

**THE SYRO- MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH**  
**MAJOR ARCHIEPISCOPAL CURIA**

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**CATHOLICATE CENTRE, TRIVANDRUM - 695004, KERALA, INDIA**

**Seventh Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod**  
**(17-21 November 2008)**

**REPORT**

His Beatitude Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Catholicos convoked the Seventh Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church at the Synod Hall of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia in the Catholicate Centre, Pattom, Trivandrum from 17 to 21 November 2008.

The Synod Fathers spent the time from 6 p.m. on 17 November to noon on 18 November 2009 for recollection and meditation. Most Rev. Mar George Alanchery, Bishop of Thakkalai guided the Synod Fathers for the recollection.

The Holy Episcopal Synod (HES) began its first session at 3 p.m., after the noon prayers and lunch on 18 November 2008. All the Synod Fathers - His Beatitude Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Catholicos (President of the Synod), Most Rev. Thomas Mar Koorilos (Secretary of the Synod), Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios, Most Rev. Yoohanon Mar Chrysostom, Most Rev. Joshua Mar Ignathios, Most Rev. Abraham Mar Julios, Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Timotheos, Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas and Most Rev. Jacob Mar Barnabas – were present. Fr. Antony Valiyavilayil OIC, the Chancellor of Major Archiepiscopal Curia, recorded the minutes of the Synod, except for matters *subsecreto* on persons.

Most Rev. Gevarghese Mar Timotheos, Bishop Emeritus of Tiruvalla, requested the President for leave from attending the Holy Episcopal Synod-in-Session from the afternoon of 19 November 2009 due to his health condition. As per CCEO c 109, he was granted leave.

The Synod session started with a prayer that concluded with the prayer for the Holy Spirit – *Njangalude Karthavaya Yesumisiha*.

Thereafter it was time to tender the Catholicos' Day collections from the Eparchies and Extraterritorial Regions of the Church. Most Rev. Abraham Mar Julios, the Metropolitan of Muvattupuzha, Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas, Apostolic Visitor to North America and Europe and Most Rev. Jacob Mar Barnabas, Apostolic Visitor to the Extraterritorial Regions in India offered the collections from their respective Eparchy or Regions.

Thereafter, His Beatitude, Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis, the President of the Holy Synod welcomed all the Bishops to the Seventh Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. In his opening message, he recollected the topic of the meditation given by Most Rev. Bishop Alanchery, namely, the Synod. He also shared his experience of participating in the Roman Synod that reflected on the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church. He also said that he could speak in the Synod on behalf of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. His intervention focused on the Word of God and the apostolic tradition in India, the Word of God and its reception in the Church in

India, the Word of God and the Dalit Christians. He also committed to memory the tradition of the Malankara Church that gives particular emphasis to the Word of God in its daily life. He urged the members of the Holy Synod to continue the tradition of revering the Bible dedicated on the prayer table of the nave of the Church and on the Gospel stand kept alongside the altar. The custom of praying singing and reading from the Bible is to be fostered. Similarly our homilies should be a real breaking of the Word of God rather than applying the techniques of homiletics. His Beatitude also urged everyone to improve the quality of reading and presenting the Word of God during our Liturgical celebrations, especially at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Special attention should be given to the reading of the Bible with proper preparation, especially the reading of the Epistles at the celebration of the Holy Qurbono. His Beatitude also conveyed to the Synod Fathers, the great esteem the Holy Father shows towards the traditions of the Oriental Churches in living the Word of God. He said that the Holy Father often quotes the Oriental Fathers of the Church in his teachings.

His Beatitude also informed the Synod Fathers that together with the Malankara Catholic Faithful – Priests, Religions and the Laity – residing in Rome and who had come to Rome to participate in the celebration of the canonization of Blessed Alphonsa, he celebrated the Holy Qurbono at the main altar of St. Peter’s Basilica and prayed for the entire Church.

His Beatitude thanked all the Synod Fathers for their active presence and participation at the visitation of His Eminence Cardinal Sandri, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

Thanking God for the wonderful ways through which the Almighty guides the Church, His Beatitude declared the seventh Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church open.

