

Prot. No. AA65/2023

Dated 09 October 2023

**Crisis in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly**  
**Related to the Synodal Decision approved by Ap. See**  
**on the Uniform Mode of Celebration of Holy Qurbana**

To

His Holiness Pope Francis  
Vatican City.

Your Holiness,

Sub: PROPOSALS FOR A DEFINITE DECISION FROM THE APOSTOLIC SEE

Beseeching your paternal blessings, I, as Apostolic Administrator for the last 14 months, am presenting herewith my evaluation and proposals for a definite and final decision from the part of the Apostolic See in order to find out a lasting solution for the crisis besting the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

**I. INTRODUCTORY NOTE**

**Urgent necessity of having a definite decision from the Apostolic See:** The crisis in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly is augmenting, although there is comparatively silence as the majority of the faithful are waiting for the response from Archbishop Cyril Vasil and the Apostolic See regarding the proposals put forward by the Synodal Committee of Bishops who had dialogue mainly with those priests and laity who used to oppose the Synodal decision on the uniform mode of celebration of Holy Qurbana (Mass) which caused division, scandal and indiscipline in the Archeparchy. The recent developments are: (i) the Minor Seminary is closed; (ii) Most of the priests continue to celebrate the illicit form of Holy Qurbana in spite of several exhortations and warnings, including that of Archbishop Vasil; (iii) Indiscipline has become a normal thing among priests and (iv) there is possibility for division/schism. The present report contains: (I) A very short history and background of the issues (II) the proposals by the Dialogue Committee of Bishops and my remarks about them and (III) my proposals for a definite decision from the Apostolic See with the concurrence of Archbishop Cyril Vasil.

**II. THE BACKGROUND**

- 1. Liturgical Controversy of several decades in the Syro-Malabar Church:** The liturgical controversy in the Syro Malabar Church, especially about the mode of celebration of Holy Qurbana has a history of several decades.
- 2. Unanimous Decision in 1999:** As a result of continued discussions and dialogue, especially in the Major Archiepiscopal Assembly in the year 1998 and of the directives from the Apostolic See, the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church unanimously decided in the year 1999 to have a uniform mode of celebration of Holy Qurbana. This was the result of a compromise formula between the two liturgical schools centered at Ernakulam and Changanacherry.
- 3. The Theology of the new mode of celebration:** In the official mode of celebration of Holy Qurbana according to the Syro-Malabar Qurbana *Taksa* (Text) revised on the basis

of the specific patrimony of the Syro-Malabar Church adapting it to the needs of the times in the light of Second Vatican Council, the celebrant stands facing the people during the 'Liturgy of the Word' in conformity with the manner that Jesus taught the people. But during the Anaphora (Liturgy of the Eucharist) when we commemorate Jesus' redemptive sacrifice which He offered (Qurbana = Offering) to the Father in the symbols of bread and wine, as being the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn. 1: 29) for the salvation the humankind, the celebrant, the representative of Jesus, along with the worshipping community, stand facing the same direction looking towards the Father (Heaven/Altar/East). Again the celebrant stands facing the people after the Anaphora and Holy Communion, to send the worshipping community with missionary obligation by sealing them with the sign of the Cross.

