CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

Being an artist of convictions and conscious of his vocation, Fonseca dedicated his life to realise his dreams of indigenising Christian art. To produce a work of art which is Christian and Indian at the same time, it is not enough to put Indian garb or a halo around the head of any figure. Nor does painting Christian themes make it Christian art, for many non-Christians have portrayed Christian subjects and produced artistic works.

The work should first be a real piece of art before it can be called Christian art. For the work to be Christian, the artist should be imbued with the spirit of Christ and His values, which overflow into his creations. The secret of Fonseca's success lies in the fact that he was a true Christian rooted in God, and his art sprang from the well-spring of his faith and was the outcome of his union with God. Consequently, whatever he painted, whether religious or secular, was impregnated with his Christian spirit. The peace and serenity that pervade Fonseca's paintings, the piety, contemplative mood and sanctity that surround his figures and bestow a sense of sacredness to his works are unsurpassed by the works of other Christian painters in India.

In this connection, referring to an exhibition of Fonseca's paintings held in the Westminster Cathedral
Hall in 1948, an art critic, Iris Conlay says, "To find a simple, living and spontaneous Christian art today it appears to be necessary to search beyond the West. I found it again last week in the pictures of an Indian painter, Angelo da Fonseca, whose work is now touring the British Isles." And she continues, "A priest walking round the exhibition at the same time as myself, said he wished we could produce a comparable English artist for the people of this country, and I agreed with him. But the people of this country who did this kind of thing passed away with the Ages of Faith." ¹

Fonseca's art, besides being Christian, is truly Indian too. Having been trained in the Neo-Bengal School of Art in preference to the J.J. School of Art and similar other institutions dominated by western academic ideals, he adhered to Indian techniques, preferring watercolour to oil. Moreover, the long period (14 to 17 years) he spent in the C.P.S.S. ashram, Pune, to experience the real Indian life style in worship and the daily living out of every detail, stands to his credit by way of the effort he made in this field. Further, he was a true patriot, a son of the soil who understood the mentality of various groups, their customs and way of life, which he had the talent to illustrate. Hence his portrayal of

¹ Iris Conlay, "Indian Village Madonna", Catholic London, Friday October 8, 1948.
Indian types, forms and setting are true versions of Indian life. This is shown again by Iris Conlay when she writes with regard to the same exhibition:

The sombre Christs, the typical Hindu wise men, Martha's and Mary's clad in saris and carrying the usual vessels used in the household life in India today, were especially delightful. Christ had so obviously lived in the village homes of Mr. Fonseca's country. The open house, the plain little mat, the arch of the formal building all appeared over and over again in his pictures breaking the special serenity of the East.  

To sum up, Fonseca's art is Indian in conception and ideals of beauty, seen through religion and in terms of God's presence in all creation. His figures are Indian more in their deep spiritual awareness than in their external signs and appearance. The weighty words of Sepp Schuller are very apt in this connection. He says that Angelo da Fonseca, "with a great nobility of line and colour has depicted Christian motives in the finest and purest cultural traditions of his country" and thus created an art that is at once Christian and Indian.

Having made indigenisation of Christian art the goal of his life, and being the first modern Catholic artist in this field, Fonseca had to struggle against opposition. Nothing however would deter him from his set purpose, neither lack of encouragement nor destructive criticism from his confreres and the clergy, nor the scarcity of patrons.

2. Ibid.
Far from being disheartened by these vicissitudes, but trusting in the value of his cause and of his art, he continued to experiment with the firm determination to bring to birth a truly Indian Christian art. In his approach, he had the courage to be different and to set aside the traditional methods and treatment of Christian subjects and to adopt a new style and to take the first bold step in this direction. He was the first Indian Catholic artist who felt the urgency of the need and had the daring to launch out into this difficult task, where one could easily fail unless one is a true artist and where one has to cut his own path through unknown terrain.

Fonseca's innumerable works of art bear testimony to the fact that he succeeded in achieving what he set about, he concretized the principles and theories laid down by the Church regarding adaptation and indigenisation. His initiative, originality and courage in this sphere are laudable. Thus he ushered in a new era of artistic awakening and achievements and paved the way for others to continue. To this effect, H.Heras, S.J., called him, "the dean of Indian Christian Art", the Father of Indian Christian Art - and even "The patriarch of Indian Christian Art". Fonseca, being a true pioneer with a vision, caught a glimpse of what lies beyond the horizon of ordinary men and shared his vision with the rest of mankind through his art.

Being the first major attempt in the field of indigenisation, Fonseca's art has its limitations. In general, his religious paintings especially of the early period lack spontaneity and are somewhat rigid for the simple reason that many of these were commissions and had to please the patrons (Fig.156). Moreover, some of them were executed according to instructions given to him. In his later works, world recognition and awards gave him greater self-confidence (Fig.157). While this was the case with the religious pictures, his secular works were free and lively from the start as he had no inhibitions resulting from the desire to please or to be approved by others. In other words, he could be himself and express himself the way he wanted as in the Harvest. Had he been free to realise his religious concepts and images in his own way, and had he received the whole-hearted support and encouragement of his people, he could have given an even greater impetus to Indian Christian art and perhaps, in a different way too.

A great disparity in Fonseca's style is noticeable throughout. The realistic treatment of people in his portraits and especially children differs greatly from the conventional rendering in his religious paintings as seen in the following examples: the portraits of Sherin Gilani (Fig.158), Yessonda (Fig.159), Simeon in the Temple (Fig.160) and He was full of Wisdom (Fig.161).

