

The Servant of God

Fr. Kuriackos Elias Chavara

(A Short Biographical Sketch)

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(A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH)

Imprimi potest

Fr. Canisius, C. M. I.

Prior General

Ernakulam }
24-4-1970 }

Imprimatur:

Msgr. L. J. Chittur,

Administrator.

Archdiocese of Changanacherry

Changanacherry }
13-5-1970 }

DECLARATION

Declared in conformity with the Decrees of Pope Urban VIII that in the following account the author is not anticipating the decision of the Holy See who is the sole judge in these Matters.

AUTHOR

PRAYER

O Jesus, source of all life and grace, we beseech Thee through the intercession of Thy Immaculate Mother and Thy Foster Father, glorify Thy Servant Father Kuriackos Elias, and grant that the halo of the Blessed may soon adorn him.

Grant that, imitating the example of his purity of heart and zeal for the salvation of souls, we render ourselves worthy of Thy Mystical Body.

Deign O Lord, if only it please Thee, to grant us the particular favour we ask of Thee..., that the world may know the power of Thy Servant before Thy Divine Bounty. Amen. **Our Father . . . ; Hail Mary . . . ; Glory be . . .**

FR. KURIACKOS ELIAS CHAVARA

(SERVANT OF GOD)

Introduction

Christianity in India traces its origin to the apostolic times. St. Thomas the Apostle landed at Cranganore in Kerala, on the West coast of South India, in A. D. 52. After twenty years of apostolic labours the Apostle died a martyr on 3rd. July A. D. 72, at Mylapore on the East coast of South India. The Christian community established by the Apostle in Kerala still flourishes, and is known as "Saint Thomas Christians."

The line of the Chaldean Prelates who governed the St. Thomas Christians from the earliest centuries up to the end of the sixteenth century, became extinct by the demise of Archbishop Mar Abraham in 1597. The St. Thomas Christians thereafter came under the rule of Latin Bishops, following the so called Synod of Diamper in 1599, and continued to be so till the end of the nineteenth century.

The first quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the birth of a future leader for the Catholic Syrian community, in the person of Father Kuriackos (Cyriac) Elias Chavara, whose life story is summarised in the following pages.

Birth and Childhood

In the nineteenth century the vast majority of the Catholics belonging to the Syro-Malabar rite in Kerala were under the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. Kainakary is a village in the wet low lands on the Eastern side of Alleppey, a sea-port town of central Kerala. Chavara is one of the ancient illustrious families of Kainakary. In this family Kuriackos was born on February 8, 1805, of parents Kuriackos and Mary. The infant Kuriackos was baptised on the sixteenth of February, at St. Joseph's Church at Chennankary, the parish of his parents, in the present Archdiocese of Changanacherry.

It was, and is still a custom in very many devout families of Kerala to dedicate their infants to the patronage and protection of Mary, the Blessed virgin Mother, at one or other of her celebrated shrines. The shrine of our Lady at Vechoor, in the present Archdiocese of Ernakulam, is one such shrine, and the parents

of Kuriackos took him to Vechoor on the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady and arranged for the ceremony of dedication. They used to renew this dedication year after year on the same feast day, at the same shrine for several years to come.

Kuriackos had one brother and four sisters. Being the youngest of their children, the parents of Kuriackose brought him up with special care and predilection, and the young Kuriackos grew up as the object of the joy of the family as well as of all their relatives and friends. About these childhood days, later in his famous work *Atmanuthapam* ("Repentance of the Soul"), Father Kuriackos writes: "My Mother, as she gave me food for my body, taught me several parayers, which she often made me recite with her, kneeling by her side even at the late hours of the night."

Primary Education

At the age of five Kuriackos began his primary education in the local village school, where he learned the vernacular languages of Malayalam and Tamil. He completed his primary education at the age of eleven. However there was no opportunity for him in the village to continue with his secondary or higher education;

and his progress in the acquisition of knowledge, for which he had an unusual capacity and aptitude, would have come to a standstill, had not the Providence of God arranged it otherwise.

The parents of Kuriackos were especially mindful of training him in the practice of virtues befitting his age. He learned to serve at Holy Mass even at so tender an age as when he was hardly able to lift the missal. Even as a boy he showed signs of attraction to sacerdotal life.

