

Rev. Fr. MATHEW MATTAM

(1932-2023)

*A celebrated Singer and ardent lover of
Syriac heritage & Liturgy*



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സുറിയാനി സംഗീതത്തിന്റെ സ്വര മാധുര്യം



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Rev. Fr. Mathew Mattam
1932-2023

Another exponent of authentic East Syriac Chant and Music has gone to his eternal rest in peace. Let us all remember him in our prayers. He was marked by humility and sincere commitment to our East Syriac traditions. He had an authentic Syriac diction matched by a melodious voice and a great sense of Music. His fervor and devotion was so much that he could recite the Syriac prayers and hymns by heart!

Dr. AMAL ANTONY



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Fr. Mathew Mattam & Fr. Joseph J. Palackal, CMI.

Fr. Mathew Mattam: A gem that the Syro Malabar Church failed to see!

I had the great opportunity to interview Very Rev. Fr. Mathew Mattam - from Archeparchy of Changanassery - a seasoned singer of the Syriac chants!. The conversations, hymns, songs and chants are treasures and an extremely valuable addition to the Aramaic Project.

Fr. Mattam sang about 32 melodies during this interview, including several examples of chanting slōthā (oration) between the sung portions of the Mass. Some of his renderings will help scholars to study individual variations of the same melody. A case in point is the melody of the Malayalam version of the chant “Pūš bašlāmā” (see topic no. 33 at 1:33:36). He sings this melody in a slow tempo to evoke the mood of pathos that goes along with the context of this chant at the end of a funeral service at home when the dead body is carried in procession to the cemetery. See also extended discussion on “O Des tamman” (topic no.17 at 39:36). It is a pity that such a resourceful person as Fr. Mattam is not sought after by the seminarians and music students in the Syro Malabar Church. We did not have another chance to do a follow up interview to eke out all the melodies that are stored in his brain, especially those melodies that were used in the para-liturgical services. Overall, this interview was a rewarding experience.

Joseph J. Palackal, CMI.



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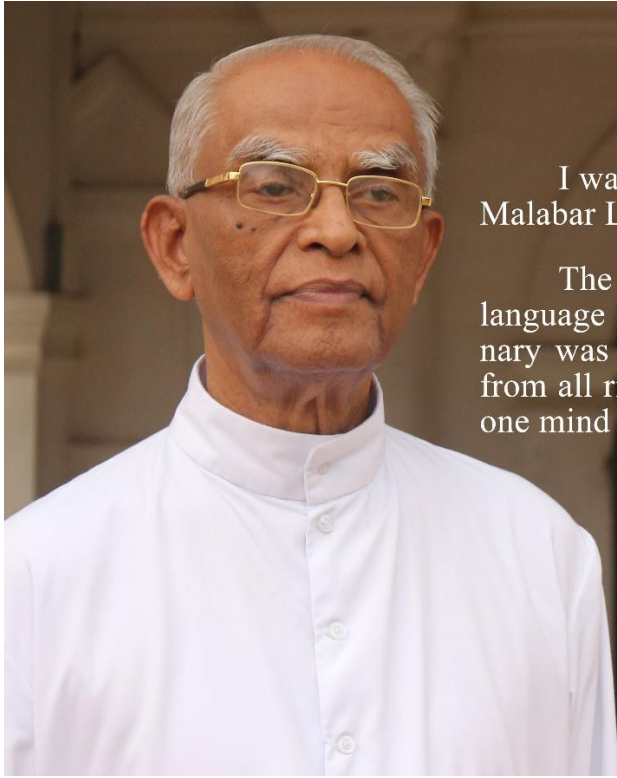
Fr. Mathew Mattam in conversation with Dr. Joseph J. Palackal

(Recorded at the cemetery chapel of the Metropolitan Church, changanacherry. 22 July 2016)



Topics:

1. The seminary days (1:20)
2. Puqdānkōn: Introductory dialogue between the celebrant and congregation (5:33)
3. Tešbōhtā lalāha (Glory to God). Sung three times in three ascending pitch registers (6:57)
4. The Lord's prayer with Thrice Holy (9:56)
5. Chanting of slōthā (prayer) after the Lord's prayer (14:39)
6. Melody of Psalm (15:33)
7. slōthā after the psalm (17:35)
8. Lāku Mārā (To You O Lord) Resurrection hymn. Sung three times with three different incipits (18:37)
9. First holy Mass (21:30)
10. What was the initial reaction to the priests and people to the Malayalam version of the Syriac liturgy? (24:20)
11. slōthā after Lāku Mārā (26:8)
12. Trisagion Qandišā alāhā. Three times with three different incipits. (27:8)
13. slōthā after Qandišā alāhā (28:56)
14. melody of "Wehu nehde" while kissing the Cross, during Raza (32:26)
15. Melody of "Barek mār" (36:26)
16. Style of chanting the Sacred Scripture (38:52)
17. Melody of "O des damman" (39:36)
18. Melody of "Dawrek sāwe" During Gospel procession (42:05)
19. Melody of "O Damhaimneen" (43:00)
20. Melody of announcing the epistle (44:13)
20. Melody of the introductory chant before the Gospel (45:00)
21. style of chanting Kārōthūthā the prayers of the faithful (47:36)
22. Melody of "wnesek lāk" (before anaphora) (48:42)
23. Melody of Exchange of peace (49:25)
24. Melody of greeting and dialogue (anaphora) (50:27)
25. Melody of "kad qāyēn" followed by Holy Holy Holy (53:13)
26. Melody of ēn mārā alāhā (before communion) (56:40)
27. Melody of "Māwhawsā" (58:32)
28. Melody of "Āhay qambel" (Deacon's invitation to Communion) (59:03)
29. Melody of "Rāzē Dnaswan" (after Communion) (59:50)
30. Melody of concluding prayers before the final blessing (1:1:20)
31. Melody of final blessing (1:03:05)
32. Melody of Wiṭa wāngunnēn. Malayalam version of the Syriac chant Edtā pūš lēk From funeral service for priests (1:06:57)
33. Malayalam version of "Pūš bšlāmā" (slow version) (1:13:36)
34. Melody of "Qambel māran" (1:14:56)



