

Formation of the Trivandrum Diocese

^[1]Dr.Alex Mathew

^[1] Bishop Abraham Memorial College., Thuruthicad., Pathanamthitta District., Kerala..

Abstract:- Kerala, called “The Cradle of Christianity in India” has always had the credit of having the largest number of Christians in India. Christian society existed from the commencement of the Christian era in India, especially in Kerala. Few historians of the 13th century opine that pope Innocent III deputed some Franciscans and Dominicans for the propagation of the Christian faith at Quilon, Mampally-near Anjengo and Veliathura – near the port. As a result of their evangelization a Diocese in Quilon was established in 1329 by Pope John XXII.

Keywords: Trivandrum Diocese, Christianity, Quilon, Mampally, Anjengo, Veliathura

As early as 1919, Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger of Quilon recommended for the formation of the Trivandrum Diocese. His recommendation materialised only after his retirement, to the Carmel Hill Monastery. To be precise, the present areas of the Trivandrum Diocese was formed by transferring the territorial jurisdiction of the areas which belonged to the two oldest Diocese earlier-Cochin and Quilon.

The Trivandrum Diocese was created by the bull of the Pope Pius I, ‘In Ora Malabarica’ dated July 1, 1937. Trivandrum, the capital of the former Travancore Cochin State and the present Kerala State was made the capital of the Diocese. The area of the Diocese at the time of its formation was about 2000 square kilometres. The Diocese began to function on 5th December 1937 with a Catholic population of 1,10,412. By separating the four taluks of Chirayinkil, Nedumangad, Trivandrum and Neyyattinkara from the Quilon Diocese, the new Trivandrum Diocese was established in 1937.

Since the Diocese was a newly creation, there were many problems to build the Bishop’s House. Finally Vellayambalam was preferred to erect the buildings of the Diocese, though the Cathedral church was about 2km away from Vellayambalam. After a decade this problem was absolutely over after having completed the needed buildings.

In 1952, the Diocese was temporarily enlarged with the addition of the small strip of coastal areas from Pallithura to Erayumanthura. This was once under the Trivandrum Portuguese Mission of the Padroado Diocese of Cochin. This transformation came into existence as a result of the abolition of Padroado. The integration of these territories with the Trivandrum Diocese was confirmed on 20th May 1955. Thus at present the total areas of the Diocese are the four taluks of Chirayinkil, Nedumangad, Trivandrum and Neyyattinkara in the Trivandrum District with eight coastal villages of Neerody, Marthandamthurai, Vallavilai, Eraviputhenthurai, Chinnathurai, Thoothoor, Poothurai and Erayumanthurai,

Chinnathurai, Thoothoor, Poothurai and Erayumanthurai in the Kanyakumari District of Tamilnadu. The total area of the Diocese is 2189 square kilometers. This Diocese became one of the biggest Diocese in the whole of India as regards the Catholic population.

The Trivandrum Diocese is bound in the north by Quilon Diocese, in the south by Kottar Diocese, in the east by the Ghats and the Palayamkottai Diocese and in the west by the Arabian Sea. St. Theresa of Child Jesus was considered the patron of the Diocese. The Bishop’s House is situated at Vellayambalam, about 3 kilometres north of the Trivandrum city. Inside the Bishop’s House Compound, there is a separate building for School administration and another block for the Trivandrum Social Service Society.

Vincent V.Dereere, the former Bishop of Quilon was transferred to the new Diocese of Trivandrum. He belonged to the Carmelite Missionaries of Belgium. The untiring efforts taken by him solved many of the problems at the initial stage. In this day today life he set an example as a real follower of Christ. As a result of his leadership and also of the Belgium Missionaries, propagation work gained momentum which resulted in the establishment of mission centres at various places. On 24th October 1966, he was relieved from his office as Bishop.

Peter Bernard Pereira acted the Auxilliary Bishop since 1955 under Bishop Dereere. He was eventually made coadjutor cum jure successions of Trivandrum on 4th July 1961. After the relieving of Bishop Vincent V.Dereere, he succeeded him as Bishop. Thus the Diocese of Trivandrum passed on to the hands of the native clergy of the Diocese.

Thanks to his indefatigable efforts, Missionary work and social activities were accelerated and the Diocese for the formation and functioning of the Trivandrum Social Service Society, an organization formed with a view to uplifting the economic conditions of the weaker sections of the society.

The steps taken by him brought the required property for the Diocese. He worked ardently for the progress of the Diocese. A large number of churches built in the mission areas and the number of religious orders introduced into the Diocese speak for his spiritual zeal. In the educational field he was instrumental in starting educational institutions. He was assiduous in building houses for the welfare of the poor. Through other means also, his helping hand reached the poor. The members of St.Vincent De Paul Society are grateful to him for the help and encouragement he gave for establishing its conferences throughout the Diocese. He exhorted the parish priests to start conferences of St.Vincent De.Paul society. The Diocesan social service attained a new shape during his time.

After the demise of Bishop Peter Bernard Pereira on 13th June 1978, Msgr.Maark Netto, the Vicar Capitular acted in-charge of Bishop. The Episcopal ordination of Bishop A.B.Jacob took place on 7th October 1979 in the Chandrasekharan Nair Stadium situated opposite to St.Joseph's Cathedral Palayam in Trivandrum. A vast concourse of the people off the Diocese attended. The call for priestly and religious vocations was much less during his reign compared with other areas of Kerala.

REFERENCES:

- Achilles Meersman., Franciscans in India, 1921-1941, Karachi, 1943.
- Antony E.P., Origin and Growth of Latin Catholics of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1981.
- Bernard.S.J., A Brief History of St.Thomas Christians, Trichnopoly,1924.
- Duncan B.Forester., Caste and Christianity, London,1980.
- Ferroli.D., tHe Jesuits in Malabar 11 Vols., Bangalore,1939.