

# Background and History of the Present Schism in the Malankara Church

by

J. Madey

The Malankara Church (or Malankara Sabha)<sup>1</sup> is one of those Churches which do not accept the Council of Chalcedon (451) and other ecumenical synods of a later time. She is one of the Oriental Orthodox or Pre-Chalcedonian or Ancient Orthodox Churches which, for a long time, were styled in the West as monophysite.

At present, this Church has to face the stormy winds of a schism within herself. Two hierarchies oppose one another, the one claiming autonomy, the second loyalty to the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, Moran Mar Ignatios Yacoub III. The atmosphere is not at all according to the principle of Christian love and charity; it is rather filled with emotions. Public demonstrations of the interested parties, lawsuits before civil tribunals, darken

---

<sup>1</sup> Under the term »Malankara Church« we have to understand the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Its Catholic branch is named the Syro-Malankara Church. Both follow the West Syrian Antiochean liturgical rite. Sometimes the Malankara Church is also named »Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar«; this name is often the cause of confusion. In Kerala, Malankara or Malabar, the largest Christian body is the Syro-Malabar Church (of East Syrian liturgical rite) which is in communion with the Church of Rome. Some prefer to call the Malankara Church today also as the »Indian Orthodox Church«. We have preferred the official name as indicated in *The Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*, Kottayam 1973. To a better understanding of what just has been stated, we reproduce here its first three paragraphs:

1. The Malankara Church is a division of the Orthodox Syrian Church. The Primate of the Orthodox Syrian Church is the Patriarch of Antioch.

2. The Malankara Church was founded by St. Thomas the Apostle and is included in the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East and the Primate of the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East is the Catholicos.

3. The ancient and the real name of the Malankara Church is the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church although it is also wrongly called 'The Jacobite Church', for the same reasons for which the Orthodox Syrian Church has been also called so. — For historical details, cf. N. J. Thomas, *Die Syrisch-Orthodoxe Kirche der Südindischen Thomas-Christen*, Würzburg 1967; P. J. Podipara, *Die Thomas-Christen*, Würzburg 1966 (English edition, London-Bombay 1970); D. Daniel, *The Orthodox Church of India*, vol. I, New Delhi 1972; E. Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India*, Calcutta-Bombay-London 1957; C. Malancharuvil, *The Syro-Malankara Church*, Ernakulam 1974.



Christ's mandate to his disciples in a non-Christian milieu. All these troubles are not only detrimental to the Malankara Church herself, but are a blow for Christianity in India, especially in the state of Kerala.

Having resigned from his high ecclesiastical office, Moran Mar Baselios Augen I was succeeded by Moran Mar Thoma Mathews I, as Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan on October 27, 1975. The latter had been elected Catholicos-elect (which corresponds to a coadjutor with the right of succession) by the episcopal synod, the managing committee and the general assembly of the Malankara Association composed of 3,000 elected representatives, on December 31, 1970<sup>2</sup>.

His opponent became the Metropolitan of Kandanad, Paulose Mar Philexinos, who was consecrated Catholicos of the East by Patriarch Ignatios Yacoub III under the name of Moran Mar Baselios Paulos II, at Damascus, on September 7, 1975. He is now leading that group of hierarchs, priests and faithful who consider the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East as their very religious superior and spiritual father in the Lord.

### *The Origin of the tension*

The present schism in the Malankara Church has its roots in events at least as far back as the seventies of the 19th century. Already in 1866, the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch deposed the then Metropolitan of Malankara Mathews Mar Athanasios (who eventually became the leader of what today is known as the Mar Thoma Syrian Church), consecrated Malpan Joseph Pulikotttil under the name of Mar Dionysios V as his successor, sent the holy Chrism and claimed the 'resisa', i.e. the cathedra from Malankara<sup>3</sup>. In order to solve the existing problems, the Patriarch of Antioch, Mar Patrose III (Butros, Peter) came to Malankara himself in 1875. On March 4, 1876, the government discontinued to acknowledge the protestantizing Mathews Mar Athanasios as the only leader of the Malankara Church. The faithful were given the possibility to choose the Metropolitan they liked.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1971) 336.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. C. Malancharuvil, *The Syro-Malankara Church*, Ernakulam 1974, 57. The author, a canonist, having stated that by 1866 the Patriarch of Antioch exercised patriarchal powers over the Malankara Church, continues, »The Malankara Metropolitans, on the other hand, seem to have not denied the supremacy of the Antiochene Patriarch, even though an acknowledgement of it was beyond their intention and will ... At any rate, this situation brought the Malankara Church to a difficult period in its history«.

<sup>4</sup> Malancharuvil, *op.c.* 58.



On June 5, 1876, an invitation was sent to all the churches of Jacobite affiliation to send one priest and two laymen as parish representatives to the church of Mulanthuruthy on June 29 of the same year for a synod. This synod took place from June 29 to July 1, 1876. Of the 180 parishes, 102 sent their representatives to the synod. The other parishes joined the excommunicated Mathews Mar Athanasios<sup>5</sup>.

Since both the parties had leaders appointed by the Patriarch of Antioch the people were lead to believe that the see of Antioch had always enjoyed supremacy over the Malankara Church. They also saw the Patriarch appointing and deposing Malankara metropolitans, sending holy Chrism to the churches, and preventing at the same time the metropolitans to do so, collecting the resisa etc. The Patriarch presiding over the synod, succeeded in establishing canons which clearly show his authority accepted by the assembly.

