

**THE LITURGICAL
HERITAGE OF THE SYRO-MALABAR
CHURCH**

Shadows and Realities

PAUL PALLATH

Article Six

UNANIMOUS DECISION OF THE SYRO-MALABAR BISHOPS ON THE UNIFORM MODE OF CELEBRATING HOLY *QURBANA*

Introduction

This is not really an article; we are simply presenting the documentation concerning the unanimous decision of the Syro-Malabar Bishops to celebrate the Holy *Qurbana* in the same manner in the entire Syro-Malabar Church. An introduction (in italics) is added to each document, which enables the readers to comprehend its significance in a better manner. For the texts in Malayalam we have provided our own English translation.

1. Uniform Mode of Celebrating the Holy *Qurbana*: Report of the Synodal Discussions

*The last synod of the second millennium, held from 14 to 20 November 1999, in view of the Great Jubilee 2000 considered a matter of prime importance, namely the painful disunity in the Syro-Malabar Church, provoked by the dispute over the liturgy. After free and fruitful discussions, the synod unanimously decided to celebrate Holy Qurbana in a uniform manner in the whole Syro-Malabar Church. Here we present the report of the discussions as found in the official Bulletin of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church.*¹

The first proposal, namely, the need for a uniform mode of celebrating the Divine Liturgy was discussed at length by the synod. All the members expressed their opinion in this matter. The following opinions were expressed by some of the members: 1) in view of peaceful implementation of the decision convene a meeting of the Central Liturgical Committee and certain representatives from the eparchies and present the formula before

¹ *Synodal News*. vol. 7, nos. 1 & 2 (December 1999) 60-61.

them. Such a consultation may be done in view of taking a decision or after taking a decision in view of its practical implementation; 2) celebrate the entire part after the anaphora facing the people, with or without a procession to the Bema with the Sacred Species; 3) let the eparchies continue with the present way of celebrating the *Qurbana* as all are happy with it. Some others were not in favour of these opinions. Finally the synod unanimously agreed to have the Syro-Malabar Liturgy celebrated in the following way: 1) from the beginning till anaphora – facing the people, 2) the whole of anaphora, communion inclusive – facing the altar and 3) the part after communion – again facing the people.

The synod also asked the Commission for Liturgy to prepare a statement with necessary details to be presented to the synod for approval. It was also decided to take the necessary steps with the help of CLC and the Liturgical Research Centre to improve the text in its theology, language and cultural expression taking into account also the directives of the Holy See as well as the opinion of the people and the pastoral situation so that the celebration may become more meaningful. The suggestion to celebrate the entire part after the anaphora facing the people is also to be studied.

As for the options given in the Thaksa it was clarified that they cannot be restricted because they have been legitimately authorised by the Holy See.

Mar Thomas Elavanal read out the draft of the directives concerning the uniform mode of celebration of the Holy *Qurbana*. A clause was requested to be added concerning the options making it clear that they are within the competence of the celebrant. The draft was accepted in its entirety.

The synod decided that the uniform mode of the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* shall come into effect on 3rd July 2000 and that a joint pastoral letter in this regard shall be sent out by the Apostolic Administrator in such a way that it can be read out in the churches on 2nd January 2000. The Apostolic Administrator was asked to prepare it in consultation with the Permanent Synod. However, it was decided to publish the decision on the uniform mode of celebration immediately after the synod.

2. The Final Unanimous Decision of the Bishops and the Statement of the Commission for Liturgy

The resolutions of the synod with regard to the uniform mode of celebrating Holy Qurbana are given among the official decision as numbers 21, 25-27.² In addition an official statement of the Commission for Liturgy approved by the synod was published.³ Here an English translation of the original statement in Malayalam is provided.

The Synod decided:

21) To have the Syro-Malabar Liturgy celebrated in the following way: 1) from the beginning till anaphora – facing the people; 2) the whole of anaphora, communion inclusive – facing the altar and 3) the part after the communion – again facing the people.

25) To approve the statement with necessary details presented by the Commission for Liturgy concerning the uniform mode of celebrating the *Qurbana*. (The statement is given below).

26) To begin the agreed form of celebrating the *Qurbana* in all the eparchies on 3rd July 2000.

27) To issue a common pastoral letter to be read out in the churches on 2nd January 2000 introducing the uniform mode of celebration of the *Qurbana* and exhorting the faithful to work together to usher in an era of greater unity and love. The Permanent Synod shall approve the text of the pastoral letter.

The Statement of the Commission for Liturgy Approved by the Synod

Matters concerning Holy *Qurbana* unanimously decided by the venerable fathers of the Synod on 19 November 1999:

1. The Holy *Qurbana* is to be celebrated, from the beginning to the Anaphora facing the people, from the Anaphora until the

² *Synodal News*, vol. 7, nos. 1& 2 (December 1999) 71-72.

³ *Synodal News*, vol. 7, nos. 1& 2 (December 1999) 72-73.

Holy Communion (inclusive) facing the altar and after the Communion facing the people.

2. The Holy *Qurbana* begins at the table of the Word (*Bema*).

3. At the beginning of the prayer, "Lord of all, we praise you", in those churches, where there exists the custom of opening the sanctuary veil, the celebrant can make one bow of reverence facing the altar; then he turns to the *Bema*.

