

# Faith Formation in the Syro Malabar Church

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## **Introduction**

The Indian Church of the Thomas Christians is an individual Church of the Catholic Communion founded on the apostolic Christ experience of St. Thomas. Their way of life lived in accordance with the gospel message, an exemplary Christian witness among non – Christians, is a clear sign of a community well formed in Christian faith. This is an attempt to present a historico - theological analysis of the different stages of catechetical ministry among the catholic Thomas Christians in view of accelerating a proper renewal in the present Syro Malabar catechesis.

The Church of the Thomas Christians has three distinctive phases of history from a catechetical point of view. The first is the pre seventeenth century period in which it was strictly Indian and oriental. The second phase starts at the dawn of the sixteenth century which marks the beginning of the western interference through the arrival of Portuguese missionaries to India

and continued up to Second Vatican Council. During these centuries the time honored ecclesial, liturgical and catechetical traditions and their indigenous ways of transmitting their faith were neither understood nor appreciated by the missionaries. As a consequence the catechetical outlook congenial to the early Christian and Patristic period was forcefully changed to suit post - reformation and tridentine mentality of the west. The third phase of this catechetical history begins with the epoch making event the Second Vatican Council, which gave an impetus to the Oriental churches by re – emphasizing the nature of the church as the communion of individual churches. Along with this the council opened up a profound and renewal in the catechetical ministry world wide, especially through the documents Lumen Gentium and Dei Verbum with it’s new visions on Revelation, Faith and Church.

## **1. The Catechetical Ministry in the Pre Seventeenth Century Church of the Thomas Christians**

The Churches of apostolic origin may develop an identity and individuality of their own as the manifestation of their response in faith to the apostolic Christ experience which they received. The Apostolic Church of the Thomas Christians of India was not an exception to this general principle. The particular way of ecclesial life attuned to the Indian and Oriental mentality developed in response to the apostolic patrimony shared by St. Thomas is known in history as the “Thommayude Margam” or the “way of Thomas”. This indigenous expression represents the sum total of their liturgical, ecclesial, ascetical and socio – cultural identity which is distinct from the ‘way of peter’.

It is not an easy task to delineate the Catechetical vision, systems and structures prevailed among the Thomas Christians, since direct historical documents referring to the catechetical structures and methods are lacking. If we plunge deep into the early history, the first, perhaps the only direct reference to catechetical instruction may be that of Melchior Nunes Barreto in 1563. After a visit to the Thomas Christians in company with the bishop of Cochin, he writes to his brethren in Europe : “ I cannot tell you, my dear brethren, how much I am consoled in the Lord when I see and speak with these Christians who from the time, when St. Thomas had been in these parts, as it is believed, have kept faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ in spite of the fact that they had been deprived of instruction, sacraments and other means which are preserved among us by the divine goodness, and even through they have been living among an infinite number of infidels, not only molested by the gentiles but even persecuted by the Moors and Jews, who are living among them, in spite of all this they have always preserved the veneration, obedience and faith of the Holy Cross and the memory of the mysteries of the Catholic Faith. And on all days before sunset they assemble in the church to recite the psalms and the lessons in Chaldean, and in the morning they do the same, the cassanars..... Reciting their matins at the altar and the people answering their alleluyas and other words with such impetus of the spirit that, although I do not understand the words they provoke in me devotion”.<sup>1</sup>

At the first sight the words of Barreto provoke in us a feeling that the Thomas Christians did not have proper catechetical formation. But when we read in between the lines along with other written documents from the missionaries our impression will be changed to the opposite extreme. Barreto viewing everything from a post – reformation and Tridentine

background could not find a system of instruction like that of post reformation period based on the dogmas or precepts of the church. If we evaluate the “Thoma Marga” the undistorted way of life of the pre seventeenth century church with an understanding of the concept and systems of catechesis in the apostolic and post apostolic times we would be surprised to see a well formed living community in faith.

## **1.1 Faith life of the Thomas Christians**

### **a) Liturgical Life**

As it is clear from the many Portuguese testimonies of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Thomas Christians were pious people, very devout in the practice of their religion. Many European missionaries witnessed to their patient devout and active participation in the long and sometimes tedious services conducted in the church in the Syriac language<sup>2</sup>. The Thomas Christians had the greatest respect for and devotion towards the Eucharist. The Divine Liturgy which they called ‘Qurbana’ was celebrated with great solemnity.

