

A REVIEW ON THE LIFE AND APOSTOLATES OF INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE IN THE SYRO- MALABAR CHURCH

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The Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church *sui iuris* is blessed abundantly with the gift of vocation to consecrated life and thus very active with the presence of fifty-six indigenous institutes of consecrated life as well as the presence of her members in hundreds of such institutes in the Universal Church. This article presents an outline of the origin and development of the indigenous institutes of consecrated life in the Syro-Malabar Church. It also analyses the canonical impacts, brought by the elevation of this Church to the Major Archiepiscopal status in 1992, on these institutes. Finally, the author deals with the struggles and the challenges faced by these institutes in the present scenario of the life and mission of this Church *sui iuris* and points out the contributions and assistances offered by these institutes to this Church *sui iuris* and to the Universal Church.

Introduction

“Institutes of consecrated life are specific gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church, which has much need of their presence that strengthens and renews the commitment to spread the gospel, to Christian education, to charity for the most needy, to contemplative prayer; the commitment to a human and spiritual formation of young people, of

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families; the commitment to justice and peace in the human family."¹ The Syro-Malabar Church *sui iuris*, the second largest Eastern Catholic Church, is blessed abundantly with these gifts of the Holy Spirit. This article will briefly survey how Syro-Malabar institutes of consecrated life originated and developed, and finally it appraises the impacts following the 1992 elevation of this Church to major archiepiscopal status.

1. Beginning of Religious Institutes in India

It is said that religious life was known and practiced by the St. Thomas Christians in India before the Portuguese arrived in the 16th century. Without much documentation, it is difficult to identify the nature and structure of this religious life; however, scant ancient and medieval testimonies do affirm its existence. Some of these testimonies attest that early monastic communities were founded near where St. Thomas was martyred. Consequently, there is reason to believe that there was a monastery at Mylapore.² The writings of Zodae, who recorded a history of Yonan the Anchorite, also attest to an early religious life. Zodae had received the anchorite at the end of 4th century, following a visit to the monastery of St. Thomas Christians towards the middle of the same century.³ St. Jerome (347-420), who testified to crowds of monks from India visiting Jerusalem, provides further evidence,⁴ as does the 6th century pilgrim Theodore. Having traveled to India from Gaul, Theodore reported finding a well-kept monastery and a Church near where St. Thomas' body first rested.⁵ Placid J. Podipara holds that East Syrian bishops who had come to Malabar in 1504 described this same monastery as "the house of the Holy Apostle Thomas" in writings to their patriarch.⁶

¹ Pope Francis, St. Peter's Square on 'the World Day of Consecrated Life', 2 February 2014.

² James Thalachelloor, "Religious among St. Thomas Christians and the Canonical Legislation on Religious of Oriental Churches," *Christian Orient*, 13 (1992), 54-65, at 54.

³ James Thalachelloor, "Religious among St. Thomas Christians and the Canonical Legislation on Religious of Oriental Churches," 55.

⁴ Jacob Kollaparambil, *Babylonian Origin of the Southists among the St. Thomas Christians*, OCA 241, Roma, 1992, 96-100.

⁵ Gregory of Tours, *Miraculorum Liber I*, 32: PL 71, 733 cf. Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, St. Paul Publications, Bombay, 1970, 25.

⁶ Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, 26. Concerning the beginning of religious institutes among St. Thomas Christians, from 10th to 17th century there are evidences of monastic life in Malabar where the St. Thomas Christians lived (cf., Alex Paul Urumpackal, *Vocations in India*, vol. 2, OIRSI,

2. A Review on the Institutes of Consecrated Life in the Syro-Malabar Church up to 1992

The 16th century arrival of Western missionaries in India radically altered the life of the St. Thomas Christians, prompting them to splinter into several groups. One of these groups was the Syro-Malabar Church, which fell under Latin jurisdiction from the mid-16th century until the late 19th. The growth of Syro-Malabar consecrated life is bisected by the 1992 elevation of this Church to major archiepiscopal status. The following is a brief review of the first period (pre-1992), during which only religious institutes of pontifical right and of eparchial (diocesan) right existed.⁷

2.1. The Genesis of the First Indigenous Religious Community for Men

Vasco De Gama first reached Kerala on 20 May 1498. He was followed by Franciscans (1500), Jesuits (1548), Carmelites (1653), and other missionaries who established houses there. Although these orders established communities and worked among the populace, they considered the locals too weak in faith to admit them as members.⁸ Regarding the Church in Kerala in the early 18th century, St. Chavara Kuriakose Elias observes:

And as any close observer can perceive, the holy way of life and exemplary conduct has not yet taken root in our Malabar. For this Malabar which had received faith from St. Thomas, the Apostle, remains barren, not having produced even one saint, while other countries and islands which received faith much later have brought forth several saints. From those lands have come many missionaries

Kottayam, 1988, 291.); Paulinus St. Bartholomew, a missionary in Malabar in the 18th century, wrote that in Malabar there were ruins of monasteries at Kuravilangadu and in a few other places. It is stated that at the advent of Portuguese in Malabar, dilapidated monasteries were found at Edapally, Angamaly and also at Mylapore (cf., B. Paulinus, *Viaggio alle Indie Orientale*, Roma, 1796, 5, as cited in James Thalachelloor, "Religious among St. Thomas Christians," 59). According to Francis Ros S J, the first Latin prelate of the St. Thomas Christians, there was a hermitage of Saints Garvasius and Porthasius at Angamaly (cf., Mundadan, *Sixteenth Century Traditions*, 149).

⁷ Varghese Koluthara, "The Role of an Eparchial Bishop in Relation to Religious of the Syro-Malabar Church," in F. Eluvathingal (ed.), *Syro-Malabar Church since the Eastern Code*, Trichur, Mary Matha Publications, 2003, 170.

⁸ Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Beginner of Consecrated Life," in *Herald of the East*, vol. 10/2 (2014), 159-172, at 160.

prompted by good intentions and absolute charity leaving their relatives and homelands with the sole motive of teaching the true religion and the way of Salvation.⁹

Disappointed with his Church in this way, St. Chavara Kuriakose Elias dedicated his life to achieving his own sainthood. On 01 January 1871, two days before his death, he said to his confreres from his deathbed, "By God's Grace I dare to say that with their help I never had an occasion to be deprived of the grace I received in baptism."¹⁰

The work of St. Chavara Kuriakose Elias and his companions had many fruits, including the foundation of various religious congregations.¹¹ In 1829 Fr. Thomas Palackal, malpan (rector) of the Pallipuram seminary, and Fr. Thomas Porukkara, secretary of the apostolic vicar, Bishop Maurilius Stabilini, sought the latter's permission to enter religious life. Convinced of their sincerity, the bishop told them, "If you, the only one or two who are knowledgeable, go away to live in silence and solitude, who else will be left to teach the people. If you like, you may establish a monastery so that all people can benefit from it..."¹² Chavara Kuriakose Elias, ordained on 29 November 1829, joined the priests' efforts to found the monastery. After he accompanied them on their third search for a location,¹³ the group was prepared to found the "little chapel" that would gradually develop into the Mannanam monastery.

On 11 May 1831, Fr. Thomas Porukkara laid the foundation stone of the above-mentioned chapel in the name of St. Joseph. *Malpan* Thomas Palackal died on 16 January 1841 and *Malpan* Thomas Porukkara on 08

⁹ *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, Vol. I: The Chronicles (Nalagamangal, K.C Chacko and Others (eds.) Mannanam, 1990, 146 as cited in Varghese Koluthara, "St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and His Charism," in *Herald of the East*, vol. 10/2 (2014), 292.

¹⁰ *Positio super introductione cause et super virtutibus ex-officio concinnata*, Vatican, 1997, 548 cf. A. Mundadan, *Bl. Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore, 2008, 390-391 as cited in Varghese Koluthara, "St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and His Charism," in *Herald of the East*, vol.10/2 (2014), 292.

¹¹ Benny Paul Thettayil, Editorial, "A Review of Religious Life and the Related," in *Herald of the East*, vol. 10/2 (2014), 147.

¹² *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, I. 2-3 as cited in Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara," 161.

¹³ *Complete Works of Bl. Chavara*, I: 8-9; *Chavara-Acchantte Sampuurna Krtithikal*, vol. I. 11, as cited in Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara," 165.

January 1846, leaving Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias – the youngest of the three – to consolidate their work by obtaining canonical approval for the community. Thus, the monastic life that began at Mannanam under the direction of Frs. Palackal and Porukkara would continue under Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias. This life beautifully blended the contemplative and apostolic dimension of monastic vocation.¹⁴ Finally, the day of religious profession arrived on Saturday 08 December 1855. Thus began the first indigenous religious community in the Syro-Malabar Church.

2.2. The Origin of the First Indigenous Religious Community for Women

Having established a monastery for men, St. Chavara Kuriakose Elias turned his efforts to establishing a convent for women. In 1865, he shared his strong desire with Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD, an Italian Carmelite missionary. Fr. Leopold wrote about it: "Fr. Chavara was really pained of not having a convent for women. For the girls in Kerala, he thought and intensely desired that they should have an abode by which they may grow in Christian virtues and spirituality."¹⁵

At that time, Fr. Leopold was spiritual father to two women residing at Koonammavu: Elisha Vakayil (34) and her daughter, Anna (14).¹⁶ Fr. Leopold informed Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias, then the only vicar general for the Syro-Malabarians in Kerala, that these women desired help leading a life of consecrated chastity. Fr. Chavara shared this information with Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli, who earnestly supported the project. A small house was then constructed to serve as the convent. On 13 February 1866, in the name of Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites (TOCD), a female religious community was founded in Koonammavu by Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD, provincial delegate of the OCD, became cofounder of this first indigenous female religious community.¹⁷

¹⁴ Thomas Kochumuttom, "Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara," 168-169.

¹⁵ Cf. Fr. Leopold Beccaro, "Preface," *Athmanuthapam*, 1959 version, xvii, as cited in *Syro-Malabar Sabhayile Karmalamathavinte Sanyasini Samoohathinte Pramanarekha* (Malayalam), Aluva, Mount Carmel Generalate, 2014, 31.

