



## Joint Letter of Syro-Malabar Vicars Apostolic in 1911

Trichur, 1 March 1911

[Before His Holiness Pope Pius X] Most Holy Father,

We the undersigned, by the grace of God and the favour of the Apostolic See vicars apostolic for the Syro-Malabar Christians dwelling in East Indies on the Malabar Coast — on this most pleasing occasion, and it may be said, worthy of perpetual memory, as Your Holiness is not disdaining to honour two of us at your presence — first of all express our gratitude for this so great a privilege granted to us.

Nor do we consider it out of place to refer to Your Holiness on this occasion that the entire Catholic and Syro-Malabar Christendom conserves an indelible and grateful memory of His Holiness Leo XIII, Pontiff of immortal memory, Predecessor of Your Holiness in this Office, who admitting their requests, namely, that they be granted bishops of their own rite and nation, in 1896 kindly established three Vicariates, namely Trichur, Ernakulam and Changanacherry under so many vicars apostolic of Syro-Malabar rite.

Afterwards, although we are here, in imitation of Apostle St Paul who with the intention that his labours might not be left to chance or in vain, visited St Peter, the prince of the apostles in Jerusalem, and in fulfilment likewise of the obligation that bishops and vicars apostolic should at certain times visit the Holy See and disclose to it the state of their Church, we also approach the Cathedra of St Peter, the centre of the Church, personally and through this petition. We consider it opportune, indeed necessary, after exposing some necessary matters with a report, to inform the Holy See about the present status of our Church, in order to take counsel for its greater good; hence we submit, as is appropriate, with the greatest reverence and submission, the following to the high and benevolent consideration of Your Holiness.

Among the Syro-Malabar faithful, as is known to the Holy See, there exist two communities or peoples, tracing their origins back to two different races; on account of this they are different and separate from each other, with a distinctive name proper to each party, namely Northist and Southist. These, even though they are otherwise good Christians, yet in social and domestic life as well as in customs they differ much between them and are not well disposed to each other. On account of this, they have lived for fifteen centuries without any bond of consanguinity or affinity, nor can they be induced to this not for reason of castes, but because they belong to races or communities different one from the other.

The same vicar apostolic, of Southist origin, governs both these races, present in the vicariate apostolic of Changanacherry; within its boundaries alone both of them inhabit intermingled. In the other two vicariates apostolic of Trichur and Ernakulam, except for the three Southist parishes entrusted to the vicariate of Ernakulam, their vicars apostolic govern only the single people of the Northists; these vicars apostolic being of the same race as their subjects, and consequently Northists. Hence in these vicariates between the governing and the governed

good harmony and concord exist. On account of this they are making progress in every respect, with the collaboration and assistance of the people. For, we absolutely need the necessary helping hand of the people, as we are really under pressure with regard to money, since we do not have any financial subsidy from the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, nor from the Propagation of Lyons in France, nor from any other charitable society in Europe.

In the vicariate of Changanacherry, on the other hand, each party is embittered on account of discrepancy and distinction, since it is governed in a combined manner with the other by one and the same bishop. Hence not only do these two parties not cooperate nor help each other, but also on occasion they readily cause difficulty upon difficulty for the bishops with regard to governance and trouble for the Holy See, etc. For example, the Northists — especially stirred up at present by some agitators, as regularly happens from time to time — presuming that their present bishop desires only the good of the community of the Southists and interpreting his acts and admonitions in a manner completely contrary to the facts, are impeding the implementation of his right decisions and creating much agitation, thus causing damage to the Church and indignity to religion and send in many petitions for the realization of their desires, etc.

In these circumstances, to govern such communities naturally inclined to different or rather to opposite directions in the same parish church or in one and the same vicariate apostolic, it is a most difficult thing for the bishops and is harmful to both parties. This is very clearly proven by the latest measures of both the prelates of the archdiocese of Verapoly and the Most Rev. Charles Lavigne SJ, formerly vicar apostolic for both parties in the vicariate of Kottayam, who after various attempts, forced by the circumstances, finally divided the parishes containing both races and separated the people from each other. Indeed, Bishop Lavigne also, with an indult of the Holy See, arranged things in such a way that each race, though under himself, be governed separately under a different vicar general of its own as separate communities. That this would be for the greater good of both parties is evident from the fact that after the aforementioned separations not only has peace been established among them but also both groups have endeavoured to enrich and embellish their parish churches and the community by their efforts.

Hence the Southists, too, though now they are under a Southist vicar apostolic, have several times petitioned from the Holy See and from the most illustrious Apostolic Delegate in the East Indies, that the present vicar apostolic of Changanacherry or any other be kindly assigned to them in an exclusive manner.

From the aforementioned facts, it is evident that as long as this vicariate apostolic of Changanacherry comprises both communities, there will be no progress in it, nor will the bishop, be he a Southist or a Northist, be at peace, but rather he will be in such a position that he must always bear a heavy cross, as we are taught by the experience of fifteen years.

Since the state of the Syro-Malabar Church or rather that of the vicariate of Changanacherry is in such a deplorable condition, in order to promote a change for the better in its status, we, the

three vicars apostolic, belonging to both peoples and very well acquainted with the nature, character and customs of our subjects, desiring their greater good and progress in temporal and above all spiritual aspects, after long deliberation and repeated consultations between us, in order to exterminate the disturbances and quarrels, to eradicate their causes and to recompose the divisions, have identified three (two) means which alone are suitable solutions. These are:

1. After re-establishing the recently suppressed vicariate of Kottayam, appoint Lord Mathew Makil, the present vicar apostolic of Changanacherry as bishop for the community of Southists alone with the title of the vicar apostolic of Kottayam, which place being their centre and the metropolis of the Jacobite Syrians, and appoint another bishop from among the Northists in the vicariate of Changanacherry for them alone, so that each one can govern his people with peace and prosperity. This is more fitting and has been longed for and petitioned by both parties.
2. Or decide in such a way that the vicar apostolic of Changanacherry, whether a Southist or a Northist, residing there and governing the Northists, should always have a coadjutor bishop from the other community who, residing in Kottayam, should govern the entire Southist people, but with the right of succession to the office of the vicar apostolic of Changanacherry. In this way each community can be governed by a bishop of its own, as previously the Holy See stipulated that the archbishop of Verapoly should have a coadjutor bishop, who would independently govern the Suriani Church, while the former would govern the Latin Church.
3. Or decide that in the vicariate of Changanacherry there should always also be a coadjutor bishop from the group other than that of the vicar apostolic with the right of succession in the office of the vicar apostolic and who governs his respective people,

Therefore, after exposing all these matters, what are we now earnestly requesting is that Your Holiness, desiring the good and wellbeing of the Syro-Malabar Church at the maximum level, from these three remedies, which we humbly and with confidence unanimously present for its greater good and progress in these few lines, benevolently accepting preferably the first one as the most efficacious of all for radically eradicating all kinds of discords from their midst, be deigned to satisfy the sons of the Syro-Malabar Church and' thus restore tranquillity forever in the vicariate of Changanacherry, agitated for a long time by waves of quarrels.

Lastly having prostrated to the kiss of Your feet, earnestly requesting Your apostolic blessing for us and for our flocks, of Your Holiness,

Malabar, 1 March 1911,

John Menacherry, Bishop of Parai and Vicar Apostolic of Trichur,

Mathew Makil, Bishop of Tralli and Vicar Apostolic of Changanacherry,

Aloysius Pareparambil, Bishop of Tiana and Vicar Apostolic of Ernakulam