They went to the church not to fulfill an obligation, but out of deep faith and conviction. Even before the introduction of Sunday obligation by the Synod of Diamper, people used to go to the Churches regularly, not only on Sundays and feast days but also on other week days recite the divine office in morning and evening.<sup>3</sup>

The Thomas Christians were not passive hearers of divine services, but they actively took part in the prayers with actions and words. The patient, devout and active participation in the long and sometime tedious

services in the church is a sign of their deep faith and spirit of prayer. The long homilies preached by the priests were an occasion for effective liturgical catechesis. As Dionysio reports, these sermons were preached by their priests for many hours together<sup>4</sup>. These long sermons helped them to deepen their understanding of faith and grasp the meaning and significance of the Divine Liturgy and its theological content. Thus the Thomas Christians were able to develop an ecclesial spirituality based on the liturgical tradition of the Church. So the popular devotions which has no relation with the liturgical heritage of the church, could not find any place among the Thomas Christians of that time.

The liturgical assembly actively responded during ceremonies also with different postures and actions. When the incense burning – vessel was passed among the congregation, the people made certain movements of their hands in order to make incense smoke come to them, which is a very meaningful liturgical expression.<sup>5</sup> They exchanged peace or ‘Kasturi’ at appropriate times during the Holy Qurbana, at the beginning and end of the Divine office and at certain other occasions also. The Synod of Diamper appreciates the custom of giving the Kasturi which according to the usage of this diocese, contains in it a symbol of charity, communion and brotherly love.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the communion service we can notice the following facts from the descriptions of Monserrate, Barbosa, Vincent Maria and others. The Thomas Christians considered communion as indispensable part of the Qurbana and the whole congregation except public sinners communicated under both species. As in the early church, a big loaf was consecrated, divided and distributed which they received in their hands. The main characteristic of their life was that it was centered on the liturgy, the re –

enactment of the paschal mystery. The Divine Liturgy and the Liturgical calendar were fully capable of involving the faithful into the salvation History which has its focal point in the mystery of Christ and of the Church.

The Holy week was celebrated in a special way by keeping vigils with long prayers and by almsgiving. On Holy Thursday the father of the family would break unleavened bread and distribute it among the members of the family together with a sweet drink to co-memorate the Last supper of our Lord. This celebration is a part of the family liturgy of the Thomas Christians. On Good Friday as a sign of sorrow, they withdraw themselves even from household activities and used to take bitter drinks. From Holy Thursday night till next Saturday, complete silence was observed and many would keep complete fasting.<sup>7</sup>

The octave of Easter, which they called the new Sunday was solemnly celebrated in honor of St. Thomas, who confessed his faith in the resurrected Lord with the words “My Lord and My God”.<sup>8</sup> July third is their greatest feast on which day they celebrated the death of the apostle St. Thomas. The Feast is known as ‘Dukrana’ means co-memoration and some families keep it as a day of ‘Chatham’<sup>9</sup>

Seventeenth century witnesses like Vincent Maria OCD and others admit that the Thomas Christians used to dedicate long hours to prayer. The lay people knew East Syriac enough to say their private prayers in it. Common family prayer in the morning and evening was very scrupulously observed. We have in the Canon Apostolorum that the laity also have to pray thrice a day.<sup>10</sup> Late Selusian laws in general say that clerics and lay people too should be diligent in reciting the office.<sup>11</sup> N. Barretto in 1561 reported that the Malabar clergy with the laity recited the office both in the evening and in the morning.<sup>12</sup> From all the above said laws and practices of the

Thomas Christians we legitimately conclude that the Thomas Christians had recited the divine office in their families also both in the evening and the morning. They also celebrated the feasts and fasts in accordance with the spirit of the Holy seasons in their families followed by traditional social ceremonies and these celebrations are effective means of family Catechesis in accordance with the Liturgical Year.