In those days the candidates for priesthood in the Syro-Malabar community, used to get their sacerdotal education in private seminaries, of which there were several in the country. These seminaries were each conducted by an individual priest who had the title of "Malpan," and who was both the Rector and Professor, accredited for the work by the local Ordinary. There was such a seminary attached to the parish church at Pallipuram, in the present Archdiocese of Ernakulam, where Father Thomas Palackal was the Malpan.

While on a visit to his relatives at Kainakary, Father Thomas Palackal happened to meet the young Kuriackos Chavara. The appearance and

deportment of the boy attracted the attention of Father Thomas Palackal, who detected in the young boy signs of a priestly vocation. With the consent of his parents, Kuriackos was soon after admitted to the seminary at Pallipuram.

In the Seminary

In the seminary, Kuriackos, though the youngest of the alumni, stood at the forefront of all in piety as well as in studies. He led a blameless life, and became the object of the singular love and esteem of all his seminary mates and of his Malpan. Kuriackos received his clerical tonsure in 1817. Not long after, the young cleric had to face a hard and unexpected trial which might have resulted in diverting the course of his life in quite a different direction. The occasion was when both his parents and his only brother were called for their eternal reward, within a short interval of time. The only child his deceased brother had left was a girl. Hence Kuriackos became the sole surviving male heir of the family. His uncles, other relatives and well-wishers, in their anxiety and good faith, urged him to leave the seminary and look after the family affairs. About this trial, he himself has recorded later on: "I bore the sorrow

of this trial in complete submission and resignation to the most holy Will of God, seeking the protection of the Blessed Virgin, as I was taught to do from my childhood days, and renewing my dedication to her." Thus he stood firm in his resolution to follow his vocation, and he tactfully dissuaded his relatives from putting obstacles in his course.

After making arrangements for the upbringing of his little niece, Kuriackos proceeded with his studies in the seminary. Father Palackal sent Kuriackos with two of his companions to the central seminary at Veraploy to study Latin. Though they were not admitted to the seminary Kuriackos stayed for some time in the premises thereof and learned Latin and Portuguese. Later he improved his knowledge of Latin under Father Maine, a priest of the Latin rite, and vicar of the Parish of Thanky in the present Diocese of Cochin.

In the seminary Father Palackal was also the confessor and spiritual father of Brother Kuriackos. In a short life-sketch written by Father Kuriackos Eliseus Porukkara, Father Chavara's companion in Religion and immediate successor as superior General, recalling the latter's life in the seminary, says: "In the seminary Brother

Kuriackos Chavara led an exemplary life of the love of God, of meekness, humility, obedience and fraternal love in such a way that all his companions in the seminary admired and loved him." A similar attestation is made also by Father Leopold, O. C. D., an Italian Missionary at Veraploy, and an intimate co-worker and spiritual father of Fr. Chavara during the last seven years of the latter's life. In a short life-sketch written immediately after Fr. Chavara's demise, Father Leopold writes: "As is testified by several of his seminary-mates who are alive now, Kuriackos did not have any worldly ambition and he was ever solicitous of his studies and the service of God, disliking and avoiding all juvenile motions of anger and harts; he always practised charity."

Ordination and the Inception of the Religious Institute

The second and third quarters of the nineteenth century witnessed the founding of two Religious Congregations in Kerala, one for men and one for women. Bishop Maurilius Stabilini, Vicar Apostolic of Bombay, was the interim Vicar Apostolic of Veraploy in Kerala around the year 1830. Father Thomas Palackal, Rector of the seminary at Pallipuram, and his illustrious

comrade Father Thomas Porukkara of the Parish of Champakulam were the trusted friends and confidants of Msgr. Stabilini. Father Palackal was the secretary to the former Vicar Apostolic, and Father Porukkara was the secretary to Msgr. Stabilini himself. These two eminent priests, well-known for their ability, sanctity and influence among the faithful, had a strong attraction for a life of solitude. They approached their Ordinary with a request for permission to leave their respective posts and lead a retired and solitary life, like the hermits of old. Giving the matter a serious and sympathetic consideration, and not granting however in full the request as it was made, Msgr. Stabilini suggested the founding of an indigenous Religious Institute. This suggestion satisfied the petitioners who found in the suggestion an ampler scope for the fulfilment of their inborn desire. This happened towards the end of the year 1829.