- 4. Controversy Continues:** Because of the general dispensation (against the spirit of CCEO Canon 1538) given by some bishops for their eparchies in the year 2000 belonging to both the liturgical groups caused the continuation of the division in the Church.
- 5. Definite decision by the Syro Malabar Synod:** After having received clear directives from the Apostolic See in the background of the approval of the revised *Qurbana Thaksa* (Mass Text), the Synod decided in the August 2021 Synod to implement definitively the 1999 Synodal decision in all the Syro Malabar eparchies on the uniform mode of celebration of Holy Qurbana. Out of 35 eparchies, 34 implemented the Synodal decision; but the majority of priests along with some laity in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly continue to oppose the implementation of the Synodal decision, in spite of the strong exhortation of Pope Francis on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022, circulars of the Major Archbishop and the Apostolic Administrator and the directives from the Apostolic See, including the circular of Pontifical Delegate Archbishop Vasil dated 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023.
- 6. Land Deal Issues and emergences of new problems:** The so called rebels in Ernakulam with the connivance of anti-Church groups are bringing up again the fabricated issues related to land deal in Ernakulam to malign Cardinal Alencherry and the Church.
- 7. CHALLENGES:** For the continuation of the crisis and division in Ernakulam have different reasons and influences at the background. The main reasons are mentioned below:
  - a) Influence of Enemies of the Church:** The anti-Church groups, both inside and outside the Church (mainly non-Christian extremist groups) help the rebels in Ernakulam both financially and strategically with the intention to divide and destroy the Church.
  - b) Lack of Discipline:** There has been indiscipline in the Ernakulam for the last several years, since the Major Archbishops, who had global responsibility and were often from outside the Archeparchy, could not concentrate on the administration in Ernakulam. Presbyterocracy was in vogue there.
  - c) False Propaganda:** Media, especially social media is widely used to influence the general public with fabricated stories. Even priests are prey for such false propaganda. After the visit of Archbishop Antony Kariyil CMI and Msgr. Antony Nariculam to Pope Francis in November 2021, they still continue to propagate that the Pope is with their stand.
  - d) Wrong Theology:** The leaders of the rebel priests often quote Pope Francis with a wrong notion on Synodality. They quote the dictum "*Vox Populi Vox Dei*" and publicly state that theirs is the voice of the people which has to be considered as voice of God. The bishop who stand with the Archdiocese has to accept and implement their voice. For them, accepting and implementing their voice is Synodality.
  - e) Emotional ego and yearning for Bishops of their own clergy:** Several emotional factors (emocracy) and false ego are working behind their resistance to accept the decision of ecclesiastical authorities. They want bishops from their own clergy.
  - f) Networking for support, including ecclesiastical heads:** The rebels, in order to get support for their stand are using wide network. They have frequent contacts with Catholic and Non-Catholic Church leaders. They claim that they have support of the Catholic Chaldean Patriarch who is for the celebration of Holy Qurbana fully facing people.
  - g) Unwieldy nature of the Archeparchy;** The Archeparchy of Ernakulam, the biggest eparchy in the Syro-Malabar Church, is really unwieldy for smooth administration, since it is situated in a large area (four districts) with different geographical cultures. The Archeparchy has 469 priests. In order to keep them united, opposition to the Changanacherry liturgical school is projected and argue that their particular culture and tradition is torpedoed by the Synodal fathers, which is a humiliation for them. (The undersigned had proposed solution for this problem through the letters dated 19 March 2023 and 31 May 2021) with plans for bifurcation.

**h) Indirect Support of Bishops, especially those hailing from Ernakulam:** The rebels claim that they have the support of some bishops, especially those hailing from Ernakulam. Some of the letters of these bishops have already given such an impression.

- 8. Attempts to find out solutions:** There have been several attempts for reconciliation with the priests and lay representatives in Ernakulam. During the last four Synods, the bishops designated some from among them, especially bishops hailing from Ernakulam, to dialogue with the representatives of priests and laity – often with the rebels. Although, the Synodal committee often conceded to their demands in order to bring in communion and obedience, the rebels went back from the consensus and demanded that their position on liturgy has to be approved first by all concerned Church authorities, thereby forfeiting all dialogue process.
- 9. Continued threats:** It is a fact that many priests and majority of the lay faithful who want to obey authorities and be in communion with the Church and celebrate Holy Qurbana as per synodal decision. But the rebel priests and laity with the support of anti-Church groups continue to threaten them in different ways. The closure of the Minor Seminary, the Cathedral Basilica and some churches is the result of mainly of these threats.
- 10. Mission of Pontifical Delegate Archbishop Cyril Vasil:** Even after the clear directives of Archbishop Cyril Vasil, the rebels continue to disobey the directives of ecclesiastical authorities. In this background, a nine member Synodal Committee made dialogue with the representatives of rebel groups.

### **III. PROPOSALS OF THE SYNODAL COMMITTEE OF BISHOPS FOR DIALOGUE**

(Here below is given the proposals given by Bishop Bosco Puthur, Convener of the Committee, on 12 September 2023 on behalf of the Dialogue Committee. The remarks of the undersigned are given in brackets).

