

Editorial

**ELEVATION OF SMC TO MAJOR
ARCHIEPISCOPAL CHURCH (SMMAC) - 25 YEARS:
IMPACT, IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES**

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The year 1992 was a watershed moment in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church (SMC). On December 16th, Saint John Paul II's apostolic decree *Quae maiori* elevated the SMC to major archiepiscopal status, thereby transforming it into the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church (SMMAC). This year, the SMMAC celebrates the 25th anniversary of this event so fundamental to its life and growth.

Like any jubilee, this silver anniversary is an opportunity for grateful self-examination. Consequently, *Iustitia*, the Dharmaram Journal of Canon Law, has dedicated this special issue to historical, juridical and pastoral reflections on the past 25 years. This introspective approach, while proudly celebrating past accomplishments, also identifies areas that need improvement and makes critical suggestions to accomplish it.

In the centuries after St. Thomas arrived in India, the SMC gradually acquired many canonical institutions that contributed to her growth. These institutions enabled excellent ministry even outside her proper territory. However, when *CCEO* was promulgated in 1990, a fundamental structural deficiency prevented the SMC from being recognized as an Eastern "church *sui iuris*."

The 1990 Eastern code intended to divide all Eastern Catholic churches into four categories of churches *sui iuris*: patriarchal (cc. 55-150), major archiepiscopal (cc. 151-154), metropolitan (cc. 155-173) and "other" (cc. 174-176). To possess *sui iuris* status under *CCEO*, a church must be united under a single hierarchy and therefore under a common head (c. 27). Because the SMC consisted of two separate metropolitan hierarchies, she did not qualify as *sui iuris* under *CCEO*.

Quae maiori remedied this fundamental deficiency. The decree provided the SMC with a common head (the major archbishop) and a single superior authority (the major archbishop and the synod of bishops). With these structural changes, the SMC finally possessed the four elements constitutive of a church *sui iuris*: (i) a community of Christian faithful, (ii) the union of this community (ii) under a single hierarchy (iii) according to the norm of law, and, finally, (iv) express recognition of the community as *sui iuris* by the supreme authority of the Church.

In the past 25 years, the SMMAC has grown in almost all areas of ecclesial life. She has established or strengthened existing ecclesiastical structures, developed particular laws, and instituted an effective judiciary to the third instance and beyond. The SMMAC has also expanded inside and outside of India, erected eparchies for the spiritual welfare of the migrant faithful, instituted apostolic visitators, and appointed *procura* in Rome. Thus, this silver jubilee is really a proud moment and an occasion to humbly thank the Lord.

Despite these successes, the SMMAC faces numerous challenges. For example, certain failures to progress and perpetual divisions over liturgical, disciplinary, and other issues still plague this church *sui iuris*. Since 1992, such internal problems can no longer be blamed on the lack of a unifying hierarchy. This silver jubilee is therefore an appropriate occasion for critical introspection. By analyzing any ongoing difficulties, the SMMAC can determine whether she has overlooked new solutions that were impossible before her elevation to major archiepiscopal status.

In this spirit, on the occasion of the jubilee of the SMMAC's elevation to major archiepiscopal status, the following scholarly articles consider some of the relevant themes. This special issue of *Iustitia* regrettably has space to discuss and debate only a select few. Nevertheless, on this auspicious occasion, it is appropriate to review the entirety of the SMMAC's life and activities in the light of both common and particular law.

Fr. Varghese Koluthara, in his article, "The Historical Evolution of The Syro-Malabar Church as A Major Archiepiscopal Church," traces the apostolic origin and development of the SMC. The author exposes internal and external struggles this church encountered before achieving her present major archiepiscopal status. He also briefly but comprehensively covers major aspects of the SMC's life, including its growth and development, multifaceted mission, territorial expansion,

administrative systems, and various other canonical institutions. Regarding the juridical vagueness of the recent jurisdictional, he says, "therefore, if ambiguity about how to proceed with the new mission of Syro-Malabar Church remains, it is now the responsibility of its hierarchy to dialogue with the Latin and Syro-Malankara bishops of India...". After reviewing the evolution of the SMC, the author ultimately concludes that "the elevation of Syro-Malabar Church to the major archiepiscopal status gave the Syro-Malabar Church a proper *sui iuris* status according to CCEO."

The Catholic Church is a communion of 24 individual churches *sui iuris*, 23 Eastern and 1 Latin. Bishop Sebastian Vaniyapurackal exposes "The Concept of Church *Sui Iuris*," beginning with its etymological meaning. Highlighting the meaning of '*sui iuris*' and related expressions in the former Eastern code, the documents of Vatican II, and *CIC*, the author identifies their commonalities and explains their evolution into the notion of 'Church *sui iuris*' found in CCEO. The author highlights the different understandings existing in the Orthodox and Catholic Churches regarding the nature of autonomy of individual Churches. Finally, he elucidates the constitutive elements of a Church *sui iuris* according to CCEO c. 27. However, the author affirms that "it is critical to remember that even before a Church *sui iuris* is recognized as such, it is first and foremost a Church: a community of faithful with a determined hierarchy and the other qualities prescribed by CCEO c. 28."