4. During the hymn of *Halleluia*, the celebrant brings the Gospel from the altar to the *Bema*.

5. During the *Karozutha* (proclamation-prayer) bread and wine can be prepared. After the preparation, the celebrant continues the prayer at the *Bema*.

6. At the beginning of the hymn/prayer, "firmly I have trusted in the Lord", the concelebrants, if any or the deacon, bring bread and wine to the altar (from the *Betgazza*) and stand facing the altar (for the offertory). Once the prayer that opens, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son", begins, the priests turn to the *Bema*. If there are no concelebrants, the celebrant, after having offered bread and wine at the altar, returns to the *Bema*.

7. The celebrant, after blessing the ministrant reciting, "May God, the Lord of all [...]", pronounces the prayer that begins, "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" and making three profound bows, comes close to the altar, kisses thrice the altar and continues the *Qurbana*, facing the altar (not facing the people).

8. After the Holy Communion, once the preparation of chalice and paten is terminated, he comes to the *Bema* and continues the rest of the *Qurbana* facing the people.

9. This order is to be kept for the celebration of the three forms of the *Qurbana*.

10. The options mentioned in the Taksa (Order) of the *Qurbana* are granted to the celebrants.

20 November 1999, Mount St Thomas,

Mar Thomas Elavanal (signed).

3. Concluding Speech of Mar Varkey Vithayathil: the Uniform Mode of Celebrating Holy Qurbana as the Best Possible Solution

The concluding speech of Mar Varkey Vithayathil delivered on 20 November 1999 was totally centred on the uniform mode of celebrating Holy Qurbana in the whole Syro-Malabar Church. After expressing his great satisfaction for the all-time important decision of the synod, he pointed out that a great danger looming in the horizon, namely the disintegration of the Syro-Malabar Church, "which our forefathers loved and fostered with so many hardships", was averted by the decision of the bishops. He acknowledged that "our lack of unity in this matter has been such a scandal for Christians and non-Christians alike for more than three decades" and augured for a new era of love and unity.⁴

Dear brother archbishops and bishops,

It is with great satisfaction that we are here today to conclude this brief but very fruitful synodal session. As I have said in my inaugural address this session had a special significance as it was held against the backdrop of the Mission Assembly and as the last session in this century. Now with the agreement that we have reached concerning the uniform mode of celebration of the Holy Qurbana which is the sum and summit of our Christian life this session has acquired an all-time importance because we can walk together, in synod, to the year of the Great Jubilee. My gaze turns to the Almighty in gratitude. At the same time I thank and congratulate all of you my brother bishops and archbishops for making this reconciliation possible. We have averted that way a great danger that was looming in the horizon. That danger was nothing but the disintegration of our Church which our forefathers loved and fostered with so many hardships. They will be looking down from heaven with a sign of relief.

I have no doubt that our people will accept this unanimous decision of ours whole-heartedly because our lack of unity in this

⁴ The speech can be found in *Synodal News*, vol. 7, nos. 1 & 2 (December 1999) 74-75.

matter has been such a scandal for Christians and non-Christians alike for more than three decades. We have wasted a lot of energy, time and money; but above all we have wasted a lot of opportunities for giving our faithful a better example of Christian life. Let us begin a new era. It is my hope and wish that the decision can be implemented by 3rd July 2000 with your co-operation and collaboration.

Of course, this is only a beginning. There are miles to go if we are to restore fully the lost communion among ourselves. It is an arduous and difficult journey. But what awaits us at the end of that journey definitely makes it worth undertaking. First of all we have to convince ourselves that the solution we have found out is the best possible solution in the present circumstances. Only when we are convinced we will be able to convince others of the necessity of such a solution. Secondly we have to be sincere in our efforts to implement this solution. There should be no negative remarks from anyone of us against anyone who are or rather were not of our view. Each of us should be extremely careful not to create any impression that this was imposed upon us. It is equally important for every one of us not to write or speak anything to anywhere or to anyone, including our superiors, with disagreeing notes.

Thirdly, we have to make every effort to create an awareness and sense of necessity among our clergy, religious and laity of the present solution. I would insist that the clergy must be told in no uncertain terms that it is extremely important to go along with our decision. They are the ones in direct contact with the faithful.

Fourthly, it is necessary to give a balanced catechesis to our faithful. Care must be taken not to go to extremes. Sensibilities of all are to be taken into account. It is often the insensibility about the problems of the other that vitiates the situation.

Having said all this I do not mean that everything concerning the Holy *Qurbana* is decided once and for all. There is still room for improvements. As it was pointed out several times in the synod those topics for improvement can be entrusted to the Liturgical Research Centre. We have to look into the linguistic, theological, pastoral, cultural aspects etc. of the Sacred Liturgy. There will be always new developments in the Sacred Liturgy. We should not be

reluctant to study them and to adopt them if found useful for our faithful because Liturgy is not something static but dynamic and growing constantly.

Apart from the Holy *Qurbana* several other topics were on our agenda and we have covered all except a few. I am hopeful that the remaining ones can be taken up in the next session scheduled for the middle of 2000.