¹⁶ Francis Thonippara, "Pioneer of the Indian Christian Monasticism," in *Herald of the East*, vol. 10/2 (2014), 183.

¹⁷ *Syro-Malabar Sabhayile Karmala Mathavinte Sanyasini Samoohathinte Pramanarekha* (Malayalam), 31.

The bamboo-mat convent, which Fr. Chavara proclaimed “a true abode of poverty,” soon received new candidates. One was Elisha Vakayil’s sister, Theresa (18). Another was a widow from the parish of Vaikom, Eliswa (37), who joined the convent under the direction of Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias. Already living ascetically in her brother’s house, Eliswa was attracted to the ascetical life at Koonammavu and arrived there on 11 February. Since Fr. Leopold had not interviewed her, Eliswa initially remained outside the convent. Elisha, Anna, and Theresa entered the convent on 13 February 1866. After these members consented to Eliswa’s admission on 14 February, Fr. Leopold admitted her and gave her the name Clara. Thus, the convent had now four sisters and one assistant.¹⁸

The convent’s humble beginnings strictly depended on divine providence. Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias writes: “We trust that God would now complete what we started. We said that he would see to it that a new building was constructed, even before the bamboo mats and the coconut leaves of the present convent are replaced.”¹⁹ Frs. Chavara Kuriakose Elias and Leopold worked hard to raise funds for the construction by visiting various parishes. The archbishop also supported the project. On 27 March 1867, the community moved from the bamboo mat convent to the newly constructed one. On the same day, the first four members - Eliswa, Anna, Theresa and Clara - were given the TOCD religious habit. On 16 July 1868, the women made religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience before Fr. Leopold.

With the founding of the TOCD convent, Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias’ long-cherished desire for a female religious congregation was fulfilled.²⁰ The foundation satisfied Fr. Chavara, who wrote that “it seems that God has willed to accomplish now, the matter of a convent for nuns for which we had prayed for a long time and still was not possible.”²¹ However, with the 1877 establishment of two vicariates for Syrian Catholics, Rome entrusted the Koonammavu convent to the

¹⁸ Francis Thonippara, “Pioneer of the Indian Christian Monasticism,” 183.

¹⁹ *Complete Works of Chavara*, vol. I, 107 as cited in Francis Thonippara, “Pioneer of the Indian Christian Monasticism,” 183.

²⁰ Francis Thonippara, “Pioneer of the Indian Christian Monasticism,” in *Herald of the East*, vol.10/2 (2014), 183-184.

²¹ *The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, vol. II, 72 (1855-1870) as cited in Francis Thonippara, “Pioneer of the Indian Christian Monasticism,” 184.

Syrian CMC religious sisters. The Latin members of the convent left in 1890. The group is now known as the CTC.²²

2.3. Other Institutes of Consecrated Life Founded in the Syro-Malabar Church

In 1887, Pope Leo XIII withdrew the St. Thomas Christians from Latin jurisdiction and erected the vicariates for them at Kottayam and Trichur. This event gave a new life for the St. Thomas Christians as the Syro-Malabar Church. The vigour of this new life is most evident in the emergence and growth of numerous male and female religious institutes, listed here below in the order of the foundation date:²³

1) Franciscan Clarist Congregation (FCC): The Secular Franciscan Third Order (SFO) was founded in the Archdiocese of Veropoly in 1865. Ten years later, a unit of SFO was founded in the parish of Pala. There, certain pious women of the SFO began in community under the guidance of Puthenparampil Thommahan. The women subsequently moved to Kannadiurumpu, where they spent years striving for a genuine and full Franciscan life. This ardent desire was communicated to the apostolic vicar of Kottayam, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Charles Lavigne, during his visit to the Pala parish on 4 July 1888. With his help, the Franciscan Clarist Congregation, a new Franciscan order, was founded on 14 December 1888 at Changanacherry in Kerala.²⁴ The new constitution was approved by the Apostolic See in 1973 and revised in 1997 based on the new Eastern code. The congregation was raised to the status of pontifical right on 01 March 1973. It has presently 24 provinces, 3 regions and about 7000 members.

2) Congregation of the Sisters of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (SVM): It was founded in 1892 in the Vicariate of Kottayam, by

²² Francis Thonippara, "Pioneer of the Indian Christian Monasticism," 184.

²³ Here we make a survey of the religious institutes of men and women that originated after CMI and CMC up to 1992. I limit myself to the survey of the indigenous religious institutes established in the Syro-Malabar Church. This survey is mainly based on the *Directory of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church*, Kakkanad, 2012. I tried to supplement it by referring to internet sources of these religious institutes, constitutions of a few religious institutes which were available with me and also from the information I received for my queries from a few Generalates of the religious institutes. I regret if there occurs inaccuracies on the details of these religious institutes and it could be improved in the future.

²⁴ *The Rule and Constitution of the Franciscan Clarist Congregation of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church*, Superior General, Alwaye, 1997, xi.

Servant of God Mar Mathew Makkil. Its charism is to "Witness the gentle, humble love of Jesus and to lead all, especially the women folk towards His salvific love, like Blessed Virgin Mary." It has now about 600 members and is of eparchial right.

3) Vincentian Congregation (VC): This clerical institute was founded in 1904 at Thottakom, in the Vicariate of Ernakulam by Fr. Varkey Kattarath. Its charism is, "He has sent me to proclaim the Good News to the Poor." This pontifical right institute has about 460 members in three provinces and three regions.

4) Congregation of the Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (SABS): This congregation was founded on 08 December 1908 by Mar Thomas Kurialacherry at Champakulam in the Vicariate of Changanacherry, with the charism of "Devotion to the Holy Eucharist the core of which is a deep personal attachment to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist." Canonically erected in 1911, the congregation is now of pontifical right. It has 4668 sisters working in 17 provinces in Kerala and 5 regions outside Kerala.

5) Congregation of Sacred Heart (SH): Venerable Fr. Mathew Kadalikkattil founded the Sacred Heart Congregation on 01 January 1911 at Pala, in the Vicariate of Changanacherry. Its charism is "To live radically the discipleship of Christ, by experiencing deeply the compassionate love of God, the Father, manifested through the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and sharing it with others, especially the poor and afflicted." The congregation has 3555 members, 11 provinces, and one region in India and abroad. The congregation was raised to the status of pontifical right on 11 March 1976.

6) Congregation of the Holy Family (CHF): It was founded by Blessed Mariam Thresia, at Puthenchira in the Vicariate of Thrissur, in 1914 to impart Christian values to families. Accordingly, the charism of the congregation is "The spirit of the Holy Family of Nazareth, the compassionate love emanating from the deep union with the Crucified Lord, and the liberative mission accomplished through family apostolate." Canonical erection took place on 14 May 1914, and the congregation was raised to pontifical status on 01 August 1978. It now has nine provinces and two regions.

7) *Society of the Oblates of the Sacred Heart (OSH): It was founded in 1921 in the Vicariate of Kottayam by Mar Alexander Choolaparambil. This eparchial right institute is a society of common life in the manner of religious. There are about 80 members in this society.*

8) Congregation of the Sisters of the Destitute (SD): It was established on 19 March 1927 by Venerable Fr. Varghese Payyapilly at Chunangamvely in the Archdiocese of Ernakulam. The congregation was founded with five young ladies as pioneers with the name "Little Sisters of the Poor." In 1933, its name was changed to 'Sisters of the Destitute' because another congregation already had the title it was founded with. On 22 May 1989, the Holy See raised the congregation to pontifical right. SD is spread over 4 continents and 11 countries. Its 6 provinces, 1 region, and 285 communities contain 1297 perpetually professed and 150 temporary professed sisters.

9) Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph (SJC): It was founded in the Eparchy of Kottayam in 1928, by the Servant of God Thomas Poothathil. The charism of this congregation is "Yoga of God's Glory and the *Dasyam* (Service) of His Compassionate Love." It is an eparchial right religious institute.

10) Congregation of the Therese of Lisieux (CST Fathers): Also called the Little Flower Congregation, this clerical religious institute began as the Society of Little Flower Brotherhood. Founded by Fr. Basilius (Thomas) Panatin in the Archdiocese of Ernakulam in 1931, the institute was canonically erected in 1945, subsequently reorganized, and raised to pontifical right in 1996. Its charism is "Be little, Serve the Little," and it has 4 provinces and 403 members.

11) Congregation of St. Therese of Lisieux (CST Brothers): It was founded in 1931 by Mar Augustine Kandathil with the charism to share the love of Christ with the poor and destitute, especially boys and youth. This eparchial right institute is the first non-clerical religious institute for men founded in the Syro-Malabar Church. There are about 80 members now.

12) Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament (MCBS): This clerical religious institute was founded by two priests, Frs. Mathew Alakalam and Joseph Paredom, in Mallappally in the Eparchy of Changanacherry in 1933 with the charism "to live and proclaim the Mystery of Eucharist." In 1989, it was raised to a pontifical congregation.

13) Congregation of Sisters of Charity (CSC): It was founded in the Eparchy of Trichur in 1944 by Servant of God Fr. Augustine Ukken. In 1995, it was raised to the status of pontifical right. This congregation with three provinces has almost 800 members.

14) Medical Sisters of St. Joseph (MSJ): It was founded in 1944 in Kothamangalam, in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam by Servant of God Msgr. Joseph C. Panjikanan with the primary apostolate of serving the poor and sick with the compassionate love of Christ. It was raised to pontifical right in 1990. There are more than 800 members in 4 provinces.

15) Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth (CSN): It was founded in 1948 at Edakkunnu in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam by Mar Augustine Kandathil. This congregation of major archiepiscopal right has about 750 members in 3 provinces.

16) Congregation of Sisters of St. Martha (CSM): It was founded in the Eparchy of Thrissur in 1948 by Fr. John Kizhakkoodan. It is now a major archiepiscopal religious institute with about 380 members.

17) Malabar Missionary Brothers (MMB): This non-clerical religious institute for men was founded by Msgr. Zacharias Vazhappilly in the Eparchy of Trichur in 1948 with the charism of evangelization through humble service. This major archiepiscopal congregation has now about 100 members in two provinces.