### **b. Ascetical Life**

For the Thomas Christians, rigorous fasting was the most important form of their ascetical practices.<sup>13</sup> For a reliable and clear picture of the life of penance of the Thomas Christians we have to depend on a few documents of the sixteenth and seventeenth century in the form of reports of the foreign missionaries. In 1579, Fr. Dionysio, S.J. from Cochin writes that the Thomas Christians are friends of fasts<sup>14</sup> and in 1557 Fr. Carneiro S.J. found that they observed their customs of fasting very perfectly.<sup>15</sup> The fast day begins on the previous day when the sun goes down. Fr. Jerome S.J. he plainly confesses to his superior that it is very difficult for the missionaries to observe the local fasts in the same way as the Christians did, because of their rigour and strictness.<sup>16</sup>

The Thomas Christians never considered fasting to be an act of private devotion nor merely as an obligation imposed by the ecclesiastical law. But it was the part and parcel of the Liturgical life of the Thomas Christians. The celebration of the Holy Qurbana, the recital of the Divine office by the whole parish community, the reception of the Sacraments, prayer and almsgiving were included in the observance of fast.<sup>17</sup> According to Gouvea's report (1606) people came to the Church three times a day,

during the season of lent and nobody was absent at the morning and evening congrigations.<sup>18</sup>

### **c. Moral Life**

According to the available sources the life and behavior of the Thomas Christians was in keeping with their social and religious status. They were always esteemed and patronized by their rulers as much for their general fidelity and regard for truth, as for their skill and military powers.<sup>19</sup> According to F. Day they were very faithful and trustworthy.<sup>20</sup> Social and Moral virtues like fidelity, regard for truth, trustworthiness etc., when possessed by a community, it is indicative of the moral and religious maturity.<sup>21</sup> History shows that the Thomas Christians were esteemed and loved even by the non – Christians. This is only because they have possessed a very high degree of moral standard. Gouvea says that no other community had great value and esteem among the Malabarians as the Syrian Christians.<sup>22</sup>

The Thomas Christians were courteous tolerant and modest. Their courteous manners contributed in great measure to preserve peace and security in the community.<sup>23</sup> .About their modesty and respect for elders A.Ayyer makes the following remarks, “They pay strict attention to the commandment, to honor their father and mother, applying it to all their governors and teachers, spiritual pastors and masters.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of these moral qualities, quarrels and moral evils were rare among the Thomas Christian. Vincenzo Maria, an Italian Missionary, testified that murder was unknown among them. He admired this conduct

and contrasted it with the frequent assassinations both in Catholic Italy and all the colonies of the Portuguese India.<sup>25</sup>

The Thomas Christian women were famous for their modesty and chastity. In fact their dress and behavior reflected their character. As A.Ayyar reports they are seldom or never known to violate the law of chastity.<sup>26</sup> Even in the midst of Hindus and other non – Christians divorce was unheard of among the Thomas Christians.<sup>27</sup> The missionaries admired, the moral life, simplicity and innocence. Paulinus of Bartholomeo said “one cannot find here the vice and customs of the Europeans who have already corrupted the coastal cities of India”.<sup>28</sup>

#### **d. Missionary Consciousness**

To be on mission, to evangelize is the basic obligation of every Christian and every church. “Evangelizing is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize”.<sup>29</sup>

In the light of the studies so far made more and more recognition is given to the fact that St. Thomas Christians were truly missionary minded. Mar Abraham Mattam had highlighted this aspect bringing out certain forgotten pieces of evidence to our notice.<sup>30</sup> Thomas Paremakal who was well aware of the pre – seventeenth century situation of the Thomas Christians, strongly affirms that there were “those who announced the faith”, among them even before the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries.<sup>31</sup>

We have a very clear reference in the report of Francis Roz, the first Latin Archbishop of the Thomas Christians. In his “Relaco de Serra” of 1604 he reports that the Northists among the Thomas Christians were always interested in conversions and that they used to baptize and add the non –

Christians to their community. He continues to say that four principal families among the Thomas Christians were specially deputed by the community to receive and look after the new converts.<sup>32</sup> This reference clearly shows that the laity actively co – operated with the ongoing process of Evangelization. Evangelization is not considered as a duty of the clergy alone, the whole community is interested in this task and this testifies the presence of the system of catechuminate among the Thomas Christians. More over, the Thomas Christians kept intact their faith amidst the vast majority of Hindus. This is evangelization in its’ proper sense. They had positive influence in the society in which they were living. This is a life lived in accordance with the Gospel message, a Christian witness among the non – Christians.

