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CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA: A HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ITS DEVELOPMENT AND INFLUENCE

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CHRZEŚCIJAŃSTWO W INDIACH: ANALIZA HISTORYCZNA I TEOLOGICZNA JEGO ROZWOJU I WPŁYWU

Streszczenie

Chrześcijaństwo, jako jedna z głównych religii świata, odegrało kluczową rolę w kształtowaniu religijnego i kulturowego krajobrazu Indii. Sercem wiary chrześcijańskiej jest osoba Jezusa Chrystusa, prawdziwego Boga i prawdziwego człowieka, którego wcielenie jest nierozzerwalnie związane z Jego Tajemnicą Paschalną: Jego cierpieniem, śmiercią i zmartwychwstaniem dla zbawienia ludzkości (*Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, 461). Kościół, jako Oblubienica Baranka (Ap 29, 9), kontynuuje misję Chrystusa, niosąc światu Jego przesłanie odkupienia. Obecność chrześcijaństwa w Indiach sięga I wieku n.e. i jest tradycyjnie przypisywana św. Tomaszowi Apostołowi, który jest uważany za czołowego założyciela indyjskiego chrześcijaństwa. Jego misyjna podróż na wybrzeże Malabar doprowadziła do powstania najwcześniejszych wspólnot chrześcijańskich, które zachowały wyjątkową tożsamość w szerszej religijnej i kulturowej strukturze Indii (Mundadan, 1989). Na przestrzeni wieków chrześcijaństwo w Indiach ewoluowało poprzez

spotkania z lokalnymi tradycjami, wpływami kolonialnymi i rdzennymi adaptacjami. Wiara stawiała czoła wyzwaniom, ale także znacząco przyczyniała się do edukacji, reform społecznych i dialogu międzyreligijnego. Niniejszy artykuł bada historyczny rozwój chrześcijaństwa w Indiach, perspektywy teologiczne i jego wpływ społeczno-kulturowy. Korzystając z analizy historycznej i teologicznej, bada ewolucję chrześcijaństwa w Indiach od jego apostoelskich początków do czasów współczesnych, biorąc pod uwagę jego interakcje z indyjskim społeczeństwem, kulturą i polityką. Ponadto badanie to podkreśla rolę Kościoła w inkulturacji i misji, zapewniając, że Ewangelia nadal jest siłą transformacyjną w indyjskim społeczeństwie.

Słowa kluczowe: chrześcijaństwo, Indie, teologia, misjonarz, kolonializm, inkulturacja, osoba, wiara.

Abstract

Christianity, as one of the world's major religions, has played a crucial role in shaping India's religious and cultural landscape. At the heart of Christian faith is the person of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, whose incarnation is intrinsically linked to His Paschal Mystery: His suffering, death, and resurrection for the salvation of humanity (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 461). The Church, as the Bride of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9), continues Christ's mission, bringing His message of redemption to the world. The presence of Christianity in India dates back to the 1st century AD and is traditionally attributed to St. Thomas the Apostle, who is regarded as a leading founder of Indian Christianity. His missionary journey to the Malabar Coast led to the establishment of the earliest Christian communities, which maintained a unique identity within the broader religious and cultural fabric of India. Over the centuries, Christianity in India has evolved through encounters with local traditions, colonial influences, and indigenous adaptations. The faith has faced challenges but has also contributed significantly to education, social reforms, and interreligious dialogue. This article examines the historical development of Christianity in India, theological perspectives, and its socio-cultural impact. Using historical and theological analysis, it explores the evolution of Christianity in India from its apostolic origins to contemporary times, considering its interactions with Indian society, culture, and politics. Furthermore, this study highlights the role of the Church in inculturation and mission, ensuring that the Gospel continues to be a transformative force in Indian society.

Keywords: Christianity, India, theology, missionary, colonialism, inculturation, person, faith.

