



THE NASCENT CONGREGATION WITH TWIN IDEALS



S.BoobalanDomnic Victor¹

¹Research Scholar,
Department of History,
Arul Anndar College,
Karumathur Madurai District,
Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

The congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart at Tirunelveli started by the devoted selfless services of Rev.Fr.Caussanel in 1903, has its own history. Like any society, Fr.Caussanel founded this congregation with twin objectives of Religious and Social Service. It was started at the time when the poor and the down-trodden were in need of helping hand to lift them up and free them from the clutches of caste and communal conflicts and poverty. Love of God and men is considered charity to God and men. To propogate these ideals, the congregation took up many measures, instituted many educational institutions and even a press to publish pamphlets and books on religion and social welfare. The present study unfolds the various measures taken up by them and how they achieved their ideals. In the religious history of Tamil Nadu, the Congregation has carved out a place for itself, which clearly shows their twin objectives fulfilled.

KEYWORDS: Congregation, Social Welfare, Fishery Coast, Jewish Custom

INTRODUCTION

The Congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart at Palayamkottai started by the devoted and dedicated services of Fr. Caussanel in 1903, has a history of its own. Like any other society of religious institution, Fr. Caussanel laid the foundation for this congregation with the twin ideals of religious and social service. It was begun at a time when many down trodden people needed the helping hand of someone to lift them up and free them from the so-called caste and communal conflicts and ill-treatment. Love of God and men is considered charity to God and men. To propagate these ideals, the Brothers have initiated many social welfare measures, instituted many educational institutions and even a press to publish pamphlets and books on religion and social welfare. With the limited resources at hand they were able to convert and confirm about thousands of people to the Sacred Heart and extend their succour to hundreds of the needy.

As a minority religious institution, it is not open to outside influence. Whatever things good or bad, happen within the premises of the congregation are settled there itself. Therefore much about the functioning of the congregation is not known to the outside world. However, a close contact with it shows that the congregation has done good work in social, educational and religious awakening. These have not formed the theme of an indepth study until now. In the religious history of Tamilnadu the congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart at Palayamkottai has carved out a place for itself, which, of course, needs a dispassionate study.

1.1 THE REALISATION OF GODDINESS

Christianity is a faith and a way to realise Godliness. As a faith it revelates the doctrines of Jesus Christ and his followers. Christians way of life is defined as a life of charity or love, love towards God and love towards men. Faith in God and service to God are the twin



themes of Christianity. Other ideals of Christianity are charity, virginity and obedience are enshrined in the text of Christianity and are preached to everybody.

Born in Asia, Christianity first spread to the West and then to the East. St. Thomas, one of the disciples of Christ is said to have come to the Western Coast of India, converted many to the new religion and had his last days in St. Thomas Mount at Madras. His converts in Malabar were reinforced a couple of centuries later by immigrants from Syria or Persia. Apparently there is no trace among them of any organised or coenobitical religious life till recent times.

1.2 THE SECOND WAVE OF CHRISTIANITY

The second wave of Christianity came to India with the landing of the Portuguese at Calicut in 1498. Thereby all Religious Orders of Portugal came to India and established their mutts mainly in Goa and in the other Portuguese settlements. They are the Augustinians, the Carmelites, the Dominicans, the Hospitallers, the Jesuits and the Theatines.¹

The Paravas of the Fishery Coast were the first to embrace Christianity. Their inability to face the aggression of Mohammedians forced them to seek protection from Portuguese in the year 1535. The successful intervention of Portuguese fleet resulted in the baptism of the Parava population of the Fishery Coast. But their baptism remained a lip service until the arrival of St. Francis Xavier, the disciple of Ignatius Loyola of Spain in the year 1542. He instructed Christianity and injected faith in them. His successors succeeded in strengthening the spiritual life of the coastal people.²

Notes

¹*The Indigenous Religious Congregations India and Ceylon Madras, 1948, p.11.*

²*Directory - Diocese of Palayamkottai- 1989, Palayamkottai, 1989, p. 1.*

1.3A SMALL STEP AT TIRUNELVELI

Under orders from the Raja of Travancore, the Portuguese came to Tirunelveli and planted two simple commercial settlements or factories there, one at Tuticorin and the other at Punnakayal. These were under the control of a captain residing at Tuticorin and taking his orders from the Viceroy at Goa.³ These traders were followed by the missionaries to Tirunelveli. The new settlements of the Paravas of the Fishery Coast near the river Tambaraparani were looked after by the missionaries of the Fishery Coast.

