

**DISSENT NOTE REGISTERED BY THE BISHOPS
OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ERNAKULAM-ANGAMALY
ON THE MOVE TO EXCOMMUNICATE THE PRIESTS**

To
His Beatitude
Mar Raphael Thattil
Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church
Mount Saint Thomas,
KAKKANAD, Kochi 682030
KERALA

13 June 2024

Your Beatitude,

We, the bishops originally from the Archdiocese of Ernakulum-Angamaly, would like to share with you and the members of the Synod our anxieties and concerns regarding our archdiocese, especially in the context of the Circular issued jointly by you and Bishop Bosco Puthur, the Apostolic Administrator.

1. We all hold on to the decision of the synod on the uniform mode of Holy Qurbana. As you know, we all had signed the last pastoral letter issued by the synod to the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly. In all the dioceses of our respective jurisdiction we do follow the uniform mode of celebration. We always show our allegiance to the Holy Father, to Apostolic See and the Synod.
2. Like all the Synodal Fathers, we too are really concerned about finding a peaceful and amicable solution for the current crisis. We feel that in the light of the recent Circular, the whole archdiocese is going to be in a turmoil and that is going to affect each and every one in the archdiocese including our own family members. So, we feel in our conscience to express these concerns.
3. To be true, we were really consoled by the tone of Pope's message given at the recent audience to you and your own interview in the Vatican News. Holy Father, though insisted on obedience, stressed the need for dialogue to safeguard unity in the Church. Your Beatitude categorically acknowledged in the interview that all the priests of Ernakulam-Angamaly use the approved text of the Holy Qurbana and the only contention is on the rubric which can be solved easily. It is learnt that the Pope told you that "yours is a *sui iuris* Church and the problem should be solved by yourselves in the synod". But, to our great dismay, such a serious Circular was issued

without seeking the opinion of the scheduled online synod. We, as members of the synod, had the responsibility given by the Holy Father to look at this issue collectively and come up with a viable solution. How is it possible that such a serious decision that would have derived from the synod, was already prepared in advance before the synod?

4. Now, the Circular issued jointly by Your Beatitude and the Administrator smacks the middle age culture of the Church. **Excommunication is an unheard term after the II Vatican Council. The oriental code of canon law (CCEO) does not envisage automatic excommunication (*latae sententiae*).** Besides, we should also keep in mind the provisions of *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela* (art. 2). We are surprised how the higher authorities of the Vatican and our Permanent Synod give instruction to the Major Archbishop and the Administrator of the Archdiocese to issue a Circular that might cause longstanding negative consequences in our Church? We would like to know whether there is anything pertinent in writing to this effect. It is very hard to comprehend how the priests who celebrate the Holy Qurbana other than the uniform mode will be in the state of excommunication. And in conscience we find it very difficult to endorse this judgment.
5. **What is the justification for giving the highest punishment?** Ecclesiastical sanctions should be proportionate to the violation. Where is the place for the medicinal character of ecclesiastical punishment which the Oriental code is famous for! Again, where is the place for the benevolence we preach? Can we as shepherds impose on our faithful something that will weigh on their conscience for a matter of not following a mere rubric, which is not part of the faith and morals? Can we claim to be good pastors after the model of the Lord who is the Good Shepherd? The resistance regarding the implementation of the rubric, in no way, we justify. Still, what we feel is that we have to take a benevolent approach in implementing it. Wherever possible, it should be implemented, but taking the priests and people into confidence.
6. The narrative of the issuance of the Circular on 9 June 2024 gives us serious matter for worry. How the Circular that was planned to be discussed in the Synod was leaked out from our Chancery? It is rumoured that in the past too such things have happened.
7. We learn that the joint meeting held on 8th June of the Consultors and Forane Vicars presided over by Bishop Bosco Puthur came to a consensus formula. The meeting selected three representatives to speak with you about it. And in fact, you had given them an appointment to meet them on

the 9th morning. In the meantime, surprisingly, the Circular was issued in a hurry.

8. The big question is that who has masterminded the whole process? Should we the members of the Synod remain simply silent spectators? Does the Major Archbishop as Father and Head of the Church have any space in such decision making? Or is he and the Synodal fathers are mere witnesses? It seems that Your Beatitude is under great pressure from certain corners. You seem to be getting no space or only little space to put into action, the direction given by the Holy Father and the amicable way you want to resolve this issue.
9. We are sure that Your Beatitude remembers many senior bishops who were part of the 1999 Synodal decision on the uniform mode of celebration and all of us the undersigned had cautioned strongly and repeatedly about the danger in reviving the 1999 Synodal decision without making statutory consultation with the priests, the religious and the laity. Twelve bishops, including all of us from the archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly, had cautioned about this crisis and we had put up a dissent note before that decision in 2021. We had highlighted that uniformity should not be at the cost of unity. Our apprehension was not even taken to discussion and a widespread impression was created as a "unanimous" decision. We are very sad that our warning, that such going back would bring about big disaster, which is happening now in our Church, was not given any consideration. We are afraid that it may lead to an erosion of faith in our community and a severe law-and-order situation in the Archdiocese. It is so heartbreaking to be witnesses of this drastic action which goes against our consciences.
10. A close look at the scenario will show that this resistance is the result of many factors. We should have taken time and come to a "consensus" process. All of us are aware of what has happened in the recent history of our Church including the land scam. In this issue and other issues, where the Archdiocese strongly feel that they did not get justice and truth, have exasperated the situation to the present level which cannot be broken with a strong Circular. These have helped to build up an emotional baggage which cannot be broken at a stroke. In the present context, we feel that any step we plan should be prudential and reconciliatory.
11. Somehow, the synod failed truly to be "synodal" in its proper sense. We, the Shepherds, should confess with all humility that we failed in being prudent and merciful pastors, and to listen seriously to our own brother bishops. In these desperate times, when people are emotionally charged, we should not

lose hope, instead relying on the intervention of Holy Spirit, we should take courage to keep dialoguing with the priests, religious and people. Pope Francis in his message gives emphasis for the need for courageous dialogue, taking time. We, the bishops from the archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly, are willing to help out, if necessary, in this process of dialogue with the priests in view of solving the present issues amicably, but not sacrificing the virtue of obedience.

12. To conclude, we the Undersigned, express our serious reservation about the Circular issued on 9 June 2024 and express our strong dissent note on any move to excommunicate those who do not celebrate the uniform mode. As members of the synod and as bishops knowing well the ground realities in Ernakulam-Angamaly, we earnestly appeal to your high authority to reconsider the matter, and not to create a great division in the Church. We respectfully request you to record this dissent note with our names and to share this with the members of the synod. Thank you.

Respectfully Yours,

Signed by:

1. Mar Ephrem Nariculam, Bishop of Chanda
2. Mar Jose Chittooparambil CMI, Bishop of Rajkot
3. Mar Jose Puthenveetil, Auxiliary Bishop of Faridabad
4. Mar Kuriakose Bharanikulangara, Bishop of Faridabad
5. Mar Sebastian Adayanthrath, Bishop of Mandya