Kuriackos Chavara, disciple of Father Thomas Palackal and alumnus of the Pallipuram seminary, then a deacon to be ordained priest, became fascinated with the idea of an indigenous Religious Institute, and ardently desired to become a member of it. Ordained priest by Msgr. Stabilini in November 1829, at the age of twenty-four, at St. Andrew's Church, Arthinkal, in the

present Diocese of Alleppey, Father Kuriackos Chavara offered his first Holy Mass in his own parish church at Chennankary. The project of the contemplated Religious Institute became so dear to his zealous heart that he offered his first Mass for its realization. A month after his ordination, Father Chavara joined the two above mentioned pioneers for the establishment of the first indigenous religious house in Kerala.

After a long and laborious search throughout the length and breadth of Kerala, a site was chosen at Mannanam, in the present Archdiocese of Changanacherry, where, on May 11, 1831 was laid the foundation stone of the religious house and chapel under the patronage of St. Joseph. The privilege of laying the foundation stone was assigned by Msgr. Stabilini and Father Palackal to Father Thomas Porukkara who was actually the originator of the idea of a retired ascetic life. The ceremony of laying the foundation stone was performed by Father Porukkara in the presence of Msgr. Stabilini, as well as Father Palackal, Father Chavara and several other priests and a crowd of devout faithful from the locality and the neighbouring places. Simultaneous with the laying of the foundation stone the founding fathers began a community life at the site in temporary buildings.

Soon several priests and seminarists joined this community as candidates for religious life.

Education of the Clergy

The pioneers of the project of the religious institute soon realised the need of a new seminary for the education of candidates to both religious and diocesan priesthood. So in the year 1833, a seminary was started attached to the religious house at Mannanam. This seminary served the needs of the Syrian community of Kerala for the following half a century. Father Thomas Palackal, besides being the head of the religious community at Mannanam, was also the Rector of the new seminary as well as of the one at Pallipuram. On his demise on January 16, 1841, Father Thomas Porukkara took his place as head of the religious community.

In the year 1844. Archbishop Francis Xavier Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly appointed Father Kuriackos Chavara as Preceptor and Examiner of all the Syrian clergy in the Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly. The order of appointment reads as follows:—

We, Francis Xavier of St. Anne, of the order of the Discalced Carmelites, by the Grace of God and the good pleasure of the Holy See,

Archbishop of Sardia and Vicar Apostolic of Malabar, impart our salutation and blessing to Rev. Fr. Kuriackos Chavara of the Parish of Chennankary:

Your eminent virtues and your practical knowledge induce Us to appoint you as Preceptor and Examiner of all the Syrian clergy in Our Apostolic Vicariate. By this patent letter we authorise you to admit candidates for the reception of orders and to grant them faculties for hearing confessions and for preaching. And therefore we hereby command all those who come under the purview of this order to accept you and obey you in the above mentioned offices of Preceptor and Examiner.

Given on February 16, in the year 1844,
from Verapoly under Our signature and seal,

Fra. Francis Xavier, Archbishop,
Vicar-Apostolic.

Father Kuriackos was thirty-nine years old at the time of this appointment.

Apostolate of the press

In the same year Father Kuriackos' attention fell on the project of establishing a printing press for publishing catholic literature in Malayalam,

the language of the place. Since he had not the means to import a foreign press, he decided to make a wooden press himself. For this purpose he studied the structure of the Government press at Trivandrum, the Capital of the then Travancore State, and instructed the local carpenters and blacksmiths to fashion a printing press which he set up by the year 1846. From this press numerous religious books have been published during the past hundred and twenty-five years. The original wooden press, now looking crude and worn out, is piously preserved as a souvenir of its founder's zeal for the salvation of souls through the apostolate of the press. It was from this printing house that the present religious Monthly, **THE FLOWER OF CARMEL**, and the Daily, **THE DEEPIKA** first saw the light of publication. Following the footsteps of Father Kuriackos Elias, the members of his institute are at present running several printing houses from where Catholic literature is disseminated.