Once more I thank all of you for your active participation in the discussions and positive contributions. May Mary the Mother of Christ help us in our efforts to guide our people who are entrusted to our care with genuine Christian leadership. May St Thomas our Father in faith intercede for us with the Lord. With these words I formally conclude the VIIth Synod (1999).

✠ Varkey Vithayathil C.Ss.R., Apostolic Administrator,
Mount St. Thomas, 20-11-1999.

4. Joint Pastoral Letter of the Syro-Malabar Bishops on the Uniform Mode of Celebrating Holy *Qurbana*

*This pastoral letter was published only in Malayalam. Since at present the Syro-Malabar Church has become global, I have made an English translation for enabling the new generations in foreign countries also to comprehend the content of this important pastoral letter. This document, which contains official information concerning the uniform mode of celebrating Holy *Qurbana* and the directives for the same, also acknowledges the scandalous disunity and conflicts that tormented the Syro-Malabar Church for more than three decades and highlights the need for unity and communion through the uniform celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity.⁵*

Venerable Brethren, dear Children,

Hope that you have been informed of the assembly of the synod of bishops of our Church held from 15 to 20 November

⁵ The original Malayalam text can be found in *Synodal News*, vol. 7, nos. 1 & 2 (December 1999) 117-123.

(1999) at Mount St Thomas, the seat of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia. In this meeting – as you have already known from the press – some decisions were taken, regarding a uniform mode of celebrating the *Qurbana*. This pastoral letter has the intention of informing you in detail about the decisions taken and of soliciting the co-operation of all for their implementation.

The position of the celebrant during the *Qurbana*, that is, whether to face the altar or the people, is a question that provoked a lot of debates and scandal. The synod has succeeded to put an end to this dispute and to arrive at a consensus regarding a single form of celebration. This is the decision of the synod:

The Holy *Qurbana* is to be celebrated, from the beginning to the Anaphora facing the people, from the Anaphora until the holy Communion (inclusive) facing the altar and after the Communion facing the people.

As an explanation to this resolution, some other matters have also been unanimously decided by the synod. Those are the following.

1. The Holy *Qurbana* begins at the table of the Word (*Bema*).
2. At the beginning of the prayer, “Lord of all, we praise you”, in those churches, where there exists the custom of opening the sanctuary veil, the celebrant can make one bow of reverence facing the altar; then he turns to the *Bema*.
3. During the hymn of *Halleluia*, the celebrant brings the Gospel from the altar to the *Bema*.
4. During the *Karozutha* (proclamation-prayer) bread and wine can be prepared. After the preparation, the celebrant continues the prayer at the *Bema*.
5. At the beginning of the hymn/prayer, “firmly I have trusted in the Lord”, the concelebrants, if any or the deacon, bring bread and wine to the altar (from the *Betgazza*) and stand facing the altar (for the offertory). Once the prayer that opens, “Glory be to the Father and to the Son”, begins, the priests turn to the *Bema*. If there are no concelebrants, the celebrant, after having offered bread and wine at the altar, returns to the *Bema*.

6. The celebrant, after blessing the ministrant reciting, "May God, the Lord of all [...]", pronounces the prayer that begins, "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" and making three profound bows, comes close to the altar, kisses thrice the altar and continues the *Qurbana*, facing the altar (not facing the people).

7. After the Holy Communion, once the preparation of chalice and paten is terminated, he comes to the *Bema* and continues the rest of the *Qurbana* facing the people.

8. This order is to be kept for the celebration of the three forms of the *Qurbana*.

9. The options mentioned in the *Taksa* (Order) of the *Qurbana* are granted to the celebrants.

Among the above mentioned, the numbers 8 and 9, it seems, require a bit of explanation. The three forms (of the *Qurbana*) are the *Raza* (the most solemn form) the solemn form and the simple form. The varying degrees of solemnity provide the basis for the variety of forms. The celebrant, the sacred ceremonies, the readings, the hymns, the use of incense etc. are the factors of solemnity (General Instructions regarding the Order of the *Qurbana*; No. 1).

Whatever be the form of celebration, the *Taksa* of the *Qurbana* states that some elements can be included or excluded. The right to decide whether to include them or not, rests with the celebrant. Since these options are granted directly by the Holy See this right of the celebrant cannot be limited. Moreover, we exhort all, specially our priests to read carefully and follow accurately the instructions given in the *Taksa* with regard to the celebration of *Qurbana*.

It is not to be understood that with the implementation of this decision everything regarding the celebration of the *Qurbana* is fixed. The Synod has entrusted the Central Liturgical Committee, an organ of the Liturgical Commission and the newly founded Liturgical Research Centre to make further studies as well as researches regarding the form of the *Qurbana*. The language of the order of the *Qurbana*, theology, pastoral thrusts, inculturation, the prayers which change according to each liturgical period (*Propria*), the guidelines and teaching of the Holy See from time to time

concerning the liturgy and other subjects are proposed by the Synod for this study.

This decision is a small step against the liturgical problem that for more than three decades has been weakening and destroying our Church. It is extremely painful that we have turned the *Qurbana*, the sacrament of unity and love, into an instrument of disunity and conflicts. We have forgotten the Word of God: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10: 17). It is the intense desire that Christ may not be divided again and hence the present situation has to be changed, that has prompted us to put an end to the diverse forms of the celebration of Holy *Qurbana* and to decide over a single form.