Each parish had to execute a bond of allegiance to the patriarch. The synod also prescribed a census in each parish which could be utilised for the collection of the patriarchal resisa. Very important measures were decided regarding the administration of the temporal goods of the Church. The established body then received the name "Syrian Christian Association" with the patriarch as patron and the Metropolitan of Malankara as president<sup>6</sup>. The association has 103 members; 24 delegates of which eight have to be priests have to administer the goods and render account to the patriarch and to the hierarchy of Malankara every year.

The synod was closely with a public document called 'padiola' signed by the people requesting the patriarch to approve and execute the decisions. In this document we read :

»From ancient times the people of Malabar and their churches are under the spiritual power of the Patriarch of Antioch. In this no one else has power. Since our bishops and priests receive (Holy) orders from you, you have power to appoint and to depose them. Your Holiness

---

<sup>5</sup> About the exact date of the beginning of the synod of Mulanthuruthy, there are different opinions. Some, e.g. Daniel, *op.c.* 95, who follows the Orthodox Syrian (Malankara) historian Z. M. Paret, *Mulanthuruthi Sunnahados*, places it into the above mentioned days (June 29 to July 1 = Midhunam 15 to 17), Malancharuvil, *op.c.* 58, follows the *Travancore Royal Court Judgement*, translated and edited by E. M. Philip, Kottayam 1890. According to him, the first day of the synod was November 15, 1876. Other historians content themselves by indicating only the year.

<sup>6</sup> It is very interesting to note that J. Mounayer, *Les Synodes Syriens Jacobites*, Beirut 1963, 103, basing himself on E. Barsaum's *Histoire des sciences et de la littérature syriaque*, Aleppo <sup>2</sup>1956, 149 (in Arabic), comes to the conclusion that the synod proclaimed the patriarch as president of the association and the metropolitan as its rector.



has the spiritual care of the Syrian people and churches in Malabar and also the power of nominating and deposing bishops.

We and our posteriority will not, until death, deviate either to the right nor to the left from the faith of the three Councils of our holy Church handed over or from the precept of our religion of true faith and of Your Holiness who is the head. We, therefore, unanimously swear before God and Your Holiness touching the cross and the Bible that until the last breath there will not be any change for this.

Requesting Your Holiness to put in effect all canons and laws pertaining to religion, we pray to confirm on the commission 24 members and the Metropolitan to it as responsible without partiality in all things pertaining to religion and community and to appoint a metropolitan from outside who shall watch that nothing may happen against faith or obedience...<sup>7</sup>

There is no doubt that the Malankara Church which up to then had ruled herself, was definitely brought under the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch with this synod. The patriarch, enjoying now the full power also in Malankara, exercised his rights. He divided the Malankara Church which heretofore had one sole diocese, into seven dioceses. As the Malankara Metropolitan Mar Dionysios was reluctant in executing the bond, he was given the least important diocese of Kollam (Quilon). In which manner the patriarch himself saw his spiritual authority over the Malankara Church becomes clear from the bull of appointment, the 'systatikon', given to the new bishop of Niranam :

»We grant him power over churches, over the fields, church properties and over everything that pertains to the churches. They should be administered according to his orders. He shall appoint administrators (economes) for the churches who shall collect the income from the fields, foundations and plantations which belong to the churches. Finally they shall give yearly report to him ...<sup>8</sup>

Having thus established his authority, the patriarch returned to his residence leaving behind him the seeds of dissension which had time to grow up in the following three decades. Mar Dionysios V, Metropolitan of Quilon, continued to rule over the whole Church as Metropolitan of Malankara till 1909. He was succeeded by Mar Dionysios VI (Vattasseril) consecrated by the Patriarch Mar Abdalla II in 1908 together with another hieromonk, the Ramban Paul, who became Kurilose Mar Athanasios.

---

<sup>7</sup> This document appeared in an English translation in *Codificazione Canonica Orientale*, Fonti, serie II, fasc. VIII : Placidus a S. Joseph TOCD, *De fontibus Juris ecclesiastici Syro-Malankarensium commentarius historico-canonicus*, Vatican City 1937, 29f.

<sup>8</sup> The receiver of this systatikon was Geevarghese Mar Gregorios (Chathuruthi) († 1902), canonised by the Holy Synod of the Malankara Church in 1947. He is today known as the Perumala Saint (Perumala is a place in the neighbourhood of Niranam, not far from Tiruvalla).



*The Conflict's eruption*

Patriarch Abdalla II who had accompanied Mar Patrose III to Malankara as Metropolitan Mar Gregorios<sup>9</sup> and had a fair knowledge of the decisions of the synod of Mulanthuruthy, came to Malankara anew as Patriarch of Antioch in order to secure his authority and supreme power in the government of the temporalities of the Church in Malankara. He demanded that all the bishops should, by a public deed, acknowledge his claims. Thus arose a heavy dispute between Mar Abdalla II and Mar Dionysios VI in regard to the nature and the extension of the patriarchal powers regarding the Malankara Church.