Head of the Religious Institute

Father Thomas Palackal and Father Thomas Porukkara, the two senior founders of the institute were called for their eternal reward in January 1841 and January 1846 respectively.

The departure of the latter in 1846 left the burden of guiding the destinies of the religious institute, which was still on its way to canonical approbation, on the shoulders of Father Kuriackos Chavara, whom Providence had chosen to guide and govern the institute for the next quarter of a century.

The members of the institute steadily grew in number. The Community at Mannanam followed a way of life in the manner of an approved religious community. They lived a life of prayer and penance, conducted a seminary for the education of clergy both religious and diocesan, and a Sanskrit school. The learning of the English language and the acquisition of higher education in the same language for clergy and laity alike were greatly desired, and it was a great need of the times as a means of progress and prosperity for the Catholic community of Kerala. The circumstances however were unfortunately unfavourable for such an initiative.

As often as the local Ordinary desired, the members of the institute went out to preach missions and retreats in the parishes of the Vicariate. As a rule every Canonical Visitation of a parish by the Ordinary was preceded by such a mission. Father Kuriackos preached in almost all the churches in Kerala in those days.

After the demise of the first two pioneers, nine more years of trial and patient expectation rolled on before the institute secured its canonical approbation. Msgr. Francis Xavier and Msgr. Ludovic were the next two successors of Msgr. Maurilius Stabilini, who carefully watched over the growth of the institute. Msgr. Bernardinus Baccinelli, O. C. D., who succeeded Msgr. Ludovic, took great interest in the institute, and it was he who decided to impart canonical approbation. He examined the rule of life followed by the Community at Mannanam, made opportune modifications in the rule, approved the rule and permitted eleven priests to make their religious vows.

The unique and solemn event took place on December 8, 1855, the first anniversary of the solemn declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Father Kuriackos Chavara pronounced his vows before Father Marceline, O. C. D., representative of the Vicar Apostolic, taking the religious name of Kuriackos Elias of the Holy Family. Then Father Kuriackos as the duly appointed religious superior, received the vows of his ten companion priests. The institute was called "Congregation of the Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel." The official position held by Father Kuriackos Chavara

was that of "Common Prior," by virtue of which he was not only the Superior of the religious community at Mannanam, but also the Superior General of all the religious houses under the institute. He held the position of the Common Prior of the institute till his demise on January 3, 1871.

Other Foundations

During the life time of Father Chavara, houses of the Congregation were established at Coonemnavu, Vazhakulam, Elthuruth, Pulincunnu and Ampazhakad; and arrangements were made to start houses at Mutholy and Chethipuzha.

A Champion of the Faith

In the year 1861, the Chaldean Patriarch of Bhagdad sent Bishop Thomas Rocos to report on the condition of the Syrian Catholic Church in Kerala (Malabar). Bishop Rocos reached Kerala in the month of May 1861. Overstepping his mandate Bishop Rocos began to exercise jurisdiction over the Syrian Community and their churches, under the false pretext of having a Papal commission for the same. The Syrian Community had been at that time in a state of discontent for not having bishops of

their own rite since the days of the unfortunate Synod of Diamper in 1599.

The false pretences of Bishop Rocos brought him big dividends in the beginning. A great majority of the Syrian parishes seceded from under the authority of their lawful pastor and went over to the intruder Bishop. Archbishop Bernardine, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly found himself in a difficult position. The enthusiasm of the people and even of the priests was so great that they almost forgot themselves with the joy of having a bishop of their own rite, little realising the implications of the false pretentions and illicit proceedings of Bishop Rocos. The anxious eyes of the Vicar Apostolic fell upon Father Kuriackos Elias at Mannanam, whom Bishop Rocos had in the meanwhile attempted in vain to win over to his side even by offering to make him a bishop. The partisans of Bishop Rocos wanted to make Mannanam monastery the seat of Bishop Rocos. But Father Kuriackos remained steadfastly faithful to his lawful authority, and summarily rejected the offer saying that he wanted to save his soul, and that he was not to be bought off as a bishop.

