

The non-christians of the time had different types of folk dances, which were displayed by the women in praise of Hindu God Shiva. It was known as *Thiruvathirakali*. Similar

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\(^{146}\) *Muthukuda* is a Malayalam word which means ‘umbrella of pearl’. It is a kind of umbrella made with small silver pearls and different colours, used in the churches during parish feasts and celebrations as a royal sign of the St. Thomas Christians. It is used in the churches also today.


\(^{148}\) *Prasad* is a Sanskrit word which means ‘pleasing’. It is a sign that God is pleased with the offerings and gives something to eat in return.
dances were performed by St.Thomas Christian women called ‘Margamkali’. It is a folk dance performed by the women of ‘Knanities Christians’ portraying the life of St. Thomas, the Apostle and his martyrdom in India. The life story of St. Thomas in Syriac text was adapted in Malayalam and is displayed in dance form. The steps of Margamkali were taught to the students at a very early age by the village teacher. The village teacher was the man, who did the translation of the text. The music of Margamkali was taken from Syriac liturgical music and no musical instruments were used during the performance. But the dancers sang the lyrics of the songs when they danced. The dress, which was used for this dance was the traditional dress of St. Thomas Christians consisting of white double long cloth and a decorated top, a golden earring at the top of the ear, a silk shall, special hair style, golden bracelets and anklets.

‘Parisamuttukali’ is the play performed by men, bearing swords and shields, which shows their martial skill and literary sense. The non-christian brothers had a war dance called Kalarippayattu. The war dance Kalarippayattu had no religious relevance. The songs were not included in this war dance. It was only the practice of the weapons which was used for the war. Whereas the dance of Parisamuttukali had a religious meaning. The songs of this dance explain the history of the birth of Jesus, the adoration of Magi (the three wise men from the East, who brought presents to the baby Jesus), the passion of Christ, St. Thomas coming to Malabar and his death in India. It was a credit

149 Margamkali .The word ‘margam’ means the way and ‘Kali’ means play, ‘the play of the way. In religious sense it means the ‘way to the salvation’. This dance is based on the subjects of the apocryphal called ‘Acts of St. Thomas’ written in the third century in Syria. It is a female dance, which is played on the occasion of reception of an eminent person, parish festivals, wedding celebrations among St. Thomas Christians in Kerala. A dozen of women dance with clapping around the lamp. The lamp signifies the Lord Jesus Christ and 12 women symbolize 12 apostles. The songs of this dance narrate the life and history of St. Thomas, the Apostle. A piece of information about the existence of the dance can be seen in the sculptures of the famous ‘Granite Cross’, which was blessed in December 1559, in Kaduthuruthy, Kerala. C.f. VELLIAN, Jacob, Margamkali: A Christian Folkdance of India Christian Performing Arts, in: Andrews MEKKATTUKUNNEL (ed.), Mar Thoma Margam: The Ecclesial Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians, Kottayam 2012, 587-589. [Hereafter, Jacob VELLIAN, Margamkali].

150 Knanities are a small group of people among the St. Thomas Christians who were led by a Jewish Christ Thomas of Knai in the fourth century. They are St. Thomas Christians and belong to the same East Syrian liturgical family. Now they have 2 dioceses and one archdiocese in Kerala in India.

151 Parisamuttukali: Many of the travel accounts about St. Thomas Christians mention them as fine-tuned soldiers and that they supplied many men to the local kings. They got training, using weapons in the village school. A piece of information about the existence of the dance Parisamuttukali can be seen in the sculptures of the famous ‘Granite Cross’, which was blessed in December 1559, in Kaduthuruthy, Kerala. Cf. Jacob VELLIAN, Margamkali, 589.
of christian cultural socio political perceptive. It was also performed in the typical language, Malayalam.\textsuperscript{152}

3.10. Socio-Political Life

From the 4\textsuperscript{th} century the St. Thomas Christians were considered as a noble group and of superior class, because of the privileges and honours awarded by the king of Kerala.\textsuperscript{153} The term 'Mapila'\textsuperscript{154} (noble) was the title of the St. Thomas Christians. The Hindu brothers called the Jews and Muslims with this term. But the St. Thomas Christians were Nazrani (=Christians) Mapila. The word Nazrani was joined to the term Mapila.\textsuperscript{155} The foreign christian business men from Persia, Alexandria, Armenia and other places were happy to come to Malabar and live among the St. Thomas Christians and enjoyed their hospitality and fraternity. The St. Thomas Christians had elephants and they rode on them, though it was a privilege of the heirs of the kings at that time. The St. Thomas Christians were skilled warriors and they accompanied their bishops. The ‘Nairs’\textsuperscript{156} respected the St. Thomas Christians and considered it, to be a great honour and regarded them as brothers.\textsuperscript{157} They took up weapons for the defence of their Hindu kings. This was the reason why they were honoured with privileges by the kings. Some of the St. Thomas Christians held also the trusteeship of the temples and they were invited during the feasts of the temples. The Archdeacon, their ecclesiastical head, was also the leader in political matters (also). They obeyed their kings without any intermediary officers and the king protected their rights.\textsuperscript{158} Fr. Placid notes,

The Thomas Christians had a king of their own who, according to some, was a Christian and according to others, a non-Christian that took special care to protect their privileges. These privileges were many and are believed to have been granted by the ancient rulers of Malabar. Some of these privileges inscribed on copper plates. A few such plates are kept todays at

\textsuperscript{152} Cf. Jacob VELLIAN, Margamkali, 587- 596.
\textsuperscript{153} Cf. Placid PODIPARA, Social and socio, 486.
\textsuperscript{154} The term Mapila means great son, king’s son and noble. It is a honour title to the St. Thomas Christians, Jews and Muslims conferred by the Hindu ruler. Sometimes it denotes christians or laymen. But when it is joined to Nazrani or to the name of a person, it shows the honour of St. Thomas Christians. Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Varthamanapusthakam, 430.
\textsuperscript{155} Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Thomas Christians, 351.
\textsuperscript{156} Nairs: a group of people, who are warriors in the Hindu community according to caste system. They are also nobles.
\textsuperscript{157} Cf. Placid PODIPARA, Social and socio, 486.
\textsuperscript{158} Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Thomas Christians. 546.
‘Kottayam and Tiruvalla’. These few plates certainly go back to dates before the 14th century.\(^{159}\)

The privileges of the St. Thomas Christians graved on copper plates were the great charter of the St. Thomas Christians. Some of the names of such plates are the ‘Iravikorthanplate’, ‘Quilon Church Plates 1 and Quilon Church Plates’. \(^{161}\)

### 3.11. Occupation

The St. Thomas Christians were farmers, soldiers and traders. They cleared forests and cultivated paddy and coconut trees, rubber, tea, coffee, pepper, cardamom, ginger etc. Their cities and towns were not very big. In their villages each house was in the middle of a plot of land which was green with cultivation. They built their houses with palm leaves. They were situated economically very well compared to the other communities. Many of them worked as a teacher or as clerks in the offices of non-christian brothers. John Marignoli\(^{162}\) says “they were the proprietors of pepper and were also masters of the public weighing office”.\(^{163}\) They love their country very much. The young men from the St. Thomas Christians were taught the use of weapons. Men always carried weapons. A Hindu anthropologist Anantakrishna Ayyar observes about the St. Thomas Christians,

> In former times they seldom appeared abroad without being well armed. They were expert huntsman, soldiers and they were held in much estimation by the rulers of the country. A native prince was respected or feared by his neighbours according to the number of Syrians in his dominations.\(^{164}\)

During the war they helped the king, who usually was not christian. The success of the king in the war depended upon the number of the brave army men from St. Thomas Christians. This made the non-christian king to build churches and to give tax free land to his soldiers for cultivation. Many of them served the king as ministers and

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\(^{159}\) Kottayam and Thiruvalla are two provinces in the southern part of Kerala.


\(^{161}\) Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Thomas Christians,351.

\(^{162}\) John Marignoli was a papal legate in China in the 14th century, he visited many countries of Asia, especially South Asia. He spent eighteen months in Kollam, a province of Kerala. Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Thomas Christians, 351.

\(^{163}\) Ibid.

\(^{164}\) AnanthaKrishna AYYAR, Anthropology, 56.
councillors. It is noted that the St. Thomas Christians integrated well with of non-christian people.\textsuperscript{165}

3.12. Spiritual Life

The St. Thomas Christians led a good christian life according to the circumstances in which they lived. But it was deeply rooted in the East Syrian spirituality, because they had relationship with East Syrian from the dawn of the christianity in India. The spirituality of St. Thomas Christians found its expression in Liturgy, family prayer, fasts and other devotions. Family prayer of the St. Thomas Christians was adapted from the Hindu families and christianised.