### **The Presentation of the Agenda**

His Beatitude, the President of the HES, presented the agenda of the Synod:

1. Prayer
2. Handing over of the Catholicos’ Day Collection
3. Inaugural Address
4. Report of the Sixth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod
5. Decisions of the Sixth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod
6. Matters *subsecreto*
7. Evaluation of the draft of the Code of Particular Canons of the SMCC
8. Evaluation / approval of the revised book of *Thukkasa*, the complete translation of the prayers of the Holy Week and the revised book of *Divyanidhi*
9. Synodal Commissions and their functional organisation
10. Construction of the Catholicate Centre
11. Evaluation of the common programmes of 2008 – July 15 and September 20
12. Other relevant matters, if any, with the consent of the President

The agenda was approved.

### **The Report and the Decisions of the Sixth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod held from 5 – 7 March 2008**

The Report and the decisions of the Sixth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod held from 5 to 7 March 2008 were read out by Most Rev. Thomas Mar Koorilos, the Secretary

of the HES. After necessary corrections and clarifications on the matter, they were proposed to be passed by Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas. Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios supported the proposal. They were passed unanimously.

### **The Deliberations**

#### **Matters *subsecreto***

#### **The Pastoral Care of the Faithful in the Gulf Countries**

**Kuwait:** His Beatitude the Catholicos informed the HES that the Bishop of Kuwait was happy to accept a Malankara Priest as Chaplain for the Malankarites in Kuwait. *He also informed that the Bishop would donate a sum of US \$ 2500/- every year for the Catholicate Centre.*

**Vicariate of Saudi Arabia:** The pastoral care of our Faithful in Saudi Arabia was discussed. It was proposed that Rev. Fr. Mathai Kandathil from the Eparchy of Bathery be assigned to this mission. His Beatitude shared with the Synod Fathers the pastoral care of and support extended by Most Rev. Paul Hinder, the Vicar Apostolic to the Malankarite under his jurisdictional care.

#### **Evaluation of the common programmes of 2008 – July 15 and September 20**

July 15, the Commemoration Feast of the Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios: The HES took note of the spontaneity expressed by the Faithful in taking part in the Padayatra. Hence it should be encouraged. Similarly the HES took note of the Padayatra organised by the Parishes in the ecclesiastical district of Trivandrum. It was also suggested that a brochure could be published informing the people concerning the cause of canonisation of the Servant of God. It was also pointed out that too many programmes at the end of the commemoration service should be avoided. The book-releasing, CD releasing and distribution of awards, including Mar Ivanios educational awards made the programme boring and disinteresting. These have to be avoided. The incense prayers (*dhūpaprarthana*) and *Nērcha* could follow immediately the Holy Qurbono. This will enable the people to participate actively in the commemoration celebrations.

**The Reunion Day celebrations:** The Synod congratulated Most Rev. Thomas Mar Koorilos and the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla for successfully hosting the Reunion Day celebrations 2008. It was noted that the selection of the venue of the celebration should be such that it should inspire the parishes and people around. The *vilambara rally* is not necessary. A Bible convention is useful. There should be a session for the catechism children. The homily at the Holy Qurbono could be given by one of our Bishops. The expenses of the celebrations should be met by all the Eparchies together.

#### **Evaluation of the draft of the Code of Particular Canons of the SMCC**

The seventh draft of the Particular Law of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, now named as “The Code of Particular Canons of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church” was taken for discussion. The Synod Fathers appreciated the painstaking efforts of the redactors, Most Rev. Thomas Koorilos, Rev. Fathers John Kochuthundil, Antony

Valiyavilayil OIC and Thomas Kuzhinapurath. It was approved by the Holy Synod as a draft that could be now presented to other relevant ecclesial fora for study.

**Evaluation / approval of the complete translation of the prayers of the Holy Week, the revised books of *Divyanidhi* and *Thūkkasa***

The complete translation of the Canonical Prayers of the Passion Week and the Order of Service of the Passion Week for the use of the Faithful were introduced. The text was approved by the Holy Synod and directed the Synodal Commission for Liturgy to present the final lay out copy to His Beatitude the Catholicos on before 30 December 2008.

It was suggested that the translation of the “Proemion – Sederō” book also be republished after language correction. Similarly, the reprint of the Canonical Daily Prayers – S’himo Namaskaram was approved.

The revised *Thūkkasa* was also introduced for the study and approval of the Holy Synod and it was approved for publication.

The *Divyanidhi*, the revised text of occasional prayers and blessings were introduced in the Holy Synod. The Synod Fathers agreed to take it home and sent in their observations to the Synodal Commission for Liturgy. The text shall be further improved incorporating these suggestions.

It was brought to the attention of the Holy Synod that the liturgical books published from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia have not been used as the only approved liturgical texts used in all our Eparchies for the liturgical celebrations. Similarly, it was suggested that the rubrics of the liturgical celebrations should be unified as prescribed in these texts.