18) Assisi Sisters of Mary Immaculate (ASMI): This congregation was founded at Cherthala in the Archeparchy of Ernakulan in 1949 by Venerable Msgr. Joseph Kandathil with the charism "to follow the humble, poor, crucified Christ and radiate his compassionate love in joyful service to the sick, the needy, the poor, and the rejected of the society especially the leprosy brethren." It was raised to the pontifical status in 1986 and has more than 700 members in four provinces.

19) Sisters of St. Martha's Congregation (SMC): It was founded in 1958 in Moolamattom in the Eparchy of Pala by Mar Sebastian Vayalil. Now there are about 300 members and still it is an eparchial right congregation.

20) Congregation of Samaritan Sisters (CSS): It was founded by Msgr. Paul Chittialpilly, at Mulayam in the Eparchy of Trichur in 1961. It is now a major archiepiscopal institute with about 370 members in two provinces.

21) Caritas Secular Institute (CSI): It was founded in 1961 in the Eparchy of Kottayam by Mar Thomas Tharayil. It is an eparchial right secular institute and there are at present more than 130 members.

22) Servants of Immaculate Lady (SOIL): It is a secular institute and was founded in 1961 in the Archeparchy of Changanacherry. This eparchial right institute has only very few members.

23) Mary Immaculate Secular Institute (MISI): It was established in 1962 by Fr. Augustine Chilenpikunnel in the Eparchy of Pala. This is also an eparchial right institute and has about 40 members.

24) Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate (MSMI): This congregation was established in 1962 at Kulathuvayal in the Eparchy of Thalassery by Msgr. C. J. Varkey. It was raised to the status of pontifical right in 1988. It has about 800 members in four provinces.

25) Missionary Society of St. Thomas the Apostle (MST): This society of apostolic life was founded in 1968 at Bharananganam, in the Eparchy of Pala by Mar Sebastian Vayalil. It is now a society of major archiepiscopal right with more than 300 members.

26) Missionary Congregation of Daughters of St. Thomas (DST): This congregation was founded by Fr. Jacob Thazhathel in 1969 at Aruvithara in the Eparchy of Pala. It is now an institute of major archiepiscopal right with about 350 members in 2 provinces.

27) Snehagiri Missionary Sisters (SMS): This congregation was founded in the Eparchy of Palai in 1969 by Fr. Abraham Kaippanplackal. As a major archiepiscopal institute, it has now about 500 members in 3 provinces.

28) Society of Nirmala Dasi Sisters (SNDS): This society was founded in 1971 by Mar. Joseph Kundukulam at Pullazhi, in the Eparchy of Trichur. Now with major archiepiscopal status, it has more than 260 members.

29) Society of Ladies of Mary Immaculate (SLMI): This society was founded in 1971 in the Eparchy of Trichur by Msgr. Paul Chittilappilly and Sr. Annakutty Kadicheeni with the main apostolate of evangelizing families. It has very few members and is of eparchial right.

30) Apostolic Sisters of Mary Immaculate (ASMI): This congregation was founded at Amboori in the Archeparchy of Changanacherry in

1974 by Cardinal Mar Antony Padiyara. It has fewer than 100 members and is an eparchial right congregation.

31) Congregation of Nazareth Sisters (CNS): It was founded at Kunnoth in the Eparchy of Thalassery in 1975 by Mar Sebastian Valloppilly. It has now about 150 members and is an eparchial right institute.

32) Sadhu Sevana Sabha (SSS): This congregation was founded at Mallussery in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam in 1975 by Fr. Thomas Maliekal with the charism, "Service in needs." It is an eparchial right institute with about 80 members.

33) Deen Bandhu Samaj (DBS): This institute was founded in the Eparchy of Jagdalpur by Mar Paulinus Jeerakath CMI in 1976. There are about 130 members in this eparchial right institute.

34) Society of Kristu Dasis (SKD): This society was founded in 1977 in the Eparchy of Mananthavady by Mar Jacob Thoomkuzhy. It is now a society of major archiepiscopal right and has about 300 members.

35) Congregation of Preshitharam Sisters (CPS): This religious institute was founded by Fr. George Kochuparambil at Kalady in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam in 1977. From 1964, it functioned as a pious union. On 08 December 1977, Joseph Cardinal Parecattil, the archbishop of Ernakulam, erected it as a religious institute of eparchial right. It is now a congregation of major archiepiscopal right with more than 250 members.

36) Sisters of Charity of St. John of God (SCJG): This congregation was founded by Br. Fortunatus Thanhaeuser at Kattappana in the Eparchy of Kanjirapally in 1977. Its members are fewer than 100 and it is of eparchial right.

37) Little Servants of Divine Providence (LSDP): This congregation was founded at Kunnamthanam in the Archeparchy of Changanacherry in 1978 by Sr. Dr. Mary Litty. Its charism is to serve Jesus in the least, the lost and the lowliest. It has about 150 members and is an eparchial right institute.

38) Sisters of Jesus (SJ): This congregation was founded in the Eparchy of Sagar by Mar Clemens Thottungal CMI in 1980. Its main apostolate is to serve the poor in the villages. There are about 90 members in this eparchial right institute.

39) Missionary Society of St. Pius X (MSP): This society was founded in 1985 in the Eparchy of Kottayam by Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry. It is an eparchial right institute and has about 60 members.

40) Little Sisters of St. Therese of Lisieux (LST): It was founded in the Eparchy of Gorakhpur in 1988 by Mar Dominic Kokkat CST with the charism of "Do little things with great love for God." This eparchial right institute has about 80 members.

41) Mar Thoma Sahodarikal: This institute of monastic life was founded in the Archeparchy of Changanacherry in 1988 by Mar Joseph Powathil. It is an eparchial right monastery *sui iuris*.

42) Society of Devpriya Sisters (DP): It was founded in the Eparchy of Rajkot in 1989 by Mar Gregory Karotemprel CMI. It is an eparchial right institute with about 70 members.

43) Missionaries of Little Flower (MLF): It was founded by Bishop Jerome M Fernandez, the Bishop of Kollam in 1959. Since 1992, it is an eparchial right institute in the Archeparchy of Changanacherry. There are more than 150 members.

44) Catholic Congregation of the Blind: It was founded in 1989 by Fr. Wilson Thomas at Muringoor, in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam. Its apostolate is mainly to foster and utilize the gifts and potential of the blind to serve the Church and society.

45) Sisters of Win Society of Jesus (WIN SJ): This secular institute was founded in 1991 at Eramalloor in the Alleppey District by Sr. Alice Lukose. It is an eparchial right institute with only a few members.

46) Disciple of Sisters of Christ (DSC): It was founded in 1994 in the mission Eparchy of Ujjain by Sr. Pushpa Mannur. It is an eparchial rite institute.

47) Society of St. Alphonsa (SA Sisters): This eparchial rite society was founded by Bishop Mar Gregory Karotemprel in 1997 in the mission Eparchy of Rajkot.

Besides these institutes of consecrated life and societies, pious unions were also founded during this period in the Syro-Malabar Church: Josephine Sisters (1953), Little Sisters of Christ (1975), Fervent Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (1981), Sisters of St. Thomas (1988), and Deivadan Sisters (1988).

2.4. Institutes of Consecrated Life of Latin Church in the Syro-Malabar Church

Around the mid-twentieth century, because of a sharp decline in European vocations, Latin institutes of consecrated life began to recruit candidates from India. These institutes eventually established houses in India, some of which were Latin and others Syro-Malabar. Over time, many of these institutes grew to include hundreds of Syro-Malabar members. As a result, most of these institutes established provinces or regions for their Syro-Malabar members. Institutes of consecrated life that were originally Latin but now having Syro-Malabar provinces are:

Institutes of consecrated life for men: Nobertines (O.Praem, 1121); Order of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel (O. Carm, 1206); Order of Friars Minor Capuchins (OFM Cap., 1209); Order of Friars Minor Conventuals (OFM Conv., 1209); Order of Clerics Regular Minor (CRm-Adorno Fathers, 1586); Order of Discalced Carmelite (OCD, 16th Cent.); Benedictine Order (OSB, 1988); Vallambrosan Benedictine Congregation (OSB. Vall., 1988); Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (C.Ss.R, 1732); Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Blessed Virgin Mary (CMF, 1847); Sacerdotal Secular Institute of Apostolic Sodales (SSIAS).

Institutes of consecrated life for women with provinces or vice province in the Syro-Malabar Church: Daughters of Presentation of Mary in the Temple (DPMT, 1833); Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Mark (SJSM, 1845); Sisters of St. Ann Bangalore (SAB, 1857); Sisters of the Poor of St. Catherine of Siena (SdP, 1873); Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries (MMS, 1925); Sisters of St. John the Baptist and Mary Queen (SJB, 1928); Franciscan Handmaids of the Good Shepherd (FHGS, 1938).

Institutes of consecrated life for women with regions in the Syro-Malabar Church: Sisters of St. Philip Neri (SF, 1794); Congregation of the Cellitines according to the Rule St. Augustine (OSA, 1838); Daughters of the Charity of the Most Precious Blood (DCPB, 1873); School Sisters of St. Francis (OSF, 1888); Apostolic Oblates (AO, 1950); Little Workers of the Sacred Heart (LWSH, 1894 - Delegation).

Within Syro-Malabar eparchies, there are also houses of 34 Latin male religious institutes, 133 Latin female religious institutes, six Latin female secular institutes, and 1 Latin female pious union.

There are now about 5000 Syro-Malabar religious priests, 33,000 sisters, and approximately 200 brothers belonging to institutes of the Syro-Malabar and other Churches *sui iuris*, especially the Latin Church.

3. The Impact on Institutes of Consecrated Life When Syro-Malabar Church became Major Archiepiscopal Church

The Syro-Malabar Church was elevated to major archiepiscopal status in 1992. At that time, the Church counted numerous institutes of consecrated life. There were 3 male and 31 female indigenous religious congregations; 2 male non-clerical religious institutes; 1 female monastery *sui iuris* and 1 hermitage. There were also 2 male societies of common life in the manner of religious, 2 male societies of apostolic life, 4 each of female secular institutes and pious unions for women. With the largest number of religious persons and institutes of any Eastern Catholic Church, the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church is a dynamic and vibrant Church and a shining example of a flourishing consecrated life.²⁵

The elevation of the Syro-Malabar Church has extensively impacted all aspects of this Church's life. However, I will limit myself to addressing the effects on institutes of consecrated life and societies.