3.12.1. Liturgy

The St. Thomas Christians did not develop their own liturgy, because they did not have church fathers or ecclesiastical writers at that time. The St. Thomas Christians received the East Syrian liturgy because it was nearer and known to them.\textsuperscript{166} The language used in this liturgy was Syriac. They had great love for the Syriac language and believed in the prayers that they had in Syriac, given by the Apostle Saint Thomas\textsuperscript{167}. They followed ‘the three Anaphoras of Theodor, Nestorius and Adai and Mari’.\textsuperscript{168} The spirituality of St. Thomas Christians was liturgy centred. Though the eucharistic celebration was very long, they participated in it whole heartedly, out of the conviction that the eucharistic celebration is the source of (the) life, the medicine of life and treasury of healing.\textsuperscript{169} The St. Thomas Christians participated not only in eucharistic celebration, but also in the liturgy of the hours in the churches in the morning and in the evening. It was in East Syriac language and prayed in choir\textsuperscript{170}. They started the prayer with the special ceremony of giving peace to the other as a sign for the love to the

\textsuperscript{165} Cf. ibid., 351, 628; Cf. PODIPARA, Placid, The Syro-Malabarians, their Life and their Activities, 518.

\textsuperscript{166} Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Thomas Christians and Adaptation, 548.

\textsuperscript{167} Cf. ibid., 265, 345-346.

\textsuperscript{168} The St. Thomas Christians used the three Anaphoras for their liturgy before the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. As a result of the synod of Diamber the two Anaphoras (Nestorius and Theodor) were forbidden. But now they are used in the Syro-Malabar Church since 2012.


\textsuperscript{170} The liturgy of the hours is recited in Malayalam language now. Every morning before the mass the morning prayer is recited in the parish with the parishioners.
neighbour and the true faith in Lord Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{171} The St. Thomas Christians received the sacraments frequently. The sacraments were celebrated in accordance with the East Syriac rite and modified with the local customs which were suited to catholic faith. Here is one example: for the sacrament of anointing the sick, the priest used to bless the sick, read the gospel over them and place a piece of palm leaves or paper over their bodies, on which the verses of the bible were written.\textsuperscript{172} The St. Thomas Christians kept the liturgical prayers they got from the east even without change in the language. They only made the external changes in accordance with the Indian style.

3.12.2. Family Prayer

There was a special room or place in the house, where all the family members came together for the family prayer in the evening. The spirit of family prayer of St. Thomas Christians originated from their Hindu brothers. The traditional Hindu families recite the prayers and read the Holy Scripture in the evening before a lightened lamp. The St. Thomas Christians followed this custom from Hindus. In the evening they came together and lighted the lamp or candles and prayed in front of the lamp and read the bible\textsuperscript{173}. At the end of the prayer the family members saluted each other with the prayer ‘praised be Jesus Christ our Lord’. The family prayer powered the unity and respect towards the elders.\textsuperscript{174} The Holy week had much importance in the families. On Holy Thursday there was a celebration of Pesaha\textsuperscript{175}, in connection with the Last Supper of our Lord. After the ceremonies in the church in the evening the family members gathered and said the evening prayer and celebrated the breaking of bread (a special bread, which was made with rice only for this occasion) and drank a special milk (special milk with rice powder, coccus sauce, jiggery (a type of sugar consumed in Asia) and bananas). They did it as remembrance of the Last Supper of the Lord. On Good Friday they did not work. It was a day of fast and abstinence. They visited the


\textsuperscript{172} Cf. Placid Podipara, The Thomas Christians, 353.

\textsuperscript{173} The family members are saying rosary as the evening prayer till now. The Syro-Malabar Church teaches that the evening prayer called ‘Ramsa’ might be recited as the family prayer. The primary steps were taken to recite ‘Ramsa’ as the family prayer in the church.


\textsuperscript{175} The word Pesaha signifies the celebration of the Jews in the early centuries. The celebration of Pesaha among St. Thomas Christians commemorates the last supper of Jesus.
church on this day twice and took part in the passion of Christ. They recalled the suffering of Jesus on the cross by taking a sip of a bitter drink in the church.\textsuperscript{176}

\section*{3.12.3. Observance of Fast}

Fasting played a great role in the spiritual life of St. Thomas Christians. The main fasts of St. Thomas Christians were 24 days fast before Christmas, 14 days of fast before the Assumption of our Lady, 49 days fast before Easter (Great Lent), 7 days of fast before the birthday of our Lady. These 7 days of fast were very special for women. The women who fast spent their whole day in the church in prayers. The women from the Hindu Religion also kept this fast of Christians. The fasts began with a bath. During the lent season meat, fish, milk, conjugal acts, use of tobacco, alcoholic were forbidden.\textsuperscript{177}

\section*{3.12.4. Other Devotions}

They had special devotion to Mary and Saint Thomas. They had a celebration of veneration of cross. The St. Thomas Christians (had) everywhere had a unique cross called a ‘St. Thomas cross’. A special cross was discovered by the portuguese missionaries in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century on the tomb of St. Thomas in Mylapore, Madras. This cross is unique and different from other crosses in shape and figure. The cross shows the resurrected Jesus and it is implanted in lotus flower which is the national flower of India, signifying the coming of St. Thomas to India to preach and spread the gospel.

They made a pilgrimage visiting Maylapore where Apostle Thomas died and was buried. There was a tradition of celebrating Holy Family feast. On this day, members of a poor family were invited and food, clothes and gifts were presented.\textsuperscript{178}

Another tradition was to remember the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. Some families of St. Thomas Christians took the vow of giving food to 12 young boys of a poor family and the priest too was invited on this occasion to represent Jesus.\textsuperscript{179}


\textsuperscript{178} Cf. Joseph CHALASSERY, The Spiritual Life, 453.

\textsuperscript{179} Cf. ibid.
3.13. Funeral Ceremonies

The St. Thomas Christians followed the East Syrian rite for the burial of the dead. But some of the local customs for the burial and for the commemoration of the dead were adopted by the St. Thomas Christians from Hindu Brahmins. The body of the dead was washed with warm water a few hours after death and laid out in the coffin in a prominent place of the house. The dying person was laid on the bed facing east and the neighbours and relatives of the dead recited the prayers. No food was cooked or served in the house of the dead until the burial. The food was prepared in the neighbouring houses and was served. The burial took place in the cemetery of the churchyard. After the burial, those who took part in the ceremony gathered in the house of the dead. The parish priest also attended the gathering. Here the priest blessed a tender coconut and cumin seeds and handed it over to the people gathered, as a drink for nourishment. Then a vegetarian food was cooked and served to all the assembled persons. The sons-in law or the nearby persons of the deceased person should carry the expenses of these ceremonies. With the prayers for the dead and alms giving they concluded the ceremonies.\(^{180}\)

The St. Thomas Christians practised a ritual bath called *Pulakuli*\(^ {181}\) on any one of the days after the burial: either on the eleventh day or the seventeenth or the twenty-eighth or the fortieth day. The *Sradha* or *Chatham*\(^ {182}\) (death anniversary) was celebrated with special liturgical prayers and alms giving etc. The priests and deacons were present to officiate the function. These celebrations and feasts commemorating the dead made the relatives and neighbours come together to express their solidarity and strengthen the bond of unity and communion. Every year on the death anniversary, holy mass is offered for the departed soul.

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\(^{181}\) It means defilement. This particular ritual bath is meant for the purification from the defilement from the contact with the dead person. All the near relatives are part of it. The time of this feast depends on the family persons. It was a custom of Brahmins, the St. Thomas Christians adopted it the way it was. C.f. Placid Podipara, Malabar Christians, 637.

