

FAMILY TRADITIONS AND IDENTITY OF ST. THOMAS CATHOLICS

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Dr. Francis Eluvathingal

“Train a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not turn away from it” (Prov 22:6).

General Information

1. The title Family Traditions and Identity of St. Thomas Catholics is a complex one. This humble study is delimited to the family the traditions and identity of the family alone.
2. This is not an exhaustive study and it does not attempt to make comparisons with other Catholic and Non-Catholic family traditions. It is possible that we notice some traditions in other churches as well. Hence, these traditions need not be exclusive for the Thomas Catholic Families alone. A lot more studies are to be done on this subject like Symposium or Seminars or doctoral thesis. This study gives only a list of the traditions practiced in the history and those are in practice even now in most of the places. Due to historical reasons, there are different traditional practices in different areas.
3. The Eparchy of Kalyan, being the first one to be erected for the Migrants of the Syro-Malabar Church, happily takes its lead to study our family traditions and identity.¹ This is a crucial subject in far as the family traditions and identity are concerned for all the migrants across the globe as the migrants face the predicament of either exist or extinct.

Introduction:

4. The identity of a community springs from its way of life; the stronger it lives its identity, the better the commitment of the community towards its future. The older one grows, the deeper one feels nostalgic about one's past, family traditions and identity. When one is far from home town, one becomes more aware of one's identity. The more one struggles to lead a perfect life the closer one grows in identity. Those families observe most of their traditions tend to have the strongest ties.
5. Taking the mission command “go and preach the Gospel”, the apostles went around the whole world and preached the Gospel. Though the apostles were from Jewish background, the people who heard the Gospel received Jesus according to their religious, cultural and linguistic mind set up. When they began living their faith, they started the rituals, customs, and many practices for living their faith in their context. This paved the way to have different traditions and rituals in the world and hence the formation of different individual Churches. Therefore we are talking about a Christian identity which got developed in Kerala, in the southern part of India in the first century; the community founded by Apostle Thomas, who preached in a new soil which had different religious, cultural and linguistic background. We are talking about a Syrian Christian identity that depended on the Syrian Church for its liturgical celebrations from 4th to 15th Centuries. We are talking about a Latinized identity imposed by European colonisation from 16th to 19th centuries. We are talking about a St. Thomas Catholic Church that passionately struggles to identify its identity since 1887 AD. We are talking a migrant Church that is spreading in the world scenario in 20th and 21st centuries with a clear vision of preserving its identity and *missio ad gentes*. As we go ahead with this topic, let us keep in mind the simplest idiom about the identity of Thomas Christians: “Hindu in Culture; Christian in Faith; Oriental in Worship”.²

¹ Kalyan Lantern Published an Article on the same topic in June 2014 and later it was discussed in Pastoral Council.

² By Late Rev. Fr. Placid Podippara CMI.

6. God created things diverse and varied. The variety and diversity found in creation adds to its beauty & splendour. "The Variety within the Church in no way harms its unity rather manifests it". (II Vat, OE 2). The II Vatican Council and the Sacred Canons insist that the real search for identity consists in going back to the roots. The rites should be preserved to its core. The Oriental Law defines what a rite is. "A rite is the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstances of history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested in each Church *sui iuris*" (CCEO Canon 28 - §1). Drawing from the spirit of this canon, family traditions which are part of the rituals should be preserved as far as possible. If the changes are permitted, it should be only for the organic improvement of the community (Ref. OE. 6).

7. In Catholic Theology, "Sacred Tradition" refers to the Deposit of Faith or Revelation shared by Jesus Christ which was handed down through oral transmission.³ There was a gap between Jesus' preaching and the formation of the Gospels. The apostles proclaimed the Gospel orally or by word of mouth what they had heard from Jesus. The liturgies of early period also were part of the same Sacred or Holy or Apostolic Tradition which is considered to be THE TRADITION as far as the Catholic Church is concerned. However, traditions which are accumulated during the centuries need not be part of the Sacred Tradition.

8. More than ever before, the institution of family is under threats of deformation and destruction in the modern secularized society. The social media-driven society offers substitutions that facilitate the commercial and utilitarian interests for traditional family. The decisive and guiding voice of the Church regarding the formation and of living in the Catholic family is to be audible enough to the faithful, that they truly experience the joy and fulfilment of the family life for which it is created. Family is the cradle of life in the society. Just as strong foundation is the key to the strength and durability of a building, Christian faith, human values, cultural and ritual catholic practices in family will prepare ideal members for both the society and the Church through many well-formed generations; such a family is Christo-centric family.

9. A German Lady theologian, in a personal conversation suggested: Europe has experimented the society without a value system, without cultural and ritual practices. The result of it is only chaos and confusion. Why should you repeat the same mistakes we have experimented and committed. Is it not better to learn from our mistakes?

10. On 07th October 2015, during the Synod on Family, Pope Francis' worded that the lives of today's family shows that they need an "injection of family spirit." In today's world, support for the family has been diminished and that the virtues of family life have not been incorporated in modern society. The family introduces to this need the bonds of fidelity, sincerity, trust, cooperation, respect; it encourages to project a habitable world and to believe in relations of trust, even in difficult conditions; it teaches to honor the word given, respect of individual persons, the sharing of personal and other limitations."⁴

I would like to divide the Family traditions and identity of St. Thomas Christians to three categories.

³ The word "tradition" is taken from Latin *trado, tradere* meaning to hand over, to deliver, or to bequeath. The teachings of Jesus and his Apostles are preserved in writing in the Bible as well as by word of mouth and are handed on. This perpetual handing over of the Tradition is called a living Tradition; it is the transmission of the teachings of the Apostles from one generation to the next. The term "deposit of faith" refers to the entirety of Jesus Christ's revelation, and is passed to successive generations in two different forms, Sacred Scripture (the Bible) and Sacred Tradition (through apostolic succession).

⁴ Pope Francis, Reported by ZENIT.org, Daily dispatch - October 07, 2015.

1. Cultural Identity and Family Traditions

1.1. Equality, Dignity and Roles in the Family

Gender equality, human dignity and different roles for each member of the family were considered as the plan of God regarding the family. Therefore the male and female respected the human dignity giving them equal rights and obligations. Hence generally no one claimed superiority over the other and no one felt inferior too. They understood that for the healthy living, God has designed the family in such a way that they share different roles, which are complementary.⁵

1.2. Head of the Family

St. Thomas Christians having followed the patriarchal system of the family, enjoyed the system of having a male person as the head of the family. Being head of the family was a role of responsibility than a privilege. The father was the head of the family. If the grandfather was present then he was the head. If both the father and the grandfather were absent, then the eldest son who has reached the age of maturity was considered to be the head of the family. This role was to be fulfilled with the cooperation and complementarily with the other male and female members of the family. Headship was understood of having the characteristics of spirituality and morality, well-mannered dealings, sufficient earnings for family, sharing the responsibility of bringing up the children and the ability to make correct decisions in consultation with others, in one word, to be the role model. Being head of the family was related to the juridical status as well as social status. The chair of the head of the family was considered to be seat of authority and generally no elders occupied that chair of the head.⁶

⁵ When God created humankind in His image, He created them male and female and called them to share equally in His likeness (Gen 1: 27). The equality shared between man and woman is further adorned by God's original plan for family through the complementary roles of man and woman as husband and wife. God reveals this plan in the creation story of Genesis, where He completed creation of the universe only at the creation of woman from the rib of man and by uniting them to prosper in the universe (Gen 2: 20-25). Jesus raises the institution of family into perfection first by being the member of an ideal family, then by resolving any issues that would come on any family just as at the miracle of Cana (Jn 2: 1-12) and finally by reinstating the original plan of God for family (Mt 19: 3-9). The indissolubility of marriage asserted by Jesus (Mt 19:6), is not a "yoke" imposed upon couples but is the expression of the stability and mutuality of the "self-gifting" by husband and wife united in marriage. Hence, through their personal and irrevocable consent in the marriage, man and woman enter into a covenant for their whole life. This lifetime covenant is a call to the 'true love between husband and wife' (GS 49) which implies a mutual gift of self and includes and integrates the sexual and affective aspects, according to the divine plan (GS 48-49). To the fulfilment of this divine vocation of building up the Body of Christ, the bride and groom are consecrated through God's grace; therefore every family is a 'domestic church' (LG 11). This domestic church gives every person initial experience of ecclesial communion to which one will be fully integrated through various points of life.

