CHAPTER IV

THE EMERGENCE OF THE ARTIST: EARLY ATTEMPTS AT INDIAN STYLE PAINTING

A. Departure from the traditional Western Style and Beginning of a more Indian Style representation of Christian Themes

Having equipped himself with the necessary tools and training in the acquisition of skills and techniques essential for the profession, and true to his own convictions, Angelo da Fonseca ventured enthusiastically into indigenising Christian art. He turned away from stereotyped, sentimental and cheap reproductions of western Christian paintings that adorned Catholic churches and homes. Pioneering thus in creating an Indian Christian art, Fonseca had to be his own pathfinder.

Before Fonseca, artists like Alfred D. Thomas and Vinayak S. Masoji had painted Christian subjects in Indian style and setting, but neither of these devoted his life entirely to translate the Christian message in the Indian context, and to make it feel at home in India as Fonseca did. He single-mindedly faced the challenge and pursued his path.
B. Characteristics of his Personal Style

In keeping with his needs and purposes, Angelo da Fonseca evolved a distinctive mode of expression. Like other artists he drew inspiration from various sources, but his talent transformed the influences into a highly personalized style. In this new approach he consciously eliminated the main features of the Christian paintings popular at the time. The style he devised was direct, simple, solid, forceful and elevated. The way of handling line and colour are particularly his own.

Certain visual elements appeal more to some artists than others: some being drawn by the splendour of colour, others by the intricacies of line or shapes, others still by the fascination of light and shade or texture, make one of these elements the predominant factor of their style. Angelo da Fonseca was attracted more than anything else by the beauty of line and its varied possibilities.

Fonseca's style is essentially linear - he sees everything in terms of line, instead of patches of colour, light and shade or masses. With a compelling power he defines the form with lines, leading the eye first along the boundaries and edges of the forms and then to the surface lines that outline the detail, thus he emphasizes the limits of things. Consequently he gives solidity to his individual figures and objects. They have tangible distinct forms that convey a feeling of stability to the spectator. It
Stark simplicity characterises Fonseca's paintings. His compositions, direct and simple, involve only a few figures in most cases. Often a single figure or two compose a scene. In the later works rarely did he use a background for his figure compositions. At times the figures occupy the entire picture space with no room left for the background. Thus the onlooker's attention is caught and centred on the main theme or figure. There are no irrelevant accessories to detract one's gaze from the main object.

The very materials employed for the work speak of the simplicity of his art. It looks as though he used anything that was available and produced out of it a great work of art. For his water-colours, Fonseca used ordinary sheets of paper - light blue, light green, gray, black or white. Other materials employed as surfaces for the different media were strawboard, hardboard, canvas and ordinary wood. Sometimes even a torn sheet of paper from an exercise notebook or a piece of broken slate served the purpose. Perhaps he could not afford the expensive papers and other grounds available for painting.

He gives due respect to the flat surface and stresses the two-dimensionality of the picture-plane. The figures and objects rest flat upon the surface and are placed parallel to the picture-plane, implying hardly any sense of space. In a few instances he indicated space by placing the objects at different levels as in Suffered under
Pontius Pilate (Fig.32). He regulated the size of each object by its relative importance in the drama and distance. By means of aerial and linear perspective or colour he created an impression of vast space in some of his early works like Christ giving the Keys to St. Peter (Fig.9) and Frs. John Grueber and Albert d'Orville, from China presenting a telescope to Raja Pratap Malla of Nepal, 1662.3

With the exception of his murals and a few large oil paintings, the majority of Fonseca's works are small in size.

The linear and flat style which Fonseca developed found apt expression in the wash technique which he acquired during his training under Abanindranath Tagore. But he applied it with slight variation for a large number of his works. He made the design on paper with pencil or charcoal. Then he moistened the underside of the paper and gave a general wash of background colour. When this was dry, he moistened the underside again and began to paint. Between each application of colour, he would moisten the underside so that the colour sunk into the paper. In this way he could paint one colour over another if needed.4 Finally

2. From the Creed series, Vatican Museum, Rome.

3. Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, Bombay.

4. Information obtained from Bishop W.Q. Lash, Hilfield, Dorset, through correspondence dated 3-3-1979. He lived with Fonseca in the C.P.S.S. ashram until 1947 when he became a bishop. He encouraged Fonseca in his venture and watched him at work.
the figures and objects were given a strong outline and details were added. This resulted in giving the painting a tempera finish.

Fonseca's paintings have none of those evanescent qualities of other worldliness, spatial feeling and shimmering light effects characteristic of the works of Abanindranath Tagore. Perhaps, he consciously avoided these qualities of Romantic dreaminess so as not to detract from the expression of spiritual realities. His figures, however, manifest another type of otherworldliness springing from the inner dynamism of faith.

Though he used the wash technique for most of his paintings, he was equally skilled in handling the transparent watercolour technique as seen in some of his watercolour studies, portraits and landscapes. With great dexterity, he employed pastels and the oil medium. He tried his hand in other media as well, such as murals, carvings on wood, tile, soft stone, slate and painting on cloth. He also experimented with the techniques of making stained glass.

To attain his purpose, Fonseca established a figure type in consonance with his ideals. Feeling the inadequacy of the human form to express the divine, he adopted a type by using certain conventions. His representations of Christ, the apostles and other men saints do not conform to any particular Indian type. They are generalised men, mostly bearded and dressed in a long tunic with or without
a shawl draped around. Their noble and dignified mien, with an aura of sanctity shining through, is an expression of Fonseca's own faith and vision.

His portrayal of women, however, is typically Indian. By their features they can be identified as Maharashtrian, Goan or Punjabi. Their dress, ornaments, postures and setting reveal their origin. The basic shape of the face, especially of the Madonnas can be traced to the pipal leaf format: with the top edges forming the eyebrows - the forehead being added - and the lower part representing the chin. The proportions of, and the distances between the forehead, eyes, nose, mouth and chin are well regulated.

For instance, in the Empty Alabaster Vase (Fig. 10) Magdalen appears as a beautiful slender young Indian maiden, perhaps, little too elongated.