\(^{182}\) Chatham is a Malayalm word from the Sanskrit word *Sradha*. It is a feast celebrated on the death anniversary of the ancestors. As the fulfilment of vows, sweets and special kinds of edibles were distributed in churches and at homes at this feast. On those days they did not forget to give alma and food for the poor people. Some of the families celebrate this feast every year in commemoration of their dead parents. A mass is celebrated for the soul of the dead in the parish church according to the request of the relatives or children of the dead person.
3.14. Church Administration

The St. Thomas Christians followed the democratic system of church administration and it was influenced by the socio-political structure of the country. The bishop was the head of the local churches in the early churches. The bishop regulated the matters with regard to rite and canon law. The St. Thomas Christians had the same situation. They got bishops from Chaldea and they ruled the church according to the canon law of the Chaldean Church. But they were not really aware of the local customs and the language of the country. We have information of the 16th and 17th century, which says that the church administration was in the hands of an archdeacon, who was a priest from the country. He did his duties with the help of the three types of indigenous assemblies, namely The Palliyogam, The Desiyogam and The Mahayogam.183

3.14.1. The Palliyogam

The root of this parish assembly or the Palliyogam of St. Thomas Christians goes back to the ancient village system of the Dravidian community. The Dravidians used to gather together to discuss the matters of the village for common interest. This system is called Manram. In this system the heads of the families were also the members of the assembly and they took decision for the welfare of the community. The parish assembly of St. Thomas Christians worked in the manner of Dravidian system, Manram. It took decision for the welfare of the community. Another source for Palliyogam among the St. Thomas Christians was the presence of synagogues in India. The Jerusalem Temple was destroyed in 587 B.C. and dispersed the Jews outside Israel. As a result of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, many synagogues were built in many parts of the world, even in India. The purpose was the unity among the Jews governed by the elders of the community. It enjoyed some kind of executive and judicial powers like the Palliyogam of St. Thomas Christians.184

The local parish was administered by the Palliyogam or parish assembly. A palliyogam consists of the representatives of the heads of the families and clergy. It was attached to

every church and enjoyed the administrative, executive and judicial powers within the parish. The assembly discussed the problems connected with the life and activities of the church, financial problems, spiritual welfare of the parish, excommunication of the public sinners etc. The excommunicated people were not allowed to enter into the church, to receive sacraments of confession and communion. They would be admitted to the parish only after performing the prescribed penance imposed on them by the assembly. The candidates for priesthood had to get an approval of the assembly before getting ordained by the bishop. All the members of Palliyogam enjoyed the same rights and powers. It was a medium to maintain solidarity and communion among the community.185

3.14.2 The Desiyogam

The Desiyogam was the regional assembly of priests and representatives of two or more parishes in the same region. It could be seen among Hindus also. This assembly was conducted for the administration of justice. The capital punishment was imposed on the culprits by this assembly, too.186 Thomas Paremmackal, the administrator of the St. Thomas Christians from 1787 to 1799, wrote about the unjust punishment of western missionaries upon a priest Chacko Edappalli in his work “All are aware that according to the ancient custom of the Malabar Church no punishment could be inflicted unless the crime was proved in front of the representatives of four churches.”187 Again there was a regional assembly to solve the dispute between the St. Thomas Christians and the western missionaries and to put forward the condition that ”no punishment would be meted out for any grave crime committed by the priests or laymen before the matter was judged by the representatives of four churches.”188 From these words it is understood that only the regional assembly was authorised to impose punishments in serious matters of priest and faithful.

3.14.3. The Mahayogam

The Mahayogam or General Assembly consists of priests and the representatives of the faithful of all the parishes of St. Thomas Christians. It was held for the general interest


188 Ibid., 452.
of the St. Thomas Christians as a whole. The chief of the St. Thomas Christians ‘Archdeacon of all India’ presided over the assembly. The matters regarding the whole community were not decided neither by Metropolitan nor by Archdeacon, but the General Assembly. Referring to this Thomas Paremacal states: “Matters pertaining to the whole community were not decided by one or two churches; all the churches used to assemble together to deal with such matters.” The General Assembly was the apex (body) of the St. Thomas Christians and enjoyed the administrative, judicial and executive powers for the whole community of St. Thomas Christians. Fr. Placid says:

Matters pertaining to the whole Church Community-religious, social, political- were handled by the representatives of all the churches. It was in these General Church Assemblies (the Malabar-Church-Yogam) that the Archdeacon, the Jathikkukarthanavian (the one responsible for the Community), as he was popularly called, played his part in the most conspicuous way. The General-Church-Assemblies were practically supreme and de facto no higher ecclesiastical authority questioned their decisions. The Thomas Christians therefore formed as it were a Christian Republic with a head from among themselves. Their bishops, who were foreigners, were eclipsed by, or were under the shadow of, the Archdeacons. Such was the canonical set-up that had developed among the Thomas Christians of the past. Because of the ‘autonomous state’ and ‘Oneness’ no foreign heresy or religious controversy had any impact on them, and they were quite content with their Archdeacons in preference to bishops from among themselves.

The participation of the lay people in the affairs of the church of the St. Thomas Christians was very effective. The members of the assembly were active and worked for the unity and communion of the St. Thomas Christians.

4. Conclusion

Fr. Placid explained very well the roots of the St. Thomas Christians of India. The elements of Indian culture which they adapted from the Hindu brothers shaped their community as the Christians of India. All aspects of their life; family life, birth and death ceremonies, marriage, socio political life, art and architecture were influenced by the customs of India. The customs and practices they received from the Hindus were beautifully adapted. It helped them to integrate themselves well in the Indian soil.

189 Cf. Paul PALLATH, The Catholic Church, 22.
190 Ibid. 445- 446
191 Placid PODIPARA, Varthamanapusthkam, 430.
CHAPTER III-Ecclesiology of Fr. Placid

1. Introduction

The origin of Indian Christianity goes back to the Apostle St. Thomas. The Indian Christians of St. Thomas are one of the old christian communities in the world, who were not known to the rest of the world because of geographical and political reasons. The St. Thomas Christians followed the traditions handed over to them from Thomas, the Apostle and the generations that followed. These traditions are their identity. When the western missionaries came to Kerala, India to spread the gospel, St. Thomas Christians had the first hand contact with the Church in Rome, which gradually in the course of time resulted in recognising and accepting the supremacy of Rome. Fr. Placid made many attempts to explain the need for the communion with Rome, without losing the unique identity of the St. Thomas Christians.

2. Identity

2.1. The Apostolic Claim of the St. Thomas Christians

The disciples of Jesus went out, filled with the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Good News to the world. They were courageous enough to travel to the distant lands to proclaim the Good News. (Acts 1:8) In accordance with the command (wish) of Jesus Christ, St. Thomas came to India to proclaim the gospel. According to Indian tradition St. Thomas reached the south west region of India, Kerala in A.D. 52 and established seven communities in Kerala. According to the tradition the Apostle Thomas converted some Jews of Kerala, (according to some historians Jewish community existed in Kerala before the coming of Thomas) and many Brahmin families of the place. Among those who received the faith, some were conferred powers of priesthood and the church gradually grew with unique ecclesiastical characteristics. In the year A.D. 72 Thomas received martyrdom, in Maylapore (Madras) while preaching the gospel in the southeast part of India.193

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192 This region is described in historical books as Malabar (the land of hills).
The St. Thomas Christians are the old christians of Malabar, the south west cost of India. But some of the historians deny the origin of St. Thomas Christians from the Apostle Thomas. It is true that there are no clear evidences, inscriptions or documents showing the coming of St. Thomas in India. Fr. Placid says:

The fathers of the church like Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Rufinus of Aquileia assign Parthia to Thomas. This however may not be considered exclusively of India. These authors recount the Palestinian tradition according to which Parthia was by lot assigned to St. Thomas as other places were to the other apostles. [\ldots] Hence the mention of Parthia in the cause of St. Thomas need not exclude India in general or South India in particular. Moreover, in those days a good deal of North West India was included in Parthia, or was under Parthian Princes. The Parthia, therefore, of St. Thomas could be said to have vaguely included in it also India to some extent.\(^{194}\)

The greatest theologian and poet of East Syria St. Ephrem (c.306-373) explains about St. Thomas in his poem,

\begin{quote}
It was to a land of dark people he was sent, to clothe them by Baptism in white robes. His grateful dawn dispelled India’s painful darkness. It was his mission to espouse India to the One-Begotten.\ldots\quad Thomas works miracles in India and at Edessa. Thomas is destined to baptize peoples preserve and steeped in darkness, and that in the land of India.\(^{195}\)
\end{quote}

The oldest written account, which speaks about the work of St. Thomas is the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, written in the third century. But the oldest work is apocryphal. This work does not stand against the Malabar traditions. Many of the Malabar traditions about St. Thomas remained oral. The chief written documents of the Malabar traditions are the songs of Rabban Thomas and the Margamkali dance.\(^{196}\) The account about the origin of Malabar called *Keralolpathi*, which is a pro-Brahmin composition, speaks about the Apostle Thomas.\(^{197}\) In the 15\(^{th}\) century, the Portugueses visited the southern part of India, and discovered the tomb of St. Thomas in Maylapore (today’s Madras). The archaeological excavations proved that there existed a tomb from the first century era.\(^{198}\) Further it is to be noted that the tomb of St. Thomas does not exist anywhere else in the world. Again it is noted that India had trade relations with the rest of the world, before the coming of christianity by sea route. The historians agree that there were jewish colonies in Malabar (Kerala) even before Christ. The settlements of the jews

