



THE SYRIAC HERITAGE AND THE FAITH FORMATION OF THE SYRO MALABAR CATHOLICS IN BANGALORE

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Abstract: The Syriac heritage of the Syro Malabar Church is an integral part of the cultural treasures of India and the world. The Syro Malabar Church (about 4 million members) is the largest among the eight churches of the St. Thomas Christians, who were evangelized by the missionary endeavors of the Aramaic-speaking Apostle Thomas. From early on, the Aramaic (Syriac) language and music played a significant role in the experience of the Christian faith in India. In spite of the challenges from Portuguese missionaries in the sixteenth century, the Syro Malabar Christians zealously cherished and preserved the Syriac tradition. In the following centuries, they also adapted many liturgical practices from the Roman rite by translating the respective Latin texts into Syriac, and composing them anew in Kerala, thereby adding another layer to the already vast Syriac chant repertory. With the vernacularization of the liturgy in the 1960s, however, intimacy with the Syriac tradition declined gradually. Luckily, the generation that was born during the transitional period (before the 1960s) continues to hold, albeit advancing in years, a prolific memory base of melodies and experiences associated with the Syriac tradition. With a focus on the musical and liturgical elements, this paper provides an overview of the various aspects of the Syriac heritage, practical suggestions to preserve it for posterity, and recommendations to make it a part of the faith formation of the present and future generations. Preserving and transferring the centuries-old Syriac heritage may be useful in connecting the dots between two complementary concepts: India and Christianity.