He saw beauty in ordinary human faces and took them as models to illustrate religious themes, transforming them with an inner radiance of peace. His figures evoke a sense of repose and make one feel at home with them - possibly the result of his efforts to incarnate the Christian faith in the culture of his people rooting it deeply in his country's soil, thus fulfilling the aspira-

5. Fonseca confided this information to Arthur Machado, his friend, who revealed it during an interview with him on 27-1-1979.
tions of his people. He went to the extent of incorporating famous Indian personalities into his religious paintings. For example, Gandhiji and Rabindranath Tagore are represented as the disciples in the Supper at Emmaus (Fig. 46). In Jesus in the Temple (Fig. 11), the Boy Christ speaks not to the Jewish religious teachers (the Pharisees and Scribes) but to Indian Philosophers—Madhava, Ramanuja and Vallabha.6 This painting also illustrates the Indian setting—the architectural background of the temple—rendered in correct perspective.

Fonseca's colours, like his technique and style, were thoroughly Indian. Just as the artists of Ajanta who used the locally available stones to make their colours, Fonseca prepared his pigments from the argillaceous mud collected from Goa. He powdered it into fine grains and mixed it with some binding medium according to the technique he had learnt at Santiniketan. The resulting hues were called Indian-red, Yellow-ochre, etc. Sometimes he mixed this with the Windsor and Newton colours to obtain the required value and intensity of a particular hue.7 These pigments were used for his watercolours, and in all likelihood,

6. Fonseca marked the names at the bottom of the photograph in his album; left back Madhava, left front Ramanuja, right Vallabha.

7. Information given by Chico D'Souza, Fonseca's nephew, who as a young boy helped him to prepare the colours.
for his murals in the C.P.S.S. ashram. Later on, the preparation of the tempera pigments was perfected by following the proportions of the media and process obtained from Beuron through his friend Rupert Seluveigerh C., a Jesuit scholastic. It is as follows:

5 eggs, 80 gr. linseed oil, boiled; 30 gr. turpentine oil; 25 gr. copaiya-balsam (can be replaced by honey); 100 gr. vinegar; (the vinegar serves only for improving the durability of the mixture; it is advisable to use as little as possible and to take water instead). The sequence of the mixture should be as follows: Yolk with linseed oil, turpentine oil, copaiya-balsam, the white of the eggs, vinegar (with water).

He favoured a limited palette of a few sober hues - light blue, light green, Indian-red, earth brown, ochre yellow and white. His soft colours appeal more to the imagination than to the senses. He used these especially for his religious paintings to evoke a mood of piety and to inspire devotion in the beholder.

Artists have used symbolic objects to represent an idea and to make tangible the invisible reality. In his great desire to indigenise, Angelo da Fonseca was careful to use only commonly accepted symbols like the halo, lotus flower, lamp, lily, cross, dove, lamb and not those that would offend his co-religionists.

8. Rupert Seluveigerh's letter to Fonseca dated May 7, 1939, Vide Appendix-C., no.7.
C. Early Works of the 30's and 40's

The first works of Angelo da Fonseca in Indian style were executed in the C.P.S.S. ashram, Pune, the most congenial ground for inspiring and fostering such an endeavour. During his training at Santiniketan Fonseca's pictures, shown at the Oriental Art Exhibition, Calcutta won the appreciation of the Public. The sketches of Abanindranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore, the paintings of the West View (Tagore's house) and Sañtimtola, and a number of watercolour studies like the Study of a Child, Study of Guita Roy – a student at Santiniketan, Study of a Boy, Study of a Violinist and Study of Haraprasanna belong to this period. During his short stay in Goa, after he returned from Santiniketan, Fonseca painted a few secular pictures before he went to Pune.

Angelo da Fonseca produced a large number of paintings within a period of about four decades. For purposes of study and analysis this large output is provisionally divided into three phases – the Early paintings of the 30's and 40's, the works of the 50's, and the creations of the final phase, the 60's. In the present study this chronological division is not strictly adhered to for the simple reason that while studying a theme or making

9. Refer Chapter VII for details of some of these paintings.
Comparisons of stylistic development from a period of experimentation and uncertainty to the mature phase, one has to bring in works of an earlier or later period.

Faith and religion were the fountainhead from which Fonseca drew inspiration for his work. His vision was distinctly religious and his deep faith provided him with ample themes. His art is serious and deeply rooted in his soul. He spent hours in prayer before painting a picture. In and through prayer he got the inspiration for his art. In this respect he comes very close to Fra Angelico who is quoted as saying that one must pray well in order to paint well. Fonseca was very familiar with Sacred Scripture and was well acquainted with the theological foundation of his art. His reflections and meditations are revealed by the high spiritual quality he maintained in his work.

Being a devout Catholic, it is but natural that Fonseca found an inexhaustible treasury of themes for his art in the mysteries of his Faith. The topics often dealt with are scenes from the life of Christ (the Annunciation, Nativity, Flight into Egypt, the Eucharist, the Crucifixion, the Pieta, the Resurrection, Christ at Emmaus) and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, including Madonnas under various titles. Series of paintings like the

illustrations of the articles of the Creed, the Seven Sacraments, the mysteries of the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross also form an important part of his work. His devotional pictures, like the representations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, the Holy Family, and other saints, as well as themes on prayer and many of his historical paintings form a significant contribution to Indian Christian painting. Religious paintings do not exhaust the repertoire of his varied talents. They find expression in portraits - in oil, watercolour and pastels - as well as landscapes.

One of the first pictures which brought recognition, publicity and patronage to Fonseca was the Annunciation. In the early years of his artistic career and of his stay at the C.P.S.S. ashram, he was asked to paint a religious picture for the magazine 'Catholic Action'. He agreed on condition that he would be permitted to paint it in Indian style. The outcome was the Annunciation, printed in full colour in the April 1935 issue. The picture, in Fonseca's words,

caused much comment and criticism, it could not be otherwise. The first attempt at painting a Christian subject in Indian style was, to say the least, very daring! But I was glad to say that the picture was liked by many and has since been reproduced many times, even in small size, like a 'holy picture'.

11. A monthly published by the Catholic Students' Union of Bombay.
The Annunciation has been very dear to Christian artists from early times since at that moment God brought to mankind, through the consent of Mary, the long-promised liberation or salvation (moksha or mukti) from the retribution (karma) that resulted from man's turning to evil.

