

GOSSNER EVANGELICAL – LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CHOTANAGPUR AND ASSAM

GELC ARCHIVE

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KERALA PROTEST CONVENTION ON ANTI-PEOPLE STANCE OF THE TRICHUR
BISHOP

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- 4 protest notes_UPDATE from Delhi

UPDATE

F R O M D E L H I

Dear Friend,

The Church in Kerala is a dominant factor in determining the course of the state's politics. Consequent to their stature as an institutionalised representative of the merchantile and the emerging capitalist classes in the state there is no ambiguity in their political option. Nevertheless, an interesting feature of the Church politics in the state is the simultaneous existence of small "prophetic" groups that challenges the official church presenting an alternate articulation of faith, political option and alliances. They are convinced in terms of Christian faith that Church should be an ally in the struggles of the poor and the exploited.

The established Church which is wild with the power they wield, will let go any opposition to their hegemony. They punish and victimise those who advocate the cause of the poor with an animosity that surpasses the terrorism of the state. The re-assertion of the rightist forces in the state as manifested during the Lok Sabha elections, gave a fillip to the human rights violations by the Church. We are bringing to you two recent incidents. It has been written by Rev.M.J.Joseph.

We request you to send protest letters to Rt.Rev.Joseph Kundukulam, Bishop's House, Trichur - 680004, Kerala and to The Rt.Rev.Alexander Mar Thoma, Puthencherry, Tiruvalla, Kerala - 689 101.

Yours in solidarity,

Date:30/1/1990.

UPDATE COLLECTIVE
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NEW DELHI - 110 016.

KERALA CHURCH SCENE AFTER THE ELECTIONS

Trichur Roman Catholic Bishop Lords it over the Church

May be the church is feeling a bit insecure, somewhere it feels a sullenness, a sense of losing its grip. So as any other institution would behave it resorts to a reflex action, be on the defensive, use its cudgel to teach them a lesson, those who make the noise, cut those wings which flutter and make the rather inconvenient noise and seem to fly up to heights that the structured church cannot afford to climb to.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the all-powerful Lord of Trichur Diocese, Bishop Kundukulam has five in his bag now. On October 14, 1989 he had Fr. Louis Chalackel suspended from West Kaloor Church. Fr. Louis had put in 27 years of service as Parish Priest. And now he is out, not even assured of his sustenance. Fr. Jose Chittilappally, Fr. Jacob Thacharattil, Fr. Jose Thalakkottoor and Fr. Jose Thathrathil, who protested against the uncannonical measures processed against Fr. Louis were also served suspension orders during the 2nd half of November, in a typical mafia style. Fr. Jose Chittilappally was the first to come on the 2nd list. On 18th, Saturday, Fr. Chittilappally coming out of the church after the morning mass noticed an unusual crowd. Three 'loyal' priest's gave leadership to the mafia operation. Fr. Jose Chittilappally was lifted up from where he sat near the grotto, hands held from behind by muscle-man and he was, hit on the vertebrae and pushed up to the parish house and thrown into the room. He was made to sign the Bishop's order, order to quit within minutes taking whatever belongings he could gather.

On 25th of November similar scene was repeated in the Puthusserry church where Fr. Jose Thathrathil was in charge. As Fr. Jose Thathrathil was expecting the mafia style transfer, he signed the order without delay and tried to explain the contents of the Bishop's letter. People wanted to listen, but the muscle-men won't allow that. There followed a free-for-all and finally the Police had to be brought. The Parish people had their way. They made Fr. Jose to explain things in detail and he left leisurely.

Two are asked to stay in a sanatorium near the Mission Hospital Trichur and other three in the Priest house situated in a corner of the Bishop's House campus. They are allowed to say private mass only in these two places. Knowing fully well the group that carried out the Bishop's orders in the garb of the Kerala Catholic Youth Movement (KCYM) and their styles, the priests are not prepared to stay in these two places as it involves serious security problem. They have no means of support, but they have decided to stay in a central place among the people. They have a place of meeting where they used to come together for study and reflection. People have extended support through money and fellowship.

Peoples church is emerging.