⁶ St. Paul teaches: "wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands" (Eph 5:22-24). In the absence of proper understanding of the concepts of Christ-Church and head-body relationships, one part of the ecclesial community will be considered as subjects of the other. While "Head" figuratively means the authority in a given situation or structure, St. Paul often used the head-body metaphor to describe the unity of Christ and His Church. As parts of a single physical structure, head and body are dependent on each other for their survival and fullness. This interdependence is evident in their functions: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her . . . that he might present the church to himself in splendour . . . that she might be holy and without blemish"(Eph 5:26). Christ became the head of His spouse Church by his selfless sacrifice for her and by making her worthy of eternal salvation. Husband assumes as the head of wife and the family first by his sanctifying role in their life, then by his ever emptying self-giving for their care and protection. This vocation of husband can be fulfilled only with the dutiful cooperation of wife as St. Paul enumerates his teaching on spousal relationship by stating that, while wife is to subject herself to husband, the husband is to love wife, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"

1.3. Numerous Children as the Symbol of Prosperity

Having more children was considered to be a matter of pride, God's blessing and sign of prosperity. Financial or material stability of the family were not considered to be the crucial point for having more children. Botheration about sustainability of the children purely depended on the providence of God.

1.4. Joint Family System

St. Thomas Christians lived in joint families. Giving and taking, sharing and correcting in the joint families have definitely contributed for the mature growth and development of the persons. As there were many children, the younger children received the dress, books and other usable things from the elder ones. The elder members took the responsibility for the growth of the younger members and were ready to sacrifice their future for the younger ones. Possessions owned by the individuals were not encouraged and everything and everyone belonged to the family.

1.5. Patriarchal System of the Family

Since St. Thomas Christians opted to follow patriarchal (*makkathayam*) system, the sons inherited the property of the father. The female children were given *sthridhanam* (dowry) at the time of marriage which was a fair consideration in money or gold but not an equal division among all children.⁷ The house of the parents would be inherited by the youngest son in the family and other sons would get fair portions of land or other properties. For the children, it was a sacred duty to help their aged parents. Therefore the parents lived in their ancestral house and they were to be taken care of by the married youngest son till their death.

1.6. Actual Name and Family Name (surname)

The use of biblical names for the new-born and the naming-ceremony of children are popular among St. Thomas Christian Community. The first male and female children respectively were given the names of the paternal grandfather and grandmother; the second pair those of the maternal grandfather and grandmother. The family is traditionally having a family name which is also considered as surname.⁸

1.7. Dress Code:

Nobility, decency and modesty were visible in the dress of the Thomas Christian which indeed helped them to have a high moral stand in their life and practice.⁹ Men and women used white

(Eph. 5:25-27). "Head" according to Sacred Scripture is neither physical nor intellectual nor consensual domination, but sensitive and intelligent leadership, based on loving consultation between the spouses, resulting in the care for his wife and children. As the Father chose to be the head of the Church, He chose husbands to be the head of family. "The head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1Cor. 11:3). Therefore, husband truly serves his wife and children as head by first subjecting himself to Jesus Christ, the true head, then by taking up primary responsibility for the family and finally, by his leadership for discerning and fulfilling the roles of each member in the family. When the headship of the family is fulfilled in an atmosphere of prayer, it leads husbands to sacrificing service.

⁷ Now there are the court verdicts ensuring the female children having equal share from the ancestral property if the will is not written by the father.

⁸ It has become a fashion that some people give a name to their house and write it down in front of the gate. This is not the surname. The family name is supposed to be surname which is the same for the whole family. In the modern times, St. Thomas Catholics, because their names are complicated outside Kerala, give their father's name as surname. This endangers the future of the family because each generation will have a new surname if this situation continues to exist.

⁹ The men used to wear an ornamented piece of cloth called *mundu*, tied round the waist downwards to the knees. Usually they did not cover their chest side except for solemn occasions where they used a decorated white cloth thrown over the shoulders. The women wore a white garment seven yards long, and one and a quarter yard broad.

coloured dresses both for the Church and other occasions including at home. When the women went to the Church or went to meet the priests, they covered their head. The women were very modest in work and behaviour and were satisfied with their household work and the simple surroundings.

1.8. Ornaments

The males and the females used ornaments. Most of the males beyond sixty grow their beard, become devout, spending their days in fasting and prayers. The females used to grow their hair as lengthy as possible. The widows did not use ornaments. The males and females did not use shoes or sandals.¹⁰

1.9. Eating Habits

Apart from some famous curries or dishes, including “*Pidiyum Kozhiyum*” those edibles made up of rice and coconut oil were the most favourite edibles (*palaharam*) among the St. Thomas Christians. *Achappam, kuzhalappam, unniyappam, vatteppam, palappam, kozhukatta, neyyappam, ayani* etc. were some of them either fried in coconut oil or prepared in steam. Ordinary food was rice and vegetarian curry. Meat and fish was used only on special occasion like Sundays and feast days.¹¹ Consuming alcohol was considered to be degradation for the family status. On special occasions, the food was served in banana leaves and the people sat on the floor squatting. People ate food with fingers. Supper was served after the family prayers.

1.10. Language

The liturgy was celebrated in Syriac and the other prayers were taught in the mother tongue. It seems that though St. Thomas Catholic attended liturgical services in Syriac, only Malayalam was known to them as language. In the middle of 20th century, it was permitted to use vernacular for the liturgical services. The Bible, the prayers, its meanings are to be understood properly by the faithful and hence the *megisterium* says that instead of divinizing the language, Bible, liturgy, prayers should be in the language that is understood by the people.

2. Value System as Identity and Family Traditions

2.1. The parents, teachers, spiritual and political leaders and elders were highly respected. Showing respect to others is so common that they are particular not to sit in the presence of their parents, seniors, elder brothers and superiors of any kind.

2.2. All the relatives of the grandparents, parents, close relatives, neighbours and friends were invited to be part of any family celebrations. It was customary to invite all paternal and maternal relatives for parish feasts, marriages and commemoration of the dead and other functions. Any time of the day the relatives were welcome. No previous appointments were needed for such visits. During the unexpected visits also whatever food or drink available would be shared with them.

A number of fringes forming a fan like appendage behind rendered their dress artistically elegant. The upper garment was called *kuppāyam*. The women used to hold an umbrella to avoid being seen by males while they going out.

¹⁰ The males also used ornaments at their ears, arms and neck. They used to grow their hair fully and tie up and arrange it in such a manner that it is very beautiful and they fixed a golden cross in it. Carrying a spear and other instruments in the hands was normal for the males. The females used ornaments which they wore in hands (*vala* or bracelets), legs (*tala* or anklets), ears (*mekkāmōtiram* and *kammal*), and neck (*patakkamaala*) but never at the nose. Apart from this they used also loin ornaments (*ealas*), girdle (*aranjānam*) and rings. The earring was used by the girls from the age of six. The widows did not use ornaments.

