

SYRIAN ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF ALEPPO

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مطرانبة السريان الأرثوذكس

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A MAN OF CHARISMA

**The Very Reverend Dr Curien Corepiscopa Kaniampampil
Personal Reflections & Recollections**

Birth Centenary Souvenir

February 27, 2012

Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim

Metropolitan of Aleppo

(1)

It was early and crispy February morning in 1980. After a demanding long flight from Damascus to Cochin, with brief stopovers in Dubai and Madras, and invigorated with the prospect of my first Episcopal mission, I reached my destination. I stepped off the plane for the first time on Keralian soil.

I knew this land very well through deciphering ecclesiastical manuscripts, archival documents and books in Deir Alzaafaran monastery, Tur Abdin, Mosul, Damascus and Rome. I had dreamt that one day I would see the Indian home of our beloved church which was blessed by St. Thomas the Apostle. It had been the platform for his mission, a fertile ground to plant his immortal church, which was the cause of his martyrdom and final resting place.

(2)

I was called, at thirty, without prior warning and chosen by the Lord to the episcopi, and ordained in 1979 by His Holiness Patriarch Mar Ignatius Yacoub III, as the Metropolitan of

Aleppo. Patriarch Yacoub III was a Malayalam speaker, a renowned scholar and historian of the Church in India. He treasured his Malankaran experience and taught us to love the church in India, which he considered a second lung of the Church. I was humbled by the honour afforded to me by the Patriarch, appointing me the Apostolic Delegate, representing the Supreme Head of the Church and presiding over the ceremonies of the celebration of the See of Antioch at the Patriarchal Monastery at Omallur.

(3)

Omallur or Omalloor is blessed with breathtaking natural beauty, where the River Achankovil marks the eastern border of the Omalloor Panchayat. Omalloor is a place of peace and harmony. There are many historically important spiritual places of worship, Church feasts (Palliperunal) and pilgrims in Omalloor. Manjanikkara Dayara is famous as an important place of pilgrimage. Every year thousands of pilgrims come by foot to the tomb of the Patriarch of Antioch and Saint Mor Ignatius Elias III at Manjanikkara.

The task was mammoth and the success of the mission was complex, and of paramount importance. Nothing could prepare you for the task at hand. This intra-church occasion had profound significance. The apostolic delegates, represented the mirror or the prism through which the Church of Antioch was seen by the faithful in India. Through the conduct of apostolic delegates, the incumbents of the See of Antioch were judged.

(4)

The busy programme of the celebration was scheduled to start with a meeting of the clergy in a small church not far from Cochin.

The Malpan of Malankara, Corepiscopa Dr Curien Kaniamparambil, an ingenious man renowned in the Church East and West, whom I have heard about and was eager to meet, was due to preside and preach in this meeting.

(5)

I entered the quaint church from the main western door facing the altar and preacher. The scene in the church was an unforgettable experience. The small church was packed with hundreds of clergy seated in orderly rows like pupils in a classroom ogling with reverence at their teacher. Their senses were all focused on the septuagenarian elder leaning on the podium

as he was delivering his sermon. They were eagerly receiving his words like a string of pearls of wisdom. Unfortunately, I could not fully understand the sermon, which was delivered in part in Malayalam, the local vernacular. However, our reverend and inspired Malpan was reciting in a beautiful Syriac homily of St. Ephrem the Syrian, and translating sermon into Malayalm for his audience. I was impressed with his perfect choice of homilies and the way he was adopting the teaching of church fathers to spiritualize the occasion. I quietly took may place at the nearest available place at the back of the church and became an integral part of the quietly listening mass of pupils.

In such an electrified milieu, you could not but reflect and meditate fervently on his homilies. I realized how the Holy Spirit works to move us and transfer our life. I felt that the Malpan, I was listening to was truly gifted: **a Man of Charisma**. V Rev Dr Curien Corepiscopa proved to be able to harness all his spiritual gifts for the good of the church. His diction and presence influenced us profoundly and struck a chord with me as I imagined a similarity with Paul the Apostle as he was addressing the Corinthians' about spiritual gifts¹.

(6)

At the end of delivering his sermon, the preacher announced the arrival of the young Apostolic Delegate. After a warm and reverent welcome, he invited me to join him at the altar to deliver to the congregation the Antiochian message on behalf of the Patriarch of Antioch. To reach the altar I had to negotiate a maze through the audience with difficulties. Fr. Curien used perfect Syriac to introduce me. As I was standing beside this spiritual giant the "**Man of Charisma**" in that auditorium of shepherds, I felt the weight of the most difficult early experience of my Episcopal vocation.

