

THE SYRO-MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH
MAJOR ARCHIEPISCOPAL CURIA

CATHOLICATE CENTRE, TRIVANDRUM - 695004, KERALA, INDIA

Ninth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod

(20-23 October 2009)

REPORT

His Beatitude Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Catholicos convoked the Ninth 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 20 to 23 October 2009.

Eight out of the nine 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. Joseph Mar Thomas and Most Rev. Jacob Mar Barnabas – were present. Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Timotheos, Bishop Emeritus of Tiruvalla, could not attend the HES due to his health conditions.

Fr. Antony Valiyavilayil OIC, the Chancellor of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia, recorded the minutes of the Synod.

The Holy Episcopal Synod began its first session at 9 a.m. on 20 October 2009.

His Beatitude Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Catholicos, the President of the Holy Synod welcomed all the Bishops to the Ninth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod. His Beatitude recalled the wonderful ways in which the Lord is leading and making the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church grow in the different part of the world rooted in the Word of God and the Holy Qurbano. He recalled the success of the celebrations of the 79th Reunion Anniversay and the Platinum Jubilee of the evangelization endeavours of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in the Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. Likewise the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the inception of the Malankara Catholic Church missions in America was a testimony of the communion and mission of our Church in the world. His Beatitude lauded the leadership of Most Rev. Yoohanon Mar Chrysostom, Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas and Most Rev. Jacob Mar Barnabas in these efforts. He also recalled the historical significance and divine plan in the visit of the His Beatitude Moran Mor Ignace Yousef III Younan, the Syrian Catholic Patriarch of Antioch to the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. His Beatitude delved on the significance of the “Year of the Priests” in the Church and invited all concerned to a spiritual empowerment during this year. The

empowerment of the Laity in our Church needs further attention. We shall not limit it to the conferral of titles on them, but our Laity, who are in general very creative in the Church should be encouraged to be participate in the building up of our Church through their incorporation in the different apostolate of the Church. The mission meet organized by the Malankara Catholic Association in South Canara in the Eparchy of Bathery was a testimony how creatively our Laity were interested in the evangelization ministry of our Church.

His Beatitude also dealt with the obligation of the Bishops to enforce the Catholic Malankara discipline in the ecclesial life, especially in the domain of the liturgical life. His Beatitude urged the Bishops to introduce the newly published liturgical books in all our liturgical celebrations in the Church. He lauded the people-friendly and warm human approaches and policies of our Bishops, which in general is appreciated by the people.

His Beatitude also shared with the HES the experience of a press conference in Rome, in which he was asked, what difference has it made to the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, that it is elevated to the rank of a Major Archiepiscopal Church. His Beatitude responded that the Church on its own could respond to the needs of her internal life and apostolate and open up itself to respond to the needs of Universal Church. She could send priests and religious to the Church in Ethiopia and that it could undertake more social and charitable commitments. These are signs of the growing vitality of our Church.

His Beatitude also conveyed to the HES the orientations of the meeting of the Heads of the Catholic Oriental Churches convened by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on 19 September 2009. His Beatitude conveyed the greetings and blessings imparted by His Holiness the Pope to the Bishops. His Beatitude informed the HES that he gifted, on behalf our Church, a Sleebo, to His Holiness. His Beatitude also conveyed to the Most Rev. Bishops the greetings of His Eminence Leonardo Cardinal Sandri, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

His Beatitude declared the HES open.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE AGENDA

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

1. Prayer
2. Report of the Eighth Holy Episcopal Synod
3. Decisions of the Eighth Holy Episcopal Synod
4. Report of the Meeting of the HES with the Rector and Staff of the Malankara Major Seminary
5. Report of the Extraordinary HES on 21 September 2009
6. The Code of Particular Canons of the SMCC
7. Curriculum for the formation of the Permanent Deacons
8. Presentation of the study of the rite of crowning according to the Malankara liturgy
9. The Planning and Preparation for the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly
10. Construction of the Catholicate Centre

11. The Common Programmes of July 15 and September 20
12. The Relation with the Thozhiyoor Church
13. Evaluation of the Mission Meet *Yesu Mahotsav*
14. Matters *subsecreto*
15. Other relevant matters if any with the consent of President

To the proposed agenda was added “Sharing the experiences in the Eparchy” and “the ways of observing the Year of Priests”. The agenda was approved by the HES

The Report and the Decisions of the Eighth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod held from 2 to 5 March 2009

The Report and the decisions of the Eighth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod were read out. In the course of the discussion it was pointed out that the decisions of the HES that has a pastoral significance has to be informed to those concerned in time. It was also pointed out the head of the Seminary Commission was called “Chairman” not “President” After these corrections and clarifications the report and the decisions were proposed to be passed by Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios. It was supported by Most Rev. Joseph Mar Thomas and passed with applause by all present.