¹¹ In the history it seems that pork and beef were not used by St. Thomas Christians.

- 2.3. All were very courteous towards strangers and foreigners. Guests of any kind were welcome in the families even for overnight stay.
- 2.4. Discipline was the most important part of life. A perfect time table was followed for the daily chores. The time table insisted the system of early to bed and early to Church/work. Timings for prayer, food, drinks, bath, etc were also strictly followed.
- 2.5. For doing anything apart from the daily chores, explicit permission is to be sort from the head of the family. Without proper information, nothing was to be done. Even going out for any purpose and time of returning etc. were to be clearly communicated.
- 2.6. Prayer and Dining were considered to be occasions of coming together. Dining was also the occasion for sharing. Sharing of different issues related to the family and community in general were the occasion of great learning for younger members of the family. Anything and everything related to the children and grandchildren were brought to this session which was used as the time of corrections.
- 2.7. The head of the family was responsible for the discipline and decisions of the house where the females were free to express their opinion and be part of the decision making process.
- 2.8. When there were many members, the male members had food first then the females. The male members were respected and always enjoyed the priority.
- 2.9. Honesty, sincerity, openness, accountability, transparency were considered to be great values in the family. Enjoyments, entertainments and vacations were unimportant or uncommon. Values such as, family bond, spirituality, alms giving, helping the poorer family members, bringing up the numerous children with lots of sacrifices, etc were placed as of primary importance.
- 2.10. Moral life was placed in high esteem. It was the responsibility of the parents and the uncles and aunties to find a proper partner for their children. They got marriage already at the age of puberty. This was to make sure that the person is free from any kind of deviation. The virginity was placed in great importance. Love marriages were not tolerated. If at all love marriages happen, they were not accepted in the family. Masturbation, Pre-marital sex, adultery, etc. were considered as most serious sins. Mixed marriages or divorce was unheard.

3. Practices of Rituals as Identity and Family Traditions

There are many ritual practices observed in the St. Thomas Catholic families. A lot of these traditions have been handed down from generation to generation right from the ancient times.

3.1. Family Prayers and Customs

3.1.1. Observance of Sunday and Days of Obligation

Sunday obligation and the observance of the days of obligation, being very important for the Thomas Christians, all the family activities of the day planned in such a way that all the members of the family attend Holy Qurbana that day. During those days, they were particular to abstain from any manual labour. The children are to attend faith formation classes in the Church either before or after the Holy Qurbana.

3.1.2. Daily Family Prayer

Hearing the Church bells chiming, thrice a day, the angelus prayer was recited in the family. The people used to stop their daily chores and recite the angelus and then continue to do their daily chores. After the evening church bell, the family with all the members together recited the angelus and then the children continued with the prayers and part of catechism which was followed by the Rosary. In some families, liturgy of the hours (*yamaprarthanakal*) was recited. The family prayer also included the dedication of the family prayer (Dedication to Sacred Heart

(*Kudumba pradhista*), reading a chapter of passage from the Bible, prayer of the faithful, prayer for the priests, and other prayers given by the Church to recite.

3.1.3. Customary Greeting (*Eeshomishihakku sthudhiaairikkatte, Umma*)

St. Thomas Christians while meeting fellow Christians especially priests and the religious, praised God saying "Praise be to Jesus Christ" or *Eesho mishihakku sthudhiaairikkatte*. Soon after the family Prayer, all the members greet the almighty God facing the family altar. And then the younger ones greet the eldest family member to the youngest with this prayerful greeting. This greeting prayer unites the family members in love and communion. This greeting prayer has two parts: the first part of the greeting is "*Eeshomishihakku sthudhiaairikkatte*" the response to the first part is "*ippoazhum eppoazhum sthudhiaairikkatte*" which means "let him be praised now and forever". After the family prayer the children greeted the elders attached with an umma (kiss). This greeting is often said to the priests and nuns.

3.1.4. Prayer Room / Family Altar

From early times people have been making special places for prayer. In some families a room was set apart for prayers or at least a part of the main room was modelled as family Altar for prayers. The Pictures were placed such that the people turn to the East. Pictures of the Sacred Heart, Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, Holy Family, relics of saints and sacred objects received from sacred places were placed at the altar together with candles, lights and flowers.

3.1.5. Dedication of the Bible

At the centre of the family Altar, a Bible is placed with due respect. It was kept in such a way that the small kids will not be able to take it but the elders can read it at any time. Nothing else usually placed on the Bible. It is naturally wrong to keep the household papers inside the Bible.

3.1.6. Holy Water

After the blessings of the Holy Saturday, the families bring the Holy Water home and place it near the entrance which can be used for making the sign of the cross when somebody enters and exits the house. Holy water is also preserved near the family altar which is used for blessing any object before using it in the family context.

3.2. Family Centered Catechetical Formation

The family is the cradle of catechesis by which faith is handed down from generation to generation. The grand children are initiated in faith and formed in good character by the grandparents. The basic catechism and prayers were taught by the grandparents or parents or elder children of the family. It was a practice in the families that the children recite all the important prayers and principles of Catholic faith daily (33 *koottam namascarangal*). Hence all the children know all the prayers from the family itself and hence it was never difficult for the youngsters to recite the prayers before the marriage (*namascarm cholli kelpikkal*).

3.3. Fasting and Abstinence

St. Thomas Catholics have a rigorous discipline with regard to fasts and abstinence. The early foreign missionaries called the early St. Thomas Christians as "the Church of those who Fast" (*upavasikalude sabha*). For any important feast celebration, the faithful prepared themselves with disciplined abstinence, fasting and prayer. The days popularly observed are all days of Lent from Ash Monday to Easter (*ambathu nombu*), period of Annunciation (*irupathanchu nombu*), preparation for of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (*Pathinanjunombu nombu*), preparation for the feast of Nativity of Mother Mary (*Ettu nombu*), the experience of Jonah inside the fish (*Moonu nombu*). The faithful abstained from Meat, fish, Egg, Milk, Milk Products, chewing of Betel, smoking, Alcohol, conjugal relationship etc. Such abstinence was also observed on all Fridays and some of them also on Wednesdays. Respecting the solemnity of the

season, the Fridays between Christmas and Denha and the first Friday after Easter are exempted from the abstinence.

All Family Members who have completed the age of fourteen and those who enjoy normal health are obliged to observe fast and abstinence. Fasting is obligatory on the first day of lent (*Vibuthi*-Ash Monday) and Good Friday. On days of fasting only one full meal is taken.

3.4. Lent Period and Holy week Celebrations

3.4.1. Pethratha

Pethratha is the day before starting the lent. On this day, special preparation of *Pidiyum Kozhiyum* is a speciality of the St. Thomas Catholic families. Another food rooted in the biblical tradition of manna (*pidi*) and quail (*kozhi*) provided to the Israel in the Sinai desert (Ex. 16: 13-14; Num: 11, 7-9). *Pidiyum Kozhiyum* resembles the manna (*pidi*) and quail (*kozhi*) and reminds that lent offers the same desert experience for 40 years experienced by the Israelites.

3.4.2. Ambathu nombu

In the Oriental Churches like the Syro-Malabar Church the lent begins on the seventh Monday before Easter. We do not skip Sundays when the length for Lent is calculated. It is a matter of tradition and good faith that most St. Thomas Christians eat only vegetarian meals for 50 full days abstaining from meat, fish and alcohol throughout Lent voluntarily even though the Church laws do not stipulate on all days of Lent, especially on Sundays. It is one of the finest spiritual offerings. The practice is the same for other Christian groups that claim St. Thomas' patrimony, such as Orthodox Christians.