Msgr. Bernardine then appointed Father Kuriackos Vicar General for the Syrian Section

of his flock, with extraordinary powers to meet the calamitous situation. The order of appointment dated June 8, 1861, reads as follows:-

For the information of Very Rev. Fr. Kuriackos Chavara, the beloved Prior of Mannanam and other monasteries: Considering the difficulty of looking after the needs of all the Christians, who have been under Our jurisdiction, considering Our advancing age and consequent weakness and dislocations, and realizing that by Our control of their affairs, the clergy and laity are not profiting spiritually, and because of the present happenings, as allowed and directed by the Council of Trent to appoint a Vicar General when necessary, convinced of your courage, skill, knowledge and saintliness, We do hereby appoint you as the Vicar General of the Syrians in Malabar, to look after their spiritual needs and to govern both the clergy and the laity with such powers and privileges as are generally granted by the Holy Church and with the special powers as would be granted by Us. We pray God to give you the grace to minister to the spiritual needs of the clergy and the laity of the Syrian churches within our jurisdiction and govern those churches.

After appointing Father Kuriackos Elias as Vicar General, Archbishop Bernardine in the letter dated June 13, 1861, addressed to the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*, recommended the appointment and consecration of Father Kuriackos Chavara as the auxiliary bishop for the Syrians. The relevant portion of the letter reads as follows:—

“.....In these circumstances I have decided with the counsel of my missionary confreres to appoint as my Vicar General for the Syrians the senior-most of the Tertiary priests who is the Prior of all the monasteries, and is the chief and head of the whole Congregation, a man truly Christian, virtuous, most prudent and well versed in the Sacred Scriptures, most learned in the Syriac language, and who has shown himself in these circumstances by deeds most attached to the Catholic religion and Holy See, so much so that the revolutionaries, the intruder and others on his side even up to Bhagdad have tried very much, used every art and cunning to the extent of offering to consecrate him bishop, to get him over to their side. If they would have been able to get him, all would have followed him, since he enjoys with all great esteem, reverence and authority... My thought

and request to Your Eminence is that, if it is judged convenient and if it is possible, to consecrate him co-abjutor bishop,... he will certainly bring forth fruits much better than those from the Chaldean Patriarch... because he is good, prudent and obedient, and in preaching he enchants... Only I must warn that the said person has the simple vow of humility, and even if he had not taken that vow, he would not accept such a character and dignity without an order, as I had to give him to make him accept to be the Vicar General..."

In the meanwhile, out the 154 Syrian parishes 86 parishes completely, and 30 parishes partly, had gone over to the side of Bishop Rocos. Only 38 parishes remained completely faithful to the legitimate authority. The situation was most calamitous. Father Kuriackos soon rose to the occasion and proved himself to be most worthy of the trust that had been placed in him. To begin with, he sought the advice and guidance of the Holy See by a letter dated June 19, 1861. He was soon in receipt of a reply from the Holy Father pope Pius IX of happy memory, by the letter dated September 5, of the same year. In this letter it was made clear that Bishop Rocos was sent to Malabar by the Chaldean Patriarch

notwithstanding the prohibitory order of the Holy See. Whereupon Father Kuriackos and other Fathers of the religious Congregation went about from parish to parish exposing the pretensions of Bishop Rocos, and brought those parishes back to the allegiance of the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. Finally, with his disarming geniality and tactfulness Father Kuriackos made the intruder bishop agree to leave Malabar for good, and persuaded the Vicar Apostolic to help Bishop Rocos with the money needed for his return journey. Within a year all the dissenting parishes were brought back under the authority of their legitimate pastor, leaving absolutely no remnant whatsoever of the unfortunate schism.

Zealous Reforms

Peace having been restored at last, Father Kuriackos set his mind on reforming the community entrusted to his pastoral care. Himself a gifted and enchanting preacher, he preached on important occasions in most of the parish churches of Kerala. He enforced the custom of preaching homilies in churches on all Sundays and on days of obligation. He sent members of his institute in batches to the various churches to preach missions and prepare the faithful for the fervent reception of the sacraments, as a

rule, in preparation for the pastoral visitations by the Vicar Apostolic. He opened catechumenates attached to each house of his institute, where non-Christians belonging to the backward classes were taught the fundamentals of the faith and were baptised. He helped the poor by collecting alms from the well-to-do and distributing the amount among the poor as food, clothing etc. In his solicitude for the poor and the destitute he persuaded the faithful of his home parish at Kainakary to establish a house for the destitute. To meet the financial needs of the Apostolic Vicariate Father Kuriackos suggested to Archbishop Bernardine to assess 5% of the income of every parish. This arrangement has worked successfully and has continued even to the present time.