Christianity, a faith centered on Jesus Christ, who is professed as both true God and true man, entered India through the apostolic mission of St. Thomas. The Incarnation of Christ is pivotal to Christian theology, as it marks the divine intervention in human history (John 1:14). His mission, culminating in the Paschal Mystery his suffering, death, and resurrection remains the foundation of Christian salvation and evangelization. St. Thomas's journey to India, as recorded in ecclesiastical traditions, signifies the early Christian commitment to spreading the Gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:19–20).

The introduction of Christianity to India is traditionally attributed to St. Thomas the Apostle in 52 AD. According to early Christian sources, such as the Acts of Thomas, he traveled to the Malabar Coast (modern-day Kerala), where he preached the Gospel and established Christian communities. These early Christians, later known as the Thomas Christians, maintained a unique identity influenced by Syriac traditions and Indian culture. Despite challenges from socio-religious structures, Christianity persisted and adapted to Indian society, demonstrating the Church's missionary nature.

The expansion of Christianity in India was later influenced by European colonial missions, leading to the introduction of Roman Catholicism by the Portuguese in the 16th century and Protestant Christianity under British rule in the 18th and 19th centuries¹. While missionary activity contributed to education, healthcare, and social reforms, it also sparked resistance from Hindu and Muslim communities². Theological inculturation played a crucial role in the survival of Christianity, as Indian theologians sought ways to harmonize Christian doctrine with local philosophies³.

This article examines the historical and theological development of Christianity in India, exploring its origins, colonial encounters, theological responses to Indian culture, and contemporary challenges. Through an interdisciplinary approach, it seeks to analyze the impact of Christianity on Indian society and its evolving role within a pluralistic religious context.

¹ R.E. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India. From Beginnings to the Present*, Oxford 2008.

² P. Chatterjee, *The Present History of West Bengal. Essays in Political Criticism*, New Delhi 1998.

³ M. Amaladoss, *Beyond Inculturation. Can the Many be One?*, Vidyajyoti Education & Welfare Society/ISPCK 1998.

THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

The beginning of Christianity in India is here divided and discussed according to three major epochs: The Ancient Era, the Medieval Era, and the Contemporary Era.

a. The Ancient Era of Christianity in India.

The early Christian presence in India remains an ongoing debate among scholars and researchers. However, according to tradition, Christianity was introduced to India by the Apostle Thomas, one of Jesus's twelve apostles, in 52 AD. This tradition is based on the apocryphal Acts of Thomas, which describe Thomas's journey to India and his missionary activities there. Several lines of evidence support the historicity of Thomas' mission to India. The tradition of Thomas' mission has been documented in various ancient texts, including the "Acts of Thomas," a 3rd-century text that describes his missionary work in India. The legend has also been corroborated by archaeological findings, including the discovery of ancient Christian artifacts and inscriptions in Kerala⁴. In 1955, at the occasion of St. Thomas Day celebrations in New Delhi, Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India, noted: "St. Thomas came to India when many of the countries of Europe had not yet become Christian, and so those Indians who trace their Christianity to him have a longer history and a higher ancestry than that of Christians of many of the European countries"⁵. It is said that Christianity in India is as old as Christianity itself. The Christian message is claimed to have been brought to India by St. Thomas one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. There is no historical evidence for this claim because of the lack of documents from the first few centuries. The earliest record for this tradition available is only from the third century onwards. But they are also not direct or detailed record but just a passing reference while writing other things. Apart from the scant documents, the Tradition is also supported by oral tradition prevalent among the field of activity of St. Thomas in India, especially the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala. This tradition is not only held by the Christians but also even among their non-Christian neighbours⁶.

The Acts of Thomas contains details about Indian geography, culture, and society that suggest a genuine familiarity with the region. Secondly, archaeological discoveries in southern India have uncovered evidence of early Christian communities, including inscriptions and architectural reserves. Finally, the early Christian writer Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-340 AD) mentions Thomas' mission

⁴ G. Menachery, *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, Vol. 1. Thrissur: St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, 2005, p. 234.