Mar Dionysios VI was willing to acknowledge only the spiritual supremacy of the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, i.e. consecration of bishops, consecration of the holy Chrism (mooron) for the Malankara Church and general supervision over the preservation of the faith of the Syrian Orthodox Church. It is interesting to note that these are the same arguments which were already pronounced by Mathews Mar Athanasios at the time of the synod of Mulanthuruthy.

While Mar Dionysios VI had the Judgement of the Royal Travancore Court on his side, the patriarch and all those who shared his opinion wished to execute what had been said in the 'Padiola' of 1876. Even among the members of the executive committee of the Malankara Association both the opinions were to be found. Thus also the people were gradually divided into two parties.

The climax of this tension was reached when the patriarch excommunicated the Malankara Metropolitan on May 31, 1911. Mar Dionysios VI did not submit to the patriarch's claims.

*Two Syrian Orthodox Churches in Malankara*

Mar Abdalla consecrated two bishops, one for the see of Ankamali, another for the ethnic group called 'Knanaya', 'Thekumbhagar' or 'Suddist' (Southist). He consecrated holy Chrism for them and convoked a synod which took place at Alwaye on August 30, 1911, where Mar Kurilose, whom he had conse-

---

<sup>9</sup> Mar Gregorios is said to have been the prime mover in the affair of the deposition of Patriarch Abdal Messih. The Firman (recognition by the Sultan of Turkey) was withdrawn from Mar Abdel Messih and given to Mar Gregorios who styled himself as Patriarch Mar Abdalla II. Many faithful, especially outside the Turkish empire, continued to consider Mar Abdal Messih as the legitimate ecclesiastical head of the Syrian Patriarchate of Antioch. Cf. Daniel, *op.c.* 110f., 115; Malancharuvil, *op.c.* 68 n. 22.



crated in 1908 together with Mar Dionysios VI, was appointed Metropolitan of Malankara in the place of Mar Dionysios VI.

In his act of submission, the newly consecrated bishop of Ankamali, Paulos Mar Athanasios, declared :

»... accept and keep the faith, traditions and customs of the Syrian Malabar Church over which Your Lordship has the supreme power ... and all laws instituted by Your Lordship and your successors as useful for ecclesiastical administration... I will accept from your holy hands Chrism ... consecrated only by the holy Antiochene Patriarch and will send it for use in the churches entrusted to me ... I will not do anything outside the power Your Lordship gives me. Your Lordship and your successors have power to excommunicate and depose me if I do anything against Your Lordship or your successors or outside the power given to me...«<sup>10</sup>

This declaration clearly demonstrates how extended the power of the Patriarch of Antioch was. It seems as if the bishops under him were simply his 'episcopal vicars' or exarchs. There is no mention of any cooperation of the Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate of Antioch in matters concerning the Malankara Church.

After two years in Malankara, Mar Abdalla II returned to the Near East leaving behind him, according to the demand of the 'Padiola', Metropolitan Sleebe Mar Osthathios as his "representative". This charge is not to be considered as identical to an apocrisiary which patriarchs may send to other autonomous Churches, it may be rather compared to that of an apostolic delegate or nuncio. Of course, the representative of the Patriarch of Antioch was not recognised by the excommunicated Mar Dionysios VI and his followers. They were, in fact, in a critical state, but as we already mentioned above, at that time the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch had two patriarchs : Mar Abdalla II, who had the approval of the Turkish government, and the deposed Mar Abdal Messih who claimed to be the legitimate patriarch and considered the withdrawal of civil recognition by the Turks as null and void for his ecclesiastical dignity.

Having been informed that his rival had excommunicated Mar Dionysios, Mar Abdal Messih declared this excommunication as invalid, in a message of August 17, 1911<sup>11</sup>. On the invitation of the Metropolitan, he came to Malankara one year later, and on September 15, 1912 he instituted the Catholicate which ought to be a continuation of the old Catholicate of the

---

<sup>10</sup> Special number of *Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam 1911, 64f.; cf. Codificazione Canonica Orientale, Fonti, serie II, fasc. IX : Placidus a S. Joseph TOCD, *Fontes Juris Canonici Syro-Malankarensium*, Vatican City 1940, 34f. n. 42; Malancharuvil, *op.c.* 67.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Daniel, *op.c.* 115.



East in Tagrit. Paulos Mar Ivanios, Metropolitan of Kandanad, the only surviving hierarch consecrated by Patriarch Patrose III, was enthroned as Catholicos under the name of Paulos Basilios. To strengthen his authority vis-à-vis the followers of Mar Abdalla, Mar Abdal Messih consecrated the bishops Mar Gheevarghese Gregorios, Mar Joachim Ivanios and Mar Gregorios Philexinos. He further declared in a letter written from the Seminary of Perumala i.a. :

»... Your Catholicos and Metropolitans who are your Pastors will, we hope, satisfy your requirements. With the assistance of the Metropolitans, the Catholicos will consecrate, according to the canons of our holy Fathers, Metropolitans and holy Chrism for you. After the death of the Catholicos, your Metropolitans have the right and authority to enthrone a Catholicos in his place. Nobody shall have any right to prevent them from doing it. However, everything shall be done prudently, orderly and according to the customs with the counsel of the Committee which is under the presidentship of Mar Dionysios, the Malankara Metropolitan ...»<sup>12</sup>

Only a few weeks later, the Patriarch left for Jerusalem<sup>13</sup>.