\(^{194}\) Placid PODIPARA, *The Thomas Christians*, 319.


were an attraction to the coming of the apostle especially to South West India.\(^{199}\) Fr. Placid observes:

There are no rival traditions nor rival tombs nor rival Thomas Christians in the world. The details and the definiteness of these traditions, above all the tomb and everything connected with it, both oral and written would be sufficient enough to prove the apostolate of St. Thomas Christians of India.\(^ {200}\)

### 2.2. The Ecclesial Tradition

The ecclesiology of the St. Thomas Christians is quite different from the western style of ecclesiology, because it was developed outside the Roman Empire. The origin of the ecclesial identity of St. Thomas Christians lay on the founder St. Thomas, the apostle of Jesus Christ. The ecclesiology of St. Thomas Christians is the living faith in Christ the Saviour. The life of the St. Thomas Christians was church centred and they understood the church as the authentic way of Christian life.\(^ {201}\) The ecclesial tradition of a church is coming “from the apostles through the fathers and which is part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage of the Universal Church.”.\(^ {202}\) The St. Thomas Christians accepted all the traditions from the beginning and (it is) called it the Law of Thomas. The Law of Thomas is the discipline of the life of the St. Thomas Christians. It is the sum total of ancient traditions and customs that they received from the Apostle St. Thomas and christianised Indian customs. The Law of Thomas of St. Thomas Christians are their ecclesial traditions, liturgy and spiritual life. It shows the individuality and authenticity of the St. Thomas Christians. These laws were unwritten, though they had legal authority in the community. Amazingly the western missionaries found them superstitious because many of the customs, rituals and traditions were taken from Hindu-brethren in view of assimilation and inculturation. Moreover the St. Thomas Christians were under East Syrian Church and the western missionaries prejudiced against the East Syrian influence and they had forbidden all those customs through the Synod of Diamber.\(^ {203}\)

\(^{199}\) Cf. ibid., 12.

\(^{200}\) Placid PODIPARA, The Thomas Christians, 324.


\(^{202}\) Orientalium Ecclesiarum, 1.

There are four particular individual churches which consider St. Thomas as their apostle, who brought the Good News to them directly or indirectly. The St. Thomas Christians of India are one of the greatest among them. The church of Edessan, the church of Chaldean with Seleucia Ctesiphon as its centre (Mesopotamia or Iraq) and the church of Persian (Iran) are the other three ones. The church of Edessa believes that the disciple of St. Thomas, Addai, is their founder of the church. The church of Chaldean with the center Seleucia Ctesiphon is believed that Mari, the disciple of Addai, is the founder of their church and the church of Persia believed like the St. Thomas Christians of India that St. Thomas is their founder. These four churches have a Thomas affinity which makes them close to each other and emerges a feeling of unity among them.

In the early churches synods and assemblies emerged to solve the problems in the church. They might have got inspiration from the apostolic Synod of Jerusalem. Provincial synod was the first among them. It was the assembly of the bishops of one province, presided over by the metropolitan of the province. The election of the bishop was in the hand of these provincial synods. There were also local synods for a small area which had legislative, administrative and judicial powers. After that the patriarchal synods came into being. The patriarchal synod was the assembly of Metropolitans presided by the patriarch.

The St. Thomas Christians had a special ecclesial level of administration, which was adopted from the autonomous village system of Indo-Dravidian Manram. There were three types of assemblies namely the parish assembly, the regional assembly and the general assembly. The parish assembly looked after (only) the affairs of the parish only. The regional assembly included three or four parishes from a region. The general assembly was competent for the whole community. The heads of the families and priests were the members of this assembly. These assemblies enjoyed the legislative, administrative and judicial powers. Adaptation of this structure helped smooth functioning of the St. Thomas Christian communities.

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204 Cf. Placid Podipara, Rise and decline, 5.
205 Cf. Joseph Kallarangatt, Ecclesiological Perspectives, 141.
2.2.1. Metropolitan

The St. Thomas Christians had relations with the church of Persia at the beginning because it was geographically near to India. They had also the same tradition and the same liturgy. That is the reason why the St. Thomas Christians of India accepted the Metropolitan leadership of Persia. The capital of the Persian Empire was Seleucia-Ctesiphon (which includes Mesopotamia and Persia). The bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon wanted to be the head of all, because he was the bishop of the capital city. The bishops of Persia also came under the leadership of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Later he was known to Chaldean Patriarch. Through Persia India came in contact with the Chaldean Patriarch. In the eight century the Patriarch of Chaldean Iso-Yahb raised the St. Thomas Christians to metropolitan status and they were subordinated to the Patriarch of Chaldean. The metropolitan is known as ‘the Metropolitan of all India or the Gate of all India’. ‘The Metropolitan and the Gate of all India’ had a special interest for the St. Thomas Christians. 208 Fr. Placid observes “Gate among the Orientals signifies sublime power or sublime authority. And the Gate in the case of St. Thomas Christians was of All-India or of entire India”.209 The metropolitan of India was fully autonomous. The Church of the East had two kinds of metropolitans, electoral and autonomous metropolitans. The electoral metropolitans participated actively in the patriarchal synod and administrated a particular territory. But the missionary metropolitans were autonomous and they conferred the episcopal ordinations and they were assisted by the archdeacons elected from the indigenous clergy. The Metropolitan of India was a missionary metropolitan and he had no obligation to participate the Synod in Persia. The indian metropolitans exercised their office until their death. They were only spiritual head of the St. Thomas Christians. They did not involve in the daily administration of the St. Thomas Christians mainly because they did not know the local language of the people. They were like the sages of India, who led an ascetical life in contemplation.210

208 Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Rise and Decline, 11-12.
209 Ibid., 14.
2.2.2. Archdeacon

In the beginning the Chaldean Patriarch appointed metropolitan and bishops for the St. Thomas Christians. As the bishops were foreigners they were not familiar with the customs and the language of the country. So the communication between the people and the bishop was very difficult. The bishops celebrated the mass and conferred the baptism. They also exercised the power in matters of rite and canon law. The day to day administration of the community was in the hands of the archdeacon, who was a native priest. 211 “The Archdeacon, who was called giathikkukarthavian, (one who is responsible for the nation, or one who governs the nation).” 212 The term archdeacon derived from the two greek words αφη and διακονος. Etymologically the term archdeacon means chief minister. This title is written for the first time in the patristic literature De Schismate Donatistarum by the bishop of Melevis in 366.213 Fr. Placid says:

The office of the Archdeacon was hereditary; it seems there was election or nomination by the Metropolitan, especially when there were more than one candidate with equal rights. This sometimes would cause dissensions among the supporters of different candidates.214

The archdeacons were priests from the soil. The archdeacon had the status of a prince. He used the title of the Archdeacon of India. He was the head of the faithful of India. There were many bishops but there was only one archdeacon for the community of St. Thomas Christians before the 16th century. The East Syrian rite and canon law prescribed only one archdeacon for one bishop. He had not only the ecclesiastical powers but also the civil powers.215 The Archdeacon of India enjoyed the legislative, judicial and executive powers. The presence of the archdeacon was necessary for the synods and assemblies of the community according to Chaldean canon law. The bishops requested the archdeacon to solve the cases among the people while they spent this time

212 Ibid.
213 Cf. KOLLAPARAMPIL, Jacob, The Archdeacon of All India, Kottayam, 1972, 23. [Hereafter, Jacob KOLLAMPARAMBIL, The Archdeacon].
in prayer, meditation and learning. The greatest power of the archdeacon was the executive power. He was the man who declared the decisions of the metropolitan among the St. Thomas Christians. The archdeacon was the second person in the diocese. He was well versed in Syriac language and scripture. He was very efficient and shouldered greater responsibilities of the community. The archdeacon worked hard to keep the individuality of the St. Thomas Christians. He was the man, who coordinated the church of St. Thomas Christians, though there were bishops from Chaldea. Every parish took care of the poor and the amount was fixed by the archdeacon. For example, there was a fund raised for the marriage for the orphans.\textsuperscript{216} The archdeacon acted as a head of the community and his power was prominent till the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. The Synod of Diamper (1599), convoked by the portuguese missionaries, representing Rome, led to a schism among the St. Thomas Christians which brought change among them and tried to establish western doctrines, rite and liturgy. During this process the role, power and authority of the archdeacon in the known manner was removed.\textsuperscript{217} Instead of metropolitan and chaldean bishops, western bishops were appointed.