In the early centuries, the St. Thomas Christians enjoyed all-India jurisdiction. Since their modern Syro-Malabar descendants are found throughout India, the SMC has spent decades demanding that this jurisdiction be restored. Fr. Varghese Poothavelithara takes up this demand in his article, "The Modification of the Territory of A Patriarchal Church - Canonical Provisions: The Attempts of A Major Archiepiscopal Church and the Responses of the Apostolic See." After the first part of the article "canonical provisions for modifying the territory of a patriarchal/major archiepiscopal Church," the second part proceeds to address "the Syro-Malabar synod's attempts to extend its proper territory and the Apostolic See's responses to these attempts." Aside from a "decrease in the number of the subjects" of one Church *sui iuris* entrusted with the pastoral care of migrants from another, the author wonders whether other consequences, especially negative consequences, would follow from expanding the proper territory of the latter church. Similarly, given the "accepted practice" of overlapping jurisdictions in the Catholic Church, the author asks

whether the chief hierarch of a Church *sui iuris* can “oppose the extension of the territory of a patriarchal Church” based solely on “the transfer of the faithful from one’s jurisdiction to their own mother Church.”

No organization or institution can exist and function without rules and discipline, nor without personnel and systems to enforce them. SMMAC is the second largest, most flourishing and vibrant Church in the communion of Catholic Churches. Fr. Benny Tharakunnel, in his article “The Impact of CCEO on the Legislative, Executive and Judicial Growth of the Syro-Malabar Church,” examines how “the Eastern code has impacted the life of the Syro-Malabar Church.” Considering “how this Church’s elevation to major archiepiscopal status has resulted in its legislative, executive and judicial growth,” the author explains how the December 16, 1992 papal documents *Quae maiori* and *Venerabili Fratri* regularized the SMC by elevating it to major archiepiscopal status and appointing Cardinal Antony Padiyara as its first major archbishop. As result of these actions, the SMC received “a juridical identity under a unifying father and head.”

Canon law urges all Catholics to foster and promote consecrated life, which “belong to the life and holiness of the Church” (CIC c. 575 §1 (cf. CCEO, c. 411). In her article “A Review of the Life and Apostolates of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church,” Sr. Rosmin historically, juridically, and critically studies the origins of indigenous religious institutes, the varied ministries that result from their unique charisms, and the impact these institutes have had on the SMMAC. She identifies about 47 Syro-Malabar institutes of consecrated life and 9 monastic institutes with effective apostolates in the SMMAC’s proper territory and elsewhere in the world. The author highlights some challenges these institutes encounter in promoting vocations and collaborating pastorally with hierarchs and parish priests. Regarding the latter, she notes that religious are “discriminated against” and “often denied just and equitable opportunities to recruit vocations” by parish priests and eparchial authorities. As a solution, the author advocates for a “consensus” that would allow religious to recruit freely in parishes and schools and would mandate the full cooperation of parish priests.”

The Catholic Church, commanded to preach the good news to all, is missionary by nature. Within the Catholic communion, the SMC is one of the most vibrant and flourishing Eastern Churches *sui iuris*. **Fr.**

Sebastian Payyappilly's article, "Canonical Facet of the Missionary Thrust of the Syro-Malabar Church," discusses the missionary nature of the Church in general, the canonical understanding of mission, and the application of mission in the Syro-Malabar Church. After rooting the missionary thrust of the SMC in the direct experience of St. Thomas the missionary, the author analyzes the various ways and means adopted for evangelization. He proceeds to argue that while "commendable missionary efforts do occur in Syro-Malabar missionary eparchies," the SMC as a whole "does not possess a missionary thrust as such towards the new evangelization." While the author appreciates the re-evangelizing dimension of the SMC's mission, he regrets the neglect of the new evangelization aspect: "This missionary limitation is unfortunate given the growth of the Syro-Malabar Church. Since her elevation to major archiepiscopal status, the Syro-Malabar Church has added multiple mission eparchies and over twenty-five years of experience as a quasi-patriarchal Church. Thus, it is high time for the Syro-Malabar Church to implement the provisions of CCEO cc. 584 - 593 regarding the evangelizing mission of the Church" (after f.n. 34).

The role of the laity in the Church, needless to say, is invaluable. Without them there is no church. The commemoration of the elevation of the SMC to Major Archiepiscopal status would be incomplete without recognizing the dignity and appreciating the excellent services the lay faithful render by '*living in the world and participating in the mission of the Church*' (CCEO c. 399). It is through the juridical institute of *palliyogam* they that they legitimately contribute. The *yogam* of the SMMAC, known as *Palliyogam*, is a unique heritage and contribution of the St. Thomas' Christians to the universal Church.

In his article "Palliyogam: A Laudable Heritage of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church in the Light of CCEO c. 295," Fr. Palathinkal Varghese, with an appraisal of the ancient heritage, treats the origin of the concept of *palliyogam* in the Hindu cultural and social background and discloses the salient features of the same. Further, the nature and objectives of the *Palliyogam*, and the three kinds of *yogam* of the SMMAC are briefly but comprehensively discussed: "i) *palliyogam* (parish assembly or *tharakoottam*), ii) *pradesika yogam* (regional assembly or *nattukoottam*), and iii) *mahayogam* / *desiyayogam* /

sabhayogam (general assembly or *pothukoottam*). *Palliyogam* - parish assembly was considered to be the basic unit of ecclesial communion. The heads of families and priests participated in this assembly" (2.1). While discussing the *CCEO* c. 295 the author affirms, "The *yogam* is a canonical institute or an organ that assists the governance of the parish" (3.1).

God of the New testament as well as the Old Testament invites the chosen people to imitate the perfection of the Heavenly Father and to strive after holiness. The last canon in *CIC* also echoes this: "salvation of souls is the supreme law in the Church." Through his article, "The Jubilant Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church and Recognized Holiness" Fr. Thunduparampil, after having briefly explained the canonization process in its two phases, asserts that like in many other fields, the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church is flourishes in holiness and contributes to the treasure of universal Church models for the imitation of sancity and intercessors before God on behalf of the needy through her canonized saints and enrich the local Church through her beatified sons and daughters and Servants of God.