3.1. Elevation of Eparchial Institutes to Major Archiepiscopal Status

According to CCEO c. 506 §3, a congregation of eparchial right within the patriarchal territory that has expanded to other eparchies of the same territory can become a congregation of patriarchal right. Under these circumstances, the patriarch can decree this status after consulting the interested parties and obtaining the consent of the permanent synod. This norm applies to societies of common life in the manner of religious (CCEO c. 556) as well as to secular institutes (CCEO c. 566). Once the Syro-Malabar Church obtained major archiepiscopal status, many of its eparchial right institutes that had expanded their membership and territory were raised to major archiepiscopal status. These institutes are the following, with the year of elevation is indicated in parentheses: Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth (1997),²⁶ Congregation of Sisters of St. Martha (1997),²⁷

²⁵ Varghese Koluthara, "The Role of an Eparchial Bishop in Relation to Religious of the Syro-Malabar Church," 170.

²⁶ *Synodal News*, no. 10 (August 1997) 34-35.

²⁷ *Synodal News*, no. 10 (August 1997) 38-39.

Missionary Society of St. Thomas the Apostle (1997),²⁸ Malabar Missionary Brothers (1997),²⁹ Congregation of Daughters of St. Thomas (2003),³⁰ Congregation of Samaritan Sisters (2006),³¹ Society of Kristu Dasis (2006),³² Congregation of the *Snehagiri* Missionary Sisters (2006),³³ Society of Nirmala Dasi Sisters (2006),³⁴ and Congregation of *Preshitharam* Sisters (2013).³⁵

3.2. The Establishment of New Monastic Institutes in the SMC

After flourishing in the East during the Patristic Age, monastic spirituality spread to the West where it became the foundation of Latin religious life (UR 15). Consequently, the Eastern code considers monks and monasteries the prototype for all other forms of consecrated life in title XII. These canons inspired the Syro-Malabar Church to attempt to revive its contemplative life. To this end, after it had obtained major archiepiscopal status, the Syro-Malabar Church created the following monastic institutes:

1) *Mar Thoma Sleeha Dayara* (Monastery) (MTSM) is a male monastery. In 1997, Fr. Xavier Koodapuzha founded it in Nallathanny, in the Eparchy of Kanjirapally, with the charism of "The First Christian Community as Reflected in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-36." Its canonical status is eparchial and *monasterium sui iuris in fieri* (in formation).

2) *Navajyothi* Benedictine Monastery (OSB), a semi-cloistered female contemplative institute under the Benedictine Confederation, was established in 2003. Mother Lilly Therese Chennattu and Cardinal Mar Varkey Vithayahil co-founded this institute at Nallathanny in the Eparchy of Kanjirapally.

3) *Daivamatha Ashram* (*Dayara D'mma D'Mshiha*) (DEM) is a female eparchial right institute founded by Bishop Mar Mathew Anikuzhikattil in 2005. The institute was established at Mankadavu in the Eparchy of Idukki with the charism "Follow the tradition, liturgy, and the spirituality of the Syro-Malabar Church."

²⁸ *Synodal News*, no. 10 (August 1997) 40-42.

²⁹ *Synodal News*, no. 10 (August 1997) 36-37.

³⁰ *Synodal News*, vol. 11, no. 2 (December 2003) 51-52.

³¹ *Synodal News*, vol. 9, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2001) 49-50.

³² *Synodal News*, vol. 14, nos. 1 & 2 (November 2006) 155-157.

³³ *Synodal News*, vol. 14, nos. 1 & 2 (November 2006) 158-160.

³⁴ *Synodal News*, vol. 14, nos. 1 & 2 (November 2006) 161-163.

³⁵ *Synodal News*, vol. 21, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2013) 162-164.

4) *Sachidananda Ashram* is a female hermitage. It was founded in 2005 by Sr. Rita Maria and Sr. Mary Josna at Songad in the Eparchy of Gorakhpur.

5) *Mangalavartha Dayara* (Servants of the Handmaid of the Lord) is a female monastic institute founded by Sr. Maria Therese in 2009 at Podimattom in the Eparchy of Kanjirappilly. It is a monastery of eparchial right and *sui iuris in fieri* (in formation).

6) *Divyakarunyamatha Ashram* is a male monastic institute founded by Fr. Marianandu Ethakkadu in 2011 at Perumthoty in the Eparchy of Idukki. With the charism of "Apostolic ministry with contemplative life," it is an eparchial right monastery *sui iuris in fieri* (in formation).

7) *Abhishekagni Sisters of Jesus and Mary* (ASJM): It is an eparchial right monastery *sui iuris* for women founded by Frs. Xavier Khan Vattayil and Binoy Karimaruthumkal and Sr. Aimy Emmanuel in 2017 at Thavalam in the Eparchy of Palakkad.

8) Preachers of Divine Mercy (PDM) is a male monastic institute of eparchial right and *sui iuris in fieri* (in formation). Frs. Xavier Khan Vattayil and Binoy Karimaruthumkal founded this institute in 2018 at Thavalam in the Eparchy of Palakkad in 2018.

9) Mount Carmel Cloistered Convent is a contemplative institute attached to the Order of Discalced Carmelites (OCD) in the Syro-Malabar Church. It was established in Malayattoor in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly in 2009.

Additionally, some male and female institutes within the Syro-Malabar Church have encouraged members seeking to lead a contemplative life within the religious institutes themselves. Examples include the CMI contemplative ashram at Kakkadampoyil in the Eparchy of Thamarassery, and the FCC contemplative ashram at Malayattoor in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

4. Synodal Commission for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

By virtue of CCEO c. 124, the patriarchal curia must include several commissions to care for the various activities for the entire Church *sui iuris*. During the VI Synod (1998) of the Syro-Malabar Church, the Apostolic Administrator reconstituted the existing commissions and constituted a new one, namely the Commission for the Clergy and the

Institutes of Consecrated Life. Three bishops were appointed as the members of this commission with one of them as its chairman.³⁶

This commission initiated dialogues with the Major Superiors and the Executive Members of SMRC, etc. As a result of its efforts, in 2009, the commission conducted three dialogue sessions with representatives of the eparchial and religious priests at the major archiepiscopal curia.³⁷

During the second session of the XVIII (2010) Synod, with the president and vice-president of SMRC present, it was suggested to either establish a new major archiepiscopal commission for religious or appoint a second secretary for them within the present commission.³⁸ The synod asked the chairman to propose a structure for Syro-Malabar religious at the next synod.³⁹ In the first session of the XIX Synod (2011), the chairman proposed dividing the Commission for Clergy and Institutes of Consecrated Life in order to establish a Commission for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. During the third session of the XIX Synod, the major archbishop constituted the new commission.⁴⁰ Soon after, the commission formed a Religious Advisory Body (RAB).⁴¹

The stated aim of the commission is to create belongingness among members of the religious congregations to the ecclesial reality.⁴² The commission attempts to resolve various disputes and canonical issues concerning members and institutes of consecrated life, such as assessing the feasibility of dividing institutes into provinces, establishing regions, etc.⁴³ Every year, during the second session of the synod, the synod fathers listen to and discuss the report of the commission.

5. Dialogue between the Hierarchy and the Institutes of Consecrated Life in SMC

The Church is deeply aware of the importance of religious institutes to its life, its mission, and to the ecclesial reality. In 1978, the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for Consecrated Life

³⁶ *Synodal News*, no. 11 (March 1998) 23-24.

³⁷ *Synodal News*, vol. 18, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2010) 32.

³⁸ *Synodal News*, vol. 18, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2010) 86.

³⁹ *Synodal News*, vol. 18, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2010) 18, 104.

⁴⁰ *Synodal News*, vol. 19, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2011) 34, 92.

⁴¹ *Synodal News*, vol. 21, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2013) 79.

⁴² *Synodal News*, vol. 21, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2013) 80.

⁴³ *Synodal News*, vol. 21, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2013) 79.

and Societies of Apostolic Life issued a joint document aimed at improving the relationship between eparchial bishops and superiors of institutes of consecrated life. Entitled *Mutuae Relationes*, this document provided several principles of dialogue and communication intended to promote healthy relationships and effective mission. CCEO prescribed that "Patriarchs as well as local hierarchs are to promote meetings with superiors of religious at fixed times and whenever it appears opportune, in order that the apostolic works that the members exercise be carried out cooperatively and harmoniously" (CCEO c. 416). These meetings would foster communion and ensure that different institutes' apostolic works are carried out collaboratively.⁴⁴

A common complaint within the Syro-Malabar Church had been that ecclesiastical authority made decisions without properly consulting laity and religious, even when the decisions affected these groups.⁴⁵ Therefore, the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church made it a point for the hierarchy and major superiors of institutes of consecrated life to dialogue and collaborate constantly.

On 20 May 1993, after Cardinal Antony Padiyara was installed as major archbishop, the Syro-Malabar synod of bishops held its first meeting. This session, presided over by Mar Abraham Kattumana as pontifical delegate, ended on 25 May 1993. Soon after, on 15 July 1993, the major superiors and representatives of the institutes of consecrated life gathered under the chairmanship of the pontifical delegate. That meeting decided to form a permanent body to represent all institutes of consecrated life before the major archbishop.⁴⁶ As a result, a group of 15 male and female major superiors was constituted as the Major Archiepiscopal Committee for the Institutes of Consecrated Life. This committee first met on 21 September 1993 under the chairmanship of the pontifical delegate,⁴⁷ then again on 07 February 1994 and 23 December 1994. The first meeting fixed the term of office for committee members at three years and elected a member as convener of the committee. The third meeting elected representatives from the

⁴⁴ Jobe Abbass, *The Consecrated Life: A Comparative Commentary of the Eastern and Latin Codes*, St. Paul University, Ottawa, 2008, 43.