The Report of the Extraordinary HES on 21 September 2009 at the visitation of His Beatitude Moran Mor Ignace Yousef III Younan, the Patriarch of the Syrian Catholic Church of Antioch was read out and was passed.

Report of the Meeting of the HES with the Rector and Staff of the Malankara Major Seminary held on 5 March 2009 was read out. It was suggested that the report should be modified before publication.

THE DELIBERATIONS

The Code of Particular Canons of the SMCC

The draft of the Code of Particular Canons of the SMCC was taken up for study and final approval. Rev. Fr. John Kochuthundil, Secretary of the Drafting Committee was called in to the HES in session to assist it in the study.

The HES studied the proposed amendments and unanimously made the corrections. The Holy Episcopal Synod in its eighth session on 22 October 2009, unanimously and solemnly approved the draft of the Code of Particular Canons of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church and requested His Beatitude, the Major Archbishop Catholicos to send a copy of the text with the acts of the Holy Episcopal Synod to the Holy See according to the norm of CCEO c 111 §3 and to promulgate it according to the norm of CCEO c 113.

Evaluation of the Reunion Day Celebrations

It was unanimously opined that the celebrations of the 79th Reunion Anniversary and the Platinum Jubilee of the evangelisation ministry of the SMCC in Tamil Nadu was a grand success. The name give to the celebration as Malankarai Thirusabai Sangamam was very apt.

All were congratulating the Eparchy of Marthandom and to its Eparch. It was suggested that the mode of celebration could evolve in the future

Evaluation of the Indian Mission Congress (IMC) 2009

Most Rev. Jacob Mar Barnabas circulated a study and evaluation of the IMC held at Mumbai by the CBCI. The HES appreciated the mission congress.

The Year of the Priests

The Synodal Commission for the Clergy is planning a get-together of all the priests of the SMCC. The HES which delved on the possible outcome of the meeting endorsed the suggestion and fixed the date of the meeting as 16 and 17 March 2010. The gathering shall be named as: Malankara Catholic Vaidika Sangamam 2010. The venue of the meeting can be MACFAST Tiruvalla. All Eparchial and Religious Priests are to be invited to the meeting by His Beatitude, the Catholicos. The Bishops have to encourage personally the priests to attend the meeting. Mr. Tim, Most Rev. Bishop Kallarangattu, Mr. Alexander Jacob IPS, Mr. Ralf Martin were suggested as resource persons for the meeting. The Catholicate Centre will present a memento to the priests. The gathering could end with a photo session.

Curriculum for the formation of the Permanent Deacons

The curriculum for the proposed formation of the Permanent Deacons was introduced by Most Rev. Abraham Mar Julios, the Chairman of the Seminary Commission. It was decided that the course should be for three years according to the norm of CCEO c 354 and the candidates shall be in the age of group of forty-five to sixty-five. The persons who aspire for the ministry shall send in their application to his respective Eparchial Bishop or Apostolic Visitor. The application is accepted in accordance with the number of Deacons required to fulfil the ministry of the Eparchy or the Extra-territorial region.

Construction of the Catholicate Centre

The accounts were presented. They were evaluated. There was some discussion over how to raise funds to complete the construction. It was suggested that some collections from the Gulf countries should be sought. It was also opined that other offerings earmarked for the common needs of the Church should reach the respective centres as stipulated.

The Major Archiepiscopal Assembly

The proposed First Major Archiepiscopal Assembly of our Church came in for deliberations. Various themes were suggested for the assembly: Malankara Catholic Church in the 21st century; Identity of the SMCC – ananyatha; the St. Thomas Christian Patrimony. The theme should be such that it highlights the particular mission of unity and evangelisation of the SMCC. There emerged a consensus that “Evangelisation and the Malankara Catholic Church” could be the theme of the assembly.

