

Syriac Music Conference And Syriac Music Festival- Gloucester, England, 14 July 2018

By **M Thomas Antony** — Last updated **Jul 15, 2018**

NEWS



Kennara, an International Conference on sacred Syriac Music and Kadavil Chandy Kathanaar Syriac music festival held in Gloucester, England on 14th July 2018. This was organised by the Syro Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain and supported by NSC network, Laus Plena Foundation and Christian Musicological Society of India.

Kennara, International Conference on Sacred Syriac Music

The conference on Sacred Syriac Music, probably first of its kind, was attended by international delegates including Veronique Nebel of Laus Plena Foundation, an international organisation supporting Sacred Christian Music traditions especially of the Eastern Churches and the earliest Christian traditions, Polus Gajo, a scholar from Iraq representing the Syriac Catholic Church in the Middle East and Rev Dr Joseph Palackal, eminent Ethnomusicologist and researcher of Indian Christianity. Mar Joseph Srampikkal, the Syro Malabar Eparchial Bishop of Great Britain presided over the Conference.

Veronique Nebel from Laus Plena Foundation commented that the Musical traditions of Syro Malabar Church is a treasure of the Universal Church that needs to be recovered, owned by the faithful and to be passed to the next generation. Laus Plena Foundation extended their support to recover and archive the forgotten Syriac chants in India. Polus Gajo presented about the Syriac music tradition of the Middle East and performed several chants in Syriac and the local Aramaic dialect still existing. It was notable that in the local Aramaic dialect, in the Lord's Prayer, they use the term 'Seytan' instead of 'Bisa' in Syriac. Mr Gajo also presented a few recorded Syriac chants from the Middle East.



Rev Dr. Joseph Palackal, in his paper, talked about serious deficiencies of the translation of Syriac terms in the vernacular liturgy. Fr Palackal pointed out that the translation of Rooha is totally disappointing as 'spirit' or 'aroopi'. These terms could not translate the real meaning of 'Rooha' in Syriac. Many terms develop in a dialect with rich meaning from that linguistic and cultural milieu and such terms cannot be translated but to be adopted like the usage of 'Yoga', 'Guru', etc in English.

Thus we should retain the word 'Rooha' and accept it. Fr Palackal also pointed out that in the 1970s, nearly 10 years after the vernacularization of the Syro Malabar Liturgy and thereby popularisation of terms 'parishudhalmavu', 'parishudhaaroopy' etc, Vayalar Rama Varma, a Hindu poet in the movie 'Makane Ninakkuvendi', composed the song of Lord's prayer in Malayalam 'Bavakkum puthranum parishudha roohaakkum....', even when lyrics 'parishidhalmavinum' or 'parishudharoopikkum' would have fit into the melody that was composed by Devarajan. This shows the linguistic semantic sensibility that the Liturgical Committee lacked. Fr Palackal commented that in order to own this music tradition and to pass on to the next generation, the present generation should extend their prayer vocabulary to include Syriac terms and to include some Syriac chants in the liturgy.

Mar Joseph Srampikkal, the Syro Malabar Eparchial Bishop of Great Britain also agreed on the poor translation of Syriac into the vernacular liturgy. Mar Srampikkal commented that there should be more efforts to revive the Syriac traditions and spirituality and to foster the Syriac music tradition in India. Mar Srampikkal is a young and energetic Bishop who is trying to build the church in the UK. Bishop Joseph has visited most of the communities and a large number of families as a part of his Pastoral ministry. The Eparchial Gathering of November 2017 was a Great initiative to understand the community and to build the community in its genuine spirituality. Mar Srampikkal is one of those shepherds who knows the sheep. It was great that even in the middle of his busy commitments on 14th July and the Walsingham Pilgrimage on 15th July, Mar Srampikkal participated the entire programme, listened to the musical performances and encouraged the participants.



Kadavil Chandy Kathanaar Syriac Music Festival.

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A Syriac music competition in the name of Kadavil Chandy Kathanaar was also planned but due to the lack of a sufficient number of teams, a Syriac Music festival was organised instead, along with this Conference.

Kadavil Chandy Kathanaar

Kadavil Chandy Kathanaar was a great poet of the Catholic Saint Thomas Christians. He was born in 1588 in Kaduthuruthy. Chandy Kathanaar was a great Syriac scholar who composed Syriac songs in India. He was popularly known as Alexander the Indian in the Syriac literature. He was a theologian and one of the four consulters of the Archdeacon. After the Coonan Cross oath, when Carmelite Missionaries arrived and reconciled with the revolted Saint Thomas Christians, Kadavil Chandy Kathanaar along with Parampil Chandy Kathanaar and Vengoor Giwargis Kathanaar, returned to the Catholic communion that resulted in the formation of the 'Pazhayacoor' community which later became the present day Syro Malabar Church and the Church of the East in India- the Chaldeans of Trichur. Thus, Kadavil Chandy Kathanaar was one of the three forefathers of the section of Saint Thomas Christians who retained the East Syriac spirituality and traditions while the other section moved over to the West Syriac rite. This event was a great honour to the memory of Kadavil Chandy Kathanaar.

It was very appropriate for the Syro Malabar Eparchy to organise such a unique event as this is a young eparchy which is trying to grow in the authentic spirituality of Syro Malabar Church. The event had a great catechetical role. Rev Fr Paul Vetticattu, the Chaplain of the Gloucester- Bristol Chaplaincy, Rev Fr Joy Vayalil, the Director of Catechesis of the Eparchy and the leaders of the Bristol- Gloucester Syro Malabar community deserves all the credit for the organisation of this wonderful event. The faithful are deeply indebted to the great support from Mar Joseph Srampikkal in the faith formation of the Church in England in its authentic spirituality.