Through this, we hope, our Church enters the path of unity, peace and progress. In the past, there had been many attempts to resolve the liturgical crisis. All these, implicitly or explicitly, have prompted today's decision. Particularly, the discussions and suggestions of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Assembly held in November 1998 and the Mission Assembly in November 1999 have accelerated the search for a speedy solution to the problem of the order of the *Qurbana*. The decision of the Synod in 1998, on the suggestion of the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly, to retain for the moment the three existing forms of the celebration, has considerably smoothened the tense situation. This became the first step to a solution to the problem.

We have taken the present decision with great anguish. This has caused pains to many. But what is important is the unity of the Church. For that we must be ready to compromise and suffer. We do not claim that the decision of the Synod is the best one. But, in the present circumstances, giving importance to the unity and growth of the Church and without causing further wounds, this remained the only one decision possible. We hope that you will also accept the same.

The above mentioned decision of the Synod on the uniform mode of *Qurbana* will enter into force, everywhere in the Syro-Malabar Church, from 3 July, the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle in the Great Jubilee Year (2000). We request the co-operation of you all for the implementation of this. Such a long interval was

proposed in order to make the necessary arrangements in the church and to prepare mentally.

The division regarding the Ourbana has obscured our Christian testimony and also has frequently led to counter-witness. I pray, "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17, 21). May this prayer of the Lord find full fruition in our Church. We are entering the 2000th year of the incarnation of Jesus, who led the whole humanity towards reconciliation and peace. On this occasion, it would really be unfortunate that the *Qurbana*, founded by our Lord in order that we may experience the fruits of the mysteries of his incarnation, has caused division among us. "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose" (1 Cor 1, 10). Let us accept this request of St. Paul. Let us pray that the words of St. Paul, "In Him the whole structure is joined together and, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2, 21), be realised in the Syro-Malabar Church. We wish you all a Jubilee year full of God's grace and bless you all in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church:

- ✠ Varkey Vithayathil C.Ss.R. (Apostolic Administrator)
- ✠ Joseph Powathil (Changanacherry)
- ✠ Jacob Thoomkuzhy (Trichur)
- ✠ George Valiamattam (Tellicherry)
- ✠ Kuriakose Kunnacherry (Kottayam).
- ✠ Joseph Pallikaparampil (Palai)
- ✠ George Punnakkottil (Kothamangalam)
- ✠ Abraham D. Mattam VC (Satna)
- ✠ Gratian Mundadan CMI (Bijnor)
- ✠ James Pazhayattil (Irinjalakuda)
- ✠ Gregory Karotemprel CMI (Rajkott)
- ✠ Dominic Kokkattu CST (Gorakhpur)
- ✠ Joseph Pastor Neelankavil CMI (Sagar)
- ✠ Mathew Vattakkuzhy (Kanjirapally)
- ✠ Paul Chittilappally (Thamarassery)

- ✠ Vijay Anand Nedumpuram CMI (Chanda)
- ✠ Jacob Manathodath (Palghat)
- ✠ Simon Stock Palathara CMI (Jagadapur)
- ✠ Emmanuel Pothanamuzhy CMI (Mananthavady)
- ✠ George Alencherry (Thuckalay)
- ✠ Thomas Elavanal MCBS (Kalyan)
- ✠ Thomas Chakiath (auxiliary bishop of Ernakulam)
- ✠ Sebastian Vadakkal (Ujjain)
- ✠ Mathew Moolakkattu OSB (auxiliary bishop of Kottayam)
- ✠ Lawrence Mukkuzhy (Belthangady)
- ✠ Joseph Kunnath CMI (Adilabad)

Given from the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Curia on 15 December 1999.

NB: This pastoral letter should be read on Sunday, 2 January 2000 during the *Qurbana*.

5. The Approval of the Holy See and the Universal Validity of the Synodal Decision

According to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches the liturgical laws, enacted by the synod and promulgated by the major archbishop have the force of law everywhere in the world (CCEO c. 150 § 2). Despite this, the Apostolic Administrator Mar Varkey Vithayathil submitted the decision of the synod to the Apostolic See for evaluation and approval. With the letter of 17 December 1999 the Congregation for the Oriental Churches expressed satisfaction for this positive step and approved the decision of the synod, considering it a fundamental contribution to ecclesial communion in the Syro-Malabar Church. The Congregation also gave three directives for the correct implementation of the decision.⁶ Once approved by the Holy See, even the disciplinary laws of the synod have universal validity (c. 150 § 3). Since the decision concerning the uniform mode of celebrating Qurbana pertains to the category of liturgical laws and since it was approved by the Apostolic See, it has the force of law everywhere in the world.

Congregatio pro Ecclesiis Orientalibus, Prot. N. 1796/99, Roma, 17 dicembre 1999.

To His Excellency, Mar Varkey Vithayathil C.Ss.R., Apostolic Administrator of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

Your Excellency,

Together with the letter of 21 November 1999, the text concerning the mode of celebrating Holy *Qurbana*, approved unanimously by the Syro-Malabar Synod during its session from 15 to 20 November has arrived at this Congregation.