All Kerala Protest Convention on anti-people stance of the Trichur Bishop

On 29th December, 1989 thousands of the faithful from different parts of Kerala from Kassargod to Trivandrum gathered in Trichur under the auspices of Christians for Radical Action (CRA) a body in existence for the past 12 years. Fisherfolk, Dalit Christians, Tribals, Youth, students, Clergy, Sisters, Young & Old, three to four thousand people attended the Seminar from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Prof. Mundaserry Hall. Dr. M.M. Thomas made the major presentation on "Religion and Liberation". Dr. Thomas said that religion for that matter the church, has a politics and an ecumenism which cater to the narrow communal institutional and selfish interests. Consequently there is a conflict between the establishment's politics and the politics for human liberation between the ecumenism of the churches (eg. Nilackal ecumenism) and the ecumenism for a real human community. The established church by its very nature will stand against the politics of human rights and human liberation. This has become evident in the action taken against the priests who took the side of the oppressed and moved with the people preaching the Gospel of human liberation. Dr. Thomas referred to the threatened action against the Mar Thoma Clergy who signed a statement during the election time to vote Congress (I) out of power. Dr. Thomas categorically affirmed, that church is the institution where Democracy is denied the most. Fr. Dominic George who inaugurated the seminar emphasize the significance of a body like CRA which was effectively providing a forum for Christians to exercise their radical commitment to the poor and the transformative challenge of the Gospel.

During the afternoon session 25 social action and faith committed groups which had gathered expressed their solidarity with the priests and assured their support in their search for a peoples church. The simple common meal shared by the whole group was in effect a meaningful "breaking of the bread".

The participants took part in a demonstration through the main streets of Trichur and assembled at the Thekkinkadu Maidan the traditional Trichur Pooram site, where the public meeting was held as the final act of the day.

The church authorities alleged the following charges against the priests.

- They have participated in the Human Fort organised by the DYFI.
- They have published pamphlets explaining the liberation motives of the Gospel. In one leaflet they have responded to the cyclical letter of the Kerala Catholic Bishop's Conference (KCBC).
- They protested against the action taken on Fr. Louis Chalackel.
- They held corner meetings explaining the liberative aspects of Christian faith emphasising the need to take a Left Political position.

MAR THOMA CHURCH AND LEFT POLITICS

The Bishop's Synod of the Mar Thoma Church threatened disciplinary action on 5 of its clergy* the signatories to the statement issued by a group of clergy and concerned laypeople at the time of the 1989 Lok Sabha elections. The statement exhorted the public to vote the Congress out of power.

The spokesman of the Bishop's Synod unequivocally accused the clergy of having disobeyed the dictats of the Metropolitan. The Most Rev. Alexander Mar Thoma had through a letter in the Church Magazine asked the clergy to abstain from direct political action.

The Naveekarana Vedi (Reformation Forum) a voluntary group in the church took up the matter for public discussion. On the New Year's Day a seminar on the "Politics of Mar Thoma Church" and a public meeting were held in Thiruvalla, the Head quarters of the Mar Thoma Church. Dr. M.M.Thomas presented a paper on the "Politics of Human Rights the Politics of Communalism?" He said that the church is playing a secure game betraying its basic commitment to justice and Human Rights. In effect the church is playing a communal card opting for the rightist politics. The Mar Thoma church has a tradition of protest. Bishop Abraham had opposed the attempt by the churches to make CP's statue. Bishop Yuhanon questioned the Political Emergency and wrote to Indira Gandhi to repeal the Emergency. So what the clergy have done is to follow the prophetic ministry as propounded by the earlier Bishops.

It has to be noted that the Bishops did not register or call into question the open election campaigning launched on by certain other clergymen on behalf of the Congress(I) or the printed statement released by some church Executive Committee members canvassing votes for the Congress(I) nominee.

The speakers at the public meeting exposed the so-called 'neutrality' of the Church. When you are for Congress (I), for the establishment, you have no politics, when you stand for the left, then you are branded political and victimized. The public meeting deplored the pitiable condition where Mar Thoma Church and its episcopal leadership have become mere dolls dancing to the tune of the elites who control the decision-making bodies. Advocate Cyrus depicted the scene as monkeys jumping to the dictates of the master. The echoes of a people's church were heard in the words of the speakers.

*The Clergy under threat are:

The Rev.Dr.T.M.Philip
The Rev. A.P.Jacob
The Rev.Varghese Thomas
The Rev.Dr.Jacob Thomas
The Rev.George Varghese