

India's "Syriac" Churches – 1996–1997¹

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Eastern Theological Association of India

Evolved from the "Oriental Study Forum" (OSF) founded in 1978,² the Eastern Theological Association of India was formally inaugurated at the auditorium of the Pastoral Centre, Changanasery, on 14 June 1997. At this meeting, the Association expressed its gratitude to Prof. Emeritus Dr. Joseph Koikakudy, convener of the OSF from its very beginning. The OSF had been dissolved, about twenty years after its foundation, and reorganized to become the Eastern Theological Association of India. The following members were elected to office: *President*, Prof. Dr. Xavier Koodapuzha (Paurastya Vidyapitham [Pontifical Oriental Institute], Kottayam-Vadavathoor); *convener*, Prof. Dr. Antony Kamukum-pallil (Principal, Missionary Orientation Centre); *vice president*, Prof. Dr. Joseph Kallarangatt (Paurastya Vidyapitham); and *treasurer*, Prof. Dr. Wilson Ukken (Paurastya Vidyapitham). Ordinary membership in the association is now reserved to those holding graduate degrees in theology; associate membership is

¹ This chronicle, for the years 1996 and 1997, is a continuation of that published in *Christian Orient* 48 (1996): 149–58.

² Besides regular meetings and conferences, the official voice of the Oriental Study Forum is the theological quarterly, *Christian Orient*.

granted to those promoting Eastern theological studies. The association, which is deeply aware of its ecumenical vocation, promotes theological studies for clergy, religious and laity.

Ecumenism

Organized by the Foundation *Pro Oriente*, the Second Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition took place in Vienna, 22 to 27 January 1996. All the Oriental Churches in India were represented there and participated actively in the consultation. *Syro-Malabar Church*: Metropolitan Mar Joseph Powathil of Changanacherry, Rev. Prof. Dr. Xavier Koodapuzha. *Church of the East*: Metropolitan Mar Aprem of Thrissur. *Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church*: George Mathew. *Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*: Rev. Johns Abraham Konat and Rev. Dr. Baby Varghese. *Syro-Malankara Catholic Church*: Rev. Prof. Geevarghese Chediath Mar Aprem. Professor Chediath and Rev. Dr. Baby Varghese presented papers³ Mar Aprem and Professor Chediath also attended the Third Non-Official Consultation, held in Mundelein, near Chicago, in 1997.⁴ The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church also took part in the Fifth Regional Symposium of *Pro Oriente* at Saint Antony's Coptic Orthodox Monastery, Waldsolms-Kröffelbach, Germany, 28 August to 2 September 1997. They were represented by Thomas Mar Themotheos (Muriankal), Metropolitan of the eparchy outside Kerala, and Rev. Dr. Kondothra M. George, respectively.

In addition, the three hierarchs of the Church of the East in India have placed their signatures under the "Joint Synodal Decree for Promoting Unity between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church," published by Mar Raphael I

³ Published in *Syriac Dialogue. Second Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*, ed. A. Stürnemann, G. Wilfänger (Vienna, 1996): 38-43, 113-25 and 153-61.

⁴ See "Joint Communiqué of the Third *Pro Oriente* Non-Official Syriac Consultation," in *Voice of the East* 44/7-8 (Thrissur, 1997): 2-6.

Bidawid, Catholicos Patriarch, Chaldean Catholic Church, and Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos Patriarch, Assyrian Church of the East. The Indian hierarchs whose signatures appear are: Mar Timotheos, Patriarchal Representative in India; Mar Aprem, Archbishop of India; Poulouse Mar Poulouse, Bishop of Trichur.

The *official* dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church continued. The joint commission met at the Orthodox Sophia Centre, Kottayam, October 10 to 14, 1997. The commission discussed primacy and collegiality, the "Synod" of Diamper, and the sacraments. Some agreement was reached on the question of removing obstacles to inter-Church marriages. In contrast to the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, this issue still exists with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. The commission's suggestions have to be approved by the pertinent authorities of the respective Churches. The next meeting of the joint commission will be at the Syro-Malabar Spirituality Centre, Manganam (Kottayam), October 26 to 30, 1998.

A. Churches of the Syro-Oriental Tradition

I. Syro-Malabar [Chaldeo-Indian] Church

a) Hierarchy

Despite the large number of Syro-Malabar faithful living in the emigration, no hierarchical organization exists for them. Therefore, two apostolic visitors were appointed to study the situation. Mar Joseph Pallickaparampil, eparch of Pala, was appointed apostolic visitor for the Syro-Malabar faithful in Europe, and Mar Gregory Karotemprel, eparch of Rajkot, Gujerat, apostolic visitor for the faithful living in the USA and Canada. Since both have eparchial responsibilities, neither is able to render to the emigrants due attention or continuous service.