2.2.3. Clerical Formation

The St. Thomas Christians followed their own system for priestly formation. The system is called Malpanate system. The term Malpanate derives from the Syriac word Malpan which means teacher or Guru. It was similar to the Indian system of education: Guru Sisha system (Guru means guide or teacher, Shisha means student). In Guru Shisha system, the students stayed with the Guru, the teacher, for a particular number of years. According to Indian culture the Guru or teacher was not merely a person who imparted worldly knowledge, he also was an example and model for his students. He earned respect from the students and from the people for his esteemed personality. He taught the students with his life example more than with worldly learnings. Here he really was) a Guru or guide.\textsuperscript{218}

Those who were responsible for the priestly formation were also called Malpan by the St. Thomas Christians. They were well versed in Syriac language, sacred scripture and

\footnotesize{216} Cf. Jacob KOLLAPARAMPIL, The Archdeacon, 86, 200-201.

\footnotesize{217} Cf. MUNDADAN, Mathias, Traditions of St. Thomas Christians, Bangalore, 1970, 145-146.

the teachings of the fathers. They were holy and saintly priests. The training system was installed in each area including intellectual, spiritual and pastoral skills. The important subjects were liturgy, the Syriac language, scripture and ethics. The students were specially trained for preaching and teaching skills. In fact they were well equipped to serve the community. The metropolitan and the archdeacon were the ex-officio teachers of the St. Thomas Christians. 

At the completion of the formation the students were recommended by Malpan and archdeacon for ordination. As years passed by the number of students and Malpan decreased. As a result several parishes worked together and took the responsibility for priestly training under one Malpan in a particular parish. This system of the formation continued till the end of the 15th century.

2.2.4. Major Archiepiscopal Church

The Syro-Malabar Church is the group of the St. Thomas Christians of India which is united with Rome. Until today they are known as Syro-Malabar Church. From 1599 to 1896 the St. Thomas Christians lived under the regency of roman catholic bishops, who were appointed by the Roman Congregation of Propaganda.

The year 1896 can be called the rebirth of Syro-Malabar Church. The long cherished dream of the St. Thomas Christians to gain autonomy was materialised, when they obtained a bishop of their own. The problems of the Syro-Malabar Church was discussed seriously in Rome and in 1887 Pope Leo XIII separated the Eastern Catholics (St. Thomas Christians) from the authority of Latin bishops. (He was the man, who first used the name Syro-Malabar for the St. Thomas Christians of India). As a result three Syro-Malabar Vicariates were established, namely Thrichur, Ernakulam and Kottayam (Changanassery) in 1896. The Syro-Malabar Church got native apostolic vicars from their own rite. Later they were made bishops. In 1923 the hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church was established with Ernakulam as the metropolitan see. Trichur(,) and Kottayam (Changanassery) were under the metropolitan see of Ernakulam (Cochin).


220 Cf. Joseph KALLARANGATT, Ecclesiological Perspectives, 147.

Under the native bishops the Syro-Malabar Church grew in spiritual, social, educational and charitable realms. Later many dioceses were erected especially in Kerala. The mission dioceses were erected outside Kerala for the migrants from Kerala. (The) Pope John Paul II constituted the Syro-Malabar Church as major archiepiscopal church in 1992 and the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church got supreme authority. The head of the Syro-Malabar Church is called Major Archbishop\textsuperscript{222}. The first session of the synod of bishops of Syro-Malabar rite was called firstly in 1993.\textsuperscript{223}

\textbf{2.3. Liturgical Traditions}

The four churches, namely the St. Thomas Christians of India, the Church of Persia (Iran), Edessa and Messopotamia (Iraq) were referred to the apostolate of St. Thomas. These churches in the early time had developed their own liturgy. This liturgy is known as the East Syrian liturgy or Chaldaic liturgy. The language of this liturgy was East Syriac. The St. Thomas Christians of India adopted East Syrian liturgy and the language of this liturgy always was East Syrian. But with the coming of the missionaries from the west in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, they had lost this Syrian liturgy, and it was replaced by Roman liturgy. But the language of the liturgy remained the same. The St. Thomas Christians followed this roman liturgy till 1962. It was in the Vatican Council II that the original liturgy was recognised and approved.\textsuperscript{224} But the new liturgy was officially recognised with the visitation of Pope John Paul II in Kerala in the year 1982.

\textbf{2.3.1. The Anaphora of Addai and Mari}

The St. Thomas Christians of India or the Syro-Malabar Church has a unique eucharistic prayer. It has the Anaphora of Addai und Mari, who are believed to be the disciples of the Apostle Thomas. The Anaphora of Addai and Mari is the ancient eucharistic prayer of the east. They are the two teachers of the church of the East. This anaphora was composed in Syriac language at the end of the second or early third

\textsuperscript{222} Major Archbishop is a dignity conferred by the Roman Catholic Church to the head of the Syro-Malabar Church. Theoretically he is just like a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. But practically he enjoyed all the powers and rights of a patriarch, in the Patriarchal Church.

\textsuperscript{223} Cf. Andrews MEKKATTUKUNNEL, Legacy of the Apostle, 68-71.

century. It developed independently and is different from the other eucharistic prayers of the patristic period. The structure of this anaphora is like the Jewish prayer meal or common meal and the pre-anaphora was structured after the Jewish assembly. In this anaphora one cannot find clearly the words of consecration like in today’s eucharistic prayer. The Anaphora of Addai and Marri includes four g’hantha prayers (prayer of praise) and each g’hantha prayer started with the prayer of St. Thomas ‘My Lord and My God’.225

2.3.2. The Anaphora of Theodore of Mopsuestia

The second anaphora of the St. Thomas Christians of India or Syro-Malabar Church is the Anaphora of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Theodor of Mopsuestia is known as ‘The Interpreter’ of sacred books. He was the bishop of Mopsuestia and had given catechetical instructions. Though the Anaphora of Theodore was not written by him, it is attributed to him for its particular theological concepts. It is believed that the disciple of Theodore, Mar Thomas translated the anaphora from Greek into Syriac. The Anaphora of Theodore has a syro-byzantine structure and consists of four g’hantha prayers (prayer of praise). Also this anaphora does not provide the full words of institution because Theodore did not consider the words of the institution as the form for the consecration of bread and wine into the body and the blood of Christ. Till the time of the Synod of Diamper (1599) the Anaphora of Theodor was used.226

In 1957 the Congregation for Oriental Churches approached Pope Pius XII and requested him to revive the use of old Anaphora of Theodore. The Pope welcomed the request and recommended it for review and scrutiny. Accordingly the Syro-Malabar Church made the Malayalam translation of the anaphora and submitted it to the liturgy committee of the oriental churches in 1984 and it was approved by Pope Benedict XVI in 2011. Finally, in December 2013, the Anaphora of Theodore came into existence. It


is used from the first Sunday of the Annunciation-Nativity Period to the Sunday of Hosanna.227

2.3.3. The Anaphora of Mar Nestorius

The most solemn anaphora of the East Syrian tradition is the Anaphora of Nestorius. This anaphora is used mainly on five feast days, namely Epiphany, the Friday of John the Baptist, the Memorial of the Greek Doctors, the Wednesday of the Rogation of the Ninevites, and Maundy Thursday. The origin of the anaphora is not known. But it is certain that it is not a translation of any Greek anaphora. It is typical East Syrian and it includes the theology and liturgical tradition of East Syriac. This anaphora has also four g’hantha prayers. The Anaphora of Nestorius has the words of institution in the eucharist, which is not common in East Syrian anaphoras.228

2.3.4. Liturgical Year

The Syro-Malabar Church has an elaborate liturgical year as John Moolan says:

Liturgical year is the yearly plan of spiritual life by the Church for her children, arranged in different seasons or periods to celebrate the mysteries of Christ in life together with feasts, fasts, and abstinence in order to make Christian life a successful pilgrimage to heaven for attaining salvation.229

The development of the theology in East and West through the centuries leads to the formation of the liturgical year in the churches. The liturgical year of the Syro-Malabar Church is divided into nine seasons and each season consists of seven weeks. It is arranged in the light of acts of Jesus on earth and in heaven. The first liturgical season is the period of Annunciation. It commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ, which brings new hope and salvation for the people. The second liturgical seasons Epiphany meditates the baptism of Jesus Christ. The third liturgical season helps to meditate the passion and death of Jesus Christ as a human being through fast, prayer and penance.