#### **Proposals of the Committee of Bishops for Dialogue Presented to the Major Archbishop, the Apostolic Administrator and the Pontifical Delegate:**

1. The positive steps evolved in the dialogue, though they are not all sufficient, may be utilized effectively as a primary step: (There should be a definitive decision from the Apostolic See at the earliest; otherwise, the crisis and division will continue for many more years).

i. Celebration of the uniform mode of the Holy *Qurbana* in all parishes and centers in the Archeparchy on a particular day. (This suggestion can be accepted as a primary step)

ii. Celebration of one *Qurbana* in the uniform mode on every Sunday in the Cathedral Basilica Ernakulam. (The directive of the Apostolic See has always been that in the Cathedral Basilica only the uniform mode of celebration can be allowed. There are several station churches in the Cathedral parish. This suggestion can be accepted as a primary step in the Station Churches)

iii. Celebration of Holy *Qurbana* in the uniform mode in the minor seminary. (This suggestion is positive and has to be implemented without fail. There should be some directives in the background of the closure of the Minor Seminary and warning to those who blocked the celebration. There should be directions regarding those priests who are asked to move away from the Seminary; but being outside continue to create problems, especially one priest.)

iv. Celebration of Holy *Qurbana* in the uniform mode in Malayattoor Kurisumudi pilgrim centre. (This is acceptable. The present directive is that uniform mode of celebration is to be followed in all centers of pilgrimages.)

v. Celebration of Holy *Qurbana* in the uniform mode in the chapels of religious houses. (This is acceptable and must be made mandatory. If the diocesan priests are not ready to celebrate, the superiors should have the freedom to invite any priest from other places and religious institutes)

vi. Celebration of uniform mode of the Holy *Qurbana* in parishes and centers by the Bishops who visit these places for one or another function. (They should be allowed on all occasions)

Vii. Commemoration of the Major Archbishop and the Apostolic Administrator in the *Qurbana* and other prayers where it was not done since the recent past. (It is acceptable and be made mandatory as expression of communion)

Viii. Reading of the Letter of the Holy Father, dated 25 March 2022, in parishes and centers. (If it is not yet done, should be read without fail).

ix. Celebrating the uniform mode of Holy *Qurbana* on at least five feast days annually in all parishes and religious houses, and (As part of catechesis, uniform mode of celebration of *Qurbana* has to be celebrated at least once on Sundays until a definite period).

X. Begin to use *Bema* in all parishes. (It should be made mandatory)

2. As some of the priests and laity of the Archeparchy are strongly inclined for a division from the Catholic communion, we must be equipped to face the challenges arising from such a possible schism. In order to protect the rights of the priests and laity who wish to obey the synodal decision of the uniform mode of Holy *Qurbana*, we need to strengthen the Curia of the Archeparchy. (It can be proposed that someone who is strong in the implementation of the Synodal decision, can be appointed as additional Syncellus and another one as Vice Chancellor).

3. As the Apostolic Administration of the Archeparchy is objected and opposed by a good number of priests and laity, steps must be taken to save the Archeparchy from falling into total anarchy. As the present Apostolic Administrator had repeatedly expressed his difficulties, due to his additional heavy responsibility in the Office of the President of the CBCI, in exercising his mission of Apostolic Administrator in the Archeparchy, the Synod may request the Apostolic See for a new Apostolic Administrator, who is committed to implement the uniform mode of Holy *Qurbana* in the Archeparchy. ( i. Accept the letter of resignation of the present Ap. Administrator dated 10 October 2023 and of the suggestion of the Permanent Synod; ii) appoint someone from Ernakulam as Auxiliary Bishop to the new Apostolic Administrator – there are already three priests who have Papal Assent for being elected/nominated bishops).

4. The proposal for constituting tribunal in view of starting canonical procedures against the dissidents will not be possible without an effective and functional Archeparchial Curia. We must be aware of the ground reality that we are not in a position to execute any canonical step against the dissident groups, even if it is taken by the Apostolic See. Failure in the execution of canonical penalties would worsen the situation and defame the ecclesiastical authority in the public. (We request that the Pontifical Delegate Archbishop Cyril Vasil SJ to come again with Diplomatic D2 Passport and take the leadership in creating the necessary infrastructure under the new Apostolic Administrator)

5. Even though the intention of the repeated request by the dissident groups for the extension of the final date of implementation is questionable, we can think of a reasonable extension of time, ensuring that the request is genuine. A sincere evaluation of the ground reality of the Archeparchy, signals us that the implementation of the uniform mode of celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* within two or three months is not easy. (The proposal is that (a) Uniform mode of celebration of Holy *Qurbana* has to be implemented in the Cathedral Basilica, Minor Seminary and Religious Houses immediately (b) In other churches and in the Station Churches of the Cathedral Basilica, at least once on Sundays until a definite final date).

