

A New Development in the Malankara Catholic Church: Major Archiepiscopal Church or Catholicate

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Abstract

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The author continues his study of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, of which he is a leading scholar. This current research is based on new ecclesiological developments within this Church, which has recently been raised to the rank of a major archiepiscopal Church *sui iuris* according to Catholic canonical norms. Madey traces the history of those developments in the canonical and conciliar literature, with special but not exclusive attention to the developments in the 20th century, chiefly in *Cleri Sanctitati* of Pope Pius XII; *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* of the Second Vatican Council; and the 1990 *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. The author differentiates ecclesial structures and canonical norms in Oriental Churches governed by a patriarch, major archbishop, catholicos, or *maphrian*. He details the role and responsibilities of the catholicos in particular, especially his election, his relationship with the other bishops of his Church, his internal responsibilities to his Church, and his external relationship to the Church and bishop of Rome, with which he, as head of the Syro-Malankara Church, is in full communion.



On February 10, 2005, the Vatican Press Office published the following news:

the Holy Father raised the Syro-Malankara Metropolitan Church *sui iuris* to the rank of a Major Archiepiscopal Church and promoted His Excellency Cyril Mar Baselios Malancharuvil, O.I.C., to the dignity of Major Archbishop of Trivandrum of the Syro-Malankarians.¹

The apostolic nuncio in India, who communicated this news to the public, explained that the new dignity is equivalent to that of *catholicos*.

What is a Major Archbishop? What is a Catholicos?

The title of “major archbishop” does not have a long tradition. It was used for the first time by the famous Greek-Melkite canonist Acacius Coussa² in order to distinguish this class of archbishops who enjoy patriarchal rights in almost all aspects. Vatican II took up this title in its decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum (OE)*, saying: “what has been said of patriarchs is valid also, in accordance with the norms of law, in respect to major archbishops who rule the whole of some individual Church or rite.”³ This statement stresses, before all, the supra-episcopal and even the supra-metropolitan authority of the major archbishop.

From *OE*, the term came into the 1990 *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO)*, where four canons are devoted to the major archiepiscopal Churches⁴:

i) a major archbishop is a metropolitan who presides over an entire Church *sui iuris*;

¹ *Bollettino della Sala Stampa della Santa Sede* (in Italian). Available at http://212.77.1.245/news_services/bulletin/news/16106.php?index=16106&po_date=10.02.2005&lang=it.

² *Epitome Praelectionum de iure ecclesiastico orientali*, vol. I (Grottaferrata, 1948). The author eventually became the pro-secretary and secretary of the Oriental Congregation (the pope being himself the prefect then) and cardinal.

³ No. 10.

⁴ *CCEO* cc. 151–154.

ii) the norms regarding patriarchal Churches and patriarchs are generally applicable to archiepiscopal Churches and major archbishops;

iii) the major archbishop is elected in the same manner as a patriarch. In contrast to patriarchs who ask the Roman pontiff for ecclesiastical communion, the major archbishop must petition the *confirmation* of his election from the Roman pontiff;

iv) major archbishops hold precedence of honor immediately after patriarchs according the order in which the Church over which they preside was erected as a major archiepiscopal Church.

Within the communion of the *Catholic* Churches, we have to distinguish the apostolic patriarchal Churches, the patriarchal Churches of later origin, and the major archiepiscopal Churches.

Table 1: The Apostolic Patriarchal Churches

Historic Center	Church(es)	Liturgical Tradition
Rome	Church of the Occident (St. Peter's primatial see) ⁵	Roman
Antioch	Maronite Church	Syro-Antiochene
	Greek Melkite Church	Byzantine
	Syriac Church	Syro-Antiochene ⁶

⁵ Other Roman Catholic prelates (e.g., Jerusalem, Venice, Goa, Lisbon) are archbishops having the title of patriarch *ad honorem*, but they do not enjoy the patriarchal authority.

⁶ We have followed the order of precedence according to *CCEO* c. 59 § 4.