Though man had offended his Creator by choosing His creatures instead, yet in His mercy the Creator not only offered His pardon to repentant man, but through the Virgin Mother Mary He came to share our human life in the person of Jesus (meaning Saviour, Liberator) in order to invite human beings to share His divine life of infinite bliss through the way (dharma) of self-giving love. St. Luke's Gospel records the event when God sent His messenger or angel with the divine proposal for human salvation, and Mary's consent on being reassured that this divine conception would keep her virginity inviolate.13

In Fonseca's painting of the Annunciation in 1935 (Fig.12), the scene is set against an arched opening forming, perhaps, part of an open gallery with a low parapet. Mary dressed in a long garment and scarf is portrayed as a tall, slender figure with her hands resting on her lap. Her face expresses her immaculate holiness and purity of life, further emphasized by the halo around her head and the lily. She listens attentively to the messenger's

words - a docile recipient of God's message and grace.
Reassured by the angel's words concerning the divine conception of her son Mary is represented by Fonseca as about to give her consent.

The angel bringing the message is poised against the background to the left. His left hand, extended towards the Virgin, holds a lily, symbolic of Mary's purity. A few sweeping lines delineate his figure. The curious treatment of the garments is worth noting - the hanging edges of the angel's dress as well as the Virgin's scarf end in sharp points. Some linear patterns decorate the floor and the parapet is painted with a leaf motif alternating with lily. The dominant colour is Fonseca's favourite Indian-red.

In this picture no symbol indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit, though in some of his paintings His presence is symbolised by beams of light radiating towards the Virgin, or by a dove. Noble in inspiration and masterly in execution, this picture breathes the solemn peace and reverence befitting this great mystery.

Through this Annunciation Fonseca became known and appreciated in Europe and in the U.S.A. Europeans admired the noble flow of the lines, the beautiful colour harmony and especially the deeply Christian representation of the event.

Angelo da Fonseca returned again and again to this
A great variety of gestures and setting can be noticed in the fifteen examples studied. These were painted between 1935 and 1957. In ten of them the Virgin Mary is presented at the right and the angel the left of the picture, as was customary with the western artists. Three of them show the angel at the right and Mary at the left, and in the other two paintings only the figure of Mary is depicted. Mary is presented seated in six, kneeling in five, standing in one. In two paintings only the busts of Mary and the angel appear and one has the bust of Mary alone. The angel Gabriel makes no appearance in two paintings, in two others he kneels, only his bust appears in two paintings, and the rest shows him either standing, in flight or alighting.

The presence of the Holy Spirit, through whose power the Incarnation took place, is implied by the symbol of the dove or rays of light. In the fifteen pictures examined He is symbolised by a dove in seven of them, by rays of light in six, and in two there are no indications of His presence.

Though the scene of the Annunciation, according to the Gospel of St. Luke, took place in Mary's house at Nazareth artists had no scruples about placing it in a palace, church, under a portico or even in a garden. With the exception of five of Fonseca's paintings which have no background, the others are placed in some interior.
The halo, a symbol of holiness, surrounds the head of Mary in all except four paintings. The spotless whiteness of the lily has made it a symbol of purity and of the virginity of Mary. The lily or the lotus in some cases, both symbols of purity, appears in eleven pictures either held in the angel's hand, painted in the background or in a pot resting on the parapet.

Fonseca does not show much variety in depicting the expression on Mary's face. Her countenance is aglow with an inner radiance of grace, and this accounts for the omission of a halo around her head in a few instances. No feeling of fear or surprise is evident on Mary's mature face as seen in many European representation of the theme. On the contrary, a deep calm and serenity pervades the picture, representing her total submission to God's will. Fonseca may have shown a characteristic quality of Indian womanhood - submission to higher and divine power - in his portrayal of Mary and her attitude. All, except one, of the fifteen paintings show Mary in deep prayer with her hands folded or resting on her lap. In four of them an oil lamp burns near her. All of these indicate that Mary was at prayer when the messenger brought the Good News. In one painting, however, Mary seems to have been grinding (inferred from the utensils around her) and suddenly

14. A common grinding machine in an Indian home called चक्की (Chakki) in Hindi and மல்லாரு (Thiriyal) in Tamil.
interrupted by the angelic salutation (Fig. 13). Even then she does not appear startled.

Representing Mary at work at the time of the Annunciation was not unknown in the artistic world. The Byzantine painters portrayed the Annunciation at the Well with Mary carrying a pitcher and standing near the curb stone of a well. Another example is the Virgin at the Spinning wheel with the distaff. But western artists preferred to show her either praying or reading the Sacred Scriptures, kneeling or seated with a book. In none of Fonseca's paintings is Mary shown reading a book except in one where an half-open scroll is before her. Consciously he wanted to give more emphasis to prayer than reading or work.

The angel Gabriel exhibits a variety of gestures. In three he appears with folded hands in the attitude of prayer; seven paintings show him with one hand extended towards the Virgin, and the other hand holding a lily or a lotus. In one, he raises the forefinger of his left hand perhaps, to underline his words and message, a gesture charged with great power and strength (Fig. 14). In another example rays of light emerging from behind the

15. The original is in the Vatican Museum archives, Rome. This painting is part of the Rosary series.

angel flood the entire surface (Fig. 15). In three others, three rays of light from above radiate towards the Virgin. A rather unusual and rare portrayal of the theme by Fonseca shows the angel with folded hands kneeling behind Mary instead of facing, her in the customary way (Fig. 16). Fonseca's Annunciations do not show the angel holding a staff or sceptre or the angel's words as in some older paintings.

The figure of Mary corresponds to the Indian type in many respects: in her features, thoughtful eyes, her posture and complexion. In the mural of the Annunciation at the C.P.S.S. ashram, she is shown as a young Maharashtrian girl dressed in a skirt and choli. In five others, too, she appears in similar costume with a scarf added. In the others she wears a sari. The ornaments—chains, beads, ear rings (sometimes quite heavy), bangles and anklets, and the hairdo decorated with flowers—are typically Indian.