5. In the collection of P.J.Ubelmesser, S.J., Nuremberg.
6. Printed into small holy pictures by Art India, Pune.
It is vain to search among Fonseca's religious paintings for ideals of beauty set forth in fixed proportions of the figure. Hence one comes across figures with very long legs as in St. Francis in the Canticle of Brother Sun (Fig. 22), Christ in Suffered under Pontius Pilate (Fig. 32), and the Christian Dawn (Fig. 162); thin spindly hands as in the Childhood of Mary (Fig. 163), or shortened arm and elongated neck (Fig. 164).

Moreover, he paid little attention to details of anatomy, though he had been very interested in it and had studied it as a medical student. In some of his secular themes and portraits he observed correct details of anatomy and proportions, but used these with discretion in his religious paintings. Nor did he worry about perspective accuracy in his compositions. He used it when he found it helpful and contributed to his purpose, otherwise he left it out of the picture altogether. Such examples are Yessonda playing in the C.F.S.S. Ashram - 1961 (Fig. 165) and the Lady of Light (Fig. 166).

The delight taken in the meticulous recording of details in some of his early paintings like the Magnificat (Fig. 167) and Come unto Me (Fig. 168) gradually gave

7. Artist's Album, no. 137.
8. Ibid, no. 30.
9. In the collection of Ivy Fonseca, Pune.
10. Artist's Album, no. 39.
11. In the collection of Ivy Fonseca, Pune.
way to a simple, broad and flat treatment (Arun - 1954, (Fig. 169) and the Mediatrix of all Graces - 1961, (Fig. 170). He did not follow strictly one particular style at a given period. A great diversity in treatment is observed in some of the paintings of the 60's; from the conventionalized and detailed portrayal of St. John the Evangelist - 1961 (Fig. 171) and the Beginning and the End - 1967 (Fig. 172) to the carefully worked out but bold rendering of the Mother and Child (Fig. 173) and the flat, broad execution of Hair Dressing - 1967 (Fig. 174).

From all these, it is obvious, that his chief concern was not the correct rendering of figures, objects and details according to the laws of perspective and anatomy, but to interpret the Christian message in a language that is understood by his people. To realise this objective he sacrificed perspective and accuracy of anatomical details. He evolved a style of his own for his religious paintings which differs from the one he employed for his portraits, landscapes and interiors.

In spite of the long and rich traditions in Christian art, Indian Christian art is still in its early stages. Except for a few scattered examples of artists who are dedicated to the cause, most Christian artists execute a Christian painting now and then according to their moods or needs.

12, 13, 14 In the collection of Ivy Fonseca, Pune.
visions and cleared the most difficult steps in this direction. To follow the lead he gave. Referring to an exhibition of his paintings held at St. Xavier's College, Bombay, in 1945, Fonseca said, "the success of it would lie if just one young lad is inspired to devote his brush to the Indian Christian cause, not considering it as a financial success. For all that, work in Our Lord's vineyard shall be fairly paid, even those who begin late in the day." This desire of Fonseca's has been partially realised, for some Christian artists have come forward to express the Christian message with their brush in a language familiar to the people. But total dedication, seriousness of purpose and devotion shown by Fonseca has not been seconded.

One cannot fully ignore the efforts being made by small groups of artists who have organized themselves to further the cause of Indian Christian art. Art India, Pune, under the able guidance and leadership of Matthew Lederle, S.J. is doing a great service in disseminating the works of Fonseca and other Indian painters by printing many of their works as Christmas and Easter cards, small holy pictures, ordination souvenirs and a few larger


16. Such groups are the Asian Christian Art Association, the Bombay Christian Artists' group called CACA, and another group in Andhra Pradesh.
Art education is essential to make people acquainted with the rich cultural treasures of their country, and to help them realise and value the Indian interpretation of the Christian faith through their cultural media. With education a change in mentality and attitude can be brought about.

For a full realisation of Fonseca's ideals and dreams, and to create an art comparable with the productions of the Ages of Faith, it may take a century or more. But an intense religious revival that generates a faith which inspires, fosters and leads to expressions in pictorial forms together with a band of devoted, dedicated artists who are at once truly Christian and Indian may speed up the full flowering of Indian Christian art.
devotional pictures which could be framed and used in homes and institutions. Of late, the National Biblical Catechetical Liturgical Centre at Bangalore has printed, in fairly large size, paintings by Claire illustrating scenes from the life of Christ. All these have helped many people to come to know and appreciate the value of these paintings.

With the recognition of the difficulties involved in printing many paintings of different artists at a low cost, it should in fairness be pointed out, that some of these pictures are printed in entirely different colours, unimaginable to Fonseca, thus creating misunderstanding and giving a wrong impression of his palette. For instance, Sarvapujitaya Namah – 1962\(^\text{17}\) is reproduced in dominant pinkish-violet tone, where as in the original the colours are very pleasing and subdued. There is no trace of pink or violet in the original (Figs. 175 and 176). Again, the painting Amaraya Namah – 1952 (Fig. 52) is printed in reverse.

Fonseca's desire that Christian paintings in Indian style should find a place in Catholic churches and homes has been fulfilled to a certain extent. Some of his murals and his Stations of the Cross as well as the murals of Genevieve adorn the walls of churches, while originals and prints of Indian Christian paintings occupy a respectable place in some institutions and in the homes of those Christians who understand and appreciate their worth.

\(^{17}\text{In the collection of P.J. Ubelmesser, S.J., Nuremberg.}\)
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