3.4.3. Paadinombu

In some parts of Kerala, 25th day of the lent is remembered as the day of *pathinombu* and on that they prepare *inriappam*.

3.4.4. Nalpathamvelli (40th Friday)

Friday before the Hosanna Sunday used to be a reminder for the last ten days of lent. The families started rigorous lent.

3.4.5. Kozhukatta Perunnal

The Saturday between the *nalpathamveli* and Hosanna is specially celebrated as *Kozhukatta Perunnal*. *Kozhukatta* and *Peechampidy* are prepared in round and rectangle size. The gospel reading of that day indicates that these edibles have direct biblical symbolism in it (John 12: 1-8). It is naturally a reminder of the hospitality of Martha and Mariam in the house of Lazares. Mary anointed Jesus feet with the perfume of pure nard from the expensive alabaster jar. *Kozhukatta* resembles the alabaster jar of Mary and when it is steamed hot, it would be broken and fills the home with a sweet perfume of rice flour, jaggery and coconut and other spices. *Peechampidy* does not taste much and resembles the silver coin purse of Judas who argued for selling the perfume to filling his purse. These edibles are prepared only that day of the year and shared with the neighbours in order to foster unity and brotherhood. Interpreting these edibles to stones which the people picked up to throw at Jesus is incorrect.

3.4.6. Hosanna Sunday

On Hosanna Sunday, Palm leaves are brought Home from the Church by each and every member of the house and kept in his or her room, a symbol of protection from evil.

3.4.7. Maundy Thursday (Pesaha Vyazham)

On Maundy Thursday, as a part of the family celebration of the Passover feast, special unleavened bread (*Pesahappam*) was prepared. It was patterned in the Jewish mode of celebration of the Passover in the family which was continued in the St. Thomas tradition taking the spirit of Exodus 12:14-27. Tender coconut leaves blessed on Hosanna Sunday is used to

make small cross on the top of the bread which was also called as *Kurisappam* which represented the bread used by Jesus in the last Supper. In the evening all the members of the family, including the extended family used to gather in the ancestral house. The eldest male member of the family would lead the prayer and would read the biblical passage, after removing the palm leaf cross, broke the *Kurisappam* with hands and would distribute it with other members of the family from the eldest member to the youngest. The bread is received with respect in the palm with both the hands akin to receiving the Holy Communion.

Bread called *inriappam* is also prepared along with *Kurisappam*. INRI appam reminds us of the crucifixion of Jesus on the following day (*Jesus Nazraene Rex Iudeorum*) and hence is also very much biblical. The preparation is almost the same as *Kuriasappam* but is prepared in banana leaves and steamed and does not the palm leaf cross in it.

Together with this a special drink was also prepared with rice flour, coconut milk and jaggery which represented the wine at the Last Supper. The *Kuriasappam* and *pal* (milk) is not given to non-Christians nor is it kept for the next day whereas *inriappam* can be distributed among the non-Christians. During the breaking of the bread, *Puthenpana* is read out. When the elder in the family dies, the *pesahaappam* is not prepared for a year in the ancestral house. It was the responsibility of the neighbouring family to prepare it for them. *Kurisappam* seems have its origin during the Chaldean period where as *inriappam* may be of Portuguese period which has a Latin origin.

In the method of preparation of the *appam* and *pal*, it varies from region to region.

3.4.8. Good Friday (Holy Friday)

On Good Friday, the Syro-Malabar Church celebrates the Passion of the Christ by holding commemorative ‘Stations of the Cross’, reading related passages from the Bible etc. On Good Friday, a bitter drink (*Kaipuneer*) from bitter gourd was prepared and drunk by the family/Church members. It was a strong tradition to read *puthenpana* during the day by somebody and others listened to it.

3.4.9. On Holy Saturday (Valiya Shani)

In the middle ages, beginning roughly in the eighth century, the ceremonies of the Easter Vigil, especially the blessing of new fire and the lighting of the Easter candle, began to be performed earlier. Eventually, these ceremonies were performed on Holy Saturday morning. The Syro-Malabar Church follows this tradition very piously. The whole of Holy Saturday, originally a day of mourning for the crucified Christ and of expectation of His Resurrection, now became little more than an anticipation of the Easter Vigil. Strict fasting and abstinence continued to be practiced on the morning of Holy Saturday, thus reminding the faithful of the sorrowful nature of the day and preparing them for the joy of Easter feast. While fasting and abstinence are no longer required on Holy Saturday morning, practicing these Lenten disciplines is still a good way to observe this sacred day before the Easter Vigil Services start closer to midnight in anticipation and celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. After the blessing of the Holy water in the church, now there is a practice of bringing a portion of the water at home and used for blessing the house or things.

3.5. **House Building and Blessing Rituals:**

St. Thomas Christians considered the construction of houses to be a holy ceremony. In the villages the houses are constructed facing towards the East or the north with a cowshed, well, garden and vegetable farm nearby. Some of the non-Christian practices were adopted by St. Thomas Christians such as finding the position for the house, for the well, for a stable by seeking opinion of traditionally accepted experts “*Asharis*” in the field.

Boiling the milk (*Pal Kachal*) or *Grihapraves* is again an important ritual as once the construction is over, it was a practice to dedicate the house to the Lord, blessing of the house is done by the Parish Priest. During the preparation for the blessing, near the family altar, a traditional '*Para*' and '*Nilavalakku*' are kept on the floor. The family members and extended family members fill the *Para* with a handful of paddy. Towards the end the Head of the family fills the *Para* above its brim. Before the rituals begin, the people gather in the courtyard and witness the parish priest giving the key of the house to the Head of the family who will then open the main door and invite everyone to enter into the house for prayer.

Most families also boil a pot of milk and allow it to overflow on boiling to symbolize the overflow of prosperity to the new House and its members.

3.6. Special Celebrations

3.6.1. Christmas

As a preparation for Christmas, 25 days of abstinence was practised by St. Thomas Christians. In the recent times, Christmas cribs are prepared in the garden in order to give the message of Christmas to all the people. Special edibles like *vatteppam* was the special for Christmas which is also shared with the neighbouring Hindu families.

3.6.2. Epiphany or Denha

The festival of Epiphany marks the baptism of Jesus and was known in various names such as *rakkuli*, *pindikuthi* etc in different places. *Rakkuli* (night Bath) was a ceremonial bath in the pond or river near to the houses remembering the baptism of Jesus, which was a symbol of personal purification. In North Kerala it was called *pindikuthi perunnal* when feast torches were lighted on *pindi* (Plantain trunk) in the night in front of every house and it was a communitarian proclamation of Jesus as the light of the world, calling out '*el-paiya*' (God is Light) in Syriac.

3.6.3. Feast of St. Thomas (Dukrana and Puthunjayar)

The Feast of St. Thomas on 3rd July has always been called *Dukrana* (In Syriac), means remembrance or commemoration. It was celebrated as *Sradham* or *Chattam*, the death anniversary of St. Thomas. The other feast was on the octave of Easter, which was called the new Sunday (*puthunjayar*), celebrated solemnly in the Honour of St. Thomas who was invited to place the hands in the wound of Christ when Thomas confessed with Conviction "My lord, My God". After long days of abstinence and fasting, pilgrimage to Malayattoor where St. Thomas is believed to have prayed, is made by many Christians on this occasion.

3.7. Special Devotions

3.7.1. Veneration of the Mar Sliba (Holy Cross)

Cross (Marthoma Kurishu) was venerated as religious symbol in the house and used as the sign of protection in the body. Everything related to life was begun with a sign of the cross.