The angel being a spiritual being, the artist gives him a form according to his imagination and traditional modes of representing such a creature. Consequently the features are generalized. He wears a long flowing garment, the hanging edges of which in two examples terminate in a point. Gradually the pointed ends become wavy or straight.

17. Ibid.
In five of Fonseca's pictures the usual wings associated with angels are not represented. In complexion he appears Indian. Accessories like a small oil lamp in one painting and the kuthuvilakku in three are Indian.

It is interesting to note that in the early representation of the Annunciation the figures are slender, elegant and almost fragile. The lines delineating these forms are equally graceful and delicate. They gain in strength as Fonseca's art matures. This is noticeable in the Announcements painted in the 1940's where the figures are solid but graceful, and outlined with a bolder line (Fig.17). The two Annunciations where the angel is kneeling, and the two examples where the angel is completely left out of the scene are also of later date (Fig.18). Another striking feature of some of the later ones is the absence of the halo around Mary's head or the lily held in the angel's hand.

The compositions are very simple. The figures are placed parallel to the picture plane. There is no indication of space or depth through the use of perspective, shading or colour except in one painting. There is very little modelling, of figures with light and shade. They are displayed flatly on the picture space. In one painting (Fig.19) the figures are placed at different levels and reduced size in the distant plane is observable. The

18 In the Vatican Museum archives, Rome. It belongs to the Credo series.
angel in the near plane is larger than the Virgin in the distant plane, thus creating a sense of space. But there is a feeling of unity in the composition. The figures are knit together by a gesture or a glance or directional line, thus creating unity of action or psychological unity. The subdued and harmonious colour scheme adds to the unity and spiritual atmosphere - giving a feeling of something tremendous and mysterious taking place. The latter aspect is an outcome of the artist's own spiritual life and the result of his reflections and contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation. Without these, Fonseca would not have been able to create these feelings in his paintings and to communicate them to the viewers.

Many critics have expressed their appreciation for Fonseca's murals which once adorned the old chapel in the C.F.S.S. ashram, Pune. The chapel built in the style of a Hindu temple was dedicated in 1934 to St.Clare. Slowly in fell into disrepair and was pulled down to Fonseca's grief.19 The Annunciation with the angel at the left and Mary at the right, was painted on either side of the doorway leading to the sanctuary. Mary is shown in an attitude of deep prayer - her hands joined, eyes closed and her whole being engrossed in God (Fig. 20).20

20. The murals are lost today, a photograph of Mary is preserved in the artist's album.
The light from the nearby lamp illumines her beautiful features. The Holy Spirit, represented by the symbol of a dove, hovers over her.

A feeling of space is produced by the large portion of the sky at the left and the fading of details and colour. An atmosphere of quiet and peace prevails and Fonseca has succeeded in surrounding the scene with an aura of supernatural mystery.

One is struck by the overwhelming simplicity (the hallmark of Fonseca's paintings) with which St. Francis of Assisi is depicted on the back wall of the present chapel (Fig. 21). A few lines in brown, on an off-white ground framed by a moulding, bring out clearly the forms of the saint and the bare winter tree with a bird perched on one of its branches. With folded hands Francis gazes up at the bird. The benign look on Francis' face indicates his great love and tenderness towards all God's creatures. The old chapel that was later destroyed appears in the background.

The Canticle of Brother Sun, a poem composed by St. Francis, speaks in even more eloquent terms of his great respect and love for all creation. Fonseca's painting of the Canticle of Brother Sun dated 1957 (Fig. 22)\(^1\) shows him almost identical with the trees around. The disproportionately tall and thin figure - a symbol perhaps of

\(^1\) In the collection of Ivy Fonseca, Punc.
uprightness and honesty— is as straight as the tree.

His ascetical face expresses his profound absorption in God, as if in ecstasy, oblivious of his surroundings. In creating the feeling of spiritual mystical experience, Fonseca comes very close to El Greco.

Two other murals executed in 1934 adorn the walls of the verandah in the C.P.S.S. ashram hostel. Both have the same dimensions and format. They represent the Vision of St. Francis and St. Francis embracing the Leper. A floral border encloses the paintings in both cases, in the manner of the Mughal miniatures. In the Vision of St. Francis (Fig. 23), with eager longing, burning love and tender compassion for the sufferings of Christ, the saint gently embraces the Crucifix, and Christ in turn looks at him with infinite love, and in His great gratitude to Francis He detaches His right hand from the Cross and appears to place it on Francis' shoulder as in the painting by Murillo.

These murals in the C.P.S.S. ashram are in a bad state of preservation, especially those on the hostel verandah. Exposed to light and weathering the paint, as well as the ground is peeling off. Immediate steps should be taken to salvage the treasures from total deterioration.

The words of Abanindranath Tagore, "You ought to do some Bible pictures in fresco. There are so many churches in India that people ought to get paint the life of Christ
on their walls"22, gave Fonseca renewed enthusiasm to try
his hand again on murals. Moreover, the information
regarding the tempera mixtures obtained from Beuron gave
a fresh impetus to experiment further with this medium.
Perhaps, this explains, why the early murals in the ashram
are fast deteriorating, for he did not yet have the proper
knowledge of the proportions and media of the tempera
mixtures. Those in the church of St. Francis Xavier and
the De Nobili chapel, executed later, are still fresh and
bright.

The murals in the church of St. Francis Xavier, Pune,
were painted a decade later (1944) at the order of R.Rauw,
the parish priest. At the transept ends, covering the
entire width of the wall, Fonseca portrayed two large
paintings of St. Francis Xavier preaching in Goa and the
Death of St. Francis Xavier. In the latter (Fig.24)
Fonseca pictured "two Portuguese fidalgos who came out to
visit the body of the Saint on learning of his death. I
had a special pleasure in portraying my father in one of
them. In the other, I like wise portrayed Fr.Heras whom
I venerate as my second father."23 In this he was following
the practice of some of the old masters who portrayed
their patrons, friends or foes or themselves in some of
their works.

22. Abanindranath Tagore's letter to Fonseca, received on
January 30, 1939. Vide Appendix C, no.4, for the
whole letter.
23. Fonseca, op.cit., p.141.
Against a light cream background the figures and details stand out in broad, bold, brown lines. They look more like sketches than paintings. The strength and durability of the tempera pigments were tested in 1980 when they were given a thorough cleaning with soap, revealing thus the clarity and freshness of the original work.