It was suggested that the liturgical laws and observances which are discussed in the Holy Synod should be promulgated. It was observed that the Book of Rubrics (*Thūkkasa*) be published first. This shall be followed by an instruction issued by the Major Archbishop Catholicos. This instruction shall be prepared after consulting all the Bishops and getting their suggestions too.

**Other relevant matters, if any, with the consent of the President**

As the deliberations of the topics on the agenda were completed, with the consent of the Holy Synod, the following matters were introduced for discussion.

***1. Laws on the Observance of Fast and Lent and Marriage Prohibitions***

The Holy Synod took note of the changes taking place in Church in the observance of fasts and Lent. Considering the social situation of our Faithful, the HES decided to issue a few norms concerning the observance of the fasts, Lent and the prohibition of the celebration of marriage during the Lenten season. In this context the HES also discussed those matters for the preparation of marriage. It was decided that the important Fasts observed in our Church are:

- i. the Twenty-Five-Days Fast
- ii. the Three Days Fast
- iii. the Fifty Days Fast or the Great Lent
- iv. the Thirteen Days Fast in preparation for the feast of the Apostles (16-29 June)
- v. the Fifteen Days Fast in preparation for the Feast of Assumption (1-15 August).

Besides these, the Eight Days Lent in preparation for the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1-8 September) is recommended as devotion.

Penitential observances of the days of Fasts and Lent are:

- i. All should abstain from meat during the Twenty-Five-Days Fast, the Three Days Fast and the Fifty Days Fast. On Three Days Fast, the first Monday (*Subukhono*) and all Fridays of the Great Lent and days from Fortieth Friday till Easter we should also abstain from fish and eggs. On Good Friday, besides what is mentioned above, we should also abstain from milk and all milk products.
- ii. The Faithful above 21 and below 60 years of age are obliged to fast till noon on the second day of the Three Days Fast, the first Monday and all Fridays of the Great Lent. The sick, pregnant women and those who do hard labour are not obliged to fast.

### **Prohibition of marriage celebration during Fasts and Lent**

The Holy Synod gives us a few norms concerning marriage in our Church. The Church wishes that the sacrament of marriage is not celebrated during the seasons of Fasts, Lent and the karthiruppukalam. However, henceforth, this prohibition of marriage is binding only during the days of:

- i. the Twenty-Five-Days Fast
- ii. the Three Days Fast
- iii. the Fifty Days Fast or the Great Lent

Dispensation from these prohibited days may be obtained from the Archi/Eparchial Bishops. Archi/Eparchial Bishop may grant this dispensation for the days of the Twenty-five Days Fast and the first twenty-five days of the Fifty Days Fast or the Great Lent, considering favorably the pastoral needs of our People. But our Faithful are reminded that they may apply for such dispensations only for the most serious reasons. During the Three Days Fast and from the Fortieth Friday to Easter this special permission (dispensation) will not be granted.

At the banquet of the marriage celebrated with special permission during the days of Fast and Lent, abstinence from the use of meat as prescribed by the Church should be strictly observed. Similarly, at all other celebrations during the days of Fast and Lent, abstinence from meat should be observed.

### ***2. Other norms to be observed for the celebration of marriage***

The Holy Synod evaluated the pastoral care given to the youth of our Church who prepare for the Sacrament of Matrimony. The youth getting married in our Church should:

- i. prepare themselves for the sacrament of matrimony taking part in the marriage preparation course.
- ii. fill up and submit the “Prenuptial Enquiry Form”.

The Parish Priest or his delegate should make use of this opportunity for a personal dialogue with the candidates of marriage and use the occasion to instruct them on the

spiritual and canonical aspects of marriage. They should also be urged to complete the civil law formalities on this matter.

In the celebration of marriage, all are obliged to observe Christian maturity during the blessing of the marriage in the Church and in the celebrations thereafter. All should take care that the experience of the presence of God at the sacrament of marriage is not lost. The Parish Priest and the members of the family should see to it that the mind-set of the choir is mature and that it promotes the experience of the sacredness of the sacrament. The Parish Priests should instruct the photographers and videographers not to hinder the divine nature of the holy sacrament through their work. All are specially reminded to maintain simplicity at the marriage banquets. It is a blessing to participate in the Archieparchial / Eparchial projects that help the marriage of the poor with the expenses of the extravaganza.