3.7.2. Devotion to Mother Mary and St. Joseph

According to age-old oriental tradition, *Ettunombu* (from 1st Sept) was observed in preparation for the Nativity of Mother of God on 8th September and *pathinanjunombu* (14 days from 1st August) was observed in preparation of the Dormition (Assumption – 15th August) of the Holy Mary Mother of God. In recent origins, the month of October is especially dedicated for praying the Rosary and the month of May is observed for special devotion (*vanankamasam*) in honour of Mother Mary. In the month of March *vanankamasam* is conducted in honour of St. Joseph and in June in honour of Sacred Heart of Jesus.

3.8. Vow of Food (Nercha Baskhanam)

All different vows related to food, taken by St. Thomas Christians, have reference to Jesus who was concerned to feed the hungry. Food, both physical and spiritual, is a great symbol in the life

of Jesus. In the end, Jesus gave himself as food for many so that they may live eternally. Most of these *nerchas* have imbibed this spirit and were prepared in the families.

3.8.1. Oottu nercha:

Nercha is part of a vow which a person decides to do in order to receive a favour or a gesture of thanksgiving to the Lord. *Oottu nercha* or *muthiyuttu* is a meal served as an act of charity commonly performed by the families especially on the feast of St. Joseph – on 19th March. A poor family is invited representing the Holy Family and they are given a sumptuous meal. This poor family is respectfully seated as honourable guests and served solemn meal. They will be given also clothes. This *nercha* is a great sign of spirituality and humility.

3.8.2. Pachor

Pachor is a meal or edible offering as part of a vow, mostly as gratitude for the grace received or to receive a favour for a prayer intention. This is brought to the church in a vessel. The priest blesses it and the pieces of it are distributed among the people.

3.8.3. Perunnal Nercha

Feasts of the parish or chapels are celebrated with special *nercha* prepared in the families. After the blessing, it is given either after the liturgical ceremonies or near the *roopakoodu* where the statues of the saints, exposed in a decorated frame. These traditions seem to be mere imitation of the hindu *prasatha* from the temples. The housewives took pride in preparing this *nercha* which is also as a thanksgiving to the plentiful harvest or for the intentions of the agriculture.

3.8.4. Slihanmarude Nercha

The concept of it is similar to *oottunercha* but this vow is to invite 12 men representing 12 apostles. On this occasion also *pidiyum kozhiyum* are served.

3.8.5. Puzhukku and Thamukku Nerchas

These *nercha* is attached some places and unique to them only. *Puzhukku nercha* is prepared with different vegetables, which is given by Ramapuram church. *Thamukku nercha* is tasty and sweet rice preparation, a *nercha* given at Alangad, Kuravilangad, etc. in the churches named after the Infant Jesus. Now-a-days these are prepared in big quantity and hence the cooking itself is done in the Churches itself.

3.8.6. Pashni Kanji

Rich Catholics were concerned about the poor and Pashni Kanji was a meal to feed many poor people of the locality. At the lunch time, many poor people would gather to have this meal. They would be seated at the courtyard and Kanji and vegetables would be given to them.

3.9. Pilgrimages

3.9.1. Vow (Vazhipadu)

Pilgrimage was part of a Vow. In order to seek some special blessings and favours, the faithful with devotion made this vow to God that they would make a rigorous sacrifice by going on pilgrimage preparing themselves with abstinence and fasting. It seems that this vow (*vazhipadu*) in the form of pilgrimage was meticulously fulfilled by St. Thomas Christians. This vow was not just to make a pilgrimage trip but to prepare with fasting and abstinence (*Nombu*) and mostly done by walking with barefoot.

3.9.2. Pilgrim Places of St. Thomas

In the early centuries, the faithful used to go to Mylapore either in groups or individually, to pray at the tomb of St. Thomas. This pilgrimage (*therthadanam*) reminds us about the first visit of St. Thomas Christians along with Keppa (supposed to be the first Bishop of St. Thomas Christians ordained by the Apostle Thomas) at Mylapore as soon as they heard about the martyrdom of Apostle Thomas. Apart from Mylapore pilgrimage, the Christians started the visit

to Malayattoor, Kodungaloor, Paalayoor and other places related to St. Thomas. During the pilgrimage, they used to sing the songs traditionally sung and make it a prayerful experience.

3.9.3. Other Pilgrim Places

Places like Kurivilangad, Alangad, Athirampuzha, Edapally, Bharananganam, Mannanam, Ollur, Ramapuram, Kuzhikattussery and many other places are the old and new pilgrim centres where a massive number of Christians visit during the year.

3.9.4. Kanikka and Nercha (Prasadam):

Kanikka is the love offering placed in the box kept at the pilgrim centre. This *kanikka* was given as money or kind by way of sacrifice of the person, which was used only for spiritual purposes. And *nercha (Prasadam)* is an edible given to the devotees at the pilgrim centre. When only one person from a family made the *therthadanam* (pilgrimage), *nercha (prasadam)* given from the centre was brought to the family as a holy object and shared among the family members and they believed that the merits of the pilgrimage is gained by the other family members as well.

3.10. Pious Customs related to Birth and Sacraments of Initiation

There are customs and practices from the very beginning of pregnancy and at the time of the birth and growth of the child. The birth of the first two children, pre-natal and post-natal care were considered to be the responsibility of the parents of the would-be mother.

3.10.1. 7th Month Ceremony of taking for Delivery

A gathering of close relatives is arranged at the would-be father's place and the pregnant mother to be is taken officially by the her parents to her maternal home and special care is given not only till the child is born but till the new born child is taken to the child's father place. It was considered to be a celebration of the family with relatives and neighbours distributing homemade sweets, for the gift of fertility.

3.10.2. After Delivery Rituals

Soon after a child was born, priest or male member of the family would whisper in the child's ear *Maron Yesu Mishiha* (Jesus Christ is Lord) and the child would be given with three drops of honey in which a little gold had been rubbed.

3.10.3. 28th day Thread ceremony:

On the 28th day, a black thread is tied to the waist of the new born child which was known as *irupathettukettu*. This black thread was often ornamented with toe-nails of the tiger (*pulinakham*) or mongoose teeth (*keripallu*).

3.10.4. Permission to enter the Church for the new Mother:

The new mother is permitted to enter the church only after 40 days if the child is a boy or 80 (56?) days if the child is a girl.

3.10.5. Baptism of the child

The Baptism of the Child was earlier done within 8 days, and in more recent times after the 40th day. Grandparents or paternal / maternal uncles and aunties or very close relatives were given the status of God Parents. The child is also given names of the Grand Parents or Biblical names particularly for the first and second child.

3.10.6. Choruttal

One the day of completing 11 months, the child was given *pachoru*, prepared with rice.

3.10.7. Ezhuthiniruthu:

At the age of 4 the child is symbolically taken for initiation into alphabets to a teacher (*aashan*) or to a priest for the first writing of the child.

3.11. Practices related to Marriage:

When the children become matured, the parents took initiative to get them married and settled in life. Giving children in marriage was very ceremonial. Related to marriage, St. Thomas Christians have taken many important aspects from the Indian cultural.

3.11.1. Arranged Marriages:

In arranged marriages, the meeting of prospective spouses is arranged by family members, relatives or friends, the spouses have to express free will to marry. Arranged marriages were common all round the world till the 18th Century, more so in Syro-Malabar tradition it continues till today in most families.

3.11.2. Fixing Ceremony:

Urappickal was traditionally done by the elders of the family along with the parish Priest in the girl's residence, nowadays increasingly it is done at the boy's residence. Fixing the share of the Father's property to be given to the daughter is also fixed at this time.