Eight murals, each framed by a moulding, serve as altarpieces to the side altars in the chapel of the De Nobili College, Pune. Commissioned by H. Staffner, S.J., they represent, on the left, St. John de Britto, St. Joseph and the Christ Child, St. Francis Xavier and St. Therese of Lisieux. On the right appear St. Robert Bellarmin, the Annunciation, Vision of St. Ignatius and the Vision of St. Peter Canossius. These are also painted in his characteristic sepia outlines with a cream background.

The figure of John de Britto is typically Indian - Fonseca presents him as a Brahmin. Executed much later (1957), when he was more sure of himself, they seem to lack the vivacity and spontaneity of some of his earlier works. The reason may be attributed to the fact that these commissions were undertaken to satisfy a specific need and had to please the patrons. The subject matter, the mode of working, and the details may have been dictated.

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to the artist. Thus his freedom of expression was curtailed and even his imagination did not have much scope and so he had to resort to some compromise. Fonseca himself commented earlier on this attitude: "One cannot produce masterpieces to order", he says, "the touch of the master comes to you while you are at work - with that hope I work." 25

But these paintings gave him some official recognition, for there were still critics who would not accept the idea of an Indian Christian art. Comments were coming back to his ears that hurt him or made him happy.

Other fine and interesting works of the 30's by Fonseca represent the Nativity, Epiphany, the Flight into Egypt, Christ at the house of Martha and Mary, the Supper at Emmaus, the series of twenty paintings illustrating the articles of the Creed and a host of others. The Epiphany (Fig. 25), 26 one of the finest of these, is remarkable for its grace and dignity. Mary, seated at a window, contemplates at the Infant Christ. The usual gifts of incense, gold and myrrh are neatly placed on a rug which is fully displayed as if seen from above without any recession in


26. In the collection of Ivy Fonseca, Pune.
perspective. So also the floor. The splendid figures of the Kings and other picturesque details are purposely left out in order to stress the meaning of the Epiphany or Manifestation.

The Nativity (Fig. 26) is very charming and touching in its simplicity and tender motherly affection. Both these compositions are very pleasing in their cool, subdued colour combinations. The Nativity appeared in colour as the frontispiece of Farbhasi, a Bengali monthly, and in the 1935 December issue of the Modern Review. The same theme is represented in a few other paintings also. But they are all done in the traditional way with all the appendages like the crib, a part of the stable with a few animals. In the above picture, he boldly refused to admit any of these details, not even St. Joseph is present.

A highly decorative treatment of the theme is Figure 27. The picture is divided into three zones. The middle part is devoted to the portrayal of the Nativity, with the Infant Christ lying in a manger and with Mary and Joseph on either side. In the upper part a group of figures beat drums, and sound trumpets and flute. They stand on clouds set against a dark background interspersed with clouds and stars. From these, it may be concluded that they represent

27. In the collection of F.J.Ubelmeeser, S.J., Nuremberg.
angels announcing the Good News of the birth of the Saviour. The Magi or the three Kings, shown at the lower left, advance very solemnly carrying their gifts. The shepherds at the bottom right hasten to pay their homage to the Lord.

Here is a good example of the decorative handling of line. Infant Christ, Mary and Joseph are defined by curved sweeping lines. Both straight and curved lines bound the forms of the angels, kings and shepherds. Again, features and details are indicated by lines. These lines, mostly in white, enliven the otherwise sombre hues of the picture.

The Flight into Egypt is a subject which he painted a few times. Here again he abandoned the traditional treatment of the Mother and Child seated on an ass and led by St. Joseph. One picture (Fig. 28) shows them travelling on foot. Joseph is seen here as a strong, sturdy man capable of protecting the Mother and the Child from any danger. His left arm is stretched out behind Mary in a protective gesture. In his right hand he holds a lily. Both Joseph and Mary are aware of their perilous situation and their vigilant eyes scan the surroundings to detect any sign of danger as they walk along the desert. Though they are watchful, there is no trace of fear or anxiety on their faces. Even the background, with the large expanse of sky, the low hills forming the horizon, and the stretch of water in the middle distance give a sense of peace and add to the beauty of the figures that move across it.
A few of the others show the Rest on the Flight into Egypt. An early version of 1937 (Fig. 29)\(^\text{28}\) shows them resting on a green meadow with barren hills — except for a few trees — in the background and the rather dark sky, signifying the dangers that they might have to encounter on the way. Their faces too reveal their anxiety. A more relaxed rest on the flight is noticeable in two other paintings entitled By the Wayside. A curious feature appears in another picture where two birds fly before the fastmoving travellers indicating the flight of the Holy Family (Fig. 30).\(^\text{29}\)

An oil painting of the Flight (Fig. 31) shows Mary and Joseph as refugees. It was executed during World War II when such phenomena were quite common. Their eyes are weary and heavy; sorrow and anxiety are written all over their faces, wondering what action to take next. Unlike his water colour paintings and other works in oil, this is worked out in rather quick, broad strokes.

In all these, the presentation of the theme is unmistakably Indian, including the background which is possibly the parched, barren stretches of land and low hills of the Deccan plateau. The Madonna figures and Joseph conform to Indian conception.

29. Ibid.
The subjects for some of Fonseca's paintings were suggested by his friends. For instance, H. Heras, S.J. prompted him to illustrate the articles of the Apostles' Creed, some of the historical pictures and themes taken from Vedic literature. The series of paintings relating to the Creed, twenty in number, were later acquired by Cardinal Celso Constantini.

One of the pictures of the Creed, Suffered under Pontius Pilate (Fig. 32) presents the moving encounter of Christ with the Roman Procurator. Here Fonseca had in mind the words of St. Mathew: "While Pilate was sitting in the judgement hall, his wife sent him a message: 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man, because in a dream last night I suffered much on account of him".

