

## India's "Syriac" Churches – 1990–1994<sup>1</sup>

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### *Ecumenism*

The ecumenical dialogue between the *Catholic Church* and the ["autocephalous"] *Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*, inaugurated in 1989, continued. There were meetings of the Joint Theological Commission at the Spirituality Centre of the Syro-Malabar Metropolitan Eparchy of Changanassery in Manganam (Kottayam) from December 9 to 12, 1990, as well as at the Orthodox Centre of Bombay from December 9 to 14, 1991. Professor Clarence Gallagher SJ, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, replaced his confrère, Édouard René Hambye SJ, who had passed away at Namur (Belgium) on September 7, 1990. The deliberations began with communications on (1) ecclesial communion and (2) communion in the sacramental Mysteries, prepared by two Syro-Malabar and two Malankara Orthodox theologians. Further, the commission prepared two declarations, which were eventually

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<sup>1</sup> This chronicle does not treat the Churches professing a theology of Protestant origin, such as the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Church of South India. These Churches absorbed the "Anglo-Syrian Christians" [former Jacobites], who had given fellowship to the *British Church Missionary Society* in the 19th century.

submitted to the ecclesiastical authorities of the two Churches. One treats marriages between members of the Malankara Orthodox and the Catholic Churches, the second, ecclesial-eucharistic communion. Two subcommittees were established to study more deeply "the history of the Church in India in relation with the unity and separation of our two churches" and the "role of the episcopate in the unity of the Church." Co-chairmen of all the subcommittees are Metropolitans Mar Joseph Powathil (Catholic) of Changanassery and Paulos Mar Gregorios (Malankara Orthodox) of Delhi.

Another meeting of the Joint Commission took place at the "Sophia" Orthodox Centre of Kottayam from November 15 to 18, 1993. Ten Catholic members were present. From Rome, Bishop Pierre Duprey WF, co-chairman, was accompanied by Frs. Pierre Dubasque and Clarence Gallagher. The main topic was the problem of inter-Church, or "mixed" marriages. The commission was very close to achieving a general agreement on this question, but in the end the Orthodox members declared that the Catholic or the Orthodox partner of such marriages would no longer be permitted to continue receiving Holy Communion in his or her Church of origin. Thus the dialogue came to an end. Neither the Malankara Orthodox Catholicos nor Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios took part in this meeting. Metropolitan Mathews Mar Severios (whose doctorate is from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome) became the spokesman of those (like Paulos Mar Gregorios) who oppose a change in the present practice. He was supported in his rigorous attitude by some other members belonging to the staff of the Kottayam Malankara Orthodox Seminary. In the end, everyone was dissatisfied with the result of the meeting.

The dialogue between the *Catholic Church* and *Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church*, which recognizes the supremacy of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Mar Ignatius Zakka I, was inaugurated at the Spirituality Centre of Manganam on December 15, 1990. A joint theological commission was established. This dialogue is working within the framework of the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. Co-chairmen of this joint commission are

Bishop Pierre Duprey WF of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and Metropolitan Abraham Mar Clemis of Chingavanam, the diocese of the Syrian Orthodox "Knanaya" or "Southist" community. The commission met for a second time at the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Seminary of Mulanthuruthy. There, the Catholic Church was represented by Bishop Pierre Duprey (co-chairman), Metropolitan Mar Joseph Powathil, Bishops Kuriakos Kunnacherry, Patrick D'Souza and Cyril Mar Baselios, Rev. Professors Clarence Gallagher, Mathew Vellanickal, Xavier Koodapuzha, Geevarghese Chediath and Fr. Bernard Dubasque (co-secretary); the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church by the hierarchs Thomas Mar Athanasios (co-chairman), Thomas Mar Timotheos, responsible for the communities outside Kerala, and Yuhanon Mar Meletios of Trissur, Chorepiscopus Joseph Palickaparampil, Frs. Cherian Poothicote, Dr. Adai Jacob, Kuriakos Moolayil (co-secretary), R.V. Markose, Dr. D. Babu Paul, and the deacons Shibu Cherian, Biji C. Markose and K.V. Saji. A common declaration signed November 19, 1993, was submitted by the Commission to the respective Church authorities. This mutual agreement regarding inter-Church marriages and eucharistic communion in specific cases was issued by both Churches on January 25, 1994. Together with this document, the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council published pastoral guidelines drafted by Catholic hierarchs in agreement with the Syrian Orthodox members of the Joint Commission.

The document is based on the mutual agreement signed by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I on June 23, 1984. The two parties of the dialogue affirm a common theology of the sacrament of marriage as well as of its indissolubility. At inter-Church marriage celebrations, the couple and the members of their families belonging to the two Churches, are allowed to receive the Eucharist in the church where the sacrament is celebrated. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, however, does not subscribe to the practice. They oppose such an agreement. An influential group headed by Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios of Delhi argues that signing such an agreement with the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church constitutes an action directed against the autocephalous Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church by the