On 11 November 1996, Pope John Paul II made the following changes to the hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church: Antony Cardinal Padiyara, major archbishop and metropolitan of *Ernakulam-Angamaly*, resigned from his office having reached 75 years of age. He had been appointed (not elected) major archbishop in

1992. In view of the rather precarious situation of the Syro-Malabar Church, the Holy Father did not find it opportune to nominate a successor. Therefore, he appointed only an Apostolic Administrator "*sede vacante et ad nutum Sanctae Sedis*" of Ernakulam-Angamaly in the person of Rev. Dr. Varkey Vithayathil, CSSR, who was promoted to titular archbishop of Achrida (Ohrid) on 11 November. He was consecrated by Pope John Paul II in Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, on 6 January 1997. His installation as Administrator took place on 18 January, presided over by Mar Baselios, hierarchical head of the Syro-Malankara Church. Archbishop Varkey was born at Parur in the metropolitan eparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly on 29 May 1927. He joined the Redemptorists, and was ordained to the priesthood on 12 June 1954.

The Pope also accepted the resignation of Msgr. Joseph Kundukulam, metropolitan archbishop of *Thrissur*. On 11 November 1996, he transferred Msgr. Jacob Toomkuzhy, bishop of *Thamarassery*, to the metropolitan see of Thrissur. Mar Paul Chittilapilly, bishop of Kalyan (Bombay), took charge of the eparchy of Thamarassery on 13 February 1997, while the Rev. Dr. Thomas Elavanal of the Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament became the second bishop of Kalyan. Mar Thomas (Elavanal) was born at Mutholy in the eparchy of Pala on 28 March 1950 and was ordained priest on 22 December 1975. He holds a doctorate in theology and licentiate in Oriental ecclesiastical studies. He served also as visiting professor of liturgy at the Paurastya Vidyapitham-Pontifical Oriental Institute of Religious Studies. He was ordained bishop and installed on 8 February 1997 by Mar Varkey, apostolic administrator of the major archbishopric. The vacant eparchy of *Mananthavady* received a new hierarch in the person of Rev. Emmanuel Pothanamuzhy, Carmelite of Mary Immaculate, who was born at Nadukkara in the eparchy of Kothamangalam on 5 August 1932. He was ordained priest on 1 December 1966 and raised to the episcopate on 26 January 1997. The former auxiliary bishop of Cardinal Padiyara, Msgr. Jacob Manethodath, was appointed to the vacant see of *Palakkad* (Palghat), where he was installed on 1 February 1997.

The metropolitan eparchy of Changanassery was bifurcated, and from its territory was established the eparchy of *Thakala*, situated in the south of Kerala and in Tamil Nadu States. Its first bishop is Dr. George Alencherry, former Protosyncellus (Vicar General) of Changanassery. He was born at Thuruthy in the metropolitan eparchy of Changanassery on 19 April 1945 and ordained priest on 19 November 1972. He received his doctorate in theology from the *Institut Catholique* in Paris. The episcopal ordination of Mar George took place on 2 February 1997.

The former bishop of Palakkad, Msgr. Joseph Irimpen, died on 23 August 1997 at the age of 78. After 20 years of episcopal service, he retired from his office in December 1994 and lived in the senior priests' home near Malampuzha. The funeral was officiated by Mar Varkey, Apostolic Administrator of the Major Archbishopric of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

b) Synod 1996, Rome

The 1996 synod of the hierarchy took place in Rome from 8 to 16 January 1996 in connection with the *ad limina* visit. Pope John Paul II himself gave the inaugural allocution, admonishing the hierarchs to give attention to the riches of the Syro-Oriental heritage and tradition, the importance of the liturgy, and the particular place of their Church *sui iuris*. Achille Cardinal Silvestrini, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, called upon the Syro-Malabar always to be aware that their Church is an *Eastern* Church, and that it was raised to the rank of Major Archbishopric precisely because of its Eastern character. The Church's search for identity should touch upon all areas of ecclesial life, including liturgy, theology, spirituality and discipline.

c) Synod 1997: Turbulence in the Synodal Hall

Already before the meeting of the 1997 Synod, the "Liturgical Action Committee," representing the "anti-Oriental group," had organised a massive public meeting on 10 May at the "Renewal Centre," pastoral centre of the archdiocese of Ernakulam. This meeting was openly directed against the Congregation for the

Oriental Churches, especially Mar Joseph Powathil, Metropolitan of Changanassery, the leading figure among those who defend the Eastern patrimony of the Syro-Malabar Church. The Synod itself took place from 9 to 19 June. During the deliberations of the hierarchs, a group of anti-Eastern priests, mostly from Ernakulam, made their way into the Synod hall and submitted a memorandum. Though the bishops condemned such a boisterous intervention, the leader of the group was appointed chairman of the Youth Organization by his ecclesiastical superior, the bishop of Palakkad, Msgr. Jacob Manethodath. It is evident, writes our correspondent, "that the demonstration was instigated by Bishop Manethodath," former auxiliary of Ernakulam, who had been transferred to Palakkad.

