

The Eastern Churches in India

A Chronicle 1974-1977 *

by

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1. *Syro-Malabar Church*

On June 27, 1974, the Holy Roman See divided the eparchy of Trichur; the Eastern parts are forming now the eparchy of Palghat covering a territory of 28,515 km². On the same day, Fr. Eapen Irimpan was appointed first eparch. He was ordained bishop on September 8, 1974. Since long, there was a plan of bifurcating two more eparchies of large extension, especially the metropolitan eparchy of Changanacherry reaching from central Kerala up to Cape Comorin. In March 1977, this was realized, when seven forane churches were separated from Changanacherry to form the new eparchy of Kanjirappally; the town of Kanjirappally is 24 miles east of Changanacherry. The number of faithful living in the eparchy is 110,517 (69 parishes and 29 filial churches). Mar Joseph Powathil, titular bishop of Caesarea Philippi and auxiliary bishop at Changanacherry, was appointed first eparch. At Kothamangalam, Mar Mathew Pothanamuzhi, resigned from his office due to his sickness and old age. His successor is Mar George Punnakottil, who was teaching at the St. Thomas Ap. Seminary of Vadavathoor near Kottayam. It is said that everything was arranged to divide the eparchy of Trichur and establish a new eparchy with the see at Iranjalakuda in the name of the ancient Syro-Malabar primatial see of Cranganore. Obstacles against this plan are supposed to have been raised by the Latin hierarchy and the Congregation for Evangelization.

In the North, five of the six Apostolic exarchates were raised to the state of ordinary eparchies. The exarchs were raised to the episcopate at the same time. Mar Januarius Palathuruthy (CMI) is now the eparch (ordinary bishop) of Chanda, Mar Paulinus Jeerakath (CMI) the eparch of Jagdalpur, Mar Clemens Thottunkal (CMI) the eparch of Sagar, Mar Abraham

* The present chronicle is continuing that we published in *Oriens Christianus* 60 (1976), 152-161.

D. Mattam (VC) the eparch of Satna, Mar John Perumattam the eparch of Ujjain. There remains only one Apostolic Exarchate of Bijnor which is directed by Exarch Gratian Mundadan (CMI). * Also the mission territory handed over to the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) by the Jesuit diocese of Ahmedabad near Bombay (Latin rite) whose Superior was Fr. Ralph CMI¹, was raised to the state of a Syro-Malabar eparchy. The first eparch of the new eparchy of Rajkot is Mar Jonas Thaliath (CMI) who had become known by his thesis "The Synod of Diamper" (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 152, Rome, 1958). For the last years he was acting as Deputy Secretary General to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI). He is now 58 years old.

The Little Flower Congregation (of St. Theresa of the Infant Jesus) is now involved in missionary work, too. The mission regions are, however, not yet canonically established as Oriental ecclesiastical units.

The Syro-Malabar Bishops' Conference of August 1974 decided to make an end with the liturgical disorder which had crept into this particular Church since 1968², by establishing subcommissions within the Liturgical commission, each under the leadership of a bishop: 1) for the Eucharistic sacrifice called "Qurbana", president: Mar Joseph Pallikaparampil, bishop of Abydos and auxiliary at Palai; 2) for the Divine Office, president: Mar Joseph Powathil, bishop of Caesarea Philippi and auxiliary at Changanacherry; 3) for the rites of the mysteries or sacraments, president: Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry, bishop of Kottayam; 4) for the liturgical calendar, president: Mar Sebastian Mankuzhikary, bishop of Aretusa and auxiliary at Ernakulam.

Nevertheless, there appeared a series of liturgical books 'pro manuscripto', especially from Ernakulam with the approval of the local hierarch, Cardinal Parecattil. Even quite a good number of so-called 'Indian anaphoras' from different sources, i.e. the Dharmaram College of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate where a group ignorant of their own tradition is fostering such attempts, was used by certain individual priests with the permission of their ordinary, in spite of their hinduising tendencies. In the meantime, the Roman Curia has forbidden such experimentations for the Latins of India and indirectly for all. The chaos in matters of liturgy is due to the training of the clergy in Latin seminaries. Most of them including the bishops are ignorant of what is their patrimony³. Even during the last

* Recently, this exarchate also received the status of an eparchy.

¹ Author of the pamphlet "*The Apostolate of the C.M.I. Congregation among the Jacobites*" (St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam [1976], 28 pages).