⁵ A. Jayakumar, *History of Christianity in India. Major Themes*, Kolkata 2013 p. 5.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 6.

to India in his Ecclesiastical History. Upon his arrival, Thomas healed the sick and demon-possessed, converted people from various castes, and finally died at the hands of hostile Brahmins in AD. 72. According to the second-century Acts of Thomas, he encountered an Indian official named Abban in Jerusalem, who, upon invitation, came to India to erect a palace for King Gundaphorus. Thomas agreed to go with Abban, and the king eventually embraced the faith and expressed his belief in Christianity. Till this time, Indian Christians still make pilgrimages to shrines dedicated to Thomas in remembrance of him. Interestingly, as an act of penance on Good Friday, Catholic nuns carry wooden crosses nearly 2,000 feet up a hill in Malayattoor, Kerala, where Thomas is believed to have spent many days of his life in prayer and contemplation. More so, the traditional burial site atop St. Thomas Mount in Madras has been venerated for at least 1500 years. Palm-leaf, copperplate, and stone inscriptions all attest to a living church in India dating to the earliest centuries of the Christian era. At present, at least six communities in India are believed to have a link with Thomas. They are the Orthodox Syrian Church, the Independent Syrian Church of Malabar, the Mar Thomas Church, the Malankara Catholic Church, the Church of the East, and the St. Thomas Evangelical Church⁷.

Consequently, the group of Christians known as “Thomas Christians” established themselves in the southwestern Indian state of Kerala. They developed a unique cultural and liturgical identity, resulting in a blend of Indian and Christian traditions. The Thomas Christians were also skilled in trade and commerce, and they played major roles in facilitating the Indian Ocean trade network. Although, they were small in number, they had a significant impact on Indian society and culture. They introduced new technologies, such as the use of iron tools and the construction of churches, and they helped to spread Christianity throughout southern India. These Christians maintained close ties with the Church of the East, also known as the Nestorian Church, which was based in Persia (the present-day Iran). This connection helped to shape the liturgical and theological traditions of the Thomas Christians. Around the 4th century AD, the Thomas Christians were reinforced and reignited by the arrival of Christian refugees from Persia, who were fleeing persecution at that time by the Sassanian Empire. These refugees brought with them new liturgical practices and theological ideas, which helped to further shape the identity of the Thomas Christians⁸.

Alternatively, some scholars argue that Christianity was brought to India by merchants, not by St. Thomas. These merchants, who were East Syrian traders from the Persian Gulf area, arrived in India through the Greco-Bactrian-Persian

⁷ Ibidem; S. Gertz et al., Christianity Today International/Christian History & Biography magazine, Issue 87, p. 5

⁸ J.P.M. van der Ploeg, *The Christians of St. Thomas in South India*, Bangalore 1983.

bridge, a network of trade routes that connected the Mediterranean region to India. According to this theory, the East Syrian traders brought Christianity to India through their trade interactions with the local population. This theory is supported by historical records of trade between the Persian Gulf region and India during the 1st century CE. For example, the Roman historian Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) mentions the existence of a trade route between the Persian Gulf and India. Similarly, the Greek geographer Strabo (63 BCE–24 CE) describes the trade interactions between the Persian Gulf region and India. To this end, Pliny the Elder, in 77 CE, called India “the sink of the world’s gold”⁹.

b. The Medieval Era of Christianity in India

The arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century under Vasco de Gama marked a significant turning point in the history of Christianity in India. He established the first trading posts between these two nations¹⁰. More so, the Portuguese established their colonial rule in India, particularly in the southwestern state of Kerala, where the influence of the Thomas Christians was felt. In 1599, the Portuguese Archbishop of Goa, Aleixo de Menezes, convened the Synod of Diamper, which aimed to bring the Thomas Christians under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The synod resulted in the suppression of many Indian Christian traditions and practices, and the imposition of Latin Catholicism on the Thomas Christians. This led to a significant rift within the Thomas Christian community, with some accepting the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and others rejecting it. Those who rejected the authority of the Roman Catholic Church came to be known as the Malankara Church, which continues to maintain its independence to this day. Furthermore, the Synod of Diamper resulted in the suppression of many Indian Christian traditions and practices. The use of the Syriac liturgy and the celebration of Indian Christian festivals were discouraged. Also, the synod also led to the destruction of many Indian Christian texts and manuscripts¹¹.