Another letter, received from Kerala and dated 7 July 1997, illustrates the actual situation in the Syro-Malabar Church:

[The situation] is worsening day by day. The anti-orientals are becoming more and more militant. It is an open secret that it is a group of bishops who work behind this militancy. But nobody should speak this out! You know that the synod held in Rome in 1996 took several decisions in the right direction. But none of these decisions was implemented. The only thing which was done was to put the *bema* in the Vadavathoor seminary in the middle of the *haikla*, although the decision was to place the *bema* in the middle of the *haikla* in all major seminaries and formation houses. The synod held in June this year reversed the earlier decision and asked that the *bema* be removed from the middle of the *haikla* and placed in the *questroma*. The celebrant is asked to turn to the people from the beginning of the *Qurbana* till the beginning of the *anaphora*. The mass media controlled by the anti-orientals continue to attack oriental-minded people. The bishops were blocked in the synodal hall by the militant anti-oriental priests and laity, mostly from the Ernakulam diocese. Yet there is no action against them. It seems that some bishops are not worried even if the whole church should perish. But they are happy if Mar Powathil and certain others are blackmailed and destroyed.

During the synod of the hierarchy, held in January 1998, the rebel priests did not succeed in meeting the synod. Only a synodal committee received them at the Ernakulam Pastoral Orientation Centre.

d) Monasticism

On 6 January 1997, Mar Mathew Vattackuzhy, eparch of Kanjirapally, the local Ordinary, blessed the new building of the Mar Thoma Sliha Monastery at Nallathanny. This monastery aims to give shape to Eastern monasticism, following the authentic Syro-oriental ecclesial traditions in India. The monastic movement in the Syro-Malabar Church is led by Rev. Prof. Dr. Xavier Koodapuzha, one of its most outstanding theologians. The eparch of Kanjirapally, having approved the new monastery's statutes, erected this monastic foundation as a "Monastery *in fieri* of eparchial right" and appointed Professor Koodapuzha its director. On 8 December 1997, the foundation stone for the chapel, library and novitiate building was laid by the local Ordinary.

e) Recognition of Missionary Society of Saint Thomas

The Missionary Society of Saint Thomas is a society of priests living in community, but without public vows (*societas vitae communis ad instar religiosorum*). It was founded in 1968 by the late eparch of Pala, Mar Sebastian Vayalil with 18 priests, as a society of eparchial right. It has now grown to include 218 priests. Its candidates are educated in the Minor Seminary at Melampura, in the eparchy of Pala, and the Major Seminary in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh State. The eparchy of Ujjain is served by priests of this society. Members of this society work in different parts of India and in Tanzania. On 3 September 1987, in a solemn ceremony presided over by the Apostolic Administrator of the Major Archbishopric, Mar Varkey, the society was raised to the status of a Society of Apostolic Life with major archiepiscopal (patriarchal) right.

f) New Major Seminary

The Metropolitan of Thrissur, Msgr. Jacob Thoomkuzhy, decided to establish a major seminary for his own metropolitan eparchy. On 8 December 1997, he laid the foundation stone for the new institution, which occupies about 200 acres of land. Thrissur, as it is commonly known, is one of the main centres of the "latinizing" and "anti-Oriental" group within the Syro-Malabar Church. Many consider the foundation of a new seminary there an expression of prestige and church politics.

g) "Societas Liturgica"

An international and interdenominational association of Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox liturgists, the *Societas Liturgica*, elected Prof. Dr. Jacob Vellian, in Turku, Finland, its new president. Professor Vellian is a priest of the Syro-Malabar Knanaya diocese of Kottayam. Now associate professor of the Paurastya Vidyapitham, he has taught at Saint Patrick Seminary, San Francisco, and Assumption Seminary, San Antonio. The next congress of the *Societas Liturgica* will be held at Kottayam in 1999.

h) Institute for Marriage and Family

Msgr. Angelo Scola, bishop emeritus of Grosseto, Rector of the Lateran University and President of the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for the study of marriage and family, Rome, inaugurated at Changanassery the world's fifth institution devoted to providing training to meet the modern challenges of family life; the others are in Rome, Washington, Mexico and Madrid. The doctorate will be awarded exclusively by the main centre in Rome. Rev. Jose Alencherry, Changanassery, has been appointed vice president of the Institute.