A lineamenta should be prepared by an expert committee. The convenor for the theological matters, Most Rev. Abraham Mar Julios, could convene a group of experts consisting of Rt. Rev.

Msgr. Antony Kackanatt, Rev. Fr. Philip Chempakassery, Rev. Sr. Namita SIC and Mr. Jomi Thomas to draft the preliminary lineamenta for the assembly. The Eparchial assemblies that precede the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly should study and discuss the preliminary lineamenta and suggest practical ways of achieving the goals of the evangelisation ministry of the SMCC before the final lineamenta is prepared for the Major Archiepiscopal assembly. It should set forth the priority of our missionary ministry over the institutional growth of our Church. Some questions to ponder over are: What is the percentage of our resources that is used for the direct evangelisation ministry? Are we growing in a sort of religious materialism? Do we have a mission thrust in our approach? Is our seminary formation oriented towards the mission of our Church? Do we mobilise our youth for missionary activity? Do we search for the scope of mission in other continents? Are we enkindled by the fire of missionary evangelisation?

The Eparchial Assemblies shall be held in the year 2010. Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios said that in the Eparchy of Bathery, the assembly could be held in March 2010. Most Rev. Joshua Mar Ignathios said that in the Eparchy of Mavelikara, the assembly could be convened in May 2010. The Major Archiepiscopal Assembly shall be held in January 2011.

Certain Liturgical Norms

a. Marriage Rites

Most Rev. Abraham Mar Julios introduced the study on the rite of crowning in the liturgy of the SMCC. Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Thadathil was also called in to the HES to assist His Excellency. A paper was introduced for discussion. It was proposed that in our liturgy of marriage, blessing crowns could be used by Bishops for the rite of crowning. After the crowning the chains can also be blessed and given. The complete vestments of the Bishop will be worn by the Bishop while celebrating all sacraments except the sacrament of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. If a relative of the bride and groom is assisting at marriage, he can also wear the priestly vestments. This decision will become effective from January 2010.

b. Incensing the Bishops at liturgical celebrations

When more than one Bishop is present at a liturgical celebration, the Deacon shall incense all the Bishops at first and at the subsequent incensing, the deacon need to incense only the main celebrant.

c. Attire of Bishops

It was also decided that the ordinary attire of a Bishop shall be a saffron cassock. At solemn liturgical celebrations like Priestly and Episcopal ordination, blessing of the Chrism and on Maundy Thursday, a Bishop wears a red cassock.

Evaluation of the Seminary Formation

Most Rev. Abraham Mar Julios, the Chairman of the Seminary Commission reported to the HES that there is improvement in academic, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of the formation in

our Major Seminary. However, it seems that the liturgical prayers are recited mechanically. There is an effort to elicit the support of the staff in the formation programmes. Some are to still comply with. He also informed the HES that the term of office of the present Rector expires at the end of this academic year. So also there is need of new Deans for the faculties of Philosophy and Theology. It was suggested that the practice of rotation in the appointment of the Rector of the Major Seminary was good and is to be upheld. The other members of the Seminary Commission, Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios and Most Rev. Yoohanon Mar Chrystostom, also agreed to the evaluation and report presented by the Chairman. All the other members of the HES also shared their views on the present atmosphere of formation in the Seminary.

Other relevant matters if any with the consent of the President

The pastoral and spiritual care of the children and youth of our church was proposed for evaluation. The HES appreciated the systematic implementation of the Sunday School programmes for the faith formation of our children with the introduction of the common syllabus of catechism. In this context, the need of an organisation for the effective training and formation of our children was discussed. The HES decided to establish the Malankara Catholic Children's League (MCCL) for this purpose. All Sunday School Students are members of this organisation. The units of this are to be established in all our parishes. Coordinating these units there shall be eparchial and extra-eparchial Directors. His Beatitude the Catholicos will appoint the common Director for the whole Church. The Children's League is supervised by the Synodal Commission for Faith Formation. Rev. Fr. George Thekkadayil from the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla was proposed as the common Director of the MCCL.