The evaluation of the text, the form of its approval and the commitment of the Synod for its immediate and accurate diffusion offer possibility for this Congregation to rejoice heartily over the attainment of this important result.

⁶ The letter of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (Italian) and the enclosure (English) can be found in *Synodal News*, vol. 8, nos. 2 (December 2000) 45-47.

This Dicastery has not any objections with regard to the decision adopted, which it considers a new and important step in the identity consciousness of the Syro-Malabar Church and a fundamental contribution to ecclesial communion, through an homogenous pastoral praxis. Enclosed herewith are some concrete directives for the correct application of the provision.

In order that the decision may produce the desired result, it is indispensable that in its promulgation and application, the entire Synod of Bishops – both collegially and each of the members individually – assumes full pastoral responsibility for its faithful and correct implementation.

With sentiments of distinct regards I remain,

Yours most devotedly, Achille Cardinal Silvestrini, Prefect;
M. Marusyn, Secretary.

ENCLOSURE

1. The rubrics to be promulgated for the implementation of this synodal decision should be unmistakably explicit. They should state clearly, as in the above mentioned document, that during the Anaphora the priest faces the east (or the altar, i.e., with his back to the congregation, leading the people in prayer while facing in the same direction the people themselves are facing); and that the priest begins to face in this direction (toward the altar and away from the congregation) beginning with and including the Prayer of *accessus ad altare*: “I give you thanks, my Father, Lord of heaven and earth [...]”. The priest remains facing in this direction during the entire Anaphora, except of course at those points where the traditional rubrics order him to turn to the congregation for greeting.

2. It should be noted that in churches which have restored the once-traditional Bema in the centre of the nave, in the midst of the congregation – and such a restoration would certainly be desirable at least *ad experimentum* for example, in liturgical centres and seminary or monastic chapels – then during the Liturgy of the Word the clergy on the Bema would be seated in the midst of the people and facing the same direction as they, in the direction of the lecterns for the readings of the Liturgy of the Word.

3. Furthermore, in churches so designed, it would not be necessary for the presiding priest to come to the Bema for the concluding rites of the liturgy, which would be celebrated from the front of the questroma or sanctuary platform, facing the people.

6. Dispensation from the Synodal Law and Non-Implementation of the Unanimous Decision in Some Dioceses

In seven dioceses of the Syro-Malabar Church the unanimous decision of the bishops could not be implemented on the fixed date of 3 July 2000 because of various historical reasons and adverse circumstances. In some of these dioceses a dispensation was granted on the basis of canon 1538 of CCEO. As a model we present here the text of the dispensation granted by Mar Varkey Vithayathil, promoted as major archbishop on 18 December 1999, to the priests of the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly just three days before the implementation of the synodal decision in the form of a circular letter.⁷ For the convenience of the readers we also cite the relevant canons, in virtue of which the dispensation was awarded.

Circular letter, No. 6/2000, June 30, 2000.

Letter to the Priests of the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly regarding the Implementation of the Synodal Decision on the Celebration of the Eucharist.

Dear Rev. Fathers,

Realizing that my directive (circular letter no. 5/2000) dated 30.05. 2000 to implement the decision of the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church last November concerning the celebration of the Eucharist has caused great pain and agony to most of you, and having satisfied myself that the implementation of this decision will cause irreparable damage to unity and harmonious co-operation among priests and in parishes, I, while adhering faithfully to the Synodal decision, in virtue of CCEO canon 1538, temporally postpone its implementation in the

⁷ The circular letter can be found in *Ernakulam Missam* 70 (July 2000) 7.

Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly so that an explosive pastoral situation and grave spiritual harm to the faithful may be avoided.

Wishing you a very happy Feast of St. Thomas, our Apostle,
Yours ever in the Lord,

Mar Varkey Vithayathil , Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly

Canon 1538 § 1: "The eparchial bishop can dispense in special cases from both the common law and the particular laws of his Church *sui iuris* the Christian faithful over whom he exercises power in accordance with law, whenever he deems it conducive to their spiritual good, unless reservation has been made by the authority which enacted the laws".

§ 2: "If it is difficult to contact the authority which has reserved to itself a dispensation, and at the same time there is danger of grave harm in delay, any hierarch can dispense in special cases the Christian faithful over whom he exercises power in accordance with the norm of law, provided the dispensation is one which the said authority grants in the same circumstances, without prejudice to can. 396".

Canon 396: "Except for the case, in which the invalidity of sacred ordination is declared, loss of the clerical state does not carry with it a dispensation from the obligation of celibacy, which is granted only by the Roman Pontiff".