II. Church of the East [Chaldean Syrian Church]

a) Elections

On 30 November 1997, elections took place in all 24 of the parishes belonging to this Church, in accordance with the new Constitution approved by Patriarch-Catholicos Mar Dinkha IV. Each parish elected its two trustees, as well as the 93 members (eight women and 85 men) of the Representative Council. That Council is composed of 93 elected and 10 nominated members, the parish priests, and three secretaries general of associations.

B. Churches of the Syro-Antiochene Tradition

I. Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church

a) Hierarchy

At the age of 90, Ostatehos Mar Thomas, Metropolitan of Kochi (Cochin), resigned his ministry. The prelate was born in 1904 and became a priest in 1928. He served his eparchy from 1975 to 1994. His successor is Joseph Mar Gregorios, BA, BD, MPhil, who hails from Mulanthuruthy in Kerala. Born in 1960, he became a priest in 1984. He completed his graduate studies at Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, from 1988 to 1992; during this time, he also engaged in pastoral ministry for the London parish. Afterwards, he spent one year in New York. He was ordained bishop on 16 January 1994.

This Church lost its leading prelate, His Beatitude Mar Baselios Paulos II, Catholicos (*mafryono*) of the East, on 1 September 1996. Born on 12 June 1915, he became a priest in 1938. He received episcopal ordination in 1952 within the "patriarch's party;" after a renewed rupture between the "Catholicos party" and the patriarchate, he was raised to the rank of *mafryono* of the East. At his funeral, Metropolitan Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, Syria, represented Patriarch Mar Ignatios Zakka I Iwas. Because of the tension which still existed between the two Orthodox factions, a successor has yet to be

elected. At present, a committee of two senior and two junior metropolitans is managing church affairs.

*II. Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
[Kottayam "Autocephalous" Catholicate, sometimes called
"Indian Orthodox Church"]*

a) Hierarchy

1) Changes

In 1992 the Metropolitan of Malabar, Thomas Mar Timotheos, was elected successor to the present Catholicos. The prelate, who resides at Kozhikode, was born at Nedumpuram near Tiruvalla in 1921. A priest since 1950, he embraced monasticism in 1965 and was ordained bishop in 1966. Till 1968, he served his eparchy as assistant bishop; from 1968, he has been the eparch.

Paulos Mar Pachomios, assistant bishop of Angamaly, became Metropolitan of the vacant see of Idukki in 1994. The episcopal residence is at Kumily. Born at Kurichi near Kottayam in 1946, Deacon Paul became a priest in 1974. He was ordained bishop in 1993 in order to assist the late Mar Theophilos (see "Deaths," below).

Mathews Mar Severios, born in 1949 and ordained priest in 1978, became auxiliary bishop of Kottayam-Central. He was promoted to the metropolitan see of Kandanad in 1993.

2) Deaths

The former head of the Church, His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews I, emeritus Catholicos-Patriarch of the East, Malankara Metropolitan, "88th successor of the Apostolic Throne of Saint Thomas," resigned in 1991 and died in autumn 1996. Born at Kottayam in 1907, he became a priest in 1946. In 1951 he embraced monasticism. He was ordained bishop in 1953, under the name Matthews Mar Athanasios. From 1960 to 1975 he served the Metropolitan Diocese Outside Kerala. In 1970, he was elected successor to the Catholicos Mar Baselios Augen I (with the right of

succession). He was installed as Catholicos on 27 October 1975. At his funeral, Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo, Syria, was present, having come to Kerala to attempt reconciliation between the two Orthodox factions.

On 24 November 1996, death also took another eminent figure of this Church, Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios of Delhi, known also as Paul Verghese. Many called him the "grey eminence" or even the "ruling catholicos" of his Church. He served the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and was also Principal of the School of Theology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Addis Ababa. Born in 1922, Paul Verghese had a doctorate in theology from Serampore University and several doctorates *honoris causa*. He had also been involved in the formerly Soviet-inspired Prague Peace Movement (known as *Prager Christliche Friedenskonferenz*). After his return to India, he became principal of the Malankara Orthodox Seminary in Kottayam and Secretary of the Synodal Commission for Inter-Church Relations. Despite his ecumenical activities abroad, his attitude towards the Catholic Church was not always positive.⁵

Zacharias Mar Divannasios (Dionysios), Metropolitan of Madras, died on 7 July 1997. The hierarch was born at Kundara near Kollam (Quilon) in 1924 and ordained priest in 1951. He was ordained bishop for the metropolitan see of Madras in 1978.

