

ECCLESIAL IDENTITY OF SYRO MALANKARA CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Introduction

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines the church as “the liturgical assembly, but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers.” These three meanings are inseparable. After the reunion on Sept 20, 1930, Pope Pius XI, through the Apostolic Constitution *Christo Pastorum Principi* of June 11, 1932, established the Syro-Malankara Hierarchy for the reunited community. Thus, a new rite began to exist in the catholic flock belonging to the Antiochean family as an individual church enjoying the canonical status of the Archi-Episcopal Church.

The Characteristics of the Church

The Nicene Creed indicates four basic characteristics of the Church; they are also stated by CCC. The Church professes in the creed to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These four characteristics are inseparably linked with each other.

The Notion of Unity

The concept of unity is understood in Trinitarian unity. Trinity is the source of the Church. Though there are three different persons, there exists substantial unity. The liturgical celebrations on the day of Pentecost reveal the Trinitarian unity in its existence. The prayer affirms that the Holy Trinity is with three Persons with one substance, understood by a human being as three individuals in existence. It affirms the unity of the Godhead and at the same time the individuality of Persons. Like the church is one body, from different members, visible and invisible, because God is one.

The Notion of Catholicity

The word ‘catholic’ means ‘universal,’ in the sense of ‘according to the totality’ or ‘in keeping with the whole. The Church is catholic in a double sense; first, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in it.³² Secondly, the Church is catholic because it has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race. CCC also mentions that each particular church is also catholic.

The Notion of Apostolicity

The Church is apostolic because its foundation is on the Apostles historically. It has followed the teaching of the Apostles without any deviation to this day. Our Church has the apostolic origin of St. Thomas, we are known as St. Thomas Christians.

The Notion of Holiness

The Church is holy because the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sins, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Not only is the Church holy, but also her objective is to make us holy, i.e., to live a holy life, to be different from the world, conformed to Christ’s will.

The Constituent elements of Syro Malankara Catholic Church

Spirituality

Malankara Church is a church with Oriental spirituality. The peculiarity of our Church is that it has a monastic influence in its existence. The first members who reunited with the Catholic Church were from Bethany ashram. In Eastern Christianity, worship is considered both a source and expression of theology and spirituality. In the liturgy Music, colour, and smell, as well as gestures and actions, are used to express the non-rational element of worship. Liturgical prayer has the highest value in the Eastern tradition. Unceasing prayer is a special nature of Eastern spirituality. To be more specific, the spirituality of the Malankara Church is liturgical, ecclesial, monastic, and cosmic.

Theology

Oriental Theology was born and developed in the East and the Far East. It includes the venerable theological traditions of Alexandria, Antioch, Armenia, Persia, and Constantinople. Oriental Theology is commonly characterized by the Monotheistic Trinitarian theology, Mariological concepts, primary importance to the Sacred Scripture and Divine Tradition, importance given to apophatism, and Soteriological implications. In the Eastern understanding, a theologian is a “person of the Church” (an ecclesial person) who shares the faith of the Church and that of the

people of God. He is not 'above' other believers. One has to live faith not only *in* the Church but also in the Church.

Monasticism

The monastic movement had as its goal to achieve an ideal of Christian life in community with others or contemplative solitude. Monastic asceticism required the rejection of worldly existence with its cares and temptations. The institution of a monastic order in Malankara became the formative element of the Church and transformed the life of the Church. In Malankara, the monks exercise some ministry in the Church such as that of a priest, pastor, teacher, nurse, social worker, etc., according to the need of the church. The expression *pallikalum dayarakalum* (Church and Monastery) in the Malankara Church shows the theology of the religious role in the Church's life.

Liturgy

The liturgy of the Malankara Church is Oriental in general and Antiochean in particular. Oriental Theology affirms and teaches that faith and dogma come second to prayer. The 'mystery' dimension is highly emphasized in the Eastern tradition by using signs and symbols. Malankara Church recognizes the Liturgy of the Hours as the Prayer of the Church. There are different ordos for the same. Besides the canonical prayers, there are special sets of prayers for feast days – *penkitho*. The liturgical year has seven seasons with their peculiarities. Daily prayers are done seven times (yamas). Each day of the week is dedicated to a different purpose. Along with this, there are feasts and fasts on different occasion

Canonical Discipline

Canonical discipline means the church has its power of jurisdiction and includes the various forms of legislative, administrative, judicial, and coercive power. The church derives the power of jurisdiction from Divine institutions through apostolic succession. The common code is part of the disciplinary patrimony of the church. When Malankara Church was part of the Orthodox Church, it followed the *nomocanon*. After the reunion, the church observed the sacred canons of the Catholic Church. The Church has three types of laws. They are Common Law (CCEO), Particular Law (CPCSMCC- Code of Particular Canons of Syro-Malankara Catholic Church), and More Particular Law of the eparchies. The supreme head of the church is the Roman Pontiff. The Head and Father of the church are the Major Archbishop-Catholicos. There are Holy Episcopal Synod

functions with various commissions. The church is divided into Arch Dioceses (Archi-eparchy), Dioceses (eparchy), and Exarchates with Archbishops, Bishops, or Exarchs as their head, respectively. The power vested with the authorities is not meant for ruling but it is to serve the people of God.

Conclusion

Communion with the universal Church and the protection of the ecclesial identity are the two indispensable factors of the ecclesial fulness of the church. The special mission of the Malankara Catholic Church provides also a motive for protecting its identity in totality and without any fault. Being in Catholic Communion, the church has a great responsibility to reveal the magnificence of this communion to other churches in the Malankara tradition. Therefore, the Church should be able to develop and bring up an ecclesial identity of its own as an individual church.