The figures are placed at three different levels parallel to the picture surface. At the left top, Pilate is shown seated cross-legged with his wife nearby. Her face and the gesture of her left hand indicate that she is narrating her dream and pursuing him to have nothing to do with the just man, Jesus Christ, who stands before him on a lower level. At the top right a maid brings a jug of water with which Pilate hopes to prove his innocence. The

30. In the Vatican Museum archives, Rome.

unsteady, weak character of Pilate is contrasted with the vertical, upright figure of Christ. Beside Christ but on a still lower level stands a guard. Through an opening at the bottom right corner can be seen Peter and the servant girl. As they are the farthest in the picture, they are made smaller but there is no recession into space. A certain space-consciousness is created by the different levels wherein figures and architectural details are placed. Other than this, no attention is paid to render the details of perspective like the recession or vanishing of the upper floor and the throne on which Pilate is seated. As a whole they are given a decorative treatment.

Quite an original and imaginative representation is the Communion of Saints, another article of the Creed (Fig.33)32. A large Cross, the symbol of Christ's sufferings, death and resurrection (also the sign of man's redemption) rises from the bottom of the picture. It acts both as a unifying and dividing element in the scene. Visually it divides the picture into three - an upper horizontal section and two lower vertical parts. The upper part shows heaven with the Holy Trinity surrounded by angels and saints. The whole group rests on clouds. In the lower left is a church interior where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is being celebrated, the infinite value of

32. In the Vatican Museum archives, Rome.
which benefits a soul that is released from purifying sufferings and attains moksha, as is evident from the rising figure at the lower right side. It is very significant to note how Fonseca gives material form to spiritual realities and how he used the Cross to unite the Church triumphant, the Church militant and the Church suffering. One who looks at these paintings with the eyes of faith, and humble and receptive mind, will get a glimpse of Him who is revealed through the symbols.

Other paintings which Fonseca did in series are those representing the Seven Sacraments executed in 1937, and the fifteen pictures illustrating the mysteries of the Rosary. The latter were painted in 1940-41. These follow more or less the same style of his other paintings of this period. The figures and details look more stylized in the paintings of the sorrowful and glorious mysteries of the rosary when compared to the joyful mysteries.

There are about twenty-two historical paintings by Angelo da Fonseca among the collections of the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, St. Xavier's College, Bombay. These were commissioned by Henry Heras and deal with certain events from the Jesuit activities in India. Some of these were done in 1938, a few in 1939 and 1941 and the others in 1949. One of these, the Emperor

33. A few of these are in the Vatican Museum archives, Rome.
Akbar accompanied by his son Salim visiting the Jesuits at Fatehpur-Sikri (Fig. 34)\textsuperscript{34} is an early work (1938) painted in gratitude for the encouragement he received from H. Heras.

The scene is set in a courtyard with Mughal buildings around. The three fathers Rudolfo Acquaviva, Antonio Montserrat and Henriquez have just come out of their residence and the first one, Acquaviva, paying his respects to the Emperor who with his retinue stands to the left.

The information and details required for the painting were given by Heras as Fonseca himself says:

Fr. Heras supplied me with a photograph of a Mughal painting he had discovered in the 'Bharat Itihas Samshodak Mandal' of Poona, in which Fr. Acquaviva had been identified. Thus, the face of Fr. Acquaviva in my watercolour was copied from that Mughal painting. But I had no portrait of Fr. Montserrat. Since he was a Catalan from Eastern Spain, and Fr. Heras is also a Catalan, I thought that they would not be very dissimilar. In my painting, therefore, Fr. Montserrat looks like Fr. Heras, or perhaps I should say that Fr. Heras impersonates Fr. Montserrat.\textsuperscript{35}

This was another instance where he portrayed Heras in a historical painting and it was a fine gesture of gratitude on the part of the artist.

The linear quality characteristic of Fonseca creates a certain rhythm and unity in the picture. The figures form an organic whole with the architectural background.

\textsuperscript{34} Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, Bombay.

\textsuperscript{35} Fonseca, op. cit., p. 141.
Contrary to his other works, Fonseca introduces more actors in his historical paintings. The scenes are set with appropriate backgrounds - a palace, a Mughal courtyard, a market, a southern gopura or a village or a northern countryside with snow-clad mountains in the distance. As in many of his early paintings, the colours are quite bright and vivid. His knowledge and use of perspective is also noticed in some of these paintings. For example, in Frs. John Grueber and Albert d' Orville, from China, presenting a telescope to Raja Pratap Malla of Nepal, 1662, the objects and details become blurred and colours lighten with distance, showing that he had knowledge of aerial perspective.

Inspired by the suggestion of Heras, Fonseca approached Indian Scriptures and gave visible form to some of the fine thoughts contained therein. Three paintings were done in this series. One represents the Tree of Religion with roots above and branches down, as described in the Bhagavad Gita. Fonseca introduced the Blessed Trinity in the upper section of the painting. Firmly planted on the root in the centre is a Cross, at the top of which is a dove, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. On either side of the Cross the symbolic figure of God the

36. In the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture, Pombay.

Father and Jesus Christ are seated on the roots.

The Cross unites the figures. The spreading branches of the tree below enclose the globe of the earth. The leaves are rendered with the care and love of a miniaturist, so much so that they can be numbered.

The Two Birds of Paradise (Fig. 35) looks like two paintings superimposed one above the other. The upper part is centred around a tree in the middle. On its branches two birds - one light and one dark - symbols of eternal bliss, are perched against a glow of light with radiating rays. Seated below at the bottom right corner is the figure of a venerable old man, a yogi, in an attitude of meditation. The atmosphere breathes a sense of peace and serenity conducive to mental activity. As the painting was completed in Kodaikanal, the hills and trees in the lower part are those of Kodi. They look realistic, while the upper part is more imaginary.

The artist himself gives the most appropriate description of the third picture which he considers to be one of his best paintings (Fig. 36). It represents God as described in Vedic literature.