As we have seen so far, ‘The law of Thomas’ or the ‘Thoma Marga’ is the very breath of life of the Thomas Christians. It is the sum total of the thomistic experience of Christ as experienced and lived in the liturgical celebration and day today life of the Mar Thoma Nazranikal. In other words it is the reflection of the very faith experience and expression of the Thomas Christians which is manifested through the liturgical, spiritual theological, disciplinary, social and cultural life in the church and in the world. Thus law of Thomas in its totality is the divine tradition of the apostolic church of St. Thomas and so such it form part of the divine deposit of revelation entrusted to the universal church. Thus this divine patrimony is the real source of theology and catechesis according to the genius of the Thomas Christians.

## **1.2 Catechetical approaches of ‘Thomma Margam’**

The analysis of the Thomma Marga, we have done so far bring to our mind certain salient features of an effective catechetical ministry present in the Church of the Thomas Christians. Considering the limitations of this article here we present only the very basic features.

### **1.2.a; Ecclesial Community the subject, object and place of catechesis**

Catechesis is not to be judged by the amount of intellectual information given through various means of instruction rather by the depth of the faith life of a community as their response to the experience of Divine Revelation entrusted to the Church. If Thomas Christians could preserve and transmit the apostolic patrimony they received from the Apostle St. Thomas, to the younger generations that itself is the proof of an effective system of catechesis, and surely it was not the system of instruction based on the dogmas of the Church which appeared to the scene after reformation and gained momentum in the post Tridentine Church.

Living Faith can be preserved nurtured and transmitted only by a self conscious community which lives in interaction with a living tradition who share a common story. From the narratives of the missionaries we get such a fascinating impression of a vibrant faith community and this faith community becomes the locus where the younger generations enjoys the fullness of revelation<sup>33</sup> (GDC.141). Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting this word of God, as the ecclesial community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it<sup>34</sup> (Cfr. GDC. 105, (CC. 74 – 95). The faith community is in herself a living catechesis<sup>35</sup>(GDC. 141).

### **1.2. b. Mystagogical Catechesis**

The Uniqueness of the ecclesial life of the ‘Thomma Margam’ really springs from their sacred Liturgy. It is in the Liturgy where the messianic

mystery is unveiled proclaimed and celebrated, the worshipping community experiences the salvific mysteries. The famous principle ‘Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi’ explicitly states the importance of Liturgy as the font of catechesis. One is brought to the salvific mysteries of Christ in through and by the worshipping community. Church being the worshipping community this mystery is fully accomplished in the liturgical assembly. In the Thomma Marga the Eucharist is the ‘Holy, life giving and divine mystery of Christ’s, passion death, burial and resurrection.’<sup>36</sup> Through the Eucharist, Liturgical seasons, Divine office and sacraments all the mysteries of Christian faith are presented to the faithful for experiencing the depth of these mysteries. This was attained by leading the faithful to the full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations through the long homilies preached by their priests during the ministry of the word which were typical examples of mystagogical catechesis.

The life and spirituality of the Thomma Marga was deeply rooted in the liturgical year. Liturgical year provides a deeper knowledge of the whole content of divine revelation and rich and lively experience of faith through the celebration of the mysteries of Christ and the Church in accordance with the basic rhythm of the various seasons. According to the teaching of Sacrosanctum Concilium and Catechesi Tradendae<sup>37</sup> (SC 105, CT – 48), this is an effective means employed by the Church to complete the formation of the faithful.

### **1.2.C, Mission Oriented Formation**

“If catechesis is done well, Christians will be eager to bear witness to their faith, to hand it on to their children, to make it known to others and to serve the human in every way” (CT- 24) From the historical analysis of the Thoma Margam we are convinced of the missionary consciousness of the

Thomas Christians. This is enough to conclude that the catechesis of the Thoma Margam was an effective mission oriented catechesis.