229 MOOLAN, John, Liturgical Year Syro-Malabar Church, Kottayam 2013, 16. [Hereafter, John MOOLAN, Liturgical Year].
The fourth liturgical season is the period of Resurrection, which helps the believers to enter in the mysteries of the triumph of Jesus Christ over sin and death. The Ascension of Jesus Christ is also recalled in this season. The fifth one, the season of Apostles, remembers the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the mission work of the Apostles with the power of the Holy Spirit. The sixth liturgical season is the season of summer, which manifests the fruit of the works of the Apostles, the growth of the church in faith and love. The seventh and eighth season are called the liturgical season of Elia, Moses and Cross. In this time the church meditates the final coming of Jesus Christ with Moses and Elia and the last judgement of the world. The cross is the sign of the victory of Jesus Christ and the sign of Christian. The ninth liturgical season is the season of the Dedication of the Church. In this season the church remembers her glory with Jesus Christ in joy in heaven forever This liturgical season is to be considered as the time of thanksgiving to Jesus Christ, for the institution of the Church through which the believers meet the salvation.230

2.3.5. Liturgy of the Hours

The days, hours are the gift of God for the humanity. It is the duty of man to sanctify his day and hours with the praise of God. The inspiration for the liturgy of the hours can be found from the ancient christian church. People prayed several times a day to sanctify the day.231 According to the tradition of Chaldean liturgy the St. Thomas Christians assembled in the parishes in the morning and evening and recited the morning prayer and the evening prayer with the clergy. It was not compulsory for the clergy to pray the liturgical hours. When they celebrated the liturgy of the hours, they celebrated in public. But the situation changed by the middle of the 16th century. As a result of the latin influence the recitation of the liturgy of the hours was imposed on them. Later the liturgical hours were prayed only in seminaries and other religious houses.232 There are


231 Cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium, 37-41.

three major divine praises in Syro-Malabar Church namely Ramsha, Lelya and Sapra (evening prayer, night prayer and morning prayer). According to the tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church, the beginning of the day is with the vespers. The book Genesis revealed that in the beginning there was darkness. That might be the reason behind it. The morning prayer focuses first on God and praises Him because of the wonderful creation of the creatures and the world. In this morning prayer ask help of God for the protection of the day. The night prayer is the gratitude and the praise of God for the blessings that he showed upon the mankind. The purpose of this prayer is to provide good sleep during the night and good thoughts for the coming day.  

2.3.6. Administration of Sacraments

The St. Thomas Christians or the Syro - Malabar Church has (also) seven sacraments like the Catholic Church has. Before the 16th century the first sacraments, sacrament of baptism, confirmation and Holy Eucharist were (together) administered together as in the Chaldean Liturgy. It was abolished after the coming of western missionaries. But it has been brought back into practice since 2005. Now the Syro-Malabar Church administers the sacraments of initiation, baptism, confirmation and eucharist at the same time. It is to be noted that during the baptism the child is not given both species but only the blood of Christ dipped into the mouth, if it is too young to consume the body of Christ. All other sacraments are administered in East Syrian rites.

3. Principle of Communion of the Particular Churches

The particular churches of the Catholic Church have its apostolic origin or patristic affiliation to a particular apostle of Jesus. They have their own authentic liturgical tradition, ecclesiology, canon law and spiritual traditions. The Christ experience and the understanding of gospel are different from one apostle to the other. The Apostles of Jesus Christ were sent to different parts of the world and they brought the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world, in the way they understood. As a result different types of churches were born. The experience of Christ by an apostle and the proclamation of the
Word of God and the acceptance of Good News in a particular cultural background are very important elements of a particular church. The personal experience of the apostle and the cultural background of the people who accepted gospel are unique. The particular churches of the Catholic Church are in communion with the universal church, although they have different traditions. The principle of unity in diversity plays an important role among the particular churches.\textsuperscript{235}

The Syro-Malabar Church of India is a particular church, who adopted the liturgical and canonical tradition of the East. But the church in India underwent a great change of adaptation and inculturation in the course of time and there emerged a unique church. The church adopted many cultural practices of India, which was predominantly Hindu in religion.

\textbf{3.1. Teachings of Vatican II}

The impact of Vatican Council on the renewal of particular churches was very great. The Vatican II taught ‘Catholic Church as the Communion of all the Churches’. This explanation of Vatican Council made wide changes among the particular churches in the Catholic Church. This can be seen in different documents. \textit{Lumen Gentium} says:

Collegiate unity is also apparent in the mutual relations of each bishop to individual dioceses and with the universal Church. The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful. The individual bishops are visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal church; it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists. And for that reason precisely each bishop represents his own church, whereas all, together with the pope, represent the whole Church in a bond of peace, love and unity.\textsuperscript{236}

The decree on the catholic eastern churches, \textit{Orientalium Ecclesiarum} says:

These Individual Churches both eastern and western, while they differ same what among themselves in what is called ‘rite’, namely in liturgy, in ecclesiastical discipline and in spiritual tradition, are none the less all equally entrusted to the pastoral guidance of the Roman Pontiff, who by God’s appointment is successor to Blessed Peter in Primacy over the Universal Church. Therefore these churches are of equal rank, so that none of them is superior to the others because of its rite. They have the same rites and obligations, even with regard to the preaching of the Gospel in the whole world.\textsuperscript{237}


\textsuperscript{236} Lumen Gentium, 23.

\textsuperscript{237} Orientalium Ecclesiarum, 3.
The council declares in Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, while keeping in mind the necessary unity of the whole church, have the power to govern themselves according to their own disciplines, since these are better suited to the character of their faithful and better adapted to foster the good of souls. The perfect observance of this traditional principle- which indeed has not always been observed – is a prerequisite for any restoration of Union.\(^{238}\)

**3.2. Concept of Communion of Fr. Placid**

Fr. Placid thought that the St. Thomas Christians had broken their Catholic communion with Rome after the “Coonan Cross Oath” of 1653. Due to the Oath there emerged a non-catholic group among the St. Thomas Christians. Fr. Placid took keen interest to bring the separated brothers back into the catholic fold. He observes that communion is not a communion with the Latin Church but the communion with the Roman Pontiff, who is the successor of Peter. The writings of Fr. Placid reveal that the communion with Catholic Church would not make any harmful effects against the identity of a particular church but it strengthens the identity of each particular churches.

**3.2.1. The Reason for Communion**

The Holy Gospel tells about the Primacy of Peter. Fr. Placid also believes on the primacy of Peter. The successor of Peter is the Pope, who is the head of the church. So obedience to the Pope is one of the necessary conditions for the catholic communion. According to him the Seleucian Church also known as Persian Church, was not cut off from Roman Communion, though they fell in to schism. But political and geographical reasons of the time were the obstacles for the communication and communion with Rome. As a result the St. Thomas Christians, who were under the bishops of Seleucian Church till 16th century, were also in communion with Rome. That is the reason why Fr. Placid argued for Catholic communion. Later he was a *Peritus* (expert) in the Second Vatican Council and was influenced by the teachings of the Council. In the light of Council he says that Catholic Church is a communion of particular Churches and it strengthens the concept of “Unity in diversity”.

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\(^{238}\) *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 16.
3.2.1.1. Primacy of Petrus—Biblical Grounds

Fr. Placid had the firm faith that Christianity was established by Jesus Christ and to flourish Christianity in the world Jesus Christ selected the apostles and gave them authority. St. Peter was chosen by Jesus Christ and built his church upon him. There are many occasions in the bible, which throw light upon the authority of Peter. Fr. Placid quoted some of the gospel verses to make clear that Peter was the head of the disciples. Peter’s declaration about Jesus was that “you are the Messiah, the son of the living God.” Jesus answered him, [...] “and I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church”. (Mt 16:16-17) The opinion of Fr. Placid is that only Peter could understand that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and he proclaimed it openly. So he was worthy enough to be chosen as the leader of the disciples. Jesus told Peter about only one church not many churches and wished Peter to be the head of this church. Peter is the foundation of the church and all other disciples are the members of this foundation. As Peter is the foundation, he is the one, who joins other disciples in unity and fraternity.239

The Gospel of St. Mathew says, “I will, give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mt 16:19) Fr. Placid observed from the verses of the gospel that Peter is the man who has the key of heaven which is the eternal domain and he has the absolute authority. Jesus told Peter that what he binds will be bound in heaven, too. The other disciples also derive their authority from Jesus but Peter remains the leader of them all.240

3.2.1.2. Primacy of the Pope

The church was established by Jesus Christ and Peter enjoyed the primacy as the leader of the Church. The church should flourish till the end of the world. So there should be a leader after Peter. The successor of Peter is the Pope. He is the only one who enjoys all the rights, sovereignty and authority of Peter. The Christians of the whole world are under the sovereignty of the Pope. He has the right to use his authority directly or


240 Cf. ibid., 60- 61.
indirectly. The Christians are responsible to work in unity under the Pope for bearing fruit and it is his duty to help flourish the church by promoting the good branches and removing the bad ones. He can exercise his power irrespective of east and west. So what the Pope, the successor of Peter, teaches about faith and moral of the church may not be false.