He is in His eternal meditation (tapas). Consequently He is depicted in the classical meditation pose of India (dhyāna mudrā). He is moreover shown old, cultivating a long white beard as He is 'the ancient of days' as mentioned both by Daniel and in Sanskrit literature; but at the same time, He is strong and vigorous, for days do not pass for Him, since He is 'eternal youth' as He is often called by the Buddha. All this is caused by the fact that 'He breathes by His own nature' (ānīt swadhyā),
corresponding to the name Svayamabhū which is found in Vedantic literature. Moreover, in the painting, He is shown transparent, for He is anāha, "bodyless" as we read in the Upanisads, and wears a jewel-studded Indian mukuta. His eternal thinking (tapasah mahinā) generates one (Rg.X,129,3) who is called Vak (Rg.X,125), the eternal Word, which is His own knowledge, the reflexion of Himself (rūpam) (Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad). Hence this reflexion of God's tapas is shown in the painting by the golden glow that issues forth from Īśvara's forehead. Now God and His personal Word, knowing each other, undoubtedly love each other. This love exists between both (sam avartatā) and is depicted in the painting by the flame which is burning within the chest of God, This triad which exists in God (trayam) is symbolized by the wheel which is seen behind His image, according to the comparison of the Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad; "one wheel having one felly and three tyres."38

Indeed, a very original and daring portrayal of God and a Christian interpretation of the Holy Trinity. It is a picture to be meditated upon rather than to be described or explained!

One of the most moving themes in Christian religious art is the Last Supper or the Lord's Supper. Knowing that one of His chosen apostles would betray Him to those who hated Him, Jesus found a way to remain with His own sacramentally under the appearance of food, though He would no longer be present in the human form. As He gave our bodies the power to change the food we eat into our bodies and blood, so He gave His priests the power to change bread and wine into His Body and

38. Fonseca, op.cit., pp.143-144.
Blood in order to share with us His divine life, so that, in St. Paul's words "It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me"³⁹ or as Jesus Himself has promised, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. Anyone eats this he will live forever. The bread that I will give him is my flesh which I give so that the world may live." And He continues, "This, then is the bread that came down from heaven, it is not like the bread that your ancestors ate, but then died. The one who eats this bread will live forever."⁴⁰

Artists place the accent either on the betrayal or on the Communion meal of the apostles. Angelo da Fonseca chose to stress the Communion aspect.

The three pictures of the Blessing of the Loaves and Fishes serve as a prelude to the Last Supper. In the former, Christ blessed and multiplied the five loaves of bread and two fishes which His disciples distributed to the hungry crowd of 5000 that followed Him.⁴¹ At the Last Supper He changed the bread and wine into His Body and blood and shared them with His own as a pledge of divine life.

39. Galatians - 2/20
40. John - 6/51, 58
41. Mathew-14/19; Mark-6/41; Luke-9/16; John-6/11.
The two oil paintings of the Blessing of the Loaves and Fishes, executed in 1941, are exactly the same in mood and composition except for an additional figure in one, probably Philip, and a slight difference in the treatment of the vine in the background and the arrangement of the loaves and fishes in the basket. In both, Christ's right hand is raised in blessing the loaves and fishes presented by the boy in the foreground, who is ushered in by a disciple, likely, Andrew. The figures, their dress, as well as the gestures and expressions of Christ, Andrew and the boy are exactly the same in both. The second painting (Fig. 37) with one figure less is compositionally better. For this painting, Fonseca was awarded the gold medal of the Bombay Art Society in 1942.

The Last Supper painted in 1945 (Fig. 33) is a masterpiece of his early period. It is a large oil painting showing Jesus with His apostles seated on the floor on pattra unlike the western method of grouping them around a table. The hall is spacious enough for the group.

42. This painting is in the chapel of the Institute for the Study of Religion, Pune.

43. In St. Paul's Seminary, Tiruchirapalli.

44. Taking food seated on low seats called घाट (Pattra) was customary in India especially in Maharashtra and is becoming less common today.
Christ is seated in the centre with an apostle on either side and the others are arranged in a row at the sides with a thali and a tumbler in front of each. The apostles are seen in an attitude of deep recollection with their eyes closed, their whole being absorbed in what is taking place. Judas is shown with one eye open, alert and holding the money bag in his hand. Jesus holds the cup of wine in His hands, "Then He took the cup, and after having offered thanks to God, He gave it to them with the words 'Drink from it all of you. For this is my blood of the covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" On the plate in front of Christ are two flat pieces which look more like chappatis than slices of bread.

The picture breathes an atmosphere of mystery and wonder. The burning oil lamp and the incense add to this sense of the sacred. Angelo da Fonseca deserves credit for restoring to the representation of the event the spiritual meaning, depth and air of mystery partly lost sight of in the 18th and 19th century portrayals. He returned to the religious fervour and simplicity of the Middle Ages.

It is interesting to recall some of the comments elicited by this painting when exhibited in Rome in 1950 at the Exhibition of Christian Art in Mission Lands.

"Some of the visitors in front of the Last Supper by Angelo da Fonseca cubiously smiled and said, 'It is painted according to their customs.' Others, visualizing a deeper significance in the painting, seriously affirmed, 'This artist knows Christianity thoroughly', and after viewing other specimens finally concluded, 'Our faith is deeply rooted in India.'

Two other representations of the Eucharist (Figs. 39 and 40), one painted in 1937 and the other 1964, are worth mentioning. In both the setting and arrangements are the same. Christ sits cross-legged on the pattra in the central, larger in size than the apostles, to stress His divinity—holding up the cup while the disciples sit on either side in Maharashtrian style with a thali and a tumbler in front of each. The scene of the evening meal seems to be lit by brass lamps, but in the painting an even light pervades the entire surface. The lamps do not light up any object nor cast any shadows as there is no modelling by light and shade in both pictures. There is no recession into space either—the figures are placed flat on the two-dimensional surface—whereas in the Last Supper of 1945 he has applied the rules of perspective to a certain extent. What makes the painting of 1964 an advance over the early one is that in the former there is a greater and deeper awareness of the mystery taking place, as conveyed by the more attentive and fervent gestures and postures of the apostles.

In a rather unusual handling of the theme, Fonseca presents in a line-drawing, only the two figures of Christ and the apostle John who leans on Christ's bosom (Fig. 41). This is mentioned only in the fourth Gospel. It symbolizes a soul completely given to God, that places its full trust in God and takes shelter in Him. With a few delicate lines he portrays the mystery behind the event.