## **2. Period of Occidental influences**

As a consequence of the Portuguese colonization in India in the early sixteenth century, The Thomas Christians were greatly influenced by the European missionaries. Missionaries in general failed to recognize the Thomma Margam. So they desired to conform them to the way of life of the Latin Church. Through the well known pseudo – synod of Diamper in 1599 the long standing relations with the East Syrian Church were terminated and The Thomas Christians were gradually brought under the Latin ‘Padroado’ jurisdiction This ‘Padroado’ influence led to the gradual disappearance of the identity of the ‘Thomma Margam’

### **2.1. Catechism centered dogmatic approach**

Under the influences of the western missionaries the age old indigenous catechetical system in line with the Catechumenal and mystegogical catechesis of the post apostolic church gradually disappeared and catechism centered majisterial or dogmatic approach began to gain importance. In the synod of Diamper (1599) this movement to re-organize the catechetical system in accordance with post – Tridentine attitudes gained official recognition. The subsequent history of Syro – Malabar Catechesis is one of Latinization. Along with this the formation of the Syro – Malabar Clergy also fell into the hands of the Latin Missionaries. As a result of this

distorted formation of both clergy and laity, even after the restoration of the Syro Malabar Hierachy in 1923 with indigenou bishops, the process of formation remained along the lines of the western models. The formation of CBCI in 1944, influence of the Kerygmatic renewal and the lectures of J.Hoffinger S.J. all influenced and motivated the Syro Malabar Church to go forward with the catechetical approaches of the Latin Church. The Syro Malabar Bishops could not find any defect in this because by this time the Syro Malabar clergy were fully conformed to the Latin tradition due to the priestly formation by the missionaries. This was the catechetical situation in the Syro Malabar Church at the dawn of the second Vatican Council.

## **2.2 Establishment of St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary and growth of Ecclesial Awareness**

As a consequence of the restoration program initiated by the Oriental Congregation, Holy see realized that the formation of the clergy according to the Oriental, spiritual and Liturgical traditions of the Syro Malabar Church is a basic necessity for any renewal in this ancient church. As a result of this realization the St. Thomas apostolic seminary was established at Kottayam on 3 July 1962 for formation of the clergy. In 1973 the seminary was affiliated to the Pontifical Oriental Institute of Rome and became the Paurastya Vidyapitam. The establishment of the seminary and Vidyapitam caused greater awareness according to the teachings of Vatican II in the Oriental Churches of Kerala. The Vidyapitam facilitated deep theological studies on the Oriental, Liturgical, Ecclesiological traditions of the St. Thomas Christians. It is quiet natural that this illuminated the Catechetical milieu of the Syro – Malabar Church.

### **3. Vatican II and Catechetical Renaissances**

The second Vatican Council is hailed by everyone as an epoch – making event in the history of the Church. Even though the council produced any documents on catechesis, the influence of Vatican II on catechesis was decisive. It has stimulated a profound renewal in the field of catechesis by announcing the end of a mere intellectual approach to faith. Secondly it opened the way for a better understanding of the mystery of the church by the re discovery of the nature of the Church as the communion of Churches. This major achievement of the council is very fundamental from an oriental catechetical point of view.

#### **3.1 The concept of Revelation and faith and the catechetical consequences**

Based on “Dei Filius” of Vatican I faith is understood to be the submission of the intellect and will to revealed truths. According to this understanding catechesis was the task of memorizing dry and abstract theological formulae in the form of dogmas and definitions.

The dogmatic constitution of Vatican II ‘Dei Verbum’ offers a clear and most appropriate vision on faith. “By faith man freely commits his entire self to God making the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals and willingly ascending to the revelation given by him” (DV. 5) God invites man to a life of faith which is a life of communion with him. It is a lifelong covenant with God which consists not only the acceptance of divine truth of revelation, but more than that it is also a commitment and personal

surrender to god in love. Thus faith can be articulated as an inter – personal relationship developed gradually through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, the fullness of revelation. This relationship implies a positive response from the believer by surrendering one’s whole being with a deep love and commitment. Jesus Christ, the ‘Word of God’ the fullness of revelation exists objectively and really in the Catholic Church to which the savior has entrusted the mysteries given to him by the father. Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting this ‘Word of God’ as the ecclesial community has received, understands, celebrates, lives and communicates it <sup>38</sup> (Cfr. GDC 105, CCC 74 – 95)

One can experience the fullness of this revelation only by entering into the Church community through Baptism and participating in the sacramental life of the Church. In other words the faith experience and the life of faith of an individual faithful resulting from that, ecclesial experience should be definitely ecclesial. Since universal church is the communion of individual churches, this ecclesial faith experience can be acquired only from the apostolic tradition of a particular individual church which is part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage of the universal Church.<sup>39</sup> (OE – 1). The insistence of the Holy Father John Paul II that Catechesis should be capable of announcing the content of revelation in its entirety<sup>40</sup> (CT – 58) must be understood in the light of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. The divine tradition which is part of the single sacred deposit of the word of God’ (DV. 10), entrusted to the Church, is really existing in the ecclesial faith traditions of the individual churches. There for in determining the content of catechesis, the living ecclesial faith traditions have an undeniable significance.