After the death of Mar Abraham, Aleixo de Menezes, the Archbishop of Goa, began efforts to bring the Archdiocese of Angamaly under Goa. Menezes nominated Francis Ros as Administrator of Angamaly. The synod was convened on June 20, 1599, in the church of Diamper (Udayamperoor) and continued until June 26, 1599. The synod was attended by 153 local priests and 660 lay representatives. Menezes presided over the synod. In addition, the synod issued 200 decrees distributed in nine actions (sessions). The decrees was aimed at bringing the Thomas Christians under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, the synod introduced changes to the liturgy, including the abolition of certain

⁹ S. Sanyal, *The Forgotten History of India's Maritime Past (Transcript Part-2)*. Quora: <https://www.quora.com/What-did-the-Romans-think-of-Ancient-India> (5/02/2025).

¹⁰ C.N. Anderson, *The Origins of Christian Society in Ancient India*, 2012, p. 28.

¹¹ *Synod of Diamper*; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synod_of_Diamper (9/2/2025).

prayers and the introduction of Latin Catholic practices. More so, the synod condemned Hindu beliefs and customs, including transmigration, fate, and astrology. Hindu ceremonies and customs related to matrimony, death, birth, and purification were abandoned. The Church authorities noted that the result of the synod was not as helpful as they expected. The synod achieved one of the aims of the Portuguese policy in Kerala, to separate the Syrian Christians of Malabar from the Chaldean Patriarch. As a result of the aftermath of the Synod of Diamper, Menezes stayed in Kerala until November 1599, visiting churches and examining traditional books. The Archbishopric of Angamale was degraded to a Portuguese Padroado diocese under Goa on August 4, 1600¹². In a nutshell, the Synod of Diamper made a significant mark in the history of Christianity in India. The imposition of Latin Catholicism on the Thomas Christians led to a palpable tension within the community, and the emergence of the Malankara Church. The prevalent influence of the Synod of Diamper continues to be felt in India even in contemporary times.

From the foregoing, it is important to note that the medieval period saw a significant increase in missionary activities in India, with various Catholic orders, including the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Dominicans, establishing missions and churches throughout the country. For instance the, Jesuit Missionaries played a vital role in the missionary endeavours in India during the time. Founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola in 1540, the Jesuits were known for their intellectual doggedness, spiritual discipline, and giant missionary zeal. In India, they started their first mission in 1542 at Goa, which became the epicentre of their Indian mission. The Jesuits also established missions in other parts of India, including Madurai, Mysore, and Bengal. They were successful in converting many Indians to Christianity, particularly among the lower castes and tribal communities. They were also instrumental to the also establishment of schools, colleges, and seminaries to educate and train Indian Christians for missionary work around the region¹³.

In addition to the efforts of the Jesuits, other Catholic orders, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, also established missions in India during the medieval period. The Franciscans, founded by St. Francis of Assisi in 1209, established their first mission in India in 1518 at Goa. They worked primarily among the poor and marginalized communities, establishing hospitals, orphanages, and schools for the communities. The Dominicans on the other hand, founded by St. Dominic in 1216, established their first mission in India in 1548 at Goa. They worked primarily among the upper castes and intellectual communities, establishing colleges and universities. The missionary activities of these orders, significantly impacted the Indian society and culture. They introduced Western education, medicine, and

¹² *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Diamper-Synod> (11/02/2025).