Now there were two groups in the Malankara Church, both of whom had a protohierarch styling himself Metropolitan of Malankara. The latter became known as 'Metran Kakshi' (Catholicos or Metropolitan party), the former one as 'Bava Kakshi' (Patriarchal party).

A time followed which was characterised by many attempts of reconciliation but also by a series of painful and tiresome lawsuits between the two parties in which the identity of each with the original Malankara Church and consequently the ownership of church properties were the object of bitter discussion. This state lasted till December 16, 1958 when a compromise was achieved between the Catholicos of the Malankara Church and the Patriarch of Antioch<sup>14</sup>. From 1934 onwards the Catholicos party had adopted a constitution accepting the name *Orthodox Syrian Church of Malankara* which already Mar Thomas IV († 1728) had used in 1709<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> T. Inchakalody, *Archbishop Mar Ivanios*, Trivandrum 1957, 120 (in Malayalam); cf. *Malayala Manorama* of May 17, 1913; quoted from Malancharuvil, *op.c.* 69.

<sup>13</sup> In the same year 1913, the Patriarch made his profession of faith before the Syrian Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Moran Mar Ephrem II Rahmani (1898-1929). He died in 1915 as a Syrian Catholic. Cf. A. Fortescue, *The Lesser Eastern Churches*, London 1913, 371 fn. 1; E. Tisserant, *op.c.* 197; Malancharuvil, *op.c.* 68 fn. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Daniel, *op.c.* 121-125; Malancharuvil, *op.c.* 69-71; Tisserant, *op.c.* 153-155; P. Verghese, Die syrisch-orthodoxe Kirche, in *Die Syrischen Kirchen in Indien*, ed. P. Verghese, Stuttgart 1974, 59-67.

<sup>15</sup> »Thoma, the infirm, bishop of the ancient and orthodox Syrian Christians of Hindoo ...«, cf. Malancharuvil, *op.c.* 70 fn. 31.



### *Reconciliation*

The lawsuits before the civil courts were sometimes in favour of the one or of the other party. At last, the Supreme Court of India gave the final verdict on September 12, 1958. It is entirely in favour of the claims of the Metran Kakshi.

»The decree of the trial court may be summarised as follows :

- i. Mar Gheevarghese Dionysius was the lawful Malankara Metropolitan and was recognised and accepted as such by the Malankara Syrian Church and as such had become a trustee of the Church properties;
- ii. The Patriarch had only a power of general supervision over the spiritual government of the Church but had no right to interfere with the internal administration of the Church in spiritual matters which rested only in the Metropolitan and that the Patriarch has no authority, jurisdiction, control, supervision or concern over or with the temporalities of the Arch-diocese of Malankara;
- iii. Mar Gheevarghese Dionysius was excommunicated by Patriarch Abdulla II; but such excommunication was opposed to the Constitution of the Malankara Church as laid down by the Synod of Mulanthuruthy and was canonically invalid and he was still recognised and accepted as the Malankara Metropolitan by a large majority of Malankara Syrian Christian community;
- iv. Kora Mathan Malpan and C. J. Kurien had been validly removed from the office of trustee and Mani Paulose Kathanar and Kora Kochu Korula had been validly appointed in their places.<sup>16</sup>

It is to be noted that non-Christian judges had to deal with canonical questions and to give them an adequate exegesis. Therefore it is not at all surprising that the Syrian Patriarch, through the intermediary of the Indian vice-minister of Justice, C. H. Daftari, wished a revision of this judgment claiming that the judges had erred. This appeal, however, was dismissed by the supreme judge of India, S. R. Das, who himself had been involved in the judgment mentioned above.<sup>17</sup>

Realizing the state of affairs, the Patriarch of Antioch, Moran Mar Ignatios Yacoub III, decided to establish the peace in the Malankara Church. On December 9, 1958, he sent a message ('Kalpana') to Mar Julios Elias, the then patriarchal delegate (1930-1962), on the receipt of which talks about the realization of the reconciliation took place between the hierarchs and the lay leaders in the house of the 'Knanaya' bishop (Bava Kakshi) at Chingavanam near Kottayam and at Devalokam, the Catholicos's residence in Kottayam.

---

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Daniel, *op.c.* 124.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 124.



Already on December 16, 1958, the reconciliation was publicly celebrated in the chapel of the Old Seminary at Kottayam. The Catholicos Mar Baselios Gheevarghese II († 1964), and following him Mar Julios and the hierarchs of both parties entered the chapel. Documents were exchanged in which the parties mutually accepted one another. The bishops of Ankamali, Cochin, Kandanad and of the 'Knanayas' were integrated into the Holy Synod of the Catholicate of the East. Two of the former bishops of the patriarchal group, namely Paulos Mar Philexenos of Kandanad and Abraham Mar Clemis of the 'Knanayas' are still alive.