Vatican II urges the faithful of the eastern Churches to preserve their own legitimate ecclesial traditions and way of life which includes their liturgy, spirituality, theology and discipline and to observe all the prescriptions with greatest fidelity. Council also demands a more perfect knowledge and practice of these traditions (OE – 6). All these instructions of the council really points to the need of a catechesis proper to the individual ecclesial traditions. This sincere desire of the universal church to safeguard the traditions of each church ‘sui iuris’ whole and entire by adapting its own way of life to the needs of different time and place (OE -2 ) could be realized only through a catechesis firmly based on that particular ecclesial traditions.<sup>41</sup>

### **3.2. Post Vatican Catechetical Context of the Syro Malabar Church**

Eventhough the catechetical ministry in India, after Vatican II, has developed a lot systematically; the oriental churches in India are forced to preserve the rudiments of religious colonialism, so that they could not develop a catechetical approach proper to the Oriental ecclesial traditions. The Catholic Church in India, which is the communion of three individual churches, could not impart proper convictions regarding the communion ecclesiology of the council; ofcourse there are certain exceptions here and there.

As an after effect of the Vatican II, important decisions affecting catechesis were taken in the CBCI meeting held at Delhi in 1966, which resulted in the establishment of NBCLC at Bangalore. Gradually the catechetical, liturgical and Biblical formation programmes for the clergy, religious and laity were organized by NBCLC at different parts of the

country disregarding the multi – ecclesial context of India. As a consequence most of the religious and lay leaders of the oriental Churches trained here are unable to give a formation congenial to their ecclesial identity. In 1971 NBCLC managed to publish a common catechetical Text Book series named ‘God with us’ and eventually adapted anthropological approach and methodology known as ‘sign method’. Even though the text series gained no impact in Kerala, the ‘sign Method’ found acceptance in certain regions.

In Kerala as a joint venture of the three individual churches P.O.C. was established in 1968 as the regional Pastoral Centre governed by K.C.B.C. This institution having a multi ecclesial Character focused attention on a doctrinal and Biblical formation without any consideration for the ecclesial dimension. In 1970 a common text book series ‘Pithavin Pakkaleck’ and in 1980 a new series called ‘Krishthuvinte Pinnale’ were published for use in Sunday Schools from P.O.C. As the Syro Malabar Catechetical directory confesses, the serious draw back of these texts was that it could not pay sufficient attention to the particular characteristics and traditions of the individual churches.<sup>42</sup>

### **3.3 Mar Joseph Powathil and the beginning of the New Era in Syro Malabar Catechesis**

A meeting of the CBCI was held at Trichy in 1982 from 9<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> of January. The major topic of discussion was the relationship among the catholic churches of India. Mar Joseph Powathil and Cyril Mar Baselius representing Syro Malabar Church and Malankara Church respectively presented papers on the issue. This conference marked the beginning of great awareness on the identity of the individual oriental Churches of India.

Mar Joseph Powathil was a devoted son of the Syro Malabar Church and always in the forefront in the struggle for the restoration of its identity as an individual church. He took keen interest in the study of the ancient patrimony of the St. Thomas Christians and led the faithful to greater awareness of the mystery of the church in accordance with the theological vision of Vatican II.

He did a great deal to promote an ecclesial formation congenial to the identity of St. Thomas Christians. It is his strong conviction that the variety of liturgical traditions of the Church serve to manifest the richness of the mystery of Christ and the divine plan of salvation. Therefore as the primary custodian of the Patrimony of the church he is guided by the principle that the patrimony of all the churches must remain whole and entire and the church should return to those traditions 'if they have fallen away due to the vicissitudes of time or persons'. Keeping this principles as a top priority he took commendable initiatives to give solid liturgical and catechetical formation for the faithful of the Archdiocese, which later became a blue print for renewal process especially in the field of Catechetical and mystagogical formation in the whole of the Syro Malabar Church.<sup>43</sup> Thus he opened up a new era of Ecclesial Catechesis true to the Apostolic heritage of the individual churches of Catholic Communion ever in the history of catholic catechesis.