The HES expressed its satisfaction over the functioning of the Malankara Catholic Youth Movement (MCYM). For its more effective functioning and to strengthen its leadership, the HES decided that the upper age limit of the members of the MCYM shall be 35 years. All Malankara Catholic Youth who have completed their Sunday School shall be members of the MCYM.

For the pastoral, spiritual, ecclesial, intellectual and social formation of our Youth studying in our educational institutions, the HES decided that Campus Ministry shall be organised. A common Director shall be appointed for this.

Some Liturgical Norms

At the time of Baptism and Chrismation every child, either male or female may be led to the sanctuary to kiss the altar.

Girls and women may be permitted wherever it is deemed possible, to read the Old Testament and the Letters of St. Paul standing in the haikala (nave), below the kestrumo during the Holy Qurbano and other liturgical celebrations.

The Eparchial Bishop may grant permission to the Rev. Sisters after necessary consultation and verification, who have received special training, to distribute the Holy Communion, according to

the need of the parishes of his Eparchy. This permission will be personal; hence it is not to be transferred to others. This permission is made use of only for the particular parish or for a special event. They will have to carry a special vestment blessed by the Eparch. This arrangement will come into effect from the Feast of Easter 2010.

To the insignia of the Catholicos is to be added a small golden cross on the makudam of the mudithoppi.

The HES requested the His Beatitude the Catholicos to bring forth a Pastoral Letter in which His Beatitude promulgate and bring to the attention of the People of God of SMCC some of the important decisions of the HES, such as the observance of nombu, prohibition of marriage during nombu season, campus ministry, permanent diaconate ministry, participation of women in the liturgical celebrations, etc.

Silver Jubilee of SEERI

St. Ephrem's Ecumenical Research Institute Kottayam under the auspices of the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla is completing 25 years of its service on 14 September 2010. It is an institute for Ecumenism and Syriac Studies. To mark the occasion of the Jubilee, the institute is organising an international Syriac Seminar.

Syro-Malankara Pravâsi Sangamam

The HES looked into the possibility of convening a get-together of the representatives of the Malankara Catholics employed in the Gulf Countries to coordinate the pastoral care for them. Such a meeting could also boost up their entrepreneurial talents and chalk out possibilities of investment opportunities aimed at the good of community and Church. The Holy Episcopal Synod suggested that such a gathering could be called Malankara Pravâsi Sangamam, can be convened in August 2010.

Deepika

In order to save the Deepika, the Malayalam Daily Newspaper, that supports value based journalism, the Malankara Catholic Church is expected to collaborate financially. The Major Archieparchy of Trivandrum has already promised a substantial help. Our Eparchies and Religious Congregations could also be encouraged to put in their share towards this purpose.

Sharing on ETRI

Most Rev. Jacob Mar Barnabas shared with the HES his recent experiences in the organisation of the pastoral activities in the ETRI. He recalled the enthusiasm with which the Faithful had welcomed the appointment of an Apostolic Visitor for the ETRI. However, this enthusiasm could not be sustained due to the lack of sufficient number of priests who cooperates with the arrangements. This difficult situation will linger on until we get sufficient vocations to priesthood from the region itself.

Special Synod for the Middle-East

It was learned that the Holy Father is convoking in Rome a special Synod for the Middle East in order to respond to the present challenges the Church faces there. The Holy Father has appointed His Beatitude Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis, the Major Archbishop-Catholicos as a member of the Synod. It was observed that as there is a large number of Malankara Catholics working in the Gulf countries, there is a need that the Malankara Catholic Church is represented at the Synod. Most Rev. Thomas Mar Koorilos, the Secretary of the Synod, was asked to inform this matter to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

CONCLUSION

It was agreed upon that the next and the Tenth Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod be convoked from 9 Tuesday to 12 Friday of February 2010. It was felt convenient for all that the date of the Eleventh Ordinary Synod is also fixed. It was proposed that it could be convoked from 28 to 30 September 2010.

His Beatitude the Catholicos delivered a short concluding message. His Beatitude thanked all the Synod Fathers for their participation in the Synod and the Major Archiepiscopal Curia members for all their in the conduct of the Synod. His Beatitude declared the HES closed. His Beatitude Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Catholicos said the concluding prayers and imparted the apostolic blessing.

✠ Most Rev. Thomas Mar Koorilos
Secretary

Fr. Antony Valiavilayil OIC
Chancellor