The climax of the reconciliation seems to have been reached when in 1964 the elected Augen Mar Themotheos, Metropolitan of Thumpamon, who as Metropolitan of Kandanad had joined the Metran kakshi in 1942, was about to be enthroned. The Malankara Association and the Holy Synod invited the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, who arrived in Malankara on May 22, 1964<sup>18</sup>. The patriarch, who had stayed in Malankara as a young monk for several years and had a fair knowledge of the vernacular language Malayalam, solemnly confirmed the election of Augen Mar Themotheos and presided over the investiture at Mar Elias Church in Kottayam<sup>19</sup>. The new Catholicos took the name of Mar Baselios Augen I. He resigned from his office in autumn and died in December 1975.

### *New Tensions*

In 1972, all the Syrian Christians of Malankara, irrespective of their ecclesiastical affiliation celebrated the 1900th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Thomas the Apostle.

What happened that this year must be regarded as the beginning of new tensions between the Syrian Patriarchate and the Malankara Catholicate?

1. Mar Baselios Augen I, in a document released on the occasion of the jubilee year, signs as successor on the throne of St. Thomas the Apostle.

2. Patriarch Mar Ignatios Yacoub III consecrated in March 1972 the Syrian monk Ephrem Aboodi Ramban at Damascus appointing him at

---

<sup>18</sup> *Proche-Orient chrétien* 15 (Jerusalem 1965) 76-78; Daniel, *op.c.* 145; E. R. Hambye-J. Madey, *1900 Jahre Thomas-Christen in Indien*, Freiburg i. Ue. 1972, 52f.; Verghese, *art.c.* 67.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Daniel, *op.c.* 145; *Proche-Orient chrétien* 15 (1965) 76-78; Hambye-Madey, *op.c.* 53.



the same time "Apostolic Delegate of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch"<sup>20</sup>. Mar Timotheos Ephrem Aboodi, in this capacity, returned to Malankara and took up residence at Mar Ignatius Dayra, Mathoor near Pathamthitta, Kerala. This appointment was considered by the Catholicos as an unfriendly act on the part of the patriarch vis-à-vis the autonomous status of the Malankara Church, and this reaction was communicated to the Patriarch. Mar Timotheos never received the recognition of the Catholicos and his Synod, on the contrary, the Malankara Church under the Catholicos succeeded in her efforts that Mar Timotheos's visa was not renewed. He had to leave India in 1974 and was obliged to return to the Patriarchate at Damascus.

This expulsion took place in early summer 1974, only a few months after the patriarch's letter (no. 52/74 of January 30, 1974) had reached the Catholicos<sup>21</sup>. This letter is of great importance as it reveals the whole problem. The Catholicos is accused in it of being guilty on thirteen items. We shall comment on the different topics following the order of this letter.

The Patriarch says (no. 1) that the universal Syrian Orthodox Church has but one apostolic see which is that of St. Peter [at Antioch]. It is an aberration that St. Thomas would have had a see or throne. While the arguments for the title of "successor of St. Thomas", as quoted by the supporters of the Catholicate<sup>22</sup>, recall only the recent shifting of the 'Persian' Catholicate<sup>23</sup> of old to Malankara, it certainly would have been better to make a historical research which would have proved that this title is not at all alien to the Church on the Malabar coast. As early as Mar Jacob, an East Syrian ('Nestorian') hierarch of the 14th century, signed a document which is conserved in the Vatican library, in 1301 as "Metropolitan Bishop, Prelate ... of the Holy See of the Apostle Thomas and the Holy Church of all Christians in India"<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Letter-head of the Metropolitan, as reproduced in the *Souvenir published by Souvenir Committee for the St. Thomas Church Silver Jubilee (Church of the East), Ernakulam, Cochin-11, S. India, and The 19th Hundred Centenary of Mar Thoma Slecha (The Founder of the Church of the East in India) Celebrations 1972, October 1, 2, Trichur 1972, 12.*

<sup>21</sup> We are indebted to Fr. Korah Varghese, chaplain for the faithful of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in the Federal Republic of Germany, for having made the translation of the letter from the Malayalam text published in the Catholicate's monthly *Malankara Sabha*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Daniel, *op.c.* 129f.

<sup>23</sup> The Catholicate (Maphrianate) of the East whose titulars resided at Mosul, ceased to exist in the 18th century.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. P. Chittilapilly, *The Malabar Church and Patriarchate* (= Diss., Pont. Univ. Lateranensis, Institutum Utriusque Juris), Rome 1966, 66.



In no. 2, the patriarch says that according to canon law and tradition, the patriarch is the supreme leader of the universal Syrian Orthodox Church to whom the Catholicos is subordinated. The Catholicos, however, and his followers say that the Catholicos is of equal dignity, both are prime heads, 'pradāna mēladdjakšan', either of the hierarchy of the Church of Antioch or of that of the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East, i.e. the Malankara Church<sup>25</sup>. We see that there is a strong divergence in the understanding of the "spiritual supremacy" of the Patriarch of Antioch. The *Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*, in its amended form of April 14, 1967, "approved by the Holy Episcopal Synod and promulgated by His Holiness Moran Mor Baselius Augen First, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan per his order No : 156/67 of 26th June, 1967"<sup>26</sup> mentions the patriarch only four times in nos. 1, 101, 114, 118. The last three articles define his relation to the Malankara Church. Practically he may only enthrone a new Catholicos or preside over a synod if there is a complaint against the Catholicos.