7. The Tragedy of Non-Implementation: the Continuation of Disunity with regard to the Celebration of Holy Qurbana

After the failure of some bishops including the Major Archbishop to implement the unanimous decision concerning the Holy Qurbana, the first session of the synod, held from 10 to 22 July 2000, thoroughly evaluated the tragic situation and proposed solutions. In the final statement issued to the press the synod upheld its decision and required that all should implement the uniform mode of celebration, creating favourable circumstances in their dioceses, but no expiry date was fixed for the same. Minimum pastoral prudence teaches that in the personal dioceses and parishes as well as in religious communities outside the proper territory of the Syro-Malabar Church, where Christian faithful from different regions cohabit, if the visiting bishops and priests from different dioceses celebrate Qurbana in different ways it would create disunity and consternation among the faithful and scandal among the people of other Churches and religions. In order to avoid the globalization of conflicts inside the territory of the Church, all the bishops agreed to celebrate the Holy Qurbana in the uniform manner according to the synodal decision outside the proper territory. We present here the assessment of the Synod and the passages concerning the non-implementation of the synodal decision from the opening and concluding addresses of the Major Archbishop.⁸

7.1. From the Opening Address of the Major Archbishop

[...] You are already in the know of the development with regard to the implementation of the synodal decision on the uniform mode of celebration of the Divine Liturgy. While some

⁸ Extracts from the opening and concluding addresses of the Major Archbishop in *Synodal News*, vol. 8, no. 1, September 2000, 9-11 & 39; assessment of the Synod with the indication of solutions and the final statement in *Synodal News*, vol. 8, no. 1 (September 2000) 17-21.

eparchies implemented the decision others could not do so on account of the stiff opposition of the clergy. A clear picture of the pastoral situation throughout our Church in this regard can be had only when we shall share what has taken place in the various eparchies. Unless we identify the causes for this deep-rooted and wide-spread opposition of priests to this decision of the synod and remove them, we shall never solve this long-standing liturgical dispute that is eroding our credibility and destroying the Syro-Malabar Church.

[...] At the same time we must be wary about the disintegrating forces within the Church. They are the true enemies of the Church. These enemies may take the form of persons or ideologies. In both cases they are more dangerous than the worst enemies from outside. We know that there is no dearth of such forces that are at work in our Church. It is a God-given occasion to make a sincere examination of conscience and make corrections wherever needed if we are to survive here as a Church. Let us pray that through the intercession of Mary our Blessed Mother and St Thomas, our Father in the faith we may ever proclaim the Word of God fearlessly [...].

Mount St. Thomas, 10 July 2000,

Archbishop Varkey Vithayathil C.Ss. R., Major Archbishop.

7.2. Assessment of the Implementation of the Decision on the Uniform Mode of Celebrating the Holy *Qurbana* Made by the Synod

The Major Archbishop informed the Synod that the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches asked for a report of the developments connected with the implementation of the decision of the Synod on the uniform mode of celebrating the Holy *Qurbana*. In order to help him compile the report he requested all the bishops to give him a brief report on the implementation of the decision in their eparchies.

He also invited the bishops to share with the synod the developments connected with the implementation of the synodal decision on *Qurbana*. All the eparchial bishops shared their

experiences in implementing the decision of the synod on the uniform mode of celebrating the Holy *Qurbana*. Some of the bishops including the Major Archbishop said that they could not implement the decision in spite of their best efforts because of the resistance especially from the clergy. Some others said that they could implement the decision, even though some of their clergy expressed apprehensions as to how far it would be implemented in other eparchies. One bishop said that he could implement the decision but had to reverse it because of the developments in the neighbouring eparchies. In some of the eparchies outside the *territorium proprium* the implementation was reported to be partial.

When all the members briefed the synod about the implementation or non-implementation of the decision the Major Archbishop asked whether they had some proposals for the future course of action in this regard. He pointed out that since a common vision of the identity of our Church was lacking among the bishops themselves it is not easy to arrive at a solution. He added that it was essential to find out the reason for the widespread opposition to the decision among the clergy. The general feeling reflected in the sharing was that the synod should stand by its decision and that it should reiterate it in a common statement to allay the doubts in the minds of the faithful, especially of those eparchies that implemented the decision.

The following were pointed out to be the main causes of the unfortunate situation: open and clandestine squad work by some groups who influenced the others; lenient approach of the synod against those who signed the memorandum sent to the Major Archbishop; lack of enough positive publicity and abundance of negative publicity concerning the decision; lack of catechesis in the tradition of the Oriental Churches.

There was difference of opinion among the members with regard to the opportuneness and necessity of issuing a statement of the synod concerning the implementation of the decision, the content and nature of the statement, means by which it may be made public and so on. The synod in the end found it necessary to issue a statement and to give it for publication in all leading newspapers, though some members felt that unless the various

steps to be taken to implement the decision in all eparchies were first clarified a statement was meaningless and hence not acceptable. Others felt that a statement was necessary and possible. In the end all agreed to the proposal to set up a committee for drafting the statement. Bishops Sebastian Vadakel (convener), Mathew Moolakatt and Lawrence Mukkuzhy were nominated as members of the committee.

Before discussing the draft of the statement the synod discussed also the practical steps to be taken to create a conducive atmosphere for the implementation of the decision. Some of the measures proposed were the following: 1) courses for eparchial officials for better interaction among them, 2) dialogue with the priests who are doing squad works, 3) list a few topics of relevance and ask the Research Centre to make a study of them, 4) close collaboration between the Research Centre and the CLC, 5) close collaboration between the Doctrinal Commission and the Committee for the Research Centre, 6) a common text book on ecclesiology for use in the seminaries, 7) determination of experimental centres, 8) revision and adaptation of the liturgy along with its restoration, 9) a live-together of the Consultors/Forane Vicars of the eparchies in view of fostering understanding and unity, 10) stop open criticism of authority through the press and television, 11) seminars for priests on the identity and tradition of our Church. Dialogue with them on the basis of papal documents in view of clarifying ideas and dispelling doubts, 12) a *colloquium* arranged by the Doctrinal Commission for the synodal members so that they themselves may have a common vision of the nature of our Church and her mission.