¹³ *Ibidem*.

technology to India, which helped to modernize the country and resulted in positive development. However, the missionary activities also had a negative impact on Indian culture and society. Many Indians converted to Christianity, which led to a loss of their traditional cultural identity¹⁴. From the foregoing, it is noteworthy to highlight the contributions of other religious orders like the Carmelites who were put in charge of the vicariates of Malabar and the Great Mughal, the Capuchins who laboured in Surat, Madras and Pondicherry, and the Theatines who were entrusted with the missions in Golconda. With the arrival of these orders in India in the course of the seventeenth century, they worked closely and under the direct supervision of the Propaganda, this made them face difficulties from the Portuguese authorities¹⁵.

c. The Modern Era of Christianity in India

in the modern era can be traced to the emergence of British Colonialism and Protestantism. The arrival of the British colonialists in India in the 18th century led to the establishment of colonial rule, and also paved a way for protestant missionaries to arrive in India, particularly from Britain and the United States. The Protestant missionaries introduced new forms of Christianity, such as Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and Methodism, which attracted many Indians, particularly from the lower castes and tribal communities. This, forever, altered the religious landscape of the subcontinent. The Protestants also established schools, colleges, and hospitals, which provided education and healthcare to many Indian inhabitants. These institutions were particularly beneficial to the lower castes and tribal communities, who had limited access to education and healthcare. The missionaries also promoted social reform, advocating for the abolition of practices such as *sati* and child marriage.

Many Indians, particularly from the lower castes and tribal communities, converted to Protestantism. The missionaries' emphasis on education, healthcare, and social reform resonated with these communities, who saw Protestantism as a way to improve their socio-economic status. The converts were also attracted to the Protestant emphasis on individualism, equality, and the priesthood of all believers. Several Protestant denominations established missions and churches in India. The Church of England established the Anglican Church in India, while the Presbyterian Church established the Presbyterian Church of India. The Methodist Church also established a presence in India, with the establishment of the Methodist Church in India. Other denominations, such as the Baptists and the Lutherans, also established missions and churches in India.

¹⁴ C.H. Healy, *The Franciscans in India, 1518–1810*, “The Journal of Ecclesiastical History”, 21(1970), pp. 23–42.

¹⁵ J. Thekkedath. *History of Christianity in India*, Vol II, India 1982, p. 8.

Several Protestant missionaries played notable roles in the emergence of Protestantism in India. William Carey, a Baptist missionary, is often credited with establishing the first Protestant mission in India in 1793. Other missionaries included Robert Caldwell, a Presbyterian missionary who worked in southern India, and Henry Martyn, a Church of England missionary who worked in northern India. The emergence of Protestantism in India had a lasting impact on the country's religious landscape. Protestantism introduced new forms of Christianity, such as Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and Methodism, which attracted many Indians. The Protestant emphasis on education, healthcare, and social reform also contributed to the improvement of socioeconomic conditions in India. Today, Protestantism remains a significant presence in India, with millions of Indians identifying as Protestants.

THE NATURE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN INDIA

Amidst the strong impact of Christianity in India, the influence of the Catholic Church as guided by the Pope and the Roman Curia cannot be overemphasized. The church in India has made significant growth and remarkable progress in both spiritual, pastoral, social and humanitarian aspects. The indefatigable, unrelenting and heroic efforts of the early missionaries, and the tremendous impact and support of foreign faith-based institutions is worthy of note. Through the newly established missionary department, known as *Congregatio de Propaganda Fidei*, (Congregation for the propagation of the faith), in 1622, the Holy See began to send its own missionaries to India and other countries of the region. This was not a welcomed idea by Portuguese, and there arose conflicts between the *padroado* and the Propaganda¹⁶. Notwithstanding, Catholic presence in India has continued to grow as a result of the tireless missionary effort of its evangelizers with, “more than 19.9 million Catholics in India, which represents 1.55% of the total populations of the Catholic Church within India. Also, there are 174 Dioceses in India categorized into 30 Provinces. Out of these, 132 are Latin Catholic Church, 31 are Syro-Malabar Catholic Church and 11 are Syro-Malankara Catholic Church Dioceses”¹⁷. Regardless of the minor percentage, India is said to have the second major Catholic population around Asia after the Philippines. Consequently, all the bishops in India, both Western and Eastern, form the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India, which was instituted in 1944¹⁸. Presently, the representative of the Holy See to the

¹⁶ Ibidem; J. Thekkedath, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁷ J. Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic church: From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium*, San Francisco 2012, p. 11.

