

A Report of the 9th Annual Meeting of the Tamilnadu Canonists' Association

The 9th Annual Meeting of the Tamilnadu Canonists' Association was held on the 29th and 30th January 2001 in St. Paul's Seminary, Tiruchirappalli. Twenty members participated in this meeting.

After a short reflection of a scripture passage given by Fr. V. Arul Joseph, Fr. Y. Irudayaraj welcomed the participants. The meeting was inaugurated by the most Rev. Dr. P. Antony Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Madurai. In his inaugural address, the Bishop focused on some of the important aspects of the Diocesan Synod. The synod, he said must reflect the theological reality of the church as a communion. The priests, the religious and the laity must play a vital role in the synod and contribute towards the evangelical pastoral life of the local church. The Synod is not a mere legislative body, but an ecclesial reality which celebrates the communion and mission of Christ's faithful of the local church.

Fr. J. Susaimanikam, Rector, St. Paul's Seminary received from the Bishop the first copies of the Tamil translation of Books III and VI of the 1983 code of canon law.

Fr. S. Pascal Raj, Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamallee, Chennai presented a paper on the diocesan synod: Notion of the synod, the purpose of Diocesan synod, principle roles of the synod, preparation for the synod, the convocation and celebration of the synod. He concluded his paper stating that "the more significant reality of the Diocesan Synod is the value of consultation and mutual deliberation of bishops, priest, religious and laity and the vitality of the resulting consensus. The Synod is the highest expression of the identity, resolves and direction of the local church".

The participants were divided into three groups and discussed on the positive and negative aspects of holding a Diocesan Synod. All the groups agreed on the need for the celebration of the Diocesan Synod in every diocese since it will facilitate the renewal of the diocese with a common vision, new orientation and necessary pastoral directives.

Fr. S. Clitus Rex of the Archdiocese of Pondicherry read out a paper on "The Responsibility of the Diocesan Bishop in the Temporal Goods of the church".

He highlighted the following points: The responsibility of the Diocesan Bishop in the acquisition, administration and alienation of the temporal goods of the church. He also explained some of the prescriptions of civil law which are connected with the temporal goods. Finally he has some suggestions on the following points: Training of the Diocesan Financial Administrator, Accountability and Transparency, and how to make the Diocese self-sufficient.

Fr. Swaminathan of the Archdiocese of Pondicherry gave a talk on "Socio-cultural impact on the grounds of nullity". He explained the problems involved in arranged marriages. He pointed out that both in arranged marriages and love marriages, young spouses do not evaluate their capacity to establish a stable partnership of life with a given partner. He explained moreover, how the grounds of nullity like Force and Fear, Error of quality, Lack of due discretion and Simulation are to be understood in our socio-cultural context.

Fr. Antonisamy, Rector of Christ hall Seminary, Karumathur gave a synopsis of his doctoral thesis, "Canonical and civil status of the catholic church in India and the Affirmation of the National Identity of India". Fr. John Bosco SDC gave a brief summary of his licentiate thesis, "The Governance of Religious in 1983 Code with particular reference to the servants of charity".

The participants shared their problems connected with marriage cases and some other canonical issues. They also discussed on the progress made in the translation work of the 1983 Code.

Final statements, relating to the three papers read out in the meeting, were made and approved by the participants.

It was decided to hold the 10th Annual Meeting in St. Paul's Seminary on the 29th and 30th January 2002.

The following topics and persons were fixed for the 10th Annual Meeting.

1. Fr. V. Arul Joseph: Diocesan curia in General and the office of the Chancellor in particular.
2. Fr. Peter Thumma & Fr. C.M. Joseph: The Nature and Functioning of Ecclesiastical Tribunal.
3. Fr. Antonisamy: Canonical and civil Status of the Catholic Church of India.

Fr. M. Rajasekaran proposed a vote of thanks. The meeting came to a close with a hymn to Our Lady.

Final Statements

The 9th Annual Meeting of the Tamilnadu Canonists' Association was held in St. Paul's Seminary, Tiruchirappalli on the 29th and 30th January 2001. Twenty Canonists participated in this meeting.

They discussed on the following topics:

1. The Diocesan Synod.
2. The Responsibility of the Diocesan Bishop in the Temporal Goods of the Church
3. Socio-Cultural Impact on the ground of Nullity of marriages.

The participants made the following final statements for the good of the church of Tamilnadu.

I. Diocesan Synod

The celebration of the diocesan synod in each diocese of Tamilnadu is strongly recommended for the following reasons:-

- a) It will facilitate the renewal of the diocese with a common vision, new orientation and necessary pastoral directives.
- b) It will address some of the key issues of the diocese which need immediate attention and solution.

- c) It will enhance a better participation of the laity and the religious in the life of the local church and create in them a sense of belongingness to the local church.
- d) It will foster better collaboration among the bishops, the clergy, the religious and the laity.
- e) With proper preparation and bold implementation of the proposals of the Diocesan Synod, the local church will be able to meet the present challenges facing it and give a new impetus to a new evangelization for which the church exists.

II. The Temporal Goods

- a) The ecclesiastical administrators of the temporal goods of the church are not their owners but only stewards. Hence transparency and accountability are expected of them.
- b) The administrators are bound to follow the prescriptions of both canon law and civil law on temporal goods.
- c) The constitution of finance committees both at the diocesan and parish levels is a must mandated by the code canon law.
- d) It is not in the fitness of things that the financial administrator who is answerable to the finance committee is also a member of the same committee.

III. Arranged Marriages

- a) In the context of arranged marriages in our culture, the freedom of the parties in choosing their life partner is to be safeguarded at all cost.
- b) Even in the so-called “Love Marriages” it is very important to assess the free consent of the couples.

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Fr. Y. Irudayaraj
President
Tamilnadu Canonists' Association