² Cf. our article "The So-Called Liturgical Reform of the Syro-Malabar Church", in *Diakonia* 9 (New York, 1974), 138-156.

³ Cf. Placid J. Podipara, *The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church*, Alleppey, Kerala, India 1976, especially pp. 199-208.

Seminar on Liturgy held at the National Catechetical, Biblical and Liturgical Centre of Bangalore whose director is Fr. Amalorpavadass, a brother of archbishop Lourdeswamy, secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization, some of the Syro-Malabar delegates did not concelebrate with their own confrères but did so with the Latins. It was for the first time, that the Syro-Malabarians got an opportunity to have their own liturgy in this centre; it was celebrated by Mar Abraham Mattam⁴, exarch of Satna and Fathers Chavely (Theological Faculty, Alwaye), Pathikulangara CMI (Dharmaram College), Vettickal (eparchy of Palai), Mathukathil (eparchy of Kottayam), and Vavanikunnel⁵ (metropolitan eparchy of Changanacherry).

The Pastoral, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre "Sandesanilayam" at Changanacherry is the leading institution which promotes and fosters the rediscovery of the authenticity and individuality of the Syro-Malabar Church. A slow progress is to be observed in the mentality of the élite. Before the foundation of the above mentioned subcommissions for the renewal of the liturgy, a Seminar was held in the centre whose main theme was the Divine Liturgy. The papers during this seminar (August 6 to 8, 1974) were read by Mar Joseph Powathil, Mar Abraham D. Mattam, Professors E. R. Hambye SJ, J. Chavely, J. Madey, G. Vavanikunnel and M. Vellanickal⁶. The monthly "Kathirolī", edited by Sandesanilayam, finds its way to a large part of the clergy as well as into the study centres. A small press is attached to the centre editing books in the vernacular as well as in English.

In 1976, a meeting of the directors for Catechetics of the Syro-Malabar dioceses took place under the chairmanship of Mar Joseph Powathil, president of the commission for Christian education in Kerala. It was realized that the catechetical instruction is the least helpful in preserving

⁴ After having published, for the exarchates, an English-Hindi "Missal" under the title "*Holy Qurbana According To The Syro-Malabar Rite*" (The Allahabad Block Works [Pri.] Ltd., Allahabad) in 1970 which contains the Ordo of the Qurbana and a selection of prayers proper for different periods and feasts, Mar Abraham Mattam published in 1976, together with Mar John Perumattam, exarch of Ujjain, two volumes of *Prayers Proper of the Holy Qurbana*. Vol. 1: For Sundays and Feasts — *Lent to Ascension*; vol. 2: For Sundays and Feasts — *Annunciation and Manifestation* (corresponding to the Latin periods of Advent and Epiphany).

⁵ His doctoral thesis just appeared: *Die eucharistische Katechese der Anaphora der Apostel Mar Addai und Mar Mari in der syro-malabarischen Kirche gestern und heute* (= Das östliche Christentum. Abhandlungen im Auftrag des Östkirchlichen Instituts der deutschen Augustiner, Würzburg, Steinbachtal 2a, herausgegeben von Professor Dr. Hermenegild M. Biedermann OSA, Würzburg, Neue Folge, Band 26), Würzburg, 1976.

⁶ Cf. *Der christliche Osten* 29 (1974), 151-154; *Eastern Churches Review* 7 (1975), 90-91. G. Vavanikunnel (ed.), *A Study on the Syro-Malabar Qurbana*, Changanacherry, 1976, 162 pages.

the traditions of the St. Thomas Christians. The catechetical directors prepared a document stressing this point which is to be presented to the Syro-Malabar Bishops' Conference with a view to being sent to the Committee of the Synod of Bishops' in Rome.

On October 4, 1976, Fr. Basilius (Thomas Panat), the founder of the Little Flower Congregation (of St. Theresa of the Infant Jesus) passed away. He was born on February 15, 1891, and was ordained priest on December 26, 1918. A priest of the metropolitan eparchy of Ernakulam, he started to form a community in 1931 which was approved by the ordinary as a community of priests and lay brothers on October 8, 1947. Its aim is evangelization through social works, such as conducting boys' homes, educational institutions, vocational training centres, village uplift projects, missions. The Congregation has now 11 houses; there are 79 priests, 68 seminarians, 20 novices, 24 minor seminarians. CST-priests are working in 12 dioceses of India. Three mission regions are entrusted to the Congregation. It is conducting 3 homes for boys, 1 school, 1 printing press, 2 industrial training institutes, 1 public library and 2 parishes.