The patriarch, further, stresses, in no. 3, that the Malankara Church is a part of the universal Syrian Orthodox Church. He thus denies categorically that autonomy or autocephaly was granted in 1958 or 1964. Then he objects that the Catholicos (and his followers) sometimes were using the name 'Indian Orthodox Church' saying that he were the head. "This is a new conception and a deliberate provocation of the patriarch and his authority", Mar Yacoub III writes.

The following fourth paragraph once more stresses the fact, that St. Thomas did not possess a see, hence there were no reasons to use this title (i.e. of St. Thomas) officially. It is not a matter of the Malankara Church alone, but one of the universal Syrian Church and her faith.

In no. 5, the patriarch says that it is not enough to have a friendly attitude towards the titular of the see of Antioch. The right term is, according to the canon, subordination.

No. 6 speaks of the attitude the Catholicos and his Synod have shown vis-à-vis the patriarchal delegate, Mar Timotheos Ephrem Aboodi, who has been expelled from India due to the efforts of the Malankara hierarchy with the civil authorities.

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. M. K. Abraham, *The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church Then and Now*, Chengannur 1973, 27f.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *The Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church* (English edition), Kottayam 1973, 30.



In the next paragraph, the patriarch reproaches the catholicos with having made changes in the episcopal consecration using a new 'amalogia' since 1966. The patriarch herewith renews his claims that as the supreme hierarch the 'ius liturgicum' resides with him.

In no. 8 it is stated that the Malankara Church lead by the catholicos does not repudiate the doctrine of the two natures as explained in the Tomus Leonis accepted by the council of Chalcedon and which is not recognised by the Syrian Church. It is a fact that the Malankara Church has abandoned the practice<sup>27</sup> to anathematize anybody by name in the liturgy. In the Syrian rite, the profession of faith during the ordination service demands that the ordinand declares also: "... 7. I believe and profess everything what the holy Fathers of the councils of Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus have decided and ordered. 8. I curse all the heretics who introduce destructive heresies and by this fact separate themselves from the membership in the catholic and apostolic Church, and who were cursed by the Apostles and the holy Fathers of the three councils. I curse Simon the Magician, Mani, Arius, Macedonius, Nestorius, Eutyches, Leo of Rome, Urban VIII, Hormisd, Marcion, Paul of Samosata, Bar Sauma of Nisibis and all the other heretics"<sup>28</sup>.

The patriarch then accuses the Catholicos that he tolerates uncanonical, historically false, and heretical books in the religious instruction of the Sunday Schools, and he is convinced that this is done to influence the children with a certain ideology.

No. 10 reproaches the catholicos for claiming more authority than granted to him by the Holy Synod.

No. 11 says: "During an assembly, you have proclaimed to sit on the chair of Thomas and to be equal to the patriarch of Antioch. This saying was given for publication to the press agencies. On August 24, 1972, you delivered the same speech during a meeting of the Managing Committee, and a news agency at Kottayam, the U.N.T., published it on September 26, 1972. You have repeated the same claims in your speech on the occasion of the 1900th anniversary of the death of St. Thomas."

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the saying of P. Verghese, in: Second Ecumenical Consultation between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Vienna-Lainz. September 3-9, 1973. Papers and Minutes: *Wort und Wahrheit. Revue for Religion and Culture. Supplementary Issue Number 2*, Vienna, December 1974, 128.

<sup>28</sup> A German translation is to be found in N. J. Thomas, *Die Syrisch-Orthodoxe Kirche der Südindischen Thomas-Christen* (= Das östliche Christentum, NF Heft 19), Würzburg 1967, 75 f.



The patriarch then comments on the decision of the Managing Committee of the Malankara Association, taken on May 25, 1973. This committee decided that the relations between the Patriarchate and the Catholicate would automatically cease to exist if the patriarch should consecrate a bishop for Malankara. The patriarch says that such a decision has no basis in canon law and is superfluous. He reproaches the catholicos that, by supporting such a decision, he had questioned the patriarch's authority.

At last the patriarch accuses the catholicos to have written an impolite letter, imbued with pride. He demands, within a month, an answer from the catholicos.

What surprises is that Mar Yacoub III, when mentioning St. Thomas never uses the term 'Apostle'. Indeed, already in his kalpana no. 203 of June 27, 1970, the patriarch had denied the priestly character of St. Thomas referring to John 20,21ff., where it is reported that St. Thomas was not present when the Lord appeared to his apostles on the day of his resurrection and conferred to them the Holy Spirit for their priestly ministry. For this reason there cannot be an apostolic see of St. Thomas in Malankara. Hence the catholicos may not call himself a successor of a disciple of Christ who was not even a priest<sup>29</sup>.

The Catholicos party, of course, rejects such a standpoint. "This [i.e. the absence of St. Thomas on resurrection day] does not seem to constitute sufficient and decisive ground for one to take a decision on such a very important issue like the dethroning of an Apostle. It would have had some sufficiency and validity if the Apostleship of Thomas ended on that day as a result of his omission. The Patriarch may have other reasons but he seems to fear that they may, if expressed, would expose him. Naturally he wants to avoid it. Whatever it be, he seems to have forgotten the fact that after all, he is only a Patriarch whose rank in the hierarchy is below that of an Apostle, that he has been exercising a power to which he cannot make any pretensions, that he has been tinkering with a question of faith, and that by doing so he has been exposing the Patriarchate to ridicule. The upshot of his hasty and ill-advised action is that he has earned for himself an inglorious niche in the temple of Orthodox Church History"<sup>30</sup>.