¹⁸ S. Ponnuthan, *The Spirituality of Basic Ecclesial Communities in the Socio-Religious Context of Trivandrum/Kerala, India*, Rome 1996, p. 103.

government of India and to the Church in India is the Apostolic Nuncio, The Most Reverend Leopoldo Girelli, whom the Holy Father, Pope Francis appointed in 2021, to maintain diplomatic relationship between India and the Holy See¹⁹.

INDIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIANITY

The Indian nationalist movement, which emerged towards the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, had a significant impact on Christianity in India. The movement, led by notable and prominent figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose, sought to bring to an end the British colonial rule and establish an independent Indian nation.

The Indian nationalist movement influenced Christianity in India in several ways such that it led to the Indianization of Christianity, encouraging Indian Christians to develop a more indigenous form of Christianity, free from Western colonial influences. In this way, Indian Christian theologians and leaders sought to articulate a distinctively unique, Christian identity. Many Indian Christians participated actively in the nationalist movement, seeing it as an opportunity to develop more authentic and contextual forms of Christian faith, promote social justice and strive for equality.²⁰ In a nutshell, the Indian nationalist movement had a profound impact on Christianity in India, encouraging Indian Christians to develop more indigenous forms of Christian faith and practice. The movement also stimulated the emergence of Indian Christian theology and leadership, which continue to shape the character of Christian church of India today.

PREVIOUS AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

The church in India is not immune to challenges despite her record of vibrancy. Most of her challenges are closely linked to the challenges facing India as a country. Some of these challenges often give rise to the crisis of faith. Notable among them are:

¹⁹ Vatican News, *Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli new Apostolic Nuncio to India*, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-03/pope-francis-india-appointment-apostolic-nuncio-girelli.html> (1/3/2025).

²⁰ M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution*, London 1966.

1. Secularism and Communalism

The rise of Hindu nationalism and communalism has posed significant challenges to Church Indian Christianity. Many Indian Christians have faced persecution, violence, and discrimination, particularly in rural areas. The Indian government's promotion of Hindu nationalism has also led to concerns about the erosion of secularism and the marginalization of minority communities, including Christians.

2. Social Justice and Human Rights

The church in India has a long tradition of social justice and human rights activism. However, many Indian Christians continue to face significant social and economic challenges, including poverty, inequality, and discrimination. Indian Christian organizations and leaders are working to address these issues through advocacy, education, and community development programs.

3. Dalit Christians and Caste-Based Discrimination

One of the hindrances to the spread of the Christian faith in India was the caste system. Individuals or families who sought to forsake their ancestral religion and embrace Christianity, risked being socially ostracised. Those who got converted were most often considered as having fallen from their caste, hence, marrying people of their rank and social status was almost an impossible venture. This was so huge a sacrifice which most people at that time were unwilling to make, even though they admired the truth and beauty of Christianity.²¹ Dalit Christians, who are formerly "untouchable" Christians, continue to face significant caste-based discrimination and marginalization within Indian society and the Indian church. Efforts to address these issues through advocacy, education, and empowerment programs are ongoing²².

4. Women's Empowerment and Gender Justice

Indian Christian women face significant challenges related to gender-based violence, discrimination, and marginalization. Indian Christian organizations and leaders are working to promote women's empowerment and gender justice through education, advocacy, and community development programs.