⁴⁵ *Synodal News*, no. 2 (February 1994) 20-21.

⁴⁶ *Synodal News*, no. 1 (August 1993) 42; *Synodal News*, no. 2 (February 1994) 20-21.

⁴⁷ *Synodal News*, no. 2 (February 1994) 22-23; *Synodal News*, no. 5 (April 1995) 18-19.

institutes of consecrated life to the Major Archiepiscopal Finance Council.⁴⁸

Thereafter, dialogue between the Syro-Malabar religious and hierarchy took place within the Syro-Malabar Religious Conference (SMRC) and the synod of bishops. The VI Synod (1988) decided to send the draft of the particular law on religious and secular institutes to the SMRC for its comments.⁴⁹

At the invitation of the major archbishop, the SMRC executive members attended a portion of the first assembly of the fourth Synod of Bishops (28 October - 15 November 1996). The members met the synod fathers on 11 November 1996, at which time the SMRC president presented the SMRC general body's suggestions about the canonical status of SMRC, evangelization, participation in pastoral care, etc. It had already submitted the draft of the statutes of SMRC to the synod. As a preliminary step towards granting canonical status to the SMRC, the permanent synod was authorized to study the statutes and discuss the findings with the SMRC. The president of the major archiepiscopal tribunal was entrusted to study the proposed statutes and submit the observations to the synod.⁵⁰

The VI Synod (1998) decided to dialogue with the SMRC to decide on the SMRC's request to celebrate *Holy Qurbana* on Sundays in all churches attached to houses of institutes of consecrated life and in regard to other related issues.⁵¹

The VIII Synod (2000), held from 30 October to 11 November 2000, discussed the draft of the SMRC statutes. The SMRC president presented the draft and also attended the discussion. The synodal members proposed modifying the draft in a way that would allow all Syro-Malabar institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life to be represented in SMRC. Accordingly, there was also a proposal to change the name of SMRC to that effect. The president was asked to redraft the statutes based on the suggestions of the synod fathers and of the experts on behalf of the major archbishop. The synod decided

⁴⁸ *Synodal News*, no. 5 (April 1995) 20-21.

⁴⁹ *Synodal News*, no. 11 (March 1998) 17.

⁵⁰ *Synodal News*, no. 9 (February 1997) 22-23.

⁵¹ *Synodal News*, no. 11 (March 1998) 29.

that the major archbishop may approve the revised statutes in consultation with the permanent synod.⁵²

The XII Synod (2004), 1-13 November 2004, proposed a dialogue with the SMRC. It constituted a committee of synodal members to propose the points for dialogue. The executive members were invited for synodal discussions on topics, including the need for dialogue on the diocesan level, permission from the eparchial bishop before starting religious institutions, unity of parish and the religious house, role and the mode of functioning of educational institutions, etc. There was a suggestion to have a dialogue with all the major superiors in future. It was agreed to have such a dialogue in the following session of the synod and that the superior generals of all the religious congregations and two representatives from the provincials of major congregations were to be invited.⁵³

In accordance with the above decision, during the XIII Synod (22 August - 3 September 2005), a dialogue between the synod fathers and major superiors took place on 27 August. The 09 March 2005 joint meeting of the synodal committee and SMRC executive members had chosen the topics: education, pastoral care, and formation of religious. The Commission for the Clergy and Institutes of Consecrated Life was entrusted with following up on the dialogue with the SMRC.⁵⁴

Following an extended lapse in dialogue, a member of the XVIII Synod (2010) raised the issue of the synod meeting with the major superiors or at least the officials of the SMRC. The synod decided that this meeting could be done occasionally either by the full synod or, if the full synod lacked time, by the permanent synod.⁵⁵ In the second session of the XVIII Synod, at the invitation of the Commission for Clergy and Institutes of Consecrated Life the SMRC president and the vice-president came to the synod and had discussion on: religious and evangelization, ongoing formation of the religious, better relationship between the diocesan priests and the religious.⁵⁶

As noted above, in 2011, the major archbishop constituted a separate Commission for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. On 08 January 2012, this commission held a dialogue

⁵² *Synodal News*, vol. 8, no. 2 (December 2000) 22-23.

⁵³ *Synodal News*, vol. 12, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2004) 36-37.

⁵⁴ *Synodal News*, vol. 13, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2005) 29-33, 106-107.

⁵⁵ *Synodal News*, vol. 18, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2010) 34.

⁵⁶ *Synodal News*, vol. 18, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2010) 83.

with all Syro-Malabar major superiors and the major archbishop. The religious expressed their satisfaction with the commission and acknowledged that its establishment had recognized the place of religious in the Church.⁵⁷ The following points came up in this dialogue:

1. The Syro-Malabar Church should implement the CBCI Gender policy in our parishes and institutions.
2. We should give awareness programs in the seminaries regarding the importance of ministry of the religious in the Church.
3. In the parishes and institutions we should develop participatory ministry, also involving the religious in the planning and decision making process.
4. The religious have to ensure their active participation in the parish *prathinidhiyogam*.
5. We have to take seriously the suggestions of the document of CBCI, Mutual Relations.
6. We have to consider the suggestions of Sr. Theodesia CSN, Secretary to SMRC, which she presented in the Synod.
7. The Bishops should find time to listen to the religious, as we do during the KCBC Meeting.
8. There should be mention of the religious in the prayers of the Qurbana.
9. Appropriate remuneration has to be given to the religious.
10. The religious working for the diocesan institutions should be given free days for their recollection and retreats.
11. See that necessary contracts are made when religious come for service in the parishes.
12. Religious brothers should be given involvement in parish activities.⁵⁸

In the first session of the XXI Synod (2013), the synod met with the executive council of SMRC and the Religious Advisory Body of the Commission for the Institutes of Consecrated Life to discuss the draft guidelines for coordinating the ministry and activities of Syro-Malabar religious institutes and societies in other churches *sui iuris*.⁵⁹ Before the second session of the synod, in order to increase ecclesial communion between religious and with the hierarchy, the major archbishop met with 14 groups of major superiors to discuss various issues affecting them.⁶⁰

In the second session of the XXII Synod (2014), on 28 August 2014, the synod devoted its afternoon sittings to dialogue with the major

⁵⁷ *Synodal News*, vol. 20, nos. 1-3 (December 2012) 26.

⁵⁸ *Synodal News*, vol. 20, nos. 1-3 (December 2012) 26-28.

⁵⁹ *Synodal News*, vol. 21, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2013) 26-27.

⁶⁰ *Synodal News*, vol. 21, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2013) 64-65.

superiors of religious congregations in the SMC. The following suggestions were made during the meeting:

1. In every diocese a unit of SMRC shall be established;
2. There should be coordination between the Major Archiepiscopal / Eparchial Commissions and Commissions of the Religious Congregations;
3. A pastoral letter shall be written during the Year of the Consecrated Life;
4. It shall be a time for reconciliation and dialogue;
5. There should be a common educational policy;
6. There should be a parish pastoral policy for the religious;
7. Religious life shall be included in the curriculum of the major seminaries and
8. Year of the Consecrated is an occasion to pray and to strive for the sanctification of the Church.⁶¹

The synod spent a day dialoguing with major superiors of the institutes of consecrated life in the second session of the XXIII Synod (2015). The topics of dialogue were: the relationship between religious and hierarchy, challenges faced by women religious, and the future of religious vocations. The meeting called for greater understanding and unity at all levels.⁶² The same session of the synod permitted the Commission for Institutes of Consecrated life to amend the SMRC statutes as necessary to facilitate the formation of SMRC eparchial units.⁶³

In the second session of the XIV Synod (2016), the secretary of the Commission for Institutes of Consecrated Life reported that a gap exists between the hierarchy and the religious. The secretary asked the synod to consider the views expressed by SMRC, and the synod accepted this request. To this end, the synod directed the commission chairman to interact with the major superiors' representatives to understand their concerns and present their suggestions in the next session of the synod.⁶⁴ During the second session of the XXV Synod (2017), the synod fathers met with the Syro-Malabar major superiors of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life. A total of 170 major superiors and other representatives participated.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Synodal News*, vol. 22, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2014) 83.

⁶² *Synodal News*, vol. 23, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2015) 63-64.

⁶³ *Synodal News*, vol. 23 nos. 1 & 2 (December 2015) 64,

⁶⁴ *Synodal News*, vol. 24, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2016) 91.

⁶⁵ *Synodal News*, vol. 25, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2017) 70-71

6. Directives and Guidelines Enacted by the Synod of SMC Related to Institutes of Consecrated Life

6.1. Directives on Pastoral Collaboration with the Religious

In the Syro-Malabar Church, members of institutes of consecrated life are very much involved in parish life and pastoral activities, such as catechetical instruction, faith formation of children and adults, health care, youth guidance, counseling, and care for the poor. Therefore, the collaboration of religious in pastoral activities was a serious matter of discussion between the religious and the synod of bishops.

In the 11 November 1996 meeting of the SMRC executive body and the synod, the SMRC's president presented the suggestions of its general body on the participation of clerical institutes in parish pastoral care. The permanent synod was authorized to address these issues and suggest means for effective cooperation between the eparchial bishop and religious institutes. The permanent synod entrusted this task to a committee of two members of the synod.⁶⁶

This episcopal committee talked to the SMRC representatives about the pastoral activities of religious in parishes. Since the SMRC desired to meet the entire synod, during the V Synod (09-21 June 1997), the SMRC executive body was invited to dialogue with the synod on 16 June 1997. As a result of the dialogue, the synod decided to form a committee to study the matter and propose some general guidelines for religious collaborating in parish pastoral work. The committee, to be constituted by the permanent synod, would consist of representatives of the bishops, religious, and parish priests.⁶⁷

In the First Session of VI Synod (1998), an episcopal member of the above committee presented its proposals. The synod accepted these proposals and formulated norms for implementing them. Three more bishops were appointed to the committee, and the synod asked the apostolic administrator to appoint two more priests from the eparchial clergy and five to ten religious, both male and female, to the committee. It was also decided that the norms prepared by the committee would be discussed with the representatives of the religious before finalizing them.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Synodal News*, vol. 7, nos. 1 & 3 (December 1999) 22-23.