3.11.3. Engagement Ceremony:

The engagement ceremony is celebrated almost equal to a marriage celebration although the legal implications are not the same. The engagement is celebrated in the Church by exchange of rings in presence of witnesses.

3.11.4. Going to the Church for Wedding

Before going to the Church for wedding even for engagement, the whole family came together to pray before the family altar. The prayer at the house of the bride was very intense as she steps down from her home to be part of another home. After the prayer by the priest or elder, the candidates greet their parents and other close relatives saying *eesho misihahkku sthuthiyayirikkatte*. The parents wish them back all God's blessings.

3.11.5. Wedding Processions

Wedding Processions were considered to be very important part of the marriage ceremony.¹² But this tradition is not practiced now even though there exists one or other tradition in order to add the solemnity.

3.11.6. Wedding Dress, Tali and Mantrakoti

The most important rites found exclusively in the marriage celebration of Thomas Christians are the tying of the *tali* and offering of the *Mantrakoti*. These two are found among the customs of the Hindus and indeed remain strong examples of inculturation by the Christians in India.

3.11.6.1. Wedding Dress

The bride comes to the Church adorned in a *saree* which has got similarities with the traditional *saree* of Kerala Tradition (either white or a cream coloured like the set *saree* used for *onam*). The groom comes to the wedding wearing traditional *mundu* or shirt or *kurta* and *pajama*. The recent tendency of adapting the western wedding gowns and suits seem to be a blind adaptation of western style even though some of them claim that they are cuter in the albums.

3.11.6.2. Tali:

Tali having the shape of a leaf of the Bunyan tree (*alila*), is made up of gold and worn by the bride throughout her married life around her neck. The Christian *tali* or *minnu* is made in Gold and there is a cross on it. And this Cross is made of 21 tiny balls embossed; it seems the 21 balls are calculated to be $3 \times 7 = 21$. Number 3 is easily understood as three persons of the Holy Trinity.

¹² In the past high privileges were used by St. Thomas Christians like using palanquin (*antoolam*), elephants to ride on (*Ambari*), Royal Silk Umbrellas (*Muthukuda*), day Lamps (*Pakalvilakku*), walking Clothes (*Pavata*), Traditional Drums (*Panjavadyam*), Shouts of Joy (*Natavli* by Men and *Kurava* by women), Body Guards, Fore-runners to clear the way, carpets, ornaments, slaves and many Others.

In the biblical understanding 7 is a perfect number as stated in the book of Revelation, 7 angles and trumpets, etc. In the Church there are 7 sacraments.

There are many interesting ceremonies related to the *tali*, on eve of the marriage the twine with which the *tali* is tied is prepared in the house of the bridegroom, usually from the threads taken from the wedding garment, the *mantrakoti*. Three threads are twisted into one composite thread and then out of seven such composite threads the final chord is prepared. The *tali* proclaims the bride as a married woman. When she dies, the *tali* is deposited in the treasury box of the parish Church.

3.11.6.3. Mantrakoti:

The *Mantrakoti* is the nuptial vestment for the bride presented in the church by the Bridegroom which is very biblical. Jesus in his parables insisted on the wedding dress for entering in God's kingdom. St. Paul reiterates on several occasions that Christ is the groom and the Church is its bride. The husband is to protect the wife as Christ protects the Church. East Syrian tradition has the rite of blessing of nuptial vestment indicating that the bride is adorned with her bridal robes of grace and blessing. St. Thomas Christian tradition also seems to have adapted the Hindu custom of "*Pudavakodukka*" (Conferring of Nuptial vestment).

3.11.7. Intercession for a Successful Married Life

Once the wedding is over, the first act the couple together does is to pray together in front of the patron saint of the parish church. This is also followed by placing an offering in the box (*nerch petty*) placed near the statue. This intercessory prayer is also done in the parish church of the other partner when they go there on the following days for "*marupally kumbidil*."

3.11.8. Madhuram Vekkal:

Traditionally *Madhuram vekkal* was practiced twice, once on the eve of the wedding in the respective houses of the Groom and the bride in the presence of the relatives, Neighbours and friends. After the prayers and blessing by the priest if possible, the *madhuram* is given after blessing by the eldest Aunt/Grandmother or senior relative. The second *madhuram vekkal* is done at the reception of the bride and the groom and given by the eldest person of the family. He asks loudly thrice the permission of the community gathered if the *madhuram* can be given or not, the community expresses its joy in doing so and then *madhuram* is given to both. This ceremony reminds the Bride and the groom that the life that they begin together should be as sweet as the *madhuram* they accept.

3.11.9. Wedding Ring, Garlands and Bride's Bouquet

3.11.9.1. Wedding Ring (Vivhamothiram)

Among the Syrian Catholics the exchange of rings was only part of the Betrothal ceremony but not part of the wedding. Now it has become an accepted custom to exchange rings during the wedding ceremony which both of them are supposed to wear it throughout their life.

3.11.9.2. Garlands and Bride's Bouquet

In India where Flower Garlands have an important and traditional role in every festival and especially in wedding. The couple exchange and wear a wedding Garland during the ceremony. It was considered a symbol of happiness, originally bridal garlands and bouquets were made of Herbs which had magical and meaningful properties, later the flowers replaced the herbs.

3.11.10. Wedding Feast

A sumptuous feast is served for relatives, well wishers, neighbours and friends on folded banana leaf which was considered a royal practice and a sign of great hospitality.

3.11.11. Receiving the bride in the Groom's House

Receiving the bride in the Groom's House is a very meaningful ceremony practiced by families. The groom's Mother in traditional Kerala style with a bell metal lamp with a metallic handle (*Kuttuvilaku or Nilavalikku*) and a bushel heaped up with grain welcomes the bride. The couple stand facing the entrance and they are welcomed by sprinkling water in which paddy was dipped (*nellum nirum*) which symbolizes light, prosperity and fertility. The bride is received to groom's house religiously by the mother-in-law making a sign of the cross on the bride's forehead at the front steps of the house and hands a traditional lamp (*nilavilakku*) in her hand. Groom's sisters lead the bride into the house. While entering the groom's house, the couple especially the bride takes special pride to place the right foot first which is taken from the Hindu tradition which is considered as an auspicious sign. There are also other customs followed in different places differently.

3.11.12. Entrusting the Bride to the Family of the Bridegroom:

After all the celebrations before leaving, the parents and relatives of the bride entrust her to the Groom's parents.

3.12. Rituals for the Dying and the Commemoration of the Dead

3.12.1. The care of the Dying

Tying palm leaves with biblical verse written on it to the body of the sick, giving the sick and the dying water mixed with soil taken from the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore are some traditional practices. When the signs of Death appear, the dying person is laid on a bed facing East according to local custom. Till the moment of death, the relatives and neighbours chant prayers in the ears of the dying (*Chevittorma*), As soon as person breathes his or her last, the toes and thumbs are tied together with a piece of cloth. Usually the dead body is kept facing the East at home and the graveyard also. Crucifix and Lighted candles are kept at the Head of the bed or Coffin.

3.12.2. Preparing the body for burial:

After a few hours of the death, the body of the dead is washed, dressed with fresh cloth (*Kodithuni*), anointed with perfumed oil and placed before the community to pay last respect.

3.12.3. Prayers before and during the Burial

Usually a period of not less than a day, the dead body would be placed at the house of the deceased. During this time at home, Puthenpana, thomaparvam and other prayers are recited by friends, relatives and neighbours. The Rituals of the burial have three stations. The first station starts from the house of the deceased. This is the lengthiest station which includes two readings from the Bible, sermon and the prayer of the faithful. There are very meaning prayers and the hymns are very meaningful and touching.

