

## The Eparchy of Kottayam "*Pro Gente Suddistica*"



### a) The Ethnic Community of the Southists

Any discussion about the Southists revolves around the question, who is a Southist (Knanaya)? The Knanaya is one who is born of Knanaya parents (both the father and the mother). It has been so all through the past sixteen and a half centuries. Thus the Knanaya ethnic community among the St. Thomas Christians was formed and has continued in existence through a system of strict endogamy (Knanaya man marrying Knanaya woman).

If a Knanaya marries a non-Knanaya, the non-Knanaya spouse and the children to be born of that marriage will not become members of the Knanaya Community. However, in such cases there is no social ostracism. The family remains in social communication with the relatives and friends.

As a whole, there is peaceful co-existence among the people of Kerala without discrimination of castes, creeds or communities. Of course, there may be some prejudices and rivalries among the people. This is also true in the relations between the Northists and the Southists.

### b) The Ecclesiastical Unit "*ProGenteSuddistica*'

The ethnic community of the Southists had their own churches and priests distinct from those of the Northists under the hierarchical rule by the East Syrian bishops first and then by the Latin bishops. Since 1889, the Southists' parishes were coordinated under the administrative control of a Southist Vicar General. In 1911 the Vicariate Apostolic of Kottayam, "*Pro Genre Suddistica*" was instituted including in it all the parishes of the Southists. 1923 Kottayam was raised to a Diocese (Eparchy).

This hierarchical unit of the Eparchy of Kottayam therefore, established as a gradual growth from the ecclesiastical unit of the proper parishes and proper pastors of the ethnic community of the Southists right from its beginning in the fourth century. The Southists' ethnicity has been ecclesially recognized and approved with its own ecclesiastical unit of the proper parishes and proper pastors during the past sixteen and a half centuries. The 1911 Pontifical Act of establishing a Vicariate Apostolic for this ethnic community was a further confirmation of its ecclesial recognition by the Holy See with an up-gradation of its ecclesiastical unit. The interpretation given by anyone that by the Pontifical Act of 1911, "the Knanaite ethnicity was rather tolerated than approved, given the particular historical circumstances" is utterly unhistorical. The historical circumstances of that time may have induced the Holy See for the Pontifical act, but it was not a mere toleration or even the first approval of the

Knanaya ethnicity. It was in fact a confirmation of the ecclesial recognition of the Knanaya ethnicity with an up-gradation of its ecclesiastical unit.

#### The Jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical unit of the Southists:

The bishop and the parish priests of the ethnic community of the Southists have personal jurisdiction now only over the Southists within the recognized territory which is co-extensive with the proper territory of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church.

In the cases of a Southist marrying a non-Southist, the non-Southist spouse and the children born of such marriage cannot become members of the Southists' ethnic community. They are not Southists, and therefore, the bishop and the parish priests of the Eparchy "*Pro Gente Suddistica*" cannot exercise jurisdiction over them. The Southist spouse, of course, could continue under the jurisdiction of the Eparchy "*Pro Gente Suddistica*". However, in order to keep the family unity with his/her non-Southist spouse and children in their ecclesial life as well, a practical pastoral accommodation is made through an immemorial practice; i.e. the Southist spouse of such marriage enrolls himself/herself in a non-Southist parish of the place together with the non-Southist spouse. This is done with permissions granted by the pastors concerned, both *a quo* and *ad quem*. This is a practical pastoral accommodation. There is no ecclesial exclusion, expulsion or ostracism involved in this procedure as some people wrongly interpret it.

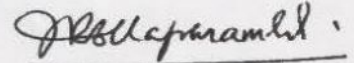
#### c) *Evangelizatio Gentium*, and the Eparchy of Kottayam "*Pro Gente Suddistica*"

How is it done? By proclaiming Jesus Christ by Christian living and preaching. What is the result expected? Conversion of mind and conversion to the Catholic Church. What is now usually achieved? The result of the first type, not of the second. What is required for the Church to be missionary as per its very nature? Is the second type result absolutely necessary? If so, which all Churches do actually fulfill the fundamental mission of being a missionary Church? The Church in Europe? Certainly larger numbers are exiting from, than coming into, the European Church, which is now confronting a neo-paganism. The Church in India? Several states have Anti-conversion Act. Except in some tribal belts, there are no conversions elsewhere. What about the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala? What about the *sui juris* Churches? CCEO prescribes a type of "Blood Descent" as the usual norm for enrollment of persons below fourteen years of age into the *sui juris* Churches. How many do exercise the option for those above fourteen years of age? How many non -Christians do become members of any *sui juris* Church? These are, of course, consideration of the *de facto* situation. One might argue that the possibility for non-Christians to become Christians is kept open in all the Churches. The answer is, please do not confuse the concrete with the abstract.

The Eparchy of Kottayam is also doing the *Evangelizatio Gentium* by proclaiming Jesus Christ by Christian living and preaching as any other Church does it. With

regard to the missionary vocations, the eparchy of Kottayam is proportionately in the forefront of all the Syro-Malabar Eparchies with the largest percentage of the total numbers of the faithful. Besides, in pursuance of the exhortation of the Vatican Council, the Eparchy of Kottayam has instituted the missionary Society of St. Pius X to save all the possible priestly vocations for the service of the Universal Church. The members of this Society are doing missionary service in several missions in India and abroad.

If any one asks, what if a non-Christian wants to become a Christian as the result of the *Evangelizatio Gentium* by the Eparchy of Kottayam? The answer is, there is all the possibility for it, keeping with the nature of this Eparchy "*Pro Gente Sudistica*". As the Southist community has done always since the fourth century, such a non-Christian will be helped to join a non-Southist Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara or Latin parish of the place according to the preference of the convert. Such parishes can in no way deny the petition of such converts. Thus the possibility of a non-Christian becoming a Christian through the *Evangelizatio Gentium* exercised by the Eparchy of Kottayam is kept open.



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