The Kerala bishops, Latins and Orientals, are said to have passed a resolution that a bishop should not put up a church within 2 furlongs (= 402,34 m) of another bishop's church. It is heard that Ernakulam (Syro-Malabar), without even informing the Latin bishop of Cochin, opened a church very close to a Latin church in Cochin. The Latin laymen complained to the government authorities that functions in the new church will cause break of peace and public order. Card. Parecattil is reported to have said that the pastoral need (*salus animarum*) requires it. The same hierarchy, on the other hand, is not at all concerned about the Malabarians outside Kerala, neither in India nor in Europe or America, where thousands of faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church are living. Recently *two* priests were sent to Bombay to take care of about 30.000 Syro-Malabar Christians scattered there. The Jacobites (Orthodox Syrian Church of Malankara) have at least three parishes there since years!, though the number of their faithful is certainly less numerous.

The thousands of Syro-Malabar Catholics in the United States, especially in centres like New York and Chicago, are deprived of all pastoral care according to their individual Rite. The numerous Syro-Malabar priests living in the United States for studies and other reasons have no mandate from their own hierarchy and are serving in Latin parishes without taking care of their own fellow-Syro-Malabar Christians. In this regard the Jacobites and the Marthomites have a real advantage. In Germany, the only official priest is for all the Indians irrespective of their ecclesiastical affiliation, and he himself is certainly a partisan of the so-called 'Indian'

rite. He is living at Cologne. The consequence of this state of things is that many Syro-Malabar (and Syro-Malankara) Catholics have ceased to practice any religious services. One Syro-Malabarian bitterly wrote to me: In the case of the Church of Cochin, "he [Card. Parecattil] says 'salus animarum' requires this! Perhaps those Malabarians [i.e. outside Kerala and India] have no soul!"

2. Chaldean Syrian Church

This small "Nestorian" Church with its headquarters at Trichur welcomed on January 1, 1976 the returning bishop Paulos Mar Paulos. After having spent seven years in the United States for studies, he came back with the doctor's degree, his thesis being "A Bonhoefferian Corrective of Karl Marx's Critique of Religion". On February 2, 1976, he ordained four new priests among whom Fr. E. A. Paul is a monk, and three deacons. This was the first ordination since 1968, since Metropolitan George Mar Aprem⁷, because of the court suits, was forbidden to exercise his episcopal powers. As already noted in the previous chronicle, there is another bishop at Trichur of the so-called "Mar Shimun's Party" (adherents of the late Nestorian Catholicos Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun) who styles himself Mar Timotheos. He inaugurated a law suit against Mar Aprem and all his priests in 1974 which is still pending.

The Mar Thomas Ashram, founded in 1972 at Mulayam, about 9 km from Trichur, received as a candidate for religious life Mr. Chundal Devassy. In the meantime, this ashram houses boys from poor families who are receiving free food. The German organization "Kindernothilfe" is sponsoring this institution. The director of the boys' home is Deacon T. O. Ignatius.

On May 5, 1974, Dr. C. M. Jacob, Vice Chancellor of Kerala Agricultural university, inaugurated the Mar Timotheos Hospital. Two physicians and a few nurses are working here in the service of the 20 patients.

"Voice of the East", the small bulletin of this Church in English, published in August 1974 a document from a Syriac manuscript written eleven years before the famous (pseudo-) synod of Diamper (1599) which has escaped the barbarian burning of books.

Another jubilee to be mentioned in this context is the 50th anniversary of the Mar Narsai Press in Trichur, founded by Mar Abimalek Timotheos

⁷ The Metropolitan has published two biographies of his predecessors, namely, *Mar Abimalek Timotheos. A Biography*, Trichur 1975, 382 pages. — *Mar Thoma Darmo. A Biography*, Trichur, 1974, 214 pages. — A third book came out in 1976: *The Nestorian Fathers*. All these books were published by Mar Narsai Press.

(†1945). A series of liturgical books in Syriac (Chaldean) and other books in Malayalam, English and modern Syriac were published here. The Syriac Calendar is sent to the Assyrian colonies throughout the world.

In April 1976, after the death of the patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun, "Voice of the East" lanced an appeal for the reconciliation of all the "Nestorian" groups living separated from one another. "Patriarchal" and "anti-patriarchal" parties ought to recognise mutually all the ordinations conferred by Mar Shimun and Mar Thoma Darmo. The civil suits should be withdrawn. The question of the calendar should be solved in an universal synod. Hereditary succession of patriarchs and bishops should no longer be in force. Nobody should have the right to interfere in matters pertaining to the Church of the East in India.