3.12.4. Kacha idil (Laying of the Silk Cloth).

The last station of the burial is at the cemetery. Earlier the dead were buried in their own premises but now since a few centuries, the burial is always in the church cemeteries. One of the most important family traditions during the burial is *kacha idil*. This *Kacha* (another form of *soshappa* that we use for the Holy Qurbana) resembles the shroud of cloth which Jesus was wrapped in. In some area only one *kacha* is put on the face of the dead by the eldest son or the closest relative. In other area, all the close relatives place a *kacha* on the dead body. However *kacha idil* shall not be replaced with floral wreaths.

3.12.5. Post Burial Rituals:

After the burial service, the members of the family would gather in the house. Sometimes priest is also present. After the prayer all would come and accept the peace (*kasturi*) from the priest and take a few seeds of jeera (cumin seed) to eat. The priest or an elder used to bless a

tender coconut (*karikku*) and drink from it and distribute it among the close relatives. Thus break the fast after the burial. After the death of the person, no food was prepared in the house of the deceased. Even if the food is to be given it was prepared by a neighbour and distributed in that house.

3.12.6. Ritual Meal (*Pula veedal*)

There were special observances for the commemoration of the dead on the 7th, 11th, 16th, 28th and 41st day after the demise. The relatives and friends of the deceased used to pray and spend time together at the house of the dead for a week. Like high caste Hindus, St. Thomas Christians also practiced *Pulakuli* or ritual bath on the 11th day after the burial, for the purification from the defilement due to the death of a family member. This practice is observed now-a-days as per the convenience of the people on the 3rd or 5th or 7th or 9th day as well. The rituals of *Pula* are meant for the remission of the debts and the sins of the deceased and hence it is observed after the death of the elders only. One this day, the family members gather in the house of the deceased after the Holy Qurbana and prayers. The priest conducts a special prayer for the dead coupled with the sprinkling of the holy water on the people and the house. This is considered to be purification of the persons and the house where the deceased was placed. Then everybody comes forward and kisses the cross on Urara worn by the priest, takes *jeera* (cumin seed) placed on the table and deposit some offering (money) in the plate placed on the table. This offering is later used for celebrating Holy Qurbana in the intentions of the deceased. This has a reference to the biblical tradition from 2 Meccabeus 12, 43-45 where Judas Maccabeus making a collection from the people and sends the money to Jerusalem Temple for sacrifices for the remission of sins of the dead.

Then all are given a ritual meal which begins with a plantain and *unniappam* which is generally brought from the family of the married daughters if there are any or of other close relatives. This ritual meal is a simple vegetarian meal mostly with *palappam* and vegetable stew. Here *pazham* resembles the sin originated by Adam eating of the fruit and the unniappam, eating of the bread which Jesus instituted as Eucharist for the forgiveness of sins. On this occasion of the ritual meal all those who collaborated on the occasion of the death are remembered thankfully inviting them to partake in the meal.

3.12.7. Ritual Meal (*Pulayadiamtharam*)

Till the commemoration on the 41st day, the family members remained in fasting and abstinence and only vegetarian meals were served in the house. The male used to grow the beard and all family members wear black or white dresses till the 40th day. For the purification of the deceased soul, the relatives observe 40 days of fasting reminding the fasting of Jesus for 40 days. Because Jesus ascended into heaven on 40th day, the Thomas Christians celebrate the 41st day with the firm faith that the soul of the deceased is also taken to heaven. As this used to be a special occasion of prayer for the deceased, after Holy Qurbana and prayers in the cemetery, a meal is given to the relatives and friends. In some parts of Kerala, non-vegetarian food is also given as it is after 40 days of abstinence. Liturgical prayers, memorial common meals, alms giving were parts of the celebrations.

3.12.8. Sradham or Chatham

The death anniversary of the deceased is called *sradham* or *chattam*. Most of the close relatives like the partner or the children observe for one year long *valayma* and on the day of anniversary *Sradham* is celebrated with a non-vegetarian meal. It is also customary that they remember the deceased on the death anniversary for some decades. It is also an occasion for the family close relatives to come together with their children and grandchildren.

General Conclusions

1. Syro-Malabar Church is proud of its rich heritage and family traditions that serve in the foundation for gratified identity. I firmly believe that this community is 'chosen people' by God with a purpose as in the case of Old Testament 'Israel', which has been going through a desert experience. When we deeply reflect about the treasure that is entrusted to us in the form of these family traditions, we would ask the Lord about his plan with humility. In the context of the migration of Thomas Christians across the globe in 20th and 21st centuries, if it is God's will that we become models and witness of faith transmission through the family traditions, we should be ready to fulfil the divine will in preserving and practicing our family traditions, in spite of the sacrifices; even if we have to pay a higher prize.

2. In the early centuries, even when the liturgical language was Syriac (the liturgical celebrations were made available in vernacular from 1962), which the faithful could not follow fully, our faith-content was intact and Christian faith was handed down through domestic customary practices and ceremonies related to birth, marriage, death, etc. Daily family prayer, Bible reading at home and para-liturgical services on the occasions of feasts, the periods of annunciation and lent, holy week, fast and abstinence are media of authentic transmission of faith. This gives a clear indication that the St. Thomas Catholics were blessed to have not only the Church centred Christian life but also family centred traditions as part of their common identity. It seems that this community can survive anywhere in the world without getting diluted if the family identity and the traditions are kept intact. I mean to say that in those places where Christianity is forbidden or the Syro-Malabar Church is not officially recognized with proper jurisdiction, if the faithful are ready to practice their family traditions, they can survive and remain as St. Thomas Catholics.

3. Family practices related to rituals are precious and these customs make families stable and serve as the foundation stones and pillars of a stable society. Customs that contribute to a family's uniqueness can give its members a sense of who they are and where they belong to. It gives a chance to say "this is the way our family does it". Thus traditions serve as a counterbalance to the intense pressure on youth to conform to their peers instead of their families. I strongly feel that multi religious, cultural and linguistic background of the cities enrich our youth without doubt but unfortunately getting exposed to all different varieties have weakened their sense identity and practicing one set of family traditions seriously. Meaningful customs build a sense of closeness that endures even long after children are grown up and gone their own way. Observing special days and events gives us a chance to pause and reflect on our lives, to think about what's most important to us and to share that with our children.

4. We can be proud of the familial stability of St. Thomas Christians. The family traditions create and reinforce a sense of security among the family members. When we do something again and again over the years and through generations, we tie our past together with our present. We link year to year, childhood to adulthood, grandparent to child and to grandchild, with shared experiences, values and memories. Consistent and meaningful family customs provide regular, familiar patterns in a rhythmic life. They add an element of predictability to the cycle of family life that's both comforting and comfortable.

5. Faith is more important for a Christian. It is an interior disposition. If so what sense does it make to observe the family traditions? This is a question generally asked. The answer should convince a Christian. Our community itself is a witness to it. We can realistically say that preserving and practicing these traditions and identity in our families has been instrumental in

deepening our faith, growing in our spirituality, developing in divine and human values, forming a better religious life, progressing in social and moral life, etc. We can further affirm that it is important to keep the traditional form of family intact so that the future generations are assisted in their life as St. Thomas Catholics. At the same time, the traditions and customs of St. Thomas Catholic Family is not a part of the Sacred Tradition which cannot be changed at all as these traditions got accumulated from the history of 20 centuries such as that of St. Thomas era, Chaldean period and the Portuguese rule. Instead of struggling to keep all the traditions intact, it is better to keep all the meaningful, fruitful and effective traditions in its integrity. If we are able to take some sincere effort, it will not be very difficult to understand the theology or spirituality of the ritualistic practices. Knowing the reasons behind those traditions and passionate approach to practice them will surely enrich the community. But openness is needed to do away with those outdated rituals.