### **3.4 Synodal Commission for catechesis**

As an after effect of the increased ecclesial awareness among the oriental Catholics especially in the ecclesiastical province of

Changanachery, a catechism series for use in the whole of the Syro Malabar Church was a felt need. In the absence of any positive attempts from the catechetical commission, the diocese under the province of Changanacherry constituted an interdiocesan commission for catechesis in 1989 and published a new series of catechetical texts for use in Sunday Schools, called '*Daivam Nammodukode*'. Though some voices were raised from different corners against this movement, in 1998 the KCBC agreed to handover the catechetical responsibility to the respective commissions of the three individual churches. By this time the Syro Malabar Church was raised to the status of Major Archiepiscopal Church. The Syro Malabar Catechetical commission was re – constituted with Mar George Alencherry as the Chairman. This commission within a short period published the catechetical Directory of the Syro Malabar Church with the title "Call and Response" the first of its kind among the oriental catholic churches. Following this the new catechetical Text Book Series "*Rakshayude Pathayil*" was published which is now used in all the diocese of the Syro Malabar Church.

### **3.5 Ecclesial Faith Pilgrimage Approach**

When the post Vatican documents define catechesis, the emphasis is not on imparting a theoretical knowledge of the dogmas but on the life of faith. From an oriental point of view this life of faith manifests itself as a progressive 'deification' of the faithful by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Full participation in the divine nature through communion with the mystery of the Holy Trinity is the final goal of this faith journey (OL.6). Hence catechesis can be defined as that form of ecclesial action which accelerates this process of deification in both church and its members. This special goal

of catechesis differentiates the catechetical Pedagogy from all other methods of secular education. Considering this goal along with the distinctive nature and content of the Syro Malabar catechesis we may feel the need of an appropriate pedagogical approach and method for an effective catechesis. The Ecclesial faith pilgrimage approach, introduced by Sandesanilayam, the first diocesan catechetical centre of India is an answer for this felt need. Since there exists at present no other catechetical approaches congenial to the Ecclesial faith traditions of the Syro Malabar Church, this unique approach and method is all the more important.

This approach perceives catechesis as an on going process of growth, a journey undertaken together with all the members of the ecclesial community the goal of which is the communion with the Holy Trinity. During his faith journey the Church incorporates the faithful more and more deeply into the ecclesial way of life.

### **3.6 'Viswasolsavam'**

This is a new scheme and methodology introduced for the intensive catechesis in summer holidays for children, based on the child centered activity oriented and play way methods, keeping the integrity of the content and theology of the Syro Malabar Catechesis. This faith formation program initiated by the Archdiocese of Changanacherry in 2001 has drawn attention of all in the catechetical sphere and lavishly gained approval and praise by all. This catechetical program is firmly rooted on catechetical technology and modern scientific educational approaches and principles. The content of this program is so arranged that it can effect an ecclesial, biblical and Mystagogical faith formation by using a creative catechetical methodology.

The church in Kerala has recognized this novel faith formation concept as one even to be proud of and almost all Eparchies in Kerala have introduced this into their scheme of faith formation with necessary modification to suit the situations available there. ‘Viswasolsavam’ the feast of faith are days of pleasure that are free from the boring routine schedule of insensitive, lifeless and dry atmosphere that is the trade mark of the classroom confined instruction, text based teaching and teacher centered dogmatic catechesis.

## **Conclusion**

I like to conclude this study on the catechesis of the Syro Malabar Church with two proposals. The first one is a proposal regarding the publication of a ‘Catechism of the Syro Malabar Church’. If we have to realize an ecclesial catechesis as envisaged by the Universal Church, we should have the possibility to enter deeply into the divine mysteries which are manifested through the Sacred traditions of this individual Church. In the prologue of the CCC it is made clear that the CCC does not provide the necessary adaptations of doctrinal presentation required by the differences of ecclesial conditions. It is the responsibility of an individual church to present the content of catechesis congenial to the Ecclesial Faith traditions of a particular individual church. Considering this responsibility, it is an imperative need of our church to have a Catechism of the Syro Malabar Church which could serve as the basic reference text for the catechism series that would be formed in future in different situations of ecclesial existence. This could be realized by the Synodal Commission for Catechesis through a very serious research into the ecclesial traditions of this church.