We have quoted this because it makes understand the reason for the explosion of the schism within the Malankara Church. It is a matter of fact that

---

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Abraham, *op.c.* 13f.; M. Manal el, Geschichtlicher Hintergrund der gegenwärtigen Krise zwischen den getrennten Brüdern der Malankara Kirche, in: *Reunion Record* 26 (Tiruvalla 1975) 12.

<sup>30</sup> Abraham, *op.c.* 15.



the adherents of what was called in the past the 'Bava kakshi' had to complain that the leaders of the other side, the 'Metran kakshi' of old, did not treat them with tact, comprehension and proper consideration<sup>31</sup>.

### *The Outburst of the Schism*

To remedy the situation which existed after the expulsion of the patriarchal Apostolic Delegate Mar Timotheos Aboodi, the patriarch decided to give those priests and faithful who still regarded him as entitled to jurisdictional powers in India, a new exarch and apostolic delegate of Indian nationality. The learned hieromonk (Ramban) Dr. K. P. Paul was consecrated at Damascus under the name of Paulos Mar Athanasios. On demand of the patriarch's followers, on February 24, 1974, two more Indian priests received the episcopal consecration, namely Fr. C. M. Thomas under the name of Thomas Mar Dionysios and Fr. P. M. Gheevarghese under the name of Gheevarghese Mar Gregorios.

The two surviving metropolitans of the old 'Bava kakshi', Mar Philexenos of Kandanad and Mar Clemis of the Knanayas, joined again the patriarch's adherents. The five hierarchs met on March 17, 1974 at Perumbavoor, Kerala, and issued a document before a very large congregation in which they declared their unconditional allegiance to the direct jurisdiction of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch.<sup>32</sup>

All attempts for reconciliation from certain good-willed individuals failed. The visit of the Catholic Syro-Malankara Metropolitan of Trivandrum Benedict Mar Gregorios to the patriarch, after the last Synod of Bishops in Rome had no other intention than to calm the minds, to hinder the outburst of a complete separation of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

---

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (London 1974) 116. — We have to add here the fact that very often the lay leaders of some great and financially powerful families played a rather pressing rôle which had disastrous consequences upon the life of the Church. Another item to be mentioned in this context is the fact the reconciliation of 1958 was too much based upon the decision of the Supreme Court in favour of the then Catholicos party. Never serious efforts were made towards an integration of the two wings existing in the Malankara Church; nothing was done for a deep spiritual renewal; in the episcopal elections, the former Catholicos party was dominating and the proportion represented by the faithful of the former Patriarch's party was not given due consideration. The sole exception from such an attitude seems to have been the Orthodox Theological Seminary of Kottayam where some efforts towards a spiritual and social integration of the future clergy were made. *Private letter* from Pune, January 26, 1976.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 7 (1975) 91.



In January 1975, the patriarch suspended the Catholicos from his functions until a formal submission was made. This was refused, and, on February 16, 1975, the Catholicate hierarchy was augmented by five new hierarchs: Paulos Mar Gregorios, Gheevarghese Mar Ostathios, Thomas Mar Makarios, Joseph Mar Pachomios and Stephanos Mar Theodosios. Paulos Mar Gregorios and Gheevarghese Mar Ostathios are widely known, from their cooperation in the World Council of Churches and at the non-official ecumenical consultations between theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church organised by the Foundation 'Pro Oriente' of Vienna, under their priestly names of Fr. Paul Verghese and Fr. M(unduvell) V. George, principal and vice-principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary of Kottayam respectively.

The group favouring the patriarch did not remain silent. In the beginning of May, a large demonstration took place at Ernakulam, diocese of Cochin. In the end of the same month, during a convention of the patriarchal youth at Tiruvalla, which certainly had in mind the Synod of the universal Syrian Orthodox Church to be held at Damascus on June 16, the participants appealed to the patriarch to depose Catholicos Mar Baselios Augen I and to elect a new one for Malankara.

Now also those with the Catholicos decided to take final steps against the two Metropolitans of Kandanad and of the Knanayas who, inspite of their attitude, continued to be still members of the Holy Synod of the Catholicate. On May 22, the Synod suspended Paulos Mar Philexinos and Abraham Mar Clemis, demanding from them a complete submission under the Synod. Since the Metropolitans did not comply, they were suspended in the beginning of June.

On June 9, the Indian newspapers reported that Paulos Mar Gregorios of the Catholicate Synod had declared that the thirteen accusations raised by the Patriarch of Antioch against the Catholicos Mar Augen I were without any foundation. The patriarch, the Metropolitan said, had no jurisdiction whatsoever in India. Jurisdiction is alone in the competence of the Catholicos and of the Holy Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church<sup>33</sup>.

---

<sup>33</sup> I am very much indebted to all my correspondents in India who have regularly supplied me with the latest news. My particular thanks are due to the Most Rev. Zacharias Mar Athanasios, eparch of Tiruvalla, and Prof. E. R. Hambye S.J., Delhi.