In the two paintings entitled in the Upper Room, one made in 1934 and the other in 1948, another variation in the treatment of the subject is seen. Here only the figure of Christ, holding up the cup and invoking the blessing, is presented. Before Him, on a plate, is a loaf of bread. From these it can be inferred that the event portrayed is the institution of the Eucharist. In another painting of the Eucharist, 1958 (Fig. 42), the artist combines the two aspects of the mystery in a single figure of Christ. The sacramental aspect is symbolized by the chalice or the cup held in His left hand, and the sacrificial side is revealed by the marks of the nail wound on the right palm held outward.

47. Painted in 1957 and preserved in the collection of Ivy Fonseca, Pune.


49. Printed in Sepp Schuller, op. cit., last page.

50. In the possession of Frances Maria Yasas, Pune.

51. In the collection of P.J. Ubelmesser, S.J., Nuremberg.
Other Indian painters like Jamini Roy and Vinayak S. Masoji painted the Last Supper. Jamini Roy's picture (Fig. 43) lacks all sense of spirituality and religious feeling, with the wooden doll-like figures. The decorative treatment makes it no more than a wall ornamentation. Masoji tried to evoke the mood of the theme by the postures, gestures and expressions of the apostles. Christ is depicted on a larger scale to emphasize His importance in the picture.

Christ at Emmaus or Super at Emmaus forms a kind of epilogue to the theme of the Eucharist, for the disciples recognized their Master at the breaking of the bread. Here again Fonseca painted two pictures quite similar in composition — one in the late 30's and the other in 1964 (Figs. 44 and 45). In both the majestic figure of Christ stands at the right and reveals Himself by blessing and breaking the bread. In one He has just broken the loaf and is about to hand it to the elderly disciple. The latter is dressed in a green robe and seated on a cushioned chair in front. In the other picture Jesus is in the act of breaking the bread. Together with the revealing gesture of Christ, recognition dawns upon the disciples. Through the expressions and gestures of the disciples, Fonseca seems to say that Christ's manifestation takes place in the heart of the faithful, the simple and the humble can have a

direct experience of God. He seems to have grasped these truths fully and presented them in a masterly way.

The action takes place against a simple background with an opening in the centre through which a glimpse of a hilly landscape beyond is brought into view. The lines delineating the figures and objects are more pronounced in the painting of 1964 than in the early one. Through varied application, the lines express form, texture and character. The face of Christ is more naturalistic in the earlier painting which has some modelling with light and shade.

A daring interpretation of the subject is a painting executed in 1935 (Fig. 46). It shows the disciples — in this case they happen to be Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore — seated at table with Christ at the right end. He is placed on a slightly higher seat and is about to bless the loaf of bread. The disciples' faces and hands express the illumination of their minds. A view of a distant landscape is seen through the opening behind Gandhiji.

On the side wall of the chapel in the C.P.S.S. ashram, Pune, hangs a painting in oil of Supper at Emmaus. It has been much repaired and overpainted.

The early works of Fonseca were executed under great inspiration. During this period he painted, "colourful things" which reflected the enthusiasm of a young artist who

This painting is in the dining hall of the C.P.S.S. ashram, Pune.
experiences the joy of creation."\textsuperscript{54}

Some of the paintings of this period show traces of influence from the earlier Schools of Indian painting in their love for detail and the use of bright colours. This appears in St. Anne and Mary, The Childhood of Mary (1951), Come unto Me (1947), as well as a number of paintings on secular themes - Music (1932), Kanaklatha (1938), Spring (1939) and Water Carrier (1940). A few paintings of the 50's like Mary betrothed to Joseph (1954), This is Christ the King (1954) also show this attention for details.

In the Childhood of Mary (Fig. 47), St. Anne and Mary appear in a garden enjoying a quiet moment. The mother is seated, and supported against her knees is the standing figure of Mary engaged in spinning. The grouping of the two figures and the gesture of the mother who places her hand tenderly on the shoulder of her little daughter knit them into a close unity. Mary's hands and feet seem too slender for her size and age. The mother's face is very Indian. Everything is depicted with great love, and careful attention is paid to the meticulous rendering of the least item. The details of the stripes on St. Anne's sari and Mary's blouse, the designs on her skirt, the treatment of the trees, leaves, foliage, hills down to the tiny petals of the flowers in the foreground, all these remind one of...

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p.2.
Indian miniaturist's love and care for little things.

The same attention to details is noticed in a later painting, Mary betrothed to Joseph (Fig.48). Here the stage is set as for a Hindu wedding. Mary and Joseph are typical Indians and the officiating priest resembles a Brahmin. They sit on the pattra in a solemn, prayerful attitude, with the things necessary for the ceremony. The details of ornamentation are again Indian. Significant among them are floral and mango leaf streamers and the flowering plantain trees. The bright colours evoke a sense of joy and the atmosphere rings with the note of jubilation that accompanies such an event.

A certain rigidity is evident in Fonseca's religious paintings, especially of the early period when many of these were done to order. But some of them are remarkable for religious feeling, like Peace to You and Forgiveness. In Peace to You, 1940 (Fig.49), the risen Christ appears to His apostles and assures them of His Peace and His continued presence with them in a more powerful way. The grouping of eleven persons in a composition is effectively handled. The groups of apostles on the right and left are placed slightly away from the central figure, thus bringing the main character into prominence. This is

In the collection of Ivy Fonseca, Pune.

In the possession of P.J. Ubelmesser, S.J., Nuremberg.
further emphasized by the dark doorway against which the white-clad figure of Christ stands. The pocket of space created in the foreground acts as an invitation to the spectator to step in and join the group.

Forgiveness, 1946 (Fig. 50)\textsuperscript{57} is a proclamation of God's boundless love and forgiveness towards repentant sinners. Magdalen, in the foreground, anoints the feet of Christ. The expression on His face, as well as the protective gesture of His right hand give her confidence. Moreover, the declaration of Jesus, "many sins are forgiven her for she has loved much,"\textsuperscript{58} reassures her of His forgiving love and restore her peace of mind. These sentiments are brought out more vividly in Penance.\textsuperscript{59}

The paintings of the early period are experiments in interpreting Christian themes through Indian motifs. Hence one cannot expect perfection at this stage of his artistic career.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Luke - 7/47.

\textsuperscript{59} One of the paintings of the Seven Sacraments, acquired by Pieter Leo Kierkels.