Mar Aprem is involved in many ecumenical activities. In 1974 he lectured at the Syro-Malabar St. Thomas the Apostle Seminary (attached to the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome) at Vadavathoor for the Catholic students of theology; he also participated in a seminar on St. Thomas Aquinas in Trichur, where he gave a conference on "Scripture and Tradition according to Thomas Aquinas". Recently he was elected president of the interconfessional Society of Indian Church History; one of the vice-presidents is the Belgian Prof. Dr. Edouard R. Hambye SJ, who is hailing from Mons and is working in India (Kurseong, Delhi, Poona, Vadavathoor-Kottayam) since 26 years.

3. *The Orthodox Syrian Church of Malankara*

In our last chronicle, we mentioned that this Church be in formal communion with the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East; at the same time we reported about the existing tensions. In January 1975, the Patriarch, Mar Ignatius Yacoub III, suspended the Catholicos from his functions until a formal submission was made. This appeal was refused, and on February 16, 1975 the hierarchy of the Catholicosate was augmented by five new hierarchs: Paulos Mar Gregorios (known before as Fr. Paul Verghese), Gheevarghese Mar Osthathios (known before as Fr. M. V. George), Thomas Mar Makarios, Joseph Mar Pachomios and Stephanos Mar Theodosios. The first two became Metropolitans of Delhi (new eparchy) and Niranam respectively. Both are known from their participation in the non-official ecumenical consultations between theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church organized by the foundation "Pro Oriente" of Vienna, Austria. An information received from Kerala, reads as follows: The consecration

“was done in a haste. On the 15th, they were ordained ‘Rambans’ (i.e. abbots), and the next day bishops. This is because of their quarrel. This ordination was questioned in the court by the Patriarch’s party known as Jacobites. The judgment was in favour of the Catholicos party. Before another hindrance come across through the civil court, they chose Saturday and Sunday. These people are fighting and the faith of those who think is disturbed. May God give peace to this Church. It has become a scandal. This Saturday (February 22) Jacobites are going to have a show of might by convoking a big meeting and processions to celebrate Patriarch’s Day. Orthodox (Catholicos party) also are arranging a Catholicos’s Day. Big processions will be taken through streets shouting slogans at each other”. Such demonstrations took place at Ernakulam, Tiruvalla and elsewhere.

The Metropolitans of Kandanad and of the Knanayas, Paulos Mar Philexinos and Abraham Mar Clemis, who stood with the patriarch were excommunicated by the Synod of the Catholicos on May 22. On June 9, 1975 Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios declared in a press interview that the Syrian patriarch has no jurisdiction whatsoever in India, this being alone in the competence of the Catholicos and of the Holy Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

Now the Syrian Patriarch convoked a synod of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church at Damascus (June 16 to 19). The participants came from the countries of the Near East, America and India. Two more priests from India received episcopal consecration there. The Synod once more solemnly proclaimed the suspension of the 92 years old Catholicos Mar Baselios Augen I empowering the patriarch to excommunicate him if this proves necessary.

As there was no positive reaction, the patriarch excommunicated the catholicos because of disobedience towards the patriarch and because of his declarations the Malankara Church be an independant, autocephalous Church. In his place, Mar Ignatius Yacoub III ordained Catholicos of the East the above mentioned Paulos Mar Philexinos, Metropolitan of Kandanad, who took the name of Mar Baselios Paulos II.

To improve the situation, Mar Baselios Augen I resigned from his high office, and the Metropolitan of the Diocese Outside Ketala, Mathews Mar Athanasios, who was already Catholicos-elect since some years, was enthroned on October 27, 1975; since then he styles himself Baselios Mar Thomas Mathews I, Catholicos of the East. On his letter paper, he is styling himself as “Catholicos of the Apostolic Throne of St. Thomas”⁸ what his predecessor did only during his last years of life.

⁸ *Voice of the East*, vol. 22 (1976), no. 2, reproduces a letter of the Catholicos to Mar Aprem of the Chaldean Syrian Church where this letter head is to be found.