The draft of the statement prepared by the committee was thoroughly discussed by the synod and was approved with some modifications. The following is the final text issued to the press:

Statement of the Synod concerning the celebration of *Qurbana* issued to the press⁹

The intense desire of the people of God for achieving more unity in the Syro-Malabar Church was most explicitly manifested

⁹ The original statement given to the press was in Malayalam; we provide our own English translation.

on the occasion of the major archiepiscopal assembly in 1998. Among the proposals this assembly submitted to the synod of bishops, the first one states thus: "It is necessary to completely overcome (resolve) the differences of opinion with regard to matters concerning the liturgy. Our strong opinion is that everywhere in the Church there should be uniformity in the manner of celebrating Holy *Qurbana*. However, since this is difficult in today's particular circumstances, permission can be granted to continue all the three modes of celebration in vogue at present.¹⁰ Even so there should be only a single manner of celebration in each diocese. After due consultations, the diocesan bishops should decide, which manner of celebration should be adopted in each diocese. In mission dioceses necessary adaptations can be made according to the circumstances of time and place with the approval of the Church. If the aforementioned three modes of celebration are continued for a long time it will be detrimental to the unity which we aim at. Hence an action-project should be formulated for implementing the uniform mode of celebrating *Qurbana* within a determined period of time".

According to these proposals the synod of bishops held in November over and above all other considerations with the aim of obtaining unity in the Church unanimously decided a uniform mode of celebrating Holy *Qurbana* and determined that this should be implemented in the entire Church on 3 July 2000. We are pleased that this decision of the synod has been implemented in most of the dioceses. However, we are sorry that in some dioceses the decision could not be implemented. We understand that the decision could not be implemented in these dioceses, because of some particular circumstances. Since the decision of the synod remains in vigour, all should take care to implement it, creating favourable circumstances.

The statement on behalf of the synod was signed by Mar Jacob Manathodath, secretary of the synod and bishop of Palghat.

¹⁰ The three modes of celebration in vogue at that time were: 1) the entire *Qurbana* facing the East, 2) the *Qurbana* facing the people and 3) liturgy of the word facing the people and the Anaphora facing the east.

It was also agreed by the bishops that in the mission centres in India and abroad they would all celebrate the Holy *Qurbana* according to the synodal decision.

7.3. From the Concluding Speech of the Major Archbishop

My dear brother Archbishops and Bishops,

It is with a sense of relief that we are here for the concluding sitting of this synodal session for we all came, I believe, with a certain amount of difference to this session last week. The reason for that difference is obvious. In the previous session we took the decision to bring about a uniformity in the mode of celebrating the Divine Liturgy by 3rd July 2000. For reasons that were explained during the sittings not all of us could implement the decision. Those of us who could implement the decision in their eparchies certainly deserve praise. I appreciate very much their sense of sacrifice in parting with the ideas that they had been holding and their commitment in this matter. I am sure that their faithful will support them wholeheartedly by firmly adhering to the decision. At the same time I can very well understand the predicament in which those who could not implement the synodal decision find themselves because I too am in the same situation. I am grateful to all of you for your empathy towards us. It has been very noble of you. At this juncture I wish to reiterate my ardent desire to see a uniform mode of celebrating the Divine Liturgy implemented everywhere in our Church. God willing, we will be able to see that day sooner or later.

As I told you in the course of this session the past two weeks had been a time in which the synod once again experienced its unity that was affirmed in the last session by taking the decision. We might well remember that none of us disowned the decision taken by the synod. That shows that there is unity in the synod. Now we have to continue to work together with this sense of unity [...].

Mount St. Thomas, 22 July 2000,

Archbishop Varkey Vithayathil c.Ss. R., Major Archbishop.

8. Conclusion: Implementation of the Unanimous Decision in the Successive Years (2001-2018)

The synod of bishops held from 10 to 22 July 2000 upheld the decision concerning the uniform mode of celebrating Holy *Qurbana* and in the statement issued to the press it was declared: "Since the decision of the synod remains in vigour, all should take care to implement it, creating favourable circumstances".¹¹ The decision of the synod concerning the uniform celebration of *Qurbana* is universally valid also because it was confirmed by the Apostolic See. However, even 17 years after the unanimous decision, in those dioceses which failed to implement it on 3 July 2000, it has not yet been executed and no serious effort has known to have been taken for the same, in spite of frequent lamentations of some bishops in the synod, as is evident from a glance at the *Synodal News*, which publishes the acts and decisions of the synod.

As regards the mission centres and dioceses of the Syro-Malabar Church outside its proper territory, the synod from 10 to 22 July 2000 declared: "It was also agreed by the bishops that in the mission centres in India and abroad they would all celebrate the Holy *Qurbana* according to the synodal decision".¹² A minimum pastoral prudence requires the uniform mode of celebration in mission territories in India and in the Syro-Malabar dioceses and parishes abroad, where priests, religious and faithful from different regions come together. If the priests originally from different dioceses and regions celebrate in various ways in those places this would create confusion among the Syro-Malabar faithful and wonderment among the Christians belonging to other Churches.