(7)

I reflected on my happiness for safely reaching the shores of Kerala the blessed land of St. Thomas. I felt at home and delighted by the generous Indian hospitality I received. I was delighted to visit the jewel of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch (SOCA) at the beginning of my Episcopal vocation. After a short reflective pose, I turned to our Malphono, who was standing beside me reverently and supportively, and said: "As I was listening to you pensively, I

¹ (1 Corinthians' 12:1-3)

was reminded of Great Church Fathers like St. Ephrem the Syrian, Mar Jacob of Serug, Mar Balay and Mar Isaac of Antioch, who were the bright beacons who guided our way. Today, I can see them through your stature, hear their voices in your discourse and immerse myself in their spirituality through your writings. I experienced such a phenomenon at the onset of my Episcopal journey of witness. I was encouraged and exhilarated by the vitality of our ancient Church and its ability to produce such apostle who could carry the beacon of its spiritual message to the nations, while working to consolidate their apostolic responsibilities and strengthen the church.

(8)

“There is no second chance to make a first impression.” Since our first encounter, I felt that we were closely related in thought, spirit and vision. Our relations went from strength to strength maintained by mutual respect, and admiration. Every time I had the opportunity to visit Kerala I was eager to find some quality time to spend with our beloved Malpan whether at his house, Church or his parish. Each time, I discovered a new quality, vigour, strength and depth in his character and felt enlightened and enriched spiritually.

You are a **“Man of Charisma”**, and generous in deploying your Charismata to enliven others on their way. According to our Church’s dogma, talents and gifts are the work of the Holy Spirit and not the work of humans; it is more than ceremonial and parades.

The mission of our Malpan Corepiscopa Curien Kaniamparambil, as any other priest and shepherd of the church, was continuously subject to the test of the Holy Spirit. During his long service in the vine of the Lord, Dr Curien had successfully set a shining example in deploying his gifts and aptitudes in the fulfilment of his vocation, pastoral duties and the passion of our Lord for unity. His religious discourse, teaching, books and disciples are all living testimonies to how he managed to use the “Gifts” that were bestowed on him by the Holy Spirit. He was a shepherd, teacher, grammarian, exegesis, thinker and reformer, to uphold the Church’s dogma and unity.

(9)

Today our Church joyously celebrates the life of its captivating centenarian.

The curious question is how the celebrated Malpan managed to nurture all these talents and what are the lessons for us to draw from his life, and accomplishments? The answer is very

simple for those who knew the stations of the cross of his early journey. It could only be the Holy Spirit which worked in him, on him and with him.

(10)

In 1925, he was enrolled as a 12 year old in the seminaries, and ever since, lived under the aegis of renowned Church Fathers and mentors of the seminaries. Some of them were beatified as Saints, such as Metropolitan Sleetba Mor Osthathios Bava, Metropolitan Paulose Mor Athanasios, Metropolitan Elias Mor Yulios Bava.

He learned the necessary Biblical knowledge, liturgies and other essential subjects of the syllabus. His considerable abilities were soon to be detected by his teachers. Therefore, special care was given to nurture his abilities until he had the call to serve the altar.

(11)

He knew all the Patriarchs of Antioch of the twentieth century, Mar Ignatius Ellias III (1917-1932), Mar Ignatius Ephrem Barsoum (1933-1957), Mar Ignatius Yacoub III (1957-1980), and Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas (1980). He was blessed by receiving all his ordinations to the diaconate, Priesthood, and Korpiscopos at the hands of Patriarchs, or their Apostolic Delegates.

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In appreciation of his intellectual endeavours, Patriarch Ephrem Barsoum awarded Very Rev Dr Curien with a Golden Medal, one of the very few medals that Patriarch Barsoum conferred on worthy people throughout his 24 years as Patriarch of Antioch. Succeeding Patriarchs bestowed upon him with titles of honour. Patriarch Yacoub III bestowed upon him the title of The Malpan of Malankara. Patriarch Zakka I bestowed upon him three honorary titles: Korooso Dashrora (Preacher of the truth), Contemporary Jerome, and the Syriac Poet of India. Catholicos Mor Baselios Paulose II awarded him two honorary titles: Nathaniel, and Bar Hebraeus. Catholicos Mor Baselios Thomas I gave him the title of Malankarayude Ezhuthachan. Abraham Mor Clemis gave him the following titles: St. Michael the Syrian (the Great), Bar Salibi, and Bar Hebraeus. He also received befitting honours from ecclesiastical and academic institutions in appreciation of his work.