The second proposal concerns the establishment of a catechetical research and training institute for the Syro Malabar Church which is an urgent need of this Church.

As an individual church of the Catholic Communion it is our responsibility to preserve, live and transmit the apostolic patrimony we have received from our Apostle ST. Thomas. The preservation and transmission of this heritage is not possible without an ecclesial formation. Since we are far behind the ideal, in this respect, we should make an earnest attempt to renew our catechetical milieu.

***Foot Notes: -***

1. A.M. Mundadan, History of Christianity in India, TPI Bangalore, 1984, P. 158
2. A.M. Mundadan, Traditions ..... op. cit, p. 157
3. Acts of the Synod of Diamper V, D. 12
4. J. Aerthayil, The Spiritual Heritage ..... P. 133
5. Ibid
6. Acts of the Synod of Diamper VII, D.4 J. Aerthayil, Op. Cit., P. 133
7. P.J. Podippara, Thomas Christians P. 94
8. A. Thazhath, Juridical Sources., P. 60
9. P.J. Podippara, Thomas Christians, P. 94
10. Zacharias Thundianplackal, Laity ..... P. 72
11. Ibid
12. Documenta Indica, Vol. V. 1958, P. 416, mentioned in Mundadan, Traditions P. 158

- 13.Cf. P. Thuruthimattom, The Fasting Discipline of the Syro Malabar Church, unplished dissertation PUL Rome 1965.
- 14.J. Aerthayil. Op. cit., P. 157
- 15.A.M. Mundadan, Traditions P. 179
- 16.ibid p.162
- 17.J. Aerthayil op.cit p. 169
- 18.A. Gouvea, Jornada, fol. 59 v – 60 mentioned in J. Aerthayil, op. cit., p. 170
- 19.Anantha Krishna Ayyar , Anthropology..... p. 56
- 20.F. Day. The Land of Perumals of Cochin, its past and present, Madras 1863, p. 219
- 21.J. Aerthayil, op. cit., p. 204
- 22.A Gouvea, Jornada, fol. 48 Vol. 2, quoted in J. Aerthayil op. cit p. 204
- 23.Ananthakrishna Ayyar, op. cit., p. 243
- 24.ibid. p. 241
- 25.Vincengo Maria, Viaggio Alle India Orientali, Roma, 1672 p. 151 mentioned in Aerthayil, op. cit., p. 205. see also Ananthakrishna Ayyar, op. cit, p. 56
- 26.Ananthakrishna Ayyar, op. cit., p. 70
- 27.P.J. podipara, Thomas Christians pp. 90 -91
- 28.Paulinus of Bertholomeo, Viaggio Alle India Orientali, Rome 1796, p. 108
- 29.Evangelli Nuntiandi 14
- 30.Cf. Mar Abraham Mattom, The Indian Church of the Thomas Christians and their Missionary Enterprisis Before the sixteenth century, OIRSI, India 1984, p. 85

- 31.Thomman Paremmakkal, The Varthamanappusthakam, OCA 190,  
PIOS Roma 1971, pp. 243 – 263
- 32.P.J. Podipara, Four Essays..... P. 63
- 33.Cfr. General Directory for catechesis 41
- 34.Cfr. GDC, 105, CCC 74 – 75
- 35.Cfr. GDC, 141
- 36.Cfr. Syro Malabar ‘Raza’
- 37.Cfr. SC. 105, CT – 48
- 38.Cfr. GDC 105, CCC 74 – 95
- 39.Cfr.OE 1
- 40.Cfr. CT. 58
- 41.Cfr. OE 2, 6
- 42.Cfr. Call and Response 24
- 43.Cfr. Cardinal Telesphore. P. Toppo, Forward to “The Ecclesial  
Mileu, Archbishop Joseph Powathil, Carmel International ,  
Trivandrum 2009.