For the coordination of the pastoral care according to the heritage and traditions of the Syro-Malabar Church, the document *Guidelines for Pastoral Care of the Migrants* approved by the synod, was promulgated by Major Archbishop Varkey Vithayathil on 23 January 2009. As regards the liturgical celebrations it states:

¹¹ *Synodal News*, vol. 8, no. 1 (September 2000) 21.

¹² *Synodal News*, vol. 8, no. 1 (September 2000) 21.

The Sacred Liturgy and the sacraments celebrated for our migrant communities shall always be the Syro-Malabar Liturgy using the approved texts and adhering to the rites and the mode of celebration approved by the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church.¹³

From what we have already seen “the mode of celebration approved by the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church” for the *Qurbana* is self evident and needs no explanation.

In the synod held from 17 to 28 August 2010 the question of the unity of the Church in relation to the uniform mode of celebrating Holy *Qurbana* was again discussed following a statement made by Jacob Angadiath, bishop of Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Chicago, on the basis of the problems he confronted in the diocese. Here the report of the discussion in the synod and first six points emerged on the question are presented:

Bishop Jacob Angadiath presented to the Synod an appeal for uniformity in the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* and a common understanding about the structure of our churches as a prerequisite for unity in the Church and the practical difficulties he faced in his eparchy because of the diversity of thinking in these matters. There was an elaborate and fruitful discussion on this matter. The important points that came during the discussion are the following:

1. Unity can be achieved only through a slow process.
2. The decision of the Synod regarding the uniformity of celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* is still valid and the Bishops should try to implement it in their own eparchies.
3. There should be continued education regarding this decision of the Synod in the eparchies where the decision could not be implemented.
4. The Guidelines for Pastoral Care has given clear directive regarding the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* in the Syro-Malabar communities outside the Syro-Malabar eparchies and we should see this directive is strictly observed by all.

¹³ *Guidelines for Pastoral Care of the Migrants*, no. 12, in *Synodal News*, vol. 17, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2009) 115; also in *Code of Particular Law of the Syro-Malabar Church*, 146.

5. The text of the sacraments should be implemented in all the eparchies of the Church.

6. The liturgical texts promulgated by the Major Archbishop should be used as such for the liturgical celebrations in the Church.¹⁴

The uniform of mode of celebrating Holy *Qurbana* in the noncompliant dioceses inside the territory seems to have practically escaped the attention of the synod, but as regards the dioceses outside the proper territory the question was often debated. In the synod of 17-27 August 2011 Bishop Jacob Angadiath explained “the need of our coming to an agreement to implement the uniform mode of celebrating the *Qurbana* and other sacraments”.¹⁵ Bishop Vijay Anand Nedumpuram CMI told the Bishops that “if we can put into practice the previous decision of the synod on the uniform mode of celebration of the *Qurbana* in this year dedicated for mission, it will be a great achievement for our Church”.¹⁶ These statements demonstrate that even outside the proper territory the decision of the synod was not fully implemented after a period of ten years.

Bishop Vijay Anand Nedumpuram CMI raised the same question also in the synod of 9-13 January 2012. In the report of the synod the following information can be found:

The Major Archbishop was of opinion that we need not enter into a detailed discussion on the matter. However he exhorted the members of the Synod that 1. We should strive to implement the decision of the Synod regarding uniform mode of celebration in the migrant communities outside the proper territory; 2. We have to be models in our liturgical celebrations, without omitting the prayers of the Anaphora; 3. We shall strive to use bema, incense and other essential elements in the celebration of the *Qurbana* on Sundays and solemn occasions.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Synodal News*, vol. 18, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2010) 67-68.

¹⁵ *Synodal News*, vol. 19, nos. 1-3 (December 2011) 91.

¹⁶ *Synodal News*, vol. 19, nos. 1-3 (December 2011) 91.

¹⁷ *Synodal News*, vol. 20, nos. 1-3 (December 2012) 23-24. After the demise of Cardinal Mar Varkey Vithayathil, on 24 May 2011 the Synod elected Mar George Alencherry as the third major archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church. He was enthroned as major archbishop on 29 May 2011.

The reports in the *Synodal News* do not attest any further discussion on the theme. The decision of the synod concerning the uniform mode of celebrating Holy *Qurbana* outside the proper territory of the Syro-Malabar Church is always upheld in principle, although not fully implemented.¹⁸ However, in recent years more efforts have been made to implement the synodal decision in extraterritorial eparchies and parishes with some positive results. However, the same cannot be affirmed with regard to those eparchies inside the proper territory, which originally did not implement the synodal decision on 3 July 2000.

¹⁸ When Syro-Malabar *Qurbana* is celebrated according to the synodal decision in Italy and other European countries even today some express astonishment, stating that they have never seen such a celebration. Moreover, with some exceptions, unless they are explicitly told, even the religious sisters arrange the altars in such a way that the celebration according to the synodal decision becomes impossible.