5. Evangelization and Conversion

The issue of evangelization and conversion remains a contentious one in India. While Indian Christians have the constitutional right to propagate their faith, Hindu

²¹ Ibidem; J. Thekkedath, op. cit., p. 4.

²² Ch.M. Bauman, *Christianity in India. A Review Essay*, "Journal of Asian Studies", 75(2016)no. 3, p. 731–746.

nationalist groups have accused Christians of using coercive tactics to convert Hindus, particularly those from lower castes and tribal communities.

6. Interfaith Dialogue and Relations

Indian Christians are increasingly engaging in interfaith dialogue and relations with other religious communities, particularly Hindus and Muslims. This dialogue has helped to promote greater understanding and cooperation between different religious communities. Despite the challenges facing Indian Christianity. Addressing these issues will require sustained efforts from Indian Christian leaders, organizations, and communities. By working together to promote social justice, human rights, and empowerment, Indian Christians can help build a more just and equitable society for all. There are also opportunities for growth, witness, and service. Indian Christians are increasingly engaging in social and economic development programs, advocating for human rights and social justice, and promoting interfaith dialogue and relations²³.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF CHURCH IN INDIA

For the continuous growth of the Christian faith in India, it is pertinent that:

1. Christians in India need to be deeply rooted in their faith beliefs and practices in order to navigate the complex challenges currently faced in India. This will require sustained efforts from Indian Christian leaders, organizations, and communities to promote social justice, human rights, and empowerment, while also engaging in interfaith dialogue and relations and witnessing to the Gospel in a pluralistic and often hostile environment.
2. Significant regional variations and diversity characterize Indian Christianity. For instance, the Syrian Christian tradition in Kerala has a distinct liturgical and cultural identity, while the Tribal Christian communities in central India have a unique cultural and linguistic heritage. Therefore, the unification of regional disparities and diversity should be addressed.
3. In recent decades, Pentecostalism has crept into the Indian church. This poses a threat to Christian as it seems to promote a counterfeit form of Christianity. Christian leaders must enlighten the faith on the dangers of this by proper formation into faith programs and on-going catechesis.
4. For the purpose of ecumenical relations, efforts should be made to initiation of faith of catechumens to promote ecumenical relations and unity among

²³ A.P. Elhance, *Conversion and Evangelism in India*, "Journal of Asian Studies", 75(2016) no. 3, p. 747–762.

the church of India by the establishment of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI).

5. Collaboration between the Priests, the Religious and the Laity is essential for bringing growth to the church in India. Rather than being mere spectators, the laity by reason of their baptism should participate in the work of evangelization in the spirit of communion, participation and mission which the ongoing Synod on synodality highlights.
6. Preferential option for the poor should remain the priority of the Church in India. The Church must seek to constantly undertake a mission to provide support to the poor, the marginalized, the migrants, and the refugees by empowering them to start up small and medium scale enterprises.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the overview of Christianity in India has highlighted the complex and multifaceted history and the theological problem of challenges of faith in the subcontinent, beginning with its ancient roots, then to the medieval era and the contemporary period. It is pertinent to note the mission of St. Thomas the Apostle, the arrival of European colonizers, particularly the Portuguese, who introduced new forms of Christianity and established Catholic missions, the emergence of the Nationalist movement, encouraging Indian Christians to develop a more indigenous form of Christianity and participate in the struggle for independence.

To live in peace and harmony, and for the Christian faith to continue to thrive in many communities in India, Indian persons have to learn to practice mutual respect. Christian leaders at different levels of the society must seek to ensure that the teachings of their respective faiths are seen in the daily life of the faithful, having vital elements of love, peace and harmony. These and many more can add value to the church in India and lead to a renewed and transformed society.

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Pius XII. *Radiomessaggio di suasantitàpio pp. Xiiper le ricorrenze centenarie ad ernakulam nel malabar in onore di s. Tommaso apostolo e di sanfrancesco saviorio* (1952), https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/speeches/1952/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19521231_apostoli-india.html (2/03/2025).

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