⁶⁷ *Synodal News*, no. 10 (August 1997) 23-24.

⁶⁸ *Synodal News*, no. 11 (March 1998) 22-23.

The committee had its meeting on 11 November 1999. In the VII Synod (1999) of the Bishops of SMC, held during 15-20 November 1999, the convener of the committee for pastoral collaboration with religious, presented the suggestions of the meeting of the committee held on 11 November 1999. The synod discussed the suggestions and approved them as follows:

- 1) As far as possible the whole community of the parish, including the religious should participate in the Divine Liturgy on Sunday in the parish church itself. However, when it is found necessary and feasible, parishes could be erected attached to the houses of clerical religious. When found necessary Sunday Liturgy could be permitted to be celebrated in the churches of the religious under the direction of the parish priest. In such circumstances, in view of better coordination of pastoral care, it is advisable that the parish priest celebrates the Sunday Liturgy occasionally in those churches. The superior should in agreement with the parish priest designate a priest to assist the parish priest in the pastoral care of the faithful. The priest designated to be in charge of the church should see that all communications from the diocese as well as from the parish are announced in the church.
- 2) At the request of the major superior resident chaplains may be appointed by the eparchial bishop.
- 3) Due regard is to be given to the desire of the religious that courses by the dioceses for their candidates be conducted after their novitiate. Those Congregations who desire to have the courses conducted in common may send the novices to the programmes organized by the dioceses.
- 4) The religious are to be reminded of the *CCEO* c. 437 §2 which says that "written permission of the eparchial bishop is required in the case of any monastery for the construction and opening of schools, guest houses, or similar buildings distinct from the monastery" and *CCEO* c. 509 §2 which says that the matters mentioned in canon 437 §2 shall apply also to houses of orders and congregations.⁶⁹

The synod decided that these directives on pastoral collaboration should be sent to the SMRC and to all eparchies, directing that they be published in the eparchial bulletins. It was also decided that a brief

⁶⁹ *Synodal News*, vol. 7, nos. 1 & 2 (December 1999) 64-65.

preamble explaining the background of the guidelines would accompany their publication.⁷⁰

During the second session of the XVIII (2010) Synod, the synod fathers met with the president and the vice-president of SMRC. During the meeting, the vice-president presented 33 SMRC proposals regarding mutual collaboration of priests and religious in dioceses. The bishops accepted the main thrust of these principles.⁷¹ The practical suggestions that emerged during this dialogue were the following:

1. The role of the chaplains of the religious could be emphasized in the pastoral service of the priests.
2. In small parishes religious sisters may have to collaborate in all the parish activities.
3. The religious should be given just allowances for the particular works entrusted to them.
4. There could be consultation meetings of the Syro-Malabar Proto-Syncelli and Syncelli together with the representatives of the religious in the Syro-Malabar Church.
5. There could be a separate Major Archiepiscopal commission for the religious or the present commission could work with two separate secretaries.
6. Due recognition must be given to religious brothers even in addressing them in public meetings.
7. The idea of appointing sisters with pastoral responsibilities and with due remuneration could be put into practice.
8. The synod may have to take up certain particular issues creating tensions in the Church for giving guidance and solutions for them.⁷²

The second session of the XXV Synod (2017) asked the Commission for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to identify areas where eparchial priests and consecrated women and men work together, then jointly discuss these in order to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between the priests and religious.⁷³

6.2. Guidelines Regarding Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

The first session of the VI Synod (1998) approved the Guidelines Regarding Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. According to these guidelines, "religious brothers who have made their final profession" (3.b.), and "the superior or assistant superior of a convent

⁷⁰ *Synodal News*, vol. 7, nos. 1 & 2 (December 1999) 65.

⁷¹ *Synodal News*, vol. 18, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2010) 83-86.

⁷² *Synodal News*, vol. 18, nos. 1 & 2 (December 2010) 83-86.

⁷³ *Synodal News*, vol. 25 (December 2017) 107.

or any religious sister who has made her final profession" (3.c.) may be commissioned as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. The guidelines demanded that they "must be presented by the parish priest and commissioned by the eparchial bishop."⁷⁴

6.3. Guidelines for the Educational Activities of the Church

As noted above, a dialogue between the synodal fathers and major superiors took place on 27 August 2005 during the XIII Synod. For the preparation of this dialogue, the XII Synod appointed a Bishops' Committee of 3 bishops to formulate discussion points. The first topic of discussion was education. After the presentation of the papers and general discussion, five main points were summed up: written permission of the local hierarch in order to start educational institutions; preservation of Christian atmosphere in the educational institutions; need to motivate the teachers for committed service and for value education; to have a policy statement for all institutions regarding admission of students, appointment of the staff, reservation of the seats for the poor and dalits etc; to have a committee on the diocesan level comprising the diocesan authorities and representatives of religious and the laity to guarantee the right functioning of all the educational institutions.⁷⁵ A committee was nominated consisting of two episcopal members and three representatives of religious to formulate the proposals emerged from the dialogue. This committee prepared nine guidelines and they were presented in the XIII Synod itself by one of the episcopal members of the committee. The synod approved them with certain modifications.⁷⁶ It requested that the major archbishop send them to the bishops and major superiors, with the instruction that these guidelines be strictly followed in the educational institutions they govern.⁷⁷

On 08 September 2005 the major archbishop sent the bishops and major superiors these Directives on Educational Institutions. In his letter of implementation (Prot. No. 661/2005), he wrote:

We had a very useful dialogue between the Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church and the Superior Generals and some selected Provincial Superiors of Syro-Malabar Religious Conference on 27 August 2005... In the light of the discussions the following generally

⁷⁴ *Synodal News*, vol. 11 (March 1998) 35.

⁷⁵ *Synodal News*, vol. 13 (December 2005) 29-33.

⁷⁶ *Synodal News*, vol. 13 (December 2005) 47-48.

⁷⁷ *Synodal News*, vol. 13 (December 2005) 55.

agreed guidelines on our Apostolate of education were drawn up. The Synod of Bishops considered this document and passed the following resolution, 'To request the Major Archbishop to send to the Bishops and the Major superiors the guidelines for the educational activities of the Church, with the instruction that these guidelines are to be strictly followed in the educational institutions managed by them.'⁷⁸

The text of these directives in Malayalam was published in the *Synodal News*.⁷⁹

6.4. Guidelines for Raising a Religious Congregation to the Major Archiepiscopal Status

As seen above, CCEO c. 506 §3 gives the general norm for raising a religious congregation of eparchial right to patriarchal right. Based on this norm, the 12 September 2008 meeting of the permanent synod approved guidelines for raising a religious congregation to major archiepiscopal status and for granting a congregation a *nihil obstat* for elevation to pontifical status.⁸⁰ These guidelines were published in the *Synodal News*.

The guidelines for raising a congregation to major archiepiscopal status require at least 150 professed members for congregations of sisters, 100 for clerical congregations, and 75 for congregations of religious brothers. The majority of the professed members should be perpetually professed. Additionally, the congregation must show a satisfactory increase in vocations and religious professions during the previous ten years (A). The second requirement is that the number of houses should be at least 35, 25, and 20 respectively (B). The third requirement is that the number of diocese other than the diocese of origin, in which the congregation is engaged in the apostolate should be at least 10, 8, and 5 (C). The fourth requisite is that there should be at least 10, 8, and 5 canonically erected communities respectively in the dioceses other than the diocese of origin (D). The congregation should have: existence for at least 25 years (E). At least one canonical house of formation in a Syro-Malabar eparchy (F). At least 10 members with secular degrees (G); at least 10 members with ecclesiastical degrees (H). And sufficient financial stability (I). It is demanded that the

⁷⁸ *Synodal News*, vol. 13 (December 2005) 89.

⁷⁹ *Synodal News*, vol. 13 (December 2005) 90-93.

⁸⁰ *Synodal News*, vol. 13 (November 2008) 81.

request be endorsed by all bishops where the congregation is engaged in the apostolate. The congregations are not to collect the recommendations of the bishops, but rather to ask the bishops to send their recommendations to the major archbishop (J).⁸¹

According to the guidelines for granting the *nihil obstat* for pontifical status, a religious congregation should have completed at least 10 years as a major archiepiscopal congregation. The congregation should also exhibit satisfactory growth in the same areas the guidelines specify for elevation to major archiepiscopal status.⁸²

6.5. Guidelines for the Syro-Malabar Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life who have Apostolate in other Churches *Sui Iuris*

The sons and daughters of the Syro-Malabar Church provide great service in almost all Latin dioceses in India and many abroad. The synod of bishops of the SMC judged that it would be better for this ministry to be more in tune with the spirit and heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church.⁸³ In this context, these guidelines were enacted by the Synod. In the XVII Synod (2009), during the discussion on guidelines for the pastoral care of migrants, it was suggested that Syro-Malabar religious of Syro-Malabar Church be required to inform the major archbishop before they begin apostolates in Latin dioceses (cf. *CCEO* c. 193). The synod also asked the major archbishop to provide guidelines for religious undertaking such apostolates. The synod entrusted the preparation of these guidelines to the Commission for Evangelization and Pastoral care of the Migrants.⁸⁴

The third session of the XIX Synod (2011) asked the Commission for Evangelization and Pastoral Care of the Migrants and the Commission for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to dialogue with the SMRC representatives and, in light of the outcome of the discussion, to present a modified draft of the "Guidelines for the Religious working in other *sui iuris* Churches" to the following synod. The chairman of the Commission for Institutes of Consecrated Life

⁸¹ *Synodal News*, vol. 13 (November 2008) 81-82.

⁸² *Synodal News*, vol. 13 (November 2008) 81-83.

⁸³ George Cardinal Alencherry, Major Archbishop, "Circular Letter after XXI Synod, Session I," 1 March 2013, *Synodal News*, vol. 21 (December 2013) 128.

⁸⁴ *Synodal News*, vol. 17, nos. 1 & 2 (November 2009) 34.

was made as the convener of it.⁸⁵ The draft of these guidelines was sent to the SMRC.