6. The identity of St. Thomas Christian families was evident in social, moral and religious realms of the society.¹³ The value system it followed, the culture it projected and the ritual expressions it practiced were attractive and acceptable for the local kings, government and the society. The interwoven living style of Christians with the people of other religion was a vehicle of trust to the next generation. Hence the value system practised by St. Thomas Christians need not be changed as such but we should be open to accept other higher values and be ready to share our value system with others. This will make a fusion of values which will enrich the people to lead a higher value system in the families (Eg. Touching the feet with hand in order receive the blessing and to show deep respect).

7. Rituals are part of the culture. Hence one cannot make a total separation of the ritual and the culture. St. Thomas Catholics are very much inculturated in the Indian soil so much so that all most all the family traditions are interlinked with the Indian culture. Hence the Indian soul would understand and accept our family traditions very easily. One should notice that the Christians did not just copy the Indian customs but Christianized them with the signs and symbols and prayers and used them as Christian customs. Now also, spreading the Gospel in the Indian soil becomes the most important duty and responsibility of inculturated St. Thomas Catholics. But when an inculturated community gets transplanted to another culture, a multi cultural context is created. Here, one needs to be open for inter-cultural adaptation¹⁴ especially in the new context of migration or evangelization. The principle of inter-cultural adaptability is mainly related to the Kingdom of God: whether the faith is meaningfully proclaimed and whether it is rightly understood and accepted. To evangelize supposes “a long and courageous process of inculturation so that the Gospel may penetrate the soul of living cultures...”¹⁵

¹³ Intervention of Apb Andrews Thazhath, on 9th Oct. 2015 during the Synod in Rome. ‘Family Liturgy’ played a great role in the life and formation of our Syro-Malabar Church. In order to promote true Christian family life and values, we have to give more importance to ‘Family Liturgy’ of the ‘Domestic Church’. I propose that as an outcome of the present Synod, dioceses publish texts / books of family liturgy and popularize them.

¹⁴ Outside India, in the context of a newly converted community through evangelization, those cultural traditions practiced by the St. Thomas Catholics in India need not be as such copied by the migrants. The inter-cultural adaptability opens the doors for the family traditions which can evolve in a different manner if it is a predominately Christian or Muslim country.

¹⁵ The inculturation of the Gospel in modern societies will demand a methodical effort of concerted research and action. This effort will assure on the part of those responsible for evangelization: (1) an attitude of openness and a critical eye; (2) the capacity to perceive the spiritual expectations and human aspirations of the new cultures; (3) the aptitude for cultural analysis, having in mind an effective encounter with the modern world. Extracts from the Vatican Document - Faith And Inculturation, International Theological Commission,1988, nr. 23.

8. The topics of inculturation and inter-cultural adaptability raise multi faceted issues: (1) regarding the identity of the migrants of the first generation (2) regarding the identity of the second and further generations of migrants (3) regarding the identity of newly converted through the evangelisation. It is to be noted that all these three groups have some difference in their religious, linguistic and cultural background. Hence as far the identity and traditions are concerned all these groups will have to be handled with sensitivity but without losing the original identity and traditions. This is not a small title of this theme but a big theme in itself. We need to engage in a lot more study and discussions on this in the future.

9. Among the discussion forums, an observation is expressed over and over again that some of the family traditions are now-a-days taken away from the families and they reserved and practiced in the Church level only. Relying on the principle of subsidiarity, the Church has the responsibility to give it back to the families and empower the families to follow those traditions, however, facilitating and making sure that such practices are correctly done by the families. In this regard, frequently heard common examples are *Appam murickal* and *Onam* celebrations.

10. On 07th October, recalling Jesus' calling of Peter to be a "fisher of men", the Pope said that "today, families are one of the most important nets for the mission of Peter and of the Church. This is not a net that makes us prisoners. On the contrary, it frees from the evil waters of abandonment and indifference, which drown many human beings in the sea of loneliness and indifference. Families know well the dignity, of feeling themselves children and not slaves or strangers, or just a number of an identity card". Following Pope's words, today the Syro-Malabar church invites us to take the net in our hands, fish the families, free them from the evil waters of modernity and relativism, in which many of our youngsters are disappeared. Let every human person in this world be part of a great family of identity and traditions.

Conclusions Given in *Instrumentum Laboris* : Revisited

1. Some of family traditions that have helped the effective preservation and transmission of faith among its members are to be identified and efforts should be taken to follow them faithfully. Some of those are listed below:

a. The spirituality of daily Family prayer should be brought back at a fixed time by all the members of the family. This prayer could be reciting the rosary or *yamaprarthanakal* or some other prayers recognized by the ecclesiastical authority. Bible reading, dedication prayers, prayer of the faithful, etc. are to be also made part of this prayer.

b. Apart from attending the Holy Qurbana, the Sunday Observance, through Catechism and other spiritual nourishment are to be encouraged.

c. Fasting and abstinence are very dear to our family tradition. The practice of abstinence (*nombu* for 50, 25, 15, 8 and 3 days and all Fridays) is to be observed besides the days of fasting. The observance of Friday abstinence is to be promoted intensely.

d. The domestic practice of making of *Pesaha – Appam* and the solemn practice of Head of the family leading the family in prayer and in cutting and distributing *appam* in '*appam murickal* ceremony' and sharing with neighbours are to be followed.

e. Giving Christian names especially the names of grandparents are to be revived. The tradition of family name as surname is to be reinstated. One should select grandparents and close relatives as the godparents for baptism. This will strengthen the family ties significantly and also the faith formation of the children.

f. *Theerthadanavum vazhippadum* (Pilgrimages and vows) to religious and holy places are to be promoted and families to be helped to fulfil this religious practice.

- g. The love and respect in remembering and praying for the dead people of the family in the observance of celebrating Holy Qurbana, oppise, *pulakuli*, *pulaveedal*, *pulayadiyantharam*, death anniversary (*shradahm*), etc. are to be practiced.
- h. The practices of fixing marriages should follow the opinion of the family members after the parties to be married and there should be many opportunities and time to get to know each other before Marriage. The girls should be permitted to see the place where they stay, sets us apart from others in society.
- i. The respect paid to the elders and the blessing imparted by them during *madhuram vaikkal* has to continue in all marriage ceremony.
- j. The solemn and prayerful entry of the bride to the house of the bridegroom shows her importance in the new house. Therefore, the traditions related to that will help to continue that spirit.
- k. The practice of *manthrakodi* and *tali* in a marriage are to be sacred symbols in the marriage. Wedding dresses also should show our culture and values.
- l. The spirit of Milk Boiling ceremony in house blessing shows the sacredness of kitchen just important as the prayer place at home, prosperity and abundance.
2. There are some traditions of which we need to imbibe their spirit into our present day. Some of which are the following:
- a. The spirit of modesty in our traditional dressings should be followed.
3. The major challenge to the preservation of the traditional form of family is the scarcity of the desired and compatible spouses from within the Syro-Malabar community, especially for girls. For this reason and for many other, marriages with persons from other religious and ethnic groups are incidental and common. The solutions to this problem need to be sought from all available sources and through aforethought measures.
4. The role and significance of fatherhood needs to be emphasized and empowered institutionally and individually. The boys should be formed, the youth should be trained in the skills and the newly married should be empowered and encouraged to take up the role of responsible fathers.
5. These traditions continue to serve a vehicle of catechesis, transmittal of values and expression of the identity of St. Thomas Christians, when their spirit and values are imbibed into our families while practicing and celebrating Christian faith.

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