Tirunelveli attracted the services of Catholicism more than any other place. It was because the missionaries

of South Travancore happened to travel through the Tirunelveli region. When Catholicism had been welcomed by the natives of Tirunelveli and its surroundings, the missionaries then realised the need for starting mission centres there.⁴ In 1606, Robert de Nobili came to Madurai and began the Madura Mission. Finding that European methods could not attract the natives, he began to follow indigenous methods of conversion and consolidation.⁵

Notes

³ *C.A. Souter (ed.), Madras District Gazetteers - Tirunelveli District, Vol. II, Madras, 1934, p.158.*

⁴*Directory - Diocese of Palayamkottai- 1989, pp. 1-2.*

⁵*Directory - Diocese of Palayamkottai- 1973, Madurai, 1973, p.14.*

1.4. THE VISIT OF ST. JOHN DE BRITTO AND THE STYLE OF VEERAMAMUNIVAR

St. John de Britto visited the South in 1686-88. The annual letter of 1688 informs that the saint built a chapel at Kamanayakanpatti in Kovilpattitaluk and Fr. X. Borghese made it permanent residence of the missionaries in the South. In 1714, Fr. Constantine Beschi took charge of the church and he introduced Indianization in worship to attract the people. He was widely known as 'Veeramamunvar'.⁶

The beginning of the 19th century marked a period of trial for the Catholics as it coincided with the arrival of non-Catholics such as Methodists in 1816, Anglicans in 1820, Gospel Society in 1825, Congregationalists in 1834, etc. For want of an organized church for about 50 years, the Catholics were for the most part a demoralised set.⁷

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⁶*Directory - Diocese of Palayamkottai- 1989, pp. 2-3.*

⁷*Ibid, pp. 3-4.*

1.5. THE NEW MADURA MISSION

The coming of four French Jesuit priests namely, Fr. Joseph Bertand, Fr. Alexander Martin, Fr. Louis Garnier and Louis du Ranquet in 1838 paved the way for the revival of Catholicism in the form of the New Madura Mission. Within 35 years of its existence, it grew into the five Dioceses of Tiruchirapalli, Tuticorin, Arch Diocese of Madurai, Palayamkottai and Sivaganga. In 1838, Palayamkottai town had only some fifty Christian families from the depressed classes.⁸ But in the passage of time, the number increased rapidly.

In the same year, a modest chapel was built for the Christians of Palayamkottai. Found insufficient it was replaced in 1863 by a fine church, Gothic in style with three naves. It was dedicated to St. Francis Xavier.⁹ Increase

in Catholic population forced the mother parish at Palayamkottai to start several parishes in rural areas.¹⁰ Many Jesuit Superiors from Western countries, who came here as priests resided at Palayamkottai and continued their missionary service from 1838. Thus many missionaries renouncing worldly pleasures, took up religious service and worked out to form a better society.

Notes

⁸Ibid, pp. 4-5.

⁹DirectoryoftheDioceseofPalayamkottai- 1973, p. 17.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 13.

1.6 REV.FR.CAUSSANEL – DRAGON OF THE SOUTH

The later half of the 19th century witnessed many remarkable changes in the Catholic order. Many missionaries came to India. Among them, Rev. Fr. Adrian Caussanel, a French Jesuit was a remarkable personality with all missionary zeal, initiative and drive. In 1893, Fr. Caussanel took over as District Superior. His incessant and selfless service earned for him the nickname of the “Dragon of the South.” He found that Palayamkottai was suffering from want of necessities. At that time there were only a few abbeys in Palayamkottai. His missionary zeal worked in him to establish a new congregation to work for the upliftment of the poor, deserted and deprived. He thus initiated the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the basic tenet of his new order. Thus was born the congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart in 1903.¹¹ The term “Brother” was used by the Jews to designate a fellow Jew. The Christians adopted this Jewish custom and called their fellow Christians as ‘Brothers’. The vocation of a religious Brother is an irreplaceable reality in the Church of Christ.¹² It inculcates fraternity and love among all. Regarding this, The Bible says in Psalm 133, verse 1, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

Notes

¹¹. Bro. Rajan, “Role of the Brothers in Building up the Church,”*100YearsAnniversarySouvenir- OurFounder’sMissioninIndia1889- 1989,Palayamkottai, n.d., p. 34.*

¹²S.Esther, *The History of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart at Palayamkottai, unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation, 1990.p.2.*

CONCLUSION

Having brotherhood as the basis and educational apostolate as the main theme, the Brothers preach the Gospel, animate the youth, impart job oriented technical education, prepare catechumens and extend their service to the needy. Their service has benefitted thousands of people in and around Palayamkottai. The Researcher triesto make an attempt to study the Congregations origin, aims and objectives, organization and administration, educational and religious service to the society at large.

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4. *Directory – DioceseofPalayamkottai – 1989, pp. 1-2.*
5. *Directory – DioceseofPalayamkottai – 1973, Madurai, 1973, p.14.*
6. *Directory – DioceseofPalayamkottai – 1989, pp. 2-3.*
7. *Ibid., pp. 3-4.*
8. *Ibid., pp. 4-5.*
9. *DirectoryoftheDioceseofPalayamkottai – 1973, p. 17.*
10. *Ibid., p. 13.*
11. Bro. Rajan, “Role of the Brothers in Building up the Church,” *100YearsAnniversarySouvenir – OurFounder’sMissioninIndia1889 – 1989,Palayamkottai, n.d., p. 34.*
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