The synod fathers met with the SMRC executive council and the Religious Advisory Body of the Commission for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life during the first session of the XXI Synod of SMC (2013). At that time, the religious presented their observations, suggestions and reservations about some clauses in the guidelines, such as: the imposing mandatory consultation with the Major Archbishop before houses are established in the other Churches *sui iuris*; the requirement to follow the liturgical traditions of the Syro-Malabar Church in the houses in the Latin Diocese.⁸⁶ The draft was modified in the light of these discussions.⁸⁷ However, in the second session of the XXI Synod (2013), the chairman of the Commission for the Institutes of Consecrated Life (convener) informed the synod that the major superiors appeared reluctant to accept these guidelines. The synod suggested continuing the dialogue with the religious to create a better rapport and keeping the guidelines in abeyance for the time being.⁸⁸ In the second session of XXII Synod (2014) the chairman presented the final draft of these guidelines and the synod approved them.⁸⁹ On 03 October 2014, the major archbishop issued a decree promulgating the "Guidelines for the Syro-Malabar Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life who have Apostolate in Other *Sui Iuris* Churches."⁹⁰ Besides a long "Preamble," there are 26 directives in these "Guidelines" published in *Synodal News*.⁹¹

The "Preamble" of the Guidelines states, "All these Institutes form part of the Syro-Malabar Church. They are, therefore, considered Institutes of the Syro-Malabar Church and are bound by these Guidelines, without prejudice to their rights and privileges they enjoy by virtue of their juridical status, especially in matters of their internal governance."⁹² Then it says,

⁸⁵ *Synodal News*, vol. 19, nos. 1-3 (December 2011) 113.

⁸⁶ *Synodal News*, vol. 21 (December 2013) 28.

⁸⁷ *Synodal News*, vol. 21 (December 2013) 28.

⁸⁸ *Synodal News*, vol. 21 (December 2013) 65.

⁸⁹ *Synodal News*, vol. 22 (December 2014) 84, 106.

⁹⁰ *Synodal News*, vol. 22 (December 2014) 201-202.

⁹¹ *Synodal News*, vol. 22 (December 2014) 203-211

⁹² *Synodal News*, vol. 22 (December 2014) 203

Over the years, the missionary enterprise of the Syro-Malabar religious institutes has been slowly extended to other *sui iuris* Churches, especially to the Latin and the Syro-Malankara Churches. This may be seen as a phase of their natural growth and reach-out to the universal Church and an expression of their prophetic initiative and zeal for doing various kinds of apostolates beyond the boundaries of the Syro-Malabar Church to share the fruits of their charisms with the universal Church.

Before the Syror-Malabar Church was erected as a Major Archiepiscopal Church *sui iuris*, these services of the religious institutes in other Churches *sui iuris* were not coordinated at a common level. Each religious institute made its own agreement with the concerned local ordinary of the Latin or other Churches *sui iuris*, both inside and outside India, as per the provisions of the Canon Law. However, due to various factors, the ecclesiological and canonical principles have often been compromised and the Syro-Malabar Church in general and the religious institutes in particular incurred losses or difficulties on many fronts. In some instances the good mutual relationship with the concerned local ordinary also suffered.

Ever since the Syro-Malabar Church was erected as a Major Archiepiscopal Church, there have been some references to the Major Archbishop and the Synod for intervening in issues, especially of violation of agreement or denial of justice, involving a Syro-Malabar religious institute and the local Latin Ordinary. Unfortunately, the major archiepiscopal authority has not been in a position to do much effectively because of the restrictive clauses in the agreements or because the agreements themselves were null and void according to Canon Law.

Lately candidates from other Churches *sui iuris*, particularly the Latin Church, have been joining the Syro-Malabar Institutes, both in India and outside India. A number of Syro-Malabar Institutes already have finally professed members of this category, albeit these Institutes do not have any Latin province or region. In some Institutes they form the major part of the members of certain provinces. This demands the erection of Latin provinces in these institutes just as the Latin Institutes have erected their Syro-Malabar Provinces or regions. A Syro-Malabar Province or region, the major part of whose members are from the Latin Church, whose area of ministry is the Latin Church and who follow the Latin liturgical

practices, loses its Syro-Malabar nature even though canonically it might be of Syro-Malabar rite. It is in this context that the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church deliberated on the need to formulate a set of guidelines for avoiding such eventualities and for making the missionary and pastoral undertakings of the religious institutes more effective, and ecclesialogically and canonically flawless. Moreover, it is more in consonance with the role of the major archbishop as the “father and head” of the Church to supervise the activities in the Church.

These Guidelines in no way intend to curb the legitimate freedom of the religious institutes but only to regulate, by coordinating their activities for the common good of the Church and of the institutes themselves. Similarly, these Guidelines concern the activities of the religious institutes, only when they take up ministry or apostolate in Churches other than Syro-Malabar Church.⁹³

7. Decisions and Acts of the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church Concerning Institutes of Consecrated Life

7.1. Extension of the Period of Juniorate and the Revision of *CCEO*

The first session of the XIX Synod (2010) endorsed the SMRC request to extend the term of juniorate from six years to nine, in exceptional cases, getting dispensation from *CCEO* c. 526 §2, for the favorable consideration of the Holy See.⁹⁴

In 2012, the second session of XX Synod (2012) proposed these revisions to *CCEO*: a. making the interstice between first and final religious profession similar to that of the Latin Code, and b. including specifications for the pastoral ministry of religious in line with those in *CIC*.⁹⁵

7.2. Promotion of Vocation to Religious Brotherhood

The congregations of religious brothers brought to the notice of the synod the crisis they are undergoing in the Church. A grave problem presented by them was that some of the clerical congregations and eparchies indiscriminately recruit religious brothers as their candidates to priesthood.⁹⁶ Another issue already brought by these

⁹³ *Synodal News*, vol. 22 (December 2014) 204-206.

⁹⁴ *Synodal News*, vol. 19, nos. 1-3 (December 2011) 46.

⁹⁵ *Synodal News*, vol. 20, nos. 1-3 (December 2012) 59.

⁹⁶ *Synodal News*, vol. 22 (December 2014) 79.

congregations was that they are not getting good candidates because of the prejudice against them.⁹⁷ Therefore, in his circular issued after the first session of XXI Synod (2013) the major archbishop wrote:

"Vocation to Religious Brotherhood is very important in the Church. The Community of Religious Brothers is facing crisis due to lack of vocations and the absence of sufficient encouragement. Therefore we have to encourage vocations to Religious Brotherhood. The Synod is thinking about how the Religious Brotherhood could actively involve themselves in the mission work of the Church and her liturgical celebrations."⁹⁸

In the first session of the XXII Synod (2014), the Central Liturgical Committee proposed that religious brothers shall be given important roles in the administration of the Church (e.g. the finance officer), principals of Sunday School, extra ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, etc. However, they may not be assigned precise liturgical roles which are reserved for the ordained ministers.⁹⁹

In its second session, the XXII Synod (2014) discussed on the promotion of vocations to religious brotherhood. It was pointed out that "although anyone has the right to discern his vocation, the Church has to promote the growth of vocations to Religious Brotherhood which in itself is a divine call." It was suggested that in the year for the consecrated life, efforts shall be made to promote vocations to consecrated life, especially to religious brotherhood; and that hereafter the bishop be careful in recruiting candidates from religious brothers.¹⁰⁰

7.3. Recognition for the Consecrated Virgins in the Syro-Malabar Church

The second session of the XXIII Synod (2015) examined the request presented to the synod by the animator-priest of the Society of Marian Singles for official recognition for the consecrated virgins in the SMC. The bishops highlighted the importance of the consecrated virgins in the life of the Church and its provision in the canon law. However, it

⁹⁷ *Synodal News*, vol. 21 (December 2013) 28-30.

⁹⁸ George Cardinal Alencherry, Major Archbishop, "Circular Letter after XXI Synod, Session I," 1 March 2013, *Synodal News*, vol. 21 (December 2013) 144.

⁹⁹ *Synodal News*, vol. 22 (December 2014) 31.

¹⁰⁰ *Synodal News*, vol. 22 (December 2014) 79.

was agreed that there should be clarity regarding the members who want to become consecrated virgins in the society and that official recognition can be given only after drafting a bye-law for them. It is also pointed out that the local hierarch is to take the initiative in this regard. The synod constituted an episcopal committee to study the matter and present the report.¹⁰¹ In the first session of the XXIV Synod (2016) the convener of the episcopal committee presented a draft on the nature, purpose and requirements for officially recognizing consecrated virgins in the Syro-Malabar Church. The synod accepted in principle the proposals and requested the committee to formulate a more precise by-law and present in the following Synod.¹⁰²

7.4. Admission of Candidates from Other Institutes

In its second session, the XXIII Synod (2015) requested that, before admitting seminarians from other congregations and dioceses, bishops and major superiors first obtain the necessary recommendation letters from the respective seminary rectors, major superiors (religious candidates) and bishops (diocesan candidates).¹⁰³

7.5. Formation of Lay Association Attached to a Religious Institute

In the context of the request from the Society of Christu Dasi Sisters, regarding the formulation of a lay association of their supporters, the second session of the XXIII Synod (2015) discussed the matter and decided to leave the matter to the proper hierarchs to decide whether they should permit starting Lay Associations by religious Congregations in their eparchies.¹⁰⁴

7.6. Legal Status of Secular Franciscan Order (SFO)

There was the discussion in the first session of the XXIV (2016) Synod on the request for legal status of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) in the Syro-Malabar Church submitted by the four Franciscan Provincial Ministers. The synod advised the applicants to prepare with the help of legal experts, statutes for Syro-Malabar units of SFO and present it to the competent authorities in Rome for approval with the recommendation of the Major Archbishop.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ *Synodal News*, vol. 23 (December 2015) 64-65; 90.

¹⁰² *Synodal News*, vol. 24 (December 2016) 25.

¹⁰³ *Synodal News*, vol. 23 (December 2015) 89.

¹⁰⁴ *Synodal News*, vol. 23 (December 2015) 65.

¹⁰⁵ *Synodal News*, vol. 24 (December 2016) 25.