Thus we have now two Churches separated from one another, which share in the same beliefs but have no mutual communion. Two separate hierarchies are leading those Christians who are now forming the *Orthodox Syrian Church* under Catholicos Baselios Mar Thomas Mathews I, and those who stay with the Patriarch and Catholicos Mar Baselios Paulos II and are known under the name of *Jacobite Syrian Church*. The schism is perfected⁹, and those who know the situation are convinced that it will not find a remedy within the next fifty years. As the judgments of the civil courts mostly were in favour of the so-called Catholicos-party, the adherents of the Patriarch have to build new churches of their own in many places.

Recently the government has appointed a special judge to hear all the cases connected with this quarrel. This is in a way good. There will be an end to the litigations' suits now pending in different courts. All these will be transferred to this special court. The observer writes: "Law will favour the Orthodox. I don't know what the Jacobites will do when they fail in court". It seems to be special to India, especially to Kerala and this Church, that Hindu judges have to explain authentically the Canon Law of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

Also in 1976, Catholicos's and Patriarch's days were celebrated grandly. On February 15, about 500,000 people celebrated Catholicos Baselios Mar Thomas Mathews at Cochin, in the presence of a delegation coming from the Armenian Apostolic Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin and the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate¹⁰. Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Chaldean Syrian Church and of the Muslim community were also present.

Two weeks later, Patriarch's Day was celebrated in the same surrounding. According to our information, there were 250,000 people present to celebrate the anniversary of the inthronisation of Patriarch Mar Ignatius Yacoub III and of the foundation of the See of Antioch by St. Peter, prince of the Apostles. The Catholic Syro-Malankara protohierarch, Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Trivandrum, who himself was a Jacobite in his youth, was invited to address the assembly¹¹. Present was also the

⁹ Mar Athanasius Y. Samuel, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the United States and Canada, in a letter to the author, writes that "there are a number of Syrian Orthodox priests currently in the United States. Unfortunately, they have brought the sad situation of schism to America" (January 18, 1977).

¹⁰ See *Romanian Orthodox Church News* 6 (1976), no. 1, pp. 17-25: "A Delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church visits the Orthodox Syrian Church of India" (with illustrations).

¹¹ Together with Fr. Stanislaus Erackel OIC, we published a German version of his speech

former Apostolic Delegate of the Patriarch, Archbishop Mar Timotheos Ephrem Aboody who also visited many towns and convents, before he returned to Damascus on March 17, 1976.

In order to foster the relations of the Catholicosate with those Churches which were helpful to the autonomistic trends, Catholicos Baselios Mar Thomas Mathews I visited the Patriarchate of Moscow, the Catholicosate of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Etchmiadzin, the Churches of Romania and of Bulgaria. This is why the Metropolitan of Delhi, Paulos Mar Gregorios, who had prepared this tour, did not appear at the Symposium Syriacum of Chantilly. He and Mar Osthathios took part in the third non-official consultation of "Pro Oriente" in Vienna. Both hierarchs celebrated the Divine Liturgy without any participation of the Syrian Orthodox representatives present there (Mar Severios Zakka Ivas, Archbishop of Baghdad and Basra, and Mar Gregorios Saliba, Archbishop of Mosul). Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios also gave the homily during the pontifical Mass celebrated by the archbishop of Vienna, Franciscus Cardinal König, at St. Steven's Cathedral of Vienna (Stephansdom).

4. Syro-Malankara Church

The protohierarch, Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Trivandrum, celebrated his 60th anniversary. Born on February 1, 1916 at Kaluppara, he became a Catholic as a disciple of his predecessor Mar Ivanios, and joined the Order of the Imitation of Christ. He was ordained priest in 1944, bishop in 1952 (coadjutor to Mar Ivanios); he became eparch of Trivandrum in 1955. Because of his social and scientific activities, he is often consulted by the central Government of India as well as by the Kerala State government. So this anniversary was celebrated on a large scale, almost like that of a leading statesman.

The two eparchies of the Syro-Malankara Church covering the whole of Kerala, large parts of Tamilnadu (formerly Madras State) and parts of Kanara (formerly Mysore State) being too large, efforts are being made, to form more eparchies. As many faithful have left their traditional homestead to settle down in little developed North Malabar and South Kanara, due to the far distance the clergy finds it difficult to stay in

"Einheit und Vielfalt — Ergänzung, kein Widerspruch" in *Der christliche Osten* 31 (1976), 155-161.