I was ordained on March 12, 1961 an year before the Syro Malabar Liturgy was translated and introduced in vernacular.

The extend of Syriac literacy started with learning Syriac language while in the minor and major seminaries. Major seminary was at St. Joseph's Pontifical Seminary at Alwaye. People from all rites and sections lived in the seminary in harmony with one mind and one heart.

It was in that period, Fr. Mathew Vadakel and Fr. Aurelian OCD published the only Notation Book for Syriac Hymns-Syriac Malayalam Hymnal. Fr. Mathew Vadakel was our Master in syriac Language. I had the great privilege and honour to learn the singing and chant styles of Syriac hymns and prayers from Fr. Mathew Vadakel.

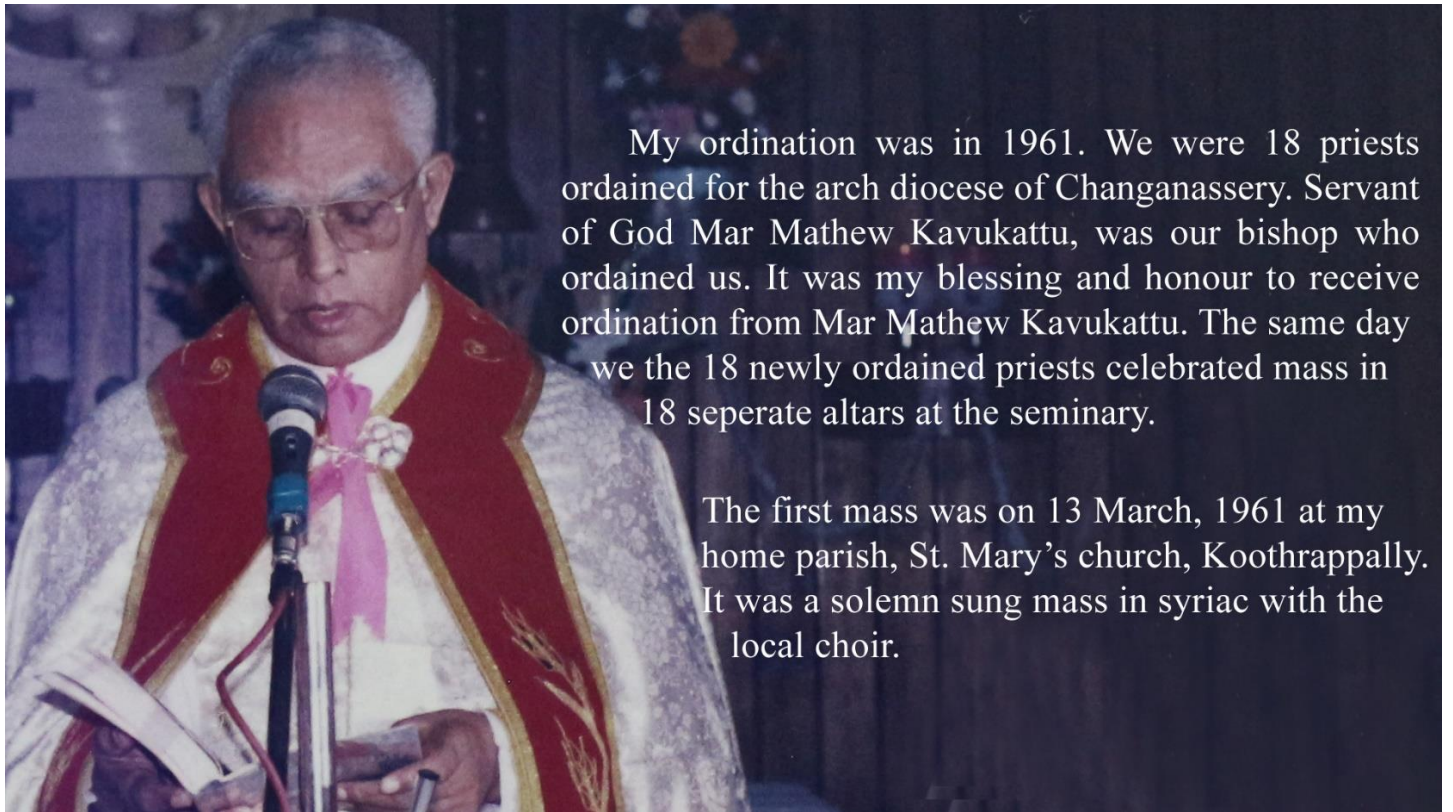


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My ordination was in 1961. We were 18 priests ordained for the arch diocese of Changanassery. Servant of God Mar Mathew Kavukattu, was our bishop who ordained us. It was my blessing and honour to receive ordination from Mar Mathew Kavukattu. The same day we the 18 newly ordained priests celebrated mass in 18 seperate altars at the seminary.