### *The Schism perfected*

The synod of the universal Syrian Orthodox Church was convoked to Damascus. The participants had to be there on June 16. They came from the Near East countries, America and India. Two more Malankara priests received the episcopal consecration there. On the press photo, five Malankara bishops are seen.

The synod once more solemnly proclaimed the suspension of the Catholicos of the East and of all those Malankara bishops who were not willing to obey to the Patriarch of Antioch. It empowered the patriarch to excommunicate the catholicos, if this proves necessary<sup>34</sup>.

As there was no positive reaction, the patriarch excommunicated the 93 years old Catholicos Mar Baselios Augen I because of disobedience towards the patriarch and because of his declarations that the Malankara Church is an independent, autocephalous Church.

In his place, on September 7, 1975, Patriarch Mar Ignatios Yacoub III ordained the Metropolitan of Kandanad Paulos Mar Philexinos Catholicos (Mafrian) of the East under the name of Mar Baselios Paulos II<sup>35</sup>.

To improve the situation of the adherents of the Catholicate, Mar Baselios Augen I resigned from his high office, and the then Metropolitan of the Diocese outside Kerala, Mathews Mar Athanasios, was enthroned on October 27, 1975<sup>36</sup>, as Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews I.

So there are now two Churches in Malankara. The *Jacobite Syrian Christians* who acknowledge the spiritual and jurisdictional supremacy of the Patriarch of Antioch, have their Catholicos Baselios Paulos II while the *Orthodox Syrian Christians* are under Catholicos Baselios Thoma Mathews I.

### *Conclusion*

Viewing all the unhappy events of the past and the present, it is necessary to state that both sides are responsible for what happened. It is beyond

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Reunion Record* 26 (1975) 12.

<sup>35</sup> Metropolitan Benedict Mar Gregorios of Trivandrum, protohierarch of the Catholic Syro-Malankara Church, asked the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Maximos V to intervene with the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatios Yacoub III, in order to prevent the schism, but due to the civil war in Lebanon, his letter arrived too late. The Syrian Patriarch had already ordained the new catholicos. — Private letter of Patriarch Maximos V, dated October 25, 1975.

<sup>36</sup> Private letter of Fr. Hormisdas C. Perumalil, dated October 27, 1975; cf. also Manalel, *art.c.* 13; photograph of the enthronement in *Reunion Record* 26 (1975) after p. 6.



doubt, that it must be a blow to all the Thomas Christians (Orthodox, Catholic, Nestorian, Mar Thoma Christians) to see the apostleship denied to the father of the Church on the Malabar Coast of India. It is for them an offence that the patriarch has denied even priesthood to him with an exegesis of John 20,21ff., which certainly will be refused by all serious scholars of the New Testament. — On the other hand, the 'autonomists', in the eyes of the patriarch and his followers, seem to have forgotten that the hierarchical and, consequently, ecclesiastical existence of theirs is due to the Syrian Church of Antioch which intervened in their favour in the 17th century. Besides that, the Malankara Church has formally accepted the Synod of Mulanthuruthy which granted the patriarch most ample powers. Decisions of civil courts in internal affairs of the Church cannot be regarded as infallible, especially not when the interpretation of synods and canon law is entrusted into the hands of non-Christians. The lawsuits will continue in the future. They are a scandal not only in the eyes of the follow-Christians, but also in those of the Hindus and Muslims of Malankara or Kerala. Millions of rupees are spent for court suits while hundred of thousands of Christians and non-Christians bitterly need material help to live a human life and to survive. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that there are not a few people who wish to get rid of these troubles in the community that paralyze the spiritual life of the Church, and wish to join the Catholic branch of the Malankara Church that came into existence in 1930 because of the very same reasons, namely in order to attain spiritual and religious peace<sup>37</sup>.

In our ecumenically oriented time, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatios Yacoub III could have reacted otherwise by giving more authority and recognition to the Malankara Synod. The impression is given that material aspects are of no little importance in the development of this schism.

The separation of the Orthodox Syrian Church from the patriarchate brings the former (inspite of her membership in the World Council of Churches) ecclesiologically into an unsound isolation. The ties with the Mother Church are broken. Which consequences will this situation have on

---

<sup>37</sup> »We get reports from our various parishes and missions that groups of our separated Brethren are coming into the Catholic Church. The conversion among the non-Christians is also progressing. In certain villages the whole people are coming into the Church. We have been able to start about 10 new missions during the last six months«. Cyclostyled Christmas letter, dated December 10, 1975, of Metropolitan Benedict Mar Gregorios of Trivandrum. — E.g. 50 families at Neerammol, 40 families at Ezhakaranad joined the Catholic Syro-Malankara Church. Cf. *Reunion Record* 26 (1975) photographs after p. 10. Others are joining the Mar Thoma Syrian Church or even the Pentecostal communities.



the relation with the other pre-Chalcedonian Churches, on the ecumenical consultations of Vienna, on the dialogue with the Byzantine Eastern Orthodox Churches, etc.? There is the danger that her catholicity may be lost as this was the case with the Independent Syrian Church of Thozhiur (or Anjoor) whose hierarchy also is rooted in the patriarchate of Antioch. We pray that the Orthodox Syrian Church of Malankara may conserve her character as a Church and not turn into a sect.