N.B. With regard to the whole question of the schism in the Orthodox Syrian Church of Malankara, we published a study "Background and history of the present schism in the Malankara Church" in *Oriens Christianus* 60 (1976), 95-112. Cf. also C. Malancharuvil, *The Syro-Malankara Church* (= *The Syrian Churches Series*, 7), Ernakulam, 1974, 58-95.

contact with the centre of the eparchy at Tiruvalla in central Kerala. The necessity of a bifurcation is manifest.

In 1976, Archbishop Mar Gregorios consecrated the Holy Mooron (i.e. myron or holy chrism) at St. John's Cathedral of Tiruvalla, assisted by Mar Athanasios, bishop of Tiruvalla, and Fr. Jacob OIC, former Superior General of the Order of the Imitation of Christ. The Tiruvalla Cathedral was presented with two icons (Syro-Indian style) of the Apostles St. Thomas and St. John the Theologian, by German friends of Schifferstadt.

At Tiruvalla, the new Pastoral and Catechetical Centre was inaugurated on October 6, 1975 by the president of the Kerala Episcopal Commission for Education, Mar Joseph Powathil, Syro-Malabar auxiliary bishop at Changanacherry, on the invitation of the local eparch Mar Athanasios. Mar Athanasios is wishing to give his clergy a stronger re-orientation which is lacking because of the priests' training in Latin seminaries. The lack of a Syro-Malankara major Seminary is bitterly felt and realized. Young priests with a thorough training in Syriac theology, patrology, spirituality and liturgy are supposed to give courses for their confrères. The centre is giving also courses for catechists of the Sunday Schools and other active groups of the Church.

The social programmes of the two eparchies are continued (housing programme; uplift of the fishermen; social aid for students, young couples etc.; old people asylum...). Due to the inflation, nowadays a sum of about 2000 DM or SFr. is needed to build a modest house for a family. The eparchies give about 100 houses to poor people every year. The annual review "Reunion Record" published by the eparchy of Tiruvalla in German, is regularly reporting about what has been achieved.

For abandoned sickly old people, the bishop of Tiruvalla is constructing a home consisting of about 12 houses (each house is for 10-12 persons), a house for the sisters and a chapel. Five houses are ready. Further means are urgently needed. Syro-Malankara members of the Holy Spirit Society of Mammolshain (Taunus) will be conducting this home.

Due to the schism in the Orthodox Syrian Church which was described above, many faithful being sick of these quarrels join other Christian bodies, especially the Mar Thoma Church which seceded in the late 19th century from it when parts took over some principals of Anglican Low Church theology, and the pentecostal sects. Some ask for admission to the Syro-Malankara Church where their genuine traditions are kept alive. This situation forces the hierarchy to create new parishes and mission stations, as at Ezhakaranad, Neerammol, Myladumpothy, Uppati and elsewhere.¹²

¹² Cf. Einheitsbewegung in Kerala, in *Ut omnes unum* 40 (1977), 159f.

On October 31, 1976, Mrs. Saramma Cherian Polachirackal, mother of Mar Athanasios, bishop of Tiruvalla, died. The Polachirackal family followed Metropolitan Mar Ivanios and his suffragan bishop Mar Theophilos into the communion with the Church of Rome in the thirties. On the news of her death, Catholicos Baselios Mar Thomas Mathews I with one of his bishops as well as two Jacobite bishops of the patriarch's party came to Polachirackal house to express their condolences and to pray. A simple social gesture or a promising ecumenical sign?

Latest news

On August 28, 1977, Mar Philexinos, Metropolitan of the Independent Syrian Church of Malabar residing at Thozhiur, was received into the Malankara Catholic Church together with his secretary, Fr. George Vadakkan. A few families followed the hierarch into the Catholic communion. Mar Philexinos is now titular Bishop of Chayal and Archiepiscopal Vicar of Trivandrum.

On September 28, 1977, Mar Athanasios, eparch of Tiruvalla, died from heart disease. This sudden death occurred one month after his stay in Europe. He had been for his ad limina visit at Rome and had taken part in the episcopal consecration of Cardinal Ratzinger in Munich and in the priestly ordinations at Paderborn. Born as an Orthodox on February 19, 1909, at Tiruvalla, he became a bank-clerk. After having joined the Catholic Church, he studied for priesthood at Kandy, Sri Lanka, and was ordained priest on August 24, 1946. On December 31, 1953 he was appointed and on April 22, 1954 ordained (tit.) Bishop of Sarepta and coadjutor of Tiruvalla. On January 27, 1955, he became eparch of this territorially largest eparchy of Kerala. Eternal Memory!