The first mass was on 13 March, 1961 at my home parish, St. Mary's church, Koothrappally. It was a solemn sung mass in syriac with the local choir.

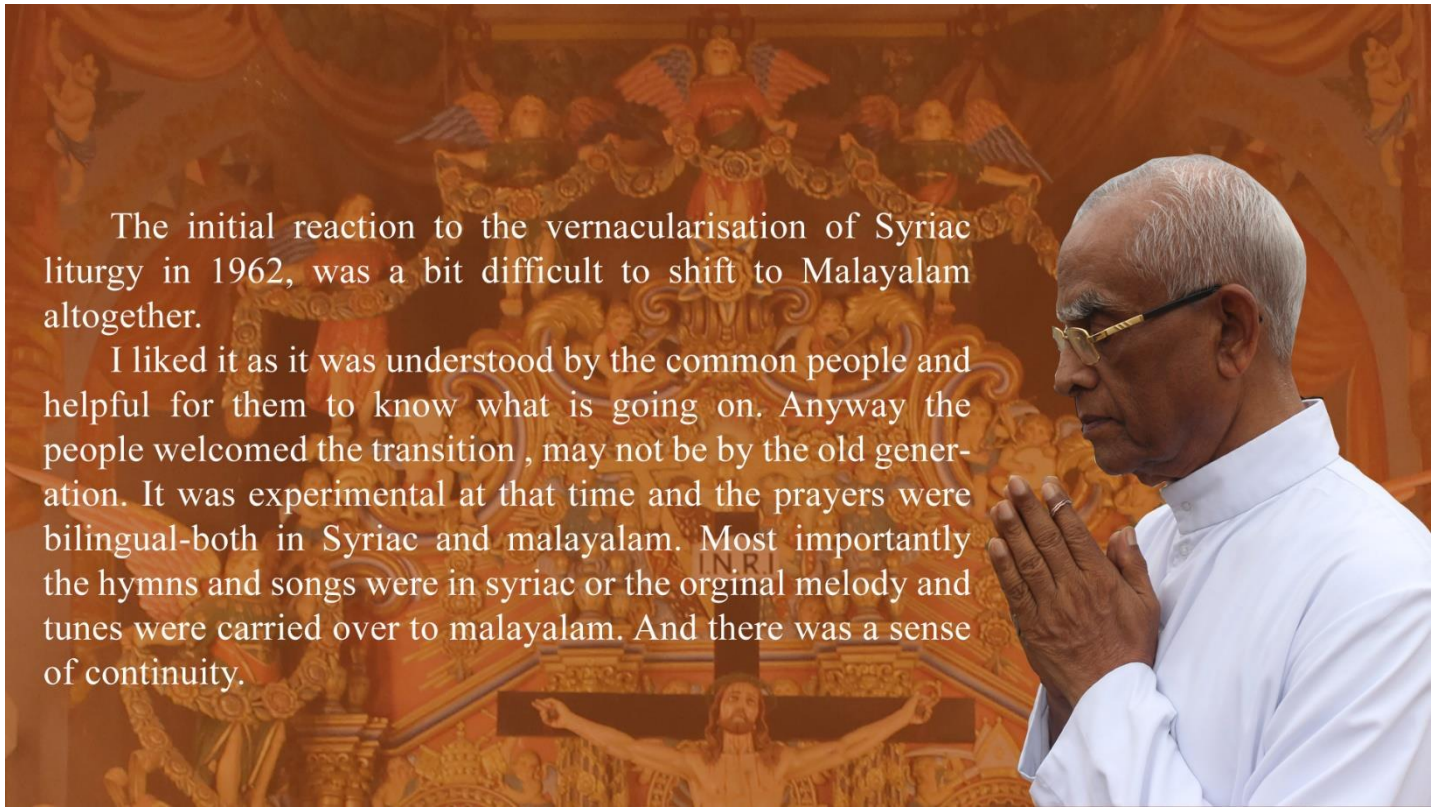


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The initial reaction to the vernacularisation of Syriac liturgy in 1962, was a bit difficult to shift to Malayalam altogether.

I liked it as it was understood by the common people and helpful for them to know what is going on. Anyway the people welcomed the transition , may not be by the old generation. It was experimental at that time and the prayers were bilingual-both in Syriac and malayalam. Most importantly the hymns and songs were in syriac or the orginal melody and tunes were carried over to malayalam. And there was a sense of continuity.