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We, with great pleasure, are adding to the long list of honour and grace and bestow upon him deservedly the honorific title: **MAN OF CHARISMA**.

(14)

One of the advantages of the celebrated is his ability to forge good relations with native Syriac speakers. Visiting Metropolitans, and Patriarchs who came from Antioch enabled him to acquire an excellent command of the Syriac language and to excel in reading, writing and speaking it. He mastered Syriac like a native speaker. He acquainted himself with its literature, most of the available books on poetry, homilies, and liturgies. He also became familiar with theological, religious, historical, and philosophical sources which he came across in books or manuscripts.

(15)

His publication record covered more than eight decades. He was probably the youngest author, and he is now the oldest author in SOCA. He translated the Book of the Morning prayers from Syriac to Malayalam when he was 15 years old; Reprinted editions of this book are still in use in SOCA. His next accomplishment was translating the Syriac Grammar Book at the age of 18.

He kept up his publishing momentum. His publication record exceeded 88 tomes, in three languages: Syriac, Malayalam and English. It reflected his command of languages and the depth of his intellect. Among his publications were, a Syriac-Malayalam, Malayalam-Syriac Lexicon, Syriac - English Lexicon, a novel in Syriac entitled *Marghonetho* (The Jewel), a Poetic Bible according to St Mathew in Syriac, and a poem on Mary Magdalene in Syriac. He crowned his list of publications with a new translation of the Bible from Peshito Syriac to Malayalam including the apocrypha. Thus, such involvement of the "Preacher of Truth" with Syriac literatures enabled him to live an enriched life with the Syriac Fathers in their Holy Syriac milieu.

(16)

His passion for the Syriac language and literature crystallized his thoughts and visions. He harnessed his talents and deployed his energies in the service of his Holy Church and his beloved people.

He never declined a request to work, where his talents were needed within the institutions of the Church or hesitated in making his service available when and where needed. He gave special attention to Sunday schools, where he spent almost half his working life (around 30 years) as a headmaster.

(17)

Nothing can oil the wheel of progress and prosperity of a church, keep it steady, and make headway in rough seas and the swift and reckless changes in our world today, like providing proper religious education to enable future generations to flourish and mentor and coach future leaders for the march ahead.

His active involvements with higher education sprang from his conviction that if the church is to continue it needs its intelligentsia.

Such passion for education is still energizing him, on the eve of his centennial. He is actively involved in researching and writing a new book entitled: *History of Syriac language and literature in India and world*.

He was constantly displaying intellectual efforts and adding daily new spiritual footprints at an advanced age. This could only be sustained by an exceptional **Man of Charisma**, in a milieu that encouraged and appreciated such acumen.

(18)

Our heartfelt congratulations to our blessed Church for nurturing such a spiritual giant.

Congratulations to India for having produced and nurtured an exceptional child.

Congratulations to the Syriac speaking world for producing and presenting such a gift to the rest of the world. He is a great scholar, who advanced the knowledge of scripture and Syriac language in a multilingual and multiethnic environments.

Congratulations for the Kaniamparambil family that gave their son to the altar. The Church is grateful for such a valuable gift. As to his family, I would specially like to mention his beloved daughters Santhamma and Somi, and all his grand and great grand children. Your father is special to you, to us and to the entire SOCA. His sublime status, standing, reputation and memories as a clergyman and scholar are prominent and eternal.

Congratulations to all those who had the opportunity to be mentored by him during their vocation.

Joy and blessing to us all who knew, loved, and accepted him as confessional father. We were energized and spiritualized by his charismata. This “**Man of Charisma**” will remain alive in our memories as long as we are.

(19)

His life embodied the teaching and spirituality of SOCA. I always felt and aspired that the essence of his life should be enshrined in an biography. As we are celebrating his centenary, I thought it is the right occasion to launch my appeal. His biography and memories will be a manual for future generations, seminarian, as well as clergy of SOCA.

We can but be very proud of Malphono Very Rev Dr Curien Corepiscopa the man of intellectual gifts.

**Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim
Metropolitan of Aleppo**

**Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese
PO Box 4194 Aleppo, Syria**

Web: www.alepposuryoye.com

Tel: 00963 21 464 0304

Res. 00963 21 464 0305

Fax: 00963 21 464 2260

Cell. 00963 94 424 6565

Email: margregorios79@hotmail.com, morgregorios@gmail.com