3.2.1.3. The Primacy of the Pope and Seleucian Church

The Seleucia Church or Seleuvian – Ctesiphon Church is also known as ‘The Persian Church’. The Persian Church had its headquarters in two cites Seleucian and Ctesiphon. They had East Syrian liturgy and rite, which was also followed by the St. Thomas Christians of India. The other names of this church were Syro-Chaldean or Babylonian Church. Later this church was divided in two groups called the Nestorian and the Chaldean.

There was a notion among the west that the church of Seleucia had no catholic communion before the 16th century. In the middle of the 16th century a part of the Nestorian Church of Seleucia denied the roman primacy and had no communion with Rome. According to Fr. Placid they were not really cut off from Rome, although they fell into schism. He points out that in the early years of Christianity it was very difficult for the remote areas to communicate with Rome because of political and geographical reasons. With regard to the Seleucian Church it was very clear that after the Rome empire became christian, the rulers of the Persian empire treated the Christians of the Persian empire with suspicion. The local churches were not aware of the controversies of the doctrines. They gave their ear to the doctrines without considering whether it was against Rome or not. They were sincere to Rome. It is noted that Rome did not condemn the communion neither directly nor indirectly.

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242 Cf. PODIPARA, Placid, Antiochia Patriarchis, 67-68.


244 Cf. Placid PODIPARA, The Church of Seleucia, 42-49, 95
The liturgical prayers of the Seleucian Church clearly throws light on Roman primacy. They prove their belief quoting the passages from the bible, by which Peter was given the primacy by Jesus Christ. The Seleucians address Peter as the head of the twelve who was given the key of the treasure of heaven.\textsuperscript{245} In the year 424 the Catholicos of Seleucia, Dadisho called a synod in Markabta and named the Catholicos as the second Peter of Seleucia. But he was not the head for the universal church, only for their ecclesiastical head of the Seleucian Church. After the death of the Catholicos Dadisho, the Seleucian Church fell into Nestorianism unknowingly. In 778 Patriarch Timothy I was elected as head of Seleucian Church. He was the defender of Seleucian Nestorianism. Timothy acknowledged that the primacy is reserved to Rome because of Peter. He kept the view that the primacy is the divine position and it should be accepted and obedience by all the patriarchs. Even though there was no communication between Rome and the Seleucian Church, it does not mean that there was no communion. Fr. Placid observed that the letters on communion between Rome and the Seleucian Church were not found. But there always existed a communication problem. Due to political reasons the church of Seleucia was cut off from Rome. In the 16\textsuperscript{th} century the Seleucian Church, which was known as Nestorian, was divided under two Patriarchs, one group accepted the faith of Rome, called the East Syriac or Chaldaic Church.\textsuperscript{246}

3.2.1.4. The Roman Primacy and the St. Thomas Christians

Fr. Placid observed that the St. Thomas Christians, who were under the bishops of Seleucian Church, had catholic communion before the 16th century, though the Seleucian Church had the line of Nestorian faith. It can be understood from history that the St. Thomas Christians did not lose their communion with Rome, though they partially accepted the faith of Nestorians.\textsuperscript{247} Later the Portugese came to know that the St. Thomas Christians were in heresy calling themselves Nestorians and they tried to bring them back into roman catholic fold. Till that time the St. Thomas Christians did not consider themselves separated from Rome. They were not aware of any heresy or of

\textsuperscript{245} Cf. Xavier Kodapuzha, Faith and Communion, 63-64.


\textsuperscript{247} Cf. Placid Podipara, The Syrian Church, 13.
holding any false dogma in their church. Fr. Placid mentioned that if the St. Thomas Christians did not have communion with Rome, they would never communicate about the errors of faith with Rome. The priests of St. Thomas Christians used to give homilies on the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and presented Blessed Virgin Mary as Mother of God and not as Mother of Christ as understood by Nestorius.248 Fr. Placid says:

The relations of the Malabar with Seleucia were for practical and not for doctrinal purposes. For the Malabar Church was neither an output nor an organic part of the Church of Selucia. Hence even if Selucia we said to have count Catholic Communion, that need not be said to have affected Malabar, which could go on with no knowledge of Seleucians’s loss of Catholic Communion. The controversy regarding Nestorianism and Ephesus could never have reached Malabar in their anti-Roman colour. [...] The Malabar Church thus could remain unchanged with regard to her attitude towards Rome even though bishops from Selucia governed her; for, those bishops were not hostile to Rome. Hence the friendly relations of the Malabarians with missionaries and representatives sent by Rome or in Communion with Rome as the Portuguese missionaries were.249

According to Fr. Placid catholic communion is the acceptance of the primacy of the Pope of Rome and to obey him as the successor of St. Peter, who was the leader of the disciples.

A Church is Catholic essentially because of its Communion with the Pope of Rome, and East Syrian or West Syrian, Greek or Latin because of its Rite. Rites are nothing but different modes of expressing the same faith under one and the same universal head of then in different languages. To possess Catholic Communion, in addition to Communion with the Pope Communion with the Churches that are in Communion with the pope is also necessary.250

3.2.1.5. Understanding of Particular Church by Fr. Placid

The opinion of Fr. Placid about the particular churches corresponds to the teachings of Vatican Council II. He comments:

Particular churches are separate groups of faithful who have their own traditions and who are held together by their own hierarchy. In other words Particular Churches are in some sense Autonomous and Sui Juris since they are each separate group with its traditions and with its hierarchy. But this Sui Juris autonomy is only relative, because they have the same government, i.e., the Government of the Roman Pontiff, the Supreme Head of the Catholic Church.251

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249 Ibid., 14.
250 Placid PODIPARA, The Church of Seleucia, 44.
251 Placid PODIPARA, Four Essays, 761.
The council teaches that the Catholic Church is a communion of particular churches. According to Fr. Placid the essence and substance of the Catholic Church remains in each particular church and Catholic Church is a union of many particular churches under the supreme head of the Pope. Each particular church has a hierarchy with its common head or supreme authority and it consists of many hierarchs. Every particular church has its own rite and the head of each particular church has only a ritual head called Archbishop Major and head of the synod of his church.\textsuperscript{252}

The church of St. Thomas Christians possesses the apostleship of St. Thomas, having the elements of particular churches like liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline and spiritual heritage. Their liturgy was East Syrian. St. Thomas Christians did not have their own bishops but depended on Persian church first followed by the Chaldean Church. As the bishops of the Chaldean Church were foreigners, the local administration was done by the archdeacon and their parishes were autonomous with their own administration. The spiritual system of the St. Thomas Christians was basically related with East Syrian liturgy and the Indian religious practices were incorporated to their spiritual life. They had great devotion to Mary and the Holy Eucharist. Their priests were generally married. Even though the elements of a particular church were not clear among the St. Thomas Christians, in considering the above mentioned elements, we can come to the conclusion that the St. Thomas Christians (Syro-Malabar Church) are also a particular church.\textsuperscript{253}

\section*{3.2.1.6. The Principle of Unity and Diversity}

Fr. Placid speaks about the unity in diversity in the light of Vatican Council II. He observes that the catholicity of the Catholic Church is revealed through the ideas of unity in diversity and diversity in unity. It means that the Catholic Church promotes different types of spiritualties for different people in different situations in the name of particular churches. Catholic Church would not want to reduce it into one institution.\textsuperscript{254}

But the power of the Pope over those particular churches is episcopal and supreme though they were constituted by different bishops and archbishops. But they all enjoy

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{252} Cf. ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{253} Cf. ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{254} Cf. Placid PODIPARA, Four Essays, 762.
\end{flushright}
communion with Rome or at the same time Rome did not separate them forever. According to Fr. Placid the diversity in the church is trinitarian. He says:

God Triune must be the model for different rites and jurisdiction that exist in the same place. Each of the Persons of the Trinity is distinct One from the other, but there is only one God, since the three Persons have one and the same Divinity or Divine Nature. Again, the distinction of Persons being kept intact, each Person is in each of the other two. The different rites in the same territory can in like manner be united among themselves. [...] Keeping their distinction in this way, they can be many, but one on Faith and Charity under the Supreme Authority of the Roman Pontiff.256

The Vatican Council II teaches:

The Holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government. They combine into different groups, which are held together by their hierarchy, and so form particular churches or rites. Between those churches there is such a wonderful bond of union that this variety in the Universal Church, so far from diminishing its unity, rather serves to emphasize it. For the Catholic Church wishes the traditions of each particular church or rite to remain whole and entire, and it likewise wishes to adapt its own way of life to the needs of different times and places.257