The Metropolitan of Bombay and Angamaly, Dr. Philippos Mar Theophilos, died on 28 September 1997. He resided mostly in Aluva (Alwaye). The see of Bombay was given to him in 1979. Mar Theophilos was born at Muthanangadi, Kottayam, in 1911 and became a priest in 1944. A kind and spiritual personality, he maintained friendly relations with the late Metropolitan Benedict Mar Gregorios (d.1994) of Trivandrum, the hierarchical head of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. Fr. Philippos was elected Metropolitan of Angamaly in 1965 and received episcopal ordination in

⁵ The rigorous line he took in this regard is followed by his disciples, Mathews Mar Severios (formerly Rev. M. A. Mathai) who holds a doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, and Rev. Dr. Kondothra M. George, principal of the Malankara Orthodox Seminary in Kottayam.

1966. At that time, he became President of the Malankara Orthodox Students' Movement. He was also President of the Synodal Committee for Inter-Church Relations.

II. Syro-Malankara Catholic Church

a) Hierarchy

The first bishop of the newly created eparchy of *Marthandom*, Lawrence Mar Ephraem (Thottam), died in the first half of 1997. For 16 years he had served the metropolitan eparchy of Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) as its auxiliary bishop. When the eparchy of Marthandom was created on 16 December 1996, he was appointed its first hierarch. Mar Ephraem was the only bishop of the two Oriental Catholic Churches belonging to the ethnic community of the Nadars; they live mainly in the southern part of Kerala and in Tamil Nadu.

The eparchy of *Sultan's Battery*, vacant since the transfer of Bishop Mar Baselios to the metropolitan see of Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), received a new bishop in the person of Dr. Varghese Ottathengil, rector of the metropolitan Saint Mary's Malankara Major Seminary in Trivandrum. Born at Kunnanathanam in the eparchy of Tiruvalla on 1 November 1950, he was ordained priest on 20 April 1978. Having obtained his doctorate in theology in Rome, he was appointed visiting professor (1987–1990), and in 1990 became rector of the seminary and professor for Indian Spirituality and Spiritual Theology. On 11 November 1996, Pope John Paul II appointed him the second bishop of the eparchy of Battery, established in 1978. At his episcopal ordination (5 February 1997), he chose the name *Geevarghese Mar Divanastios*.

On 17 July 1997, the new auxiliary bishop of the eparchy of *Tiruvalla* received episcopal ordination by the imposition of hands of Geevarghese Mar Timotheos, eparch of Tiruvalla. Mammen (Thomas) Chakkapladickal is now named *Thomas Mar Kurillos*. At his episcopal ordination, the new bishop was 39 years old. He was ordained priest in 1985 and completed his studies at the Ponti-

fical Oriental Institute in Rome, where he obtained a doctorate in Eastern canon law.

b) Saint Mary's Major Seminary

The present bishop of Battery, Prof. Dr. Daniel Mangalath, dean of studies of the philosophy section, was appointed the new rector, making him the third rector of the seminary. It serves all the eparchies of the Syro-Malankara Church and, when needed, of other Churches *sui iuris*.

c) Distinctions

As hierarchical head of the Syro-Malankara Church, Metropolitan Mar Baselios ordained three priests as Chorepiscopoi. Two of them have been working among their faithful in the United States, while the third is the present protosyncellus, Rev. Koshy Varghese Kizhakeveetil.

d) First Priest of the Harijan Community

The metropolitan eparchy of Trivandrum celebrated the ordination of seven deacons to the priesthood during paschaltide 1997. Among the ordination candidates, who had finished their theological studies at Saint Mary's Malankara Major Seminary, Thiruvananthapuram, was a Harijan. He is the first priest of this community, which in the West is often called "untouchable." The eparchy of Marthandom now has two new priests. Due to the illness of their bishop, Mar Ephraem, they too were ordained by Metropolitan Mar Baselios. The other deacons were ordained by their respective hierarchs: two for Battery, two for Tiruvalla, and two for the Syro-Malabar metropolitan eparchy of Changanassery.

e) Extension of Apostolate

On 15 August 1997, a Malankara Centre was inaugurated in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh State, to satisfy the spiritual needs of the Malankara Catholic faithful who had emigrated to that part of India.

**Примітка**

Вище подану хроніку індійських Церков сирійської традиції за роки 1996–1997 виготовив видатний знавець східнього християнства Падерборнського Університету в Німеччині, проф. Й. Мадей.