#### **IV. PROPOSALS FOR THE DEFINITE/FINAL DECISION OF APOSTOLIC SEE**

1. The Apostolic See, with the concurrence of the Holy Father shall give the final/definite decision at the earliest regarding the impasse in the Archeparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly related to the Synodal decision on the celebration of Holy *Qurbana* approved by the Apostolic See and strongly exhorted by the Holy Father. Those who do not obey shall be *ipso facto* considered as having cut off themselves from Catholic Communion and necessary action shall be followed.

2. Regarding the Synodal Decision on the Uniform Mode of Celebration of Holy *Qurbana*, the following directives shall be strictly followed. This is taken after having due consideration of the proposals of the Synodal Committee of Bishops who had discussions/dialogue with different sections of priests and laity of the Archeparchy of

i) The Uniform mode of celebration of Holy Qurbana shall be implemented immediately (without exception) (a) in the Cathedral Basilica (b) centers of formation like Minor Seminary, (c) in the chapels of all houses of institutes of consecrated life (Religious Houses), (d) Important churches of pilgrimage like international shrine of Malayattoor. In the Station Churches of Cathedral Basilica and similar places of worship, the directives for churches in general shall be followed.

ii) As suggested by the representatives of the Archeparchy to the dialogue Committee, Holy Qurbana shall be celebrated in all parishes and other centers in the Archeparchy on a specified day on or before 21<sup>st</sup> December 2023 (the centenary day of the erection of Hierarchy in the Syro-Malabar Church elevating Ernakulam as Archdiocese.

iii) All priests should strive to celebrate Holy Qurbana as per the uniform mode on all days at the earliest possible day. For those who find it necessary for catechetical purposes to have more time and step by step implementation of the Synodal decision on the implementation of uniform mode, the following norms are to be strictly followed: (a) At least one Holy Qurbana as per uniform mode shall be celebrated in all churches on all Sundays and days of obligation from Christmas 2023 onwards, (b) this general dispensation is only up to Easter 2024 from which date all priests in Ernakulam have to celebrate Holy Qurbana as per Synodal decision. (Pope Francis had exhorted priests to start the celebration in the Synodal format from Easter 2022 onwards), (c) those parishes which require further dispensation as per CCEO canon 1538 have to make their request in writing individually expressing specific reasons. Such dispensation shall be granted only for a maximum period of three months.

3. All bishops shall celebrate Holy Qurbana only as per Synodal decision and parish priests have to make necessary arrangements in this regard.

4. Bema or the table for the Liturgy of the Word has to be placed immediately in all churches where Holy Qurbana is celebrated.

5. As a public expression of Communion with the Church, commemoration of the Major Archbishop and the Apostolic Administrator in the *Qurbana* and other prayers shall be done as per liturgical laws (CCEO c. .

6. If the Letter of the Holy Father dated 25 March 2022 is not yet read in the churches, it has to be read in such churches on the forthcoming Sunday during Holy Qurbana without fail.

7. Those priests who desire to celebrate Holy Qurbana as per Synodal decision, shall not be obstructed from the celebration.

8. Disciplinary actions shall be taken against those who make obstructions for the celebration of Holy Qurbana licitly as per Synodal decision. Such persons are to be barred from any roles/offices in the parish/archdiocesan organizations.

9. Those priests who disobey the above norms shall be considered as cut off from the communion with the Catholic Church. They are, by the very fact, not permitted to celebrate Holy Qurbana. Disciplinary actions, including dismissal, shall be taken against such priests.

10. Candidates to priesthood shall take the undertaking in writing that they will abide by the Synodal decision on the celebration of Holy Qurbana and will not celebrate illicitly.

11. As suggested by the committee of bishops for dialogue, only those who are committed to follow and implement the Synodal decision and the directives of the Apostolic See shall function in the Curia. They have to show model to all priests.

12. As per the direction of the Pontifical Delegate, the Apostolic Administrator shall constitute a Tribunal to deal with cases of those who disobey the directives of the Synod and the Apostolic See. Canonical sanctions from the Apostolic See and the decisions of the Tribunal shall be implemented by the Apostolic Administrator/Curia in consultation with the Pontifical Delegate.

Seeking your paternal blessings and with best regards,

Archbishop Andrews Thazhath

Apostolic Administrator *sede plena* of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

NB. Letters with the same content is sent to:

1. His Eminence Claudio Gugerotti, Prefect, Dicastery for the Eastern Churches
2. His Grace Archbishop Cyril Vasil, Pontifical Delegate to Ernakulam-Angamaly
3. His Em. George Cardinal Alencherry, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church