### ***3. A Common Syllabus for the Minor Seminaries of our Church***

The Holy Episcopal Synod also discussed a common syllabus prepared by the Synodal Commission for Seminary Formation for the minor seminaries of our Church. Changes were suggested in the curriculum for the first years and the fourth years. With such changes, the syllabus was approved. The Holy Synod directed all concerned to introduce the syllabus in all our minor seminaries without exception from the academic year 2009-'10. Approved copies shall be sent to all the Rectors of the Minor Seminary. The entrance exam in our Major Seminary will be based on this syllabus.

### ***4. Publication of the Order of the Holy Qurbano in four languages***

Most Rev. Jacob Mar Barnabas, Apostolic Visitor to the Malankarites in the Extraterritorial Regions in India sought the opinion of the Synod Fathers in the publication of the order of the Holy Qurbano in four languages – Malayalam, English, Hindi and the local language – as parallels for the use of the young generation of our Church outside Kerala. The Synod Fathers encouraged the endeavour.

### ***5. On Pushpagiri Medical College***

His Grace Most Rev. Thomas Mar Koorilos, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Tiruvalla appraised the HES of the day to day management and the present economic conditions of the Pushpagiri Medical College run by the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla. He also elaborated the socio-political pressures faced by the Medical College. The Synod Fathers promised their support and solidarity in the matter.

### ***6. Permanent Diaconate***

The suggestion to revive the Permanent Diaconate Ministry in our Church was discussed. It was decided that the Permanent Diaconate Ministry shall be reinstated according to the norms of the CCEO and the Particular Laws codified in the proposed "Code of Particular Canons of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church". The Holy Synod authorised Most Rev. Abraham Mar Julios to draw up the curriculum for the formation of the candidates for Permanent Diaconate and draw up the plan to execute the decision at the earliest.

## **The Meeting with the Religious Major Superiors**

As per the invitation sent to the Religious Major Superiors of the Congregations of the Order of the Imitation of Christ, the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ and the Daughters of Mary, they gathered at the Catholicate Centre on 20 November 2009. The Synod Fathers met the Major Superiors at the Conference Hall of the Major Archbishop Curia at 4.30 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways and means to promote co-operation in apostolic activities and the canonical matters in this regard as per CCEO c 102 §3. The report of the meeting is appended to this report.

### **Conclusion**

After the meeting with the Major Superiors, the Synod Fathers met at the Synod Hall for the concluding session.

It was agreed upon that the next and the Eighth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod be convoked from Monday to Thursday, 2 to 5 March 2009. The Synod will begin its first session at 6 p.m. on 2 March 2009.

In his concluding address, His Beatitude the Catholicos thanked God and especially the Holy Spirit for his presence and guidance during the days of the Synod. The HES should make fruitful decisions, especially on the provision of the proposed canonical offices. He thanked all the members of the Synod for their openness and clarity of thinking and sharing what they think. He said that, the Holy Spirit is at work where there is openness and receptivity. Thus it is proved that the Synod is a walking together. His Beatitude complimented our people in all walks of life for giving effective leadership in the society though ours is a small community. In the background of the meeting of the HES with Major Superiors, he remembered with gratitude the prayerful, active apostolic activities and witness of our congregations and monasteries. At the end of His Beatitude's concluding address, he congratulated Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios, whose heavenly patron's feast falls on 29 November, for the growth of the Eparchy of Bathery and wished him in anticipation a very Happy Feast. His Beatitude also thanked Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas for his commitment for the Cause of our Church in America. He specially lauded him for the great achievement of beginning a Seminary for the priestly vocations we have in America. He also informed the HES that the construction of "Cathedral Church" in Delhi is nearing completion and the blessing of the same will be on 30 November 2008. He also informed that the Foundation Stone Laying ceremony of the Cathedral of Muvattupuzha will on 15 January 2009. Thanking everyone, His Beatitude declared the Seventh Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church closed at 6.30 p.m. on 20 November 2009.

Before proceeding to the final thanksgiving prayers, Most Rev. Jacob Mar Barnabas invited all to the blessing of the "Cathedral Church" in Delhi and Most Rev. Abrham Mar Julios invited everyone for the Foundation Stone Laying ceremony of the Cathedral of Muvattupuzha. The Synod ended with the prayers of thanksgiving

**✠ Most Rev. Thomas Mar Koorilos**  
Secretary

**Fr. Antony Valiyavilayil OIC**  
Chancellor