7.7. Revision of the *Mutuae Relationes*

Meeting with major superiors on 29 November 2013, Pope Francis urged reforming the document, *Mutuae Relationes* (Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church) of 1978. Thereafter, questions were sent to the bishops and major superiors for its revision and implementation. In the second session of the XXIV Synod (2016) the major archbishop reminded the bishops of the circular sent to them requesting suggestions for the revision of *Mutuae Relationes*. The synod entrusted to an episcopal committee to compile suggestions of the bishops and for its revision and to present them to the major archbishop.¹⁰⁶

7.8. Proposal to Confer Title of "Doctor of the Church" on St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara

The synod had some discussions for declaring St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara as the "Father of the Syro-Malabar Church." In the second session of the XXIV Synod (2016), the committee which was entrusted to study on the criteria for declaring a saint 'Father of the Church' in the Syro-Malabar Church *sui iuris* and exploring the possibility of conferring the title on St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, presented their study before the synod. The synod decided to consider it in the next session.¹⁰⁷ In the second session of XXV Synod (2017), the committee informed the synod that the major superiors of CMI and CMC Congregations have requested some more time to come up with more scientific and theological studies clearly highlighting the unique theological contributions of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara.¹⁰⁸

7.9. Pastoral Letters of the Major Archbishop

Pope Francis announced a 'Year Dedicated to Consecrated Life' in the Catholic Church from 30 November 2014 to 02 February 2016. As per the suggestion of the meeting of the synod of bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church with the major superiors of institutes of consecrated life on 28 August 2014, the major archbishop wrote a pastoral letter for the entire Syro-Malabar Church presenting reflections on consecrated life.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ *Synodal News*, vol. 24 (December 2016) 59; 88.

¹⁰⁷ *Synodal News*, vol. 24 (December 2016) 55.

¹⁰⁸ *Synodal News*, vol. 25 (December 2017) 72.

¹⁰⁹ *Synodal News*, vol. 22 (December 2014) 136-139

In this pastoral letter, the major archbishop wrote, "Priests and those who are engaged in the faith-formation programmes have to encourage the people who opt for religious life and instruct the young about the special nature of religious vocations. Parents by nurturing the young in Christian virtues have to promote the vocations to religious life. Also the religious have to be successful in attracting the young to the religious way of life through their own personal examples."¹¹⁰

On 23 November 2014, two children of Syro-Malabar Church and pioneers of religious life in this Church, Blessed Chavara Kuriakose Elias and Bl. Euphrasia were raised to the glory of the altar by solemn canonization ceremony by Pope Francis at Vatican. On this occasion, the major archbishop wrote a pastoral letter to the entire Syro-Malabar Church. In this pastoral letter, the major archbishop wrote:

"One of the greatest contributions of the Syro-Malabar Church to the Church in India is the active presence of the Religious of this Church in the field of Missionary Apostolate. It is to be remembered with gratitude that Blessed Chavara is also one of the founding fathers of the Indigenous Religious Congregations in India. Drawing inspiration from Blessed Chavara, there are now more than 50 different Religious Congregations serving in the various fields of apostolate in the Syro-Malabar Church."¹¹¹

8. The Challenges Encountered by the Religious Institutes in the Syro-Malabar Church

8.1. The Struggle in the Promotion of Vocation

Religious vocations are a great contribution of the Syro-Malabar Church to the Universal Church. However, Syro-Malabar religious institutes now face a severe quantitative and qualitative decline in vocations.¹¹² Materialism, broken families, and lack of challenge and lack of witness from the part of the religious are the causes for the negative impact on the vocation to the consecrated life.

Freedom to recruit candidates from the eparchies is another issue in this regard. CCEO c. 411 and article 87 of the Code of Particular Law of the Syro-Malabar Church urge consecrated life to be promoted by all. However, religious remain discriminated against in promoting

¹¹⁰ *Synodal News*, vol. 25 (December 2017) 139.

¹¹¹ *Synodal News*, vol. 22 (December 2014) 126-127.

¹¹² *Synodal News*, vol. 21 (December 2013) 65.

vocations. They are often denied just and equitable opportunities to recruit vocations by eparchial authorities and clergy. Thus, there should be a consensus on cooperation between the diocesan and religious vocation promoters. The latter must be given free access to the parishes and schools, as well as the full cooperation of parish priests.

8.2. The Struggle that goes on among the Active Religious Institutes which have their own Apostolates not being Supported by the CCEO

Religious institutes run many apostolates according to their charism but are not supported by CCEO or the Code of Particular Law of the Syro-Malabar Church. At the same time, almost 11 canons of CIC give clear norms for various apostolates. The lack of clarity in CCEO creates conflict between the religious institutes and hierarchies of the Eastern Churches.

8.3. Lack of Respect to the Charisms of the Religious Institutes

The charisms of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, which are needed in the Church, must be respected and fostered. However, in practice, this state of life, which is co-essential to the life of Church, is being neglected or not properly acknowledged. This phenomenon is seen in the life of the Syro-Malabar Church too.

The Syro-Malabar Church must be more aware of vocations to consecrated life and the charisms that underlie the diverse missionary activities undertaken by religious institutes. The Church has to facilitate, awaken and articulate the diversity of charisms of religious to play their role in the Church and world for liberation of all mankind as sign of God's reign of peace and justice.¹¹³

The Church's hierarchy has the right to discern and regulate the charism of religious life. At the same time, the hierarchy has a responsibility to respect the proper nature of that charism and its various manifestations, allowing each institute to express its own personality within the wider communion of the Church.¹¹⁴ For this,

¹¹³ Siby Varikaplamthadathil, "The Charism of Religious Institutes in Relation to Syro-Malabar Church," in Francis Eluvathingal (ed.), *Syro-Malabar Church Since the Eastern Code*, Mary Matha Publications, Trichur, 2003, 205-218, 218.

¹¹⁴ Koluthara, "The Role of an Eparchial Bishop in Relation to Religious of the Syro-Malabar Church," 172.

mutual consultation and dialogue have to be promoted between the religious and the eparchial bishops and patriarchs.

Religious institutes, which have a great responsibility for their internal governance, must guard against undue interference from the hierarchy. For example, the formation of religious candidates is entirely a matter of internal governance. Religious superiors must carefully arrange their formation programme to safeguard the patrimony of their institute and protect against self-dissipation. Uniform formation programs, offered by eparchial pastoral centers to various institutes with different charisms, tends to destroy the diversity and specific character and purpose for which the Holy Spirit has gifted these institutes to the local Church. Ecclesiastical authorities, especially the hierarchy and secular clergy, should be aware of the rightful autonomy of the religious institutes especially in formation. Eparchial bishops also have to respect, promote and preserve the patrimony of a religious institute in their own eparchies. Moreover, the *CCEO* (c. 418 §2) cautions the eparchial bishops and patriarchs that they are not the internal superiors of the religious institutes. The different religious institutes, which live the charism of their institutes, enrich the life of the eparchies.¹¹⁵

There are age old complaints that women religious are not properly heard, they are dictated by bishops, and diocesan priest, exploited as cheap labour force, their charism and gifts are not taken seriously, they are not represented in the decision making bodies in the Church. Religious brothers and Secular institutes also have the feeling that their vocation is considered secondary to the vocation of clerics and religious in general.

8.4. Concerns in the Field of Members of Latin Church in the Institutes of SMC

Some Syro-Malabar religious institutes have a considerable number of Latin members, especially in North India, Africa, etc. When these institutes are demanded by the hierarchy to transfer to the jurisdiction of newly erected eparchies of Syro-Malabar Church, or when they are instructed to follow the liturgical traditions of the Syro-Malabar Church, they find it very difficult and not beneficial since most of the members in those houses are candidates of Latin origin or Syro-

¹¹⁵ Koluthara, "The Role of an Eparchial Bishop in relation to Religious of the Syro-Malabar Church," 201-202.

Malabarians who have been used to the Latin ecclesial traditions for a long time. In this context, the religious requested to review the guideline given by the Synod of Bishops of SMC to follow the liturgical traditions of the SMC in the houses in Latin dioceses.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, the religious institutes are advised to explore establishing Latin provinces in areas where members are mostly Latin.¹¹⁷

8.5. Lack of Understanding and Collaboration in the Ecclesiastical Life

Despite ongoing discussions between the interested groups, grave misunderstandings remain between hierarchy and major superiors and between diocesan clergy and consecrated persons. Frequently, it is complained that some parish priests treat lay religious in a humiliating manner.

It must be admitted that gender discrimination still exists in the church. Parish priests often disrespect women religious and make excessive demands of them. Religious also do not always receive just remuneration especially women religious serving in ecclesiastical institutions.

In the field of pastoral action, though guidelines exist, parish priests often exclude religious from pastoral planning and decision-making. Rather, pastors demand that religious implement the pastor's unilateral decisions. Moreover, some religious still complain of feeling stifled by the decisions of the hierarchy.

Conclusion

Religious life, given by God to the Church, is necessary for her mission. In the Syro-Malabar Church, different forms of consecrated life have existed since the beginning. Despite insufficient documentation of these early religious, some evidence shows consecrated life even at the beginning of the St. Thomas Christians in India.

Having analyzed the beginning of the first indigenous religious communities, CMI and CMC, this study attempted to present the life and apostolates of Syro-Malabar institutes of consecrated life over the last 25 years. From this analysis, it is clear that God has provided for

¹¹⁶ *Synodal News*, vol. 21 (December 2013) 28-29.

¹¹⁷ *Synodal News*, vol. 21 (December 2013) 29.

the needs of the Syro-Malabar Church with the gift of religious. Before acquiring major archiepiscopal status, the Syro-Malabar Church counted almost 45 institutes of consecrated life. In the last 25 years, 10 diocesan right institutes have been raised to major archiepiscopal status and about 10 new institutes have been newly erected.

While struggles remain between religious institutes and the hierarchy, both sides are striving to resolve difficulties. These institutes make valuable and appreciable contributions to the Church, and the synod of bishops and SMRC are jointly working to facilitate the functioning of religious within the Syro-Malabar Church. For its spiritual and temporal development Syro-Malabar Church is highly indebted to the contributions of the consecrated persons living and working in it.