Cardinal Yves Congar notes in the light of the Second Vatican council:

Conciliar unity presents itself as the unity of diversity. It is not a monolithic unity, as the unity of ideological movements or the unity produced by an organisational centralization might be. Conciliar unity embraces and welcomes the diversity of traditions and liturgies, the diversity of ecclesiologies (as in primitive church), the cultural diversity of forms of confessions of faith, the diversity of forms of ministry, the diversity of catechetical methods, and finally the diversity of the socio-historical forms of church government. Each church keeps its personality, its freedom in the order of organisation and government, and its liturgical and cultural traditions.258

4. Conclusion

The identity of a particular church reveals the apostolic heritage, its liturgical tradition, and ecclesial tradition, spiritual and moral life of the particular church. A better knowledge about one’s own church paves the way towards deepening one’s love for the mother church. The understanding of the history of a particular church paves the way to the communion with Rome. Fr. Placid illustrates in his writings that the Pope is the supreme authority of faith and liturgy in the church. According to him the communion of the eastern churches with Rome would not make any harmful effects, but it only protects them to keep their ecclesial, liturgical and spiritual disciplines. The success of

256 Placid PODIPARA, The Rise and Decline, 56.
257 Orientalium Ecclesiarum, 2.
the Catholic Church relies on restoring the identity of every particular church. The existence of the different particular churches is a great sign for the principle of unity in diversity of the Catholic Church.
General Conclusion

1. Life, Works, and Contributions of Placid Podipara

Fr. Placid Podipara shines as the “one in the line of the Fathers”\(^\text{259}\) for the St. Thomas Christians of India, especially for Syro-Malabar Church. Even though his works included history, liturgy, canon law and church unity, his focus was on the history of the St. Thomas Christians.

As a representative of the St. Thomas Christians he had an opportunity to spend many years in Rome. During this golden period he made contacts with many prominent persons of the universal church. Even though he was engaged in the work for the universal church, his heart burnt all the time for his mother church at home in Kerala. He lost no opportunity to intervene whenever the church at home was in need.

2. The St. Thomas Christians are Indian in Culture

The idea of Fr. Placid Podipara “St. Thomas Christians are Indian or Hindu in culture” points out how this community went through the process of inculturation and adaptation. The tradition says that the disciple of Jesus Christ, St. Thomas, baptized some Hindu Brahmins (the priestly class of Hindus) and they remained Indians or Hindus in practice and culture, but they lived as Christians in this country. The term Hindu does not only refer to a particular religion but it includes the whole Indian culture. By this reflection Fr. Placid could defend the fundamentalists of India in a great extent.

Each particular church has its own apostolic heritage. But how can they keep up this heritage with originality? This particular church, the Syro-Malabar Church, has its members also in Austria. The cultural situation of Austria is far different from India. How can they keep the particularity of this church in Austria? How can this particular church integrate with the culture of Austria and continue?

The main problem of this particular church is that it has no mission outside India, living only among the migrants from Kerala, either in India or outside India. Does the church know how to integrate with the other cultures of the world? Hopefully this particular church will learn much in matters of cultural identity and flourish with its mission in the length and breadth of the world.

3. Ecclesiology of Fr. Placid

The ecclesiology of Fr. Placid is the identity of a particular church and its communion to the universal church. His ecclesiological concept is to be sound with the council teachings of Second Vatican Council that “the universal church is a communion of particular churches”. Every particular church has its own identity in ecclesial, liturgical and canonical level. Every member of a particular church has the right to keep its own identity. As a church man Fr. Placid made an attempt to propagate the identity of his particular church to the people even in the face of opposition from some section of his own people.

Fr. Placid was a pioneer for communion of particular churches (Eastern Churches) with Catholic Church. In his writings he illustrated the reason for the communion with the universal church and the need for the acceptance of the primacy of the Pope. His opinion was that the St. Thomas Christians were not against Rome or Roman Communion what was misunderstood by Portuguese missionaries in the 16th century.

The interest of Fr. Placid for the communion with Rome is clearly seen here. When he heard that one group of the non-catholics of the St. Thomas Christians came into catholic communion, he supported them and strengthened them to accomplish their dream. They are known as Syro-Malankara Church. He thought that communion is not a communion with the Latin Church but the communion with the Roman Pontiff, who is the successor of Peter.
But some of the historians pointed out that the communion of the St. Thomas Christians with Rome is the aftermath of the coming of western missionaries, especially Carmelites and Jesuits.\textsuperscript{260} Even if this is true, the communion with the Catholic Church would neither be a problem nor state the loosening of the identity of a particular church. In the opposite it would strengthen every particular church.

\textsuperscript{260} Cf. MYKHALEYKO, Andriy, Die Katholische Ostkirche, (Die Kirchen der Gegenwart 3), Göttingen 2012, 84.
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Abstract

English

Placid Podipara’s Reflection on the Church

“St. Thomas Christians are Indian in Culture”

The origin of Indian Christians can be trace to the evangelizing mission of St. Thomas the Apostle. According to Indian tradition, St. Thomas reached in Malabar (today’s Kerala), the south west coast of India in A.D. 52 and preached the Holy Gospel in India. He established seven Christian communities in India, which are called St. Thomas Christians of India. The mission of St. Thomas resulted in the establishment of a particular community with a particular style of life. At the end of the 15th century, Western missionaries came to India, recognizing that there is a Christian community in India. The original name of this church was Mar Thoma Nazrani Church (the St. Thomas Christians). The arrival of Western missionaries led to a split among the St. Thomas Christians and there emerged two groups, catholic and non-catholic. Today the catholic fractions are known as the Syro-Malabar Church and the Syro-Malankara Church. The non-catholics are called the Malankara Syrian Orthodox and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian. The Syro-Malabar Church got this name from the Western missionaries in the 20th century. The word “Syro” signifies the liturgical language and ecclesial tradition of the East Syrian Church. The term “Malabar” denotes Kerala, a state in South India.

Placid Podipara (1899-1985) was a priest who belonged to the first congregation of the Syro-Malabar Church, called Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (C.M.I.) He served his Mother Church as a professor at the Oriental Institute in Rome, as a member of the commission for the Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium, as a consultor for the commission for the Oriental Churches, and as a theologian in the Second Vatican Council. Because of his contribution to St. Thomas Christians, he is considered one of the fathers of the modern Syro-Malabar Church. Fr. Placid convincingly explains through his writings the identity of this particular church, which is shown in all aspects of history, liturgy, culture, theology, and cannon law. In the beginning of the 20th
century, Hindu fundamentalists claimed that Indian Christians are foreigners. As the voice of the St. Thomas Christians, Fr. Placid reacted with the reflection that “St. Thomas Christians are Indian in culture.”

This thesis is an attempt to reflect on Fr. Placid Podipara’s work “St. Thomas Christians are Indian in culture”. The first chapter discusses the biographical details of Fr. Placid, the second chapter throws light upon the cultural and social practices of the St. Thomas Christians, in all aspects of their family life celebrations, birth, marriage, etc.) and in church administration. While the last chapter analyses the role and relevance of cultural identity in the Syro-Malabar Church. In the light of the Second Vatican Council, Fr. Placid agrees with the view that the Catholic Church is the communion of individual Churches or particular Churches.
Placid Podipara's Reflection on the Church

„St. Thomas Christians are Indian in Culture”


# Curriculum Vitae

1. **Persönliche Angaben**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Lijo Joseph, Thomas Kuzhippallil</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geburtsjahr und -ort:</td>
<td>1984, Chirakkadavu, Kerala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religionsbekenntnis:</td>
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<td>Lenny Joseph</td>
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2. **Schul- und Universitätse Bildung**

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<tr>
<td>1990 bis 1994</td>
<td>L.P. School (Volksschule), St. Ephrem's Chirakkadavu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 bis 1997</td>
<td>U.P. School (Gymnasium - Unterstufe), St. Ephrem's Chirakkadavu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997 bis 2000</td>
<td>H.S. School (Gymnasium - Unterstufe), St. Ephrem’s Chirakkadavu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Eintritt in das Priesterseminar der Diözese Kanjirappally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 bis 2002</td>
<td>H.S. School im Priesterseminar (Matura)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 bis 2005</td>
<td>Bachelor Studium in Geschichte, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 bis 2007</td>
<td>Bachelor Studium in Philosophie an der Hochschule „Good Shepherd“, Major Seminary Kunnoth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 bis 2008</td>
<td>Praktikum in der Dözese Kanjirappally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 bis 2015</td>
<td>Theologie Studium in Wien</td>
</tr>
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