Religious Institute for Women

About the founding of the first Religious Institute for women in Kerala, Father Leopold, O. C. D., writes: "In order to assist the Vicar Apostolic more closely and more effectively, Father Kuriackos left Mannanam and resided at Coonemnavu (near Verapoly, the seat of the Vicar Apostolic), in 1864. It was not in his nature to hesitate to take up any initiative or keep back from any project, if only that was a work of obedience to the Vicar Apostolic and

of promoting the good of the souls. A very important one of such projects is the founding of a religious house for women at Coonemnavu in the year 1866. It is a fact well known to all how much he laboured for the orderly progress of the institute and the formation of its first members." This house founded by Father Kuriackos with the advice and help of Father Leopold, O. C. D., is the Carmelite convent at Coonemnavu, named after the great St. Theresa of Avila, and it is the mother house of all the Carmelite sisters of the Syrian rite in India.

Services to the Syro-Malabar Rite

At the time of Father Kuriackos Elias, the liturgical practices of the Syrian Church in Malabar had lost their uniformity. There was no written rubrics for common use among the clergy. Based on the rubrics given in the Syriac Missal, Father Kuriackos wrote a book containing the rubrics of the Mass in detail, and published the same with due permissions. Thus he could bring about a uniformity in the celebration of the sacred liturgy in the Syrian Rite. He also edited the canonical office for the priests, and the rubrics of the solemn High Mass and solemn Vespers.

Man of Prayer

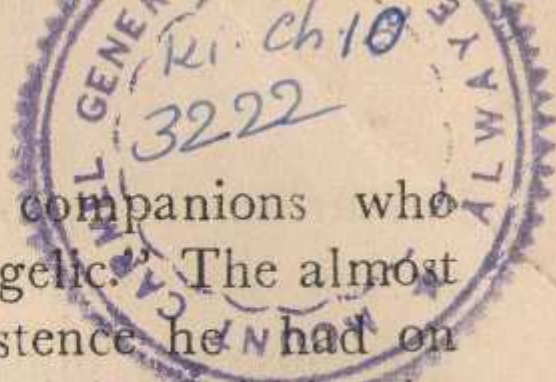
From the day of his ordination to the very end of his life, Father Kuriackos was a man of action, a truly apostolic man. But more than that, he was a saintly person, a man of faith, a man of prayer, full of spiritual zeal and supernatural charity, a devotee of the Blessed Sacrament, of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Holy Family. As attested by a contemporary, he was "a man filled with the Holy Ghost."

Conversation with God in prayer was the very breath of his life. He prayed always and everywhere. His works both printed and preserved in manuscripts, breathe a spirit of prayer. This spirit was instilled in his soul by his devout mother in his very childhood. Recalling this in his celebrated work *Atmanuthapam* Father Kuriackos says: When my mother woke up at mid-night to pray, I too woke up with her, and falling on my knees by her side, recited with her the prayers to Our Lord and to the Blessed Virgin Mary." This spirit of prayer instilled in him in his very childhood, he maintained all along his life. The life of the religious community at Mannanam was essentially a life of prayer, of prolonged vocal and mental prayer. Besides the daily meditations and canoni-

cal prayers, it was required of the community to recite the fifteen decades of the Holy Rosary the prayers in honour of the sacred wounds of Jesus, the dolours of Mary, and the joys and sorrows of St. Joseph. As eye witnesses have testified, during the appointed hours of daily meditation at which the whole community would be present, Father Kuriackos used to be so absorbed in conversation with his Divine Lord that he often would not know when the prescribed time for meditation was over, and someone else would have to remind him to say the concluding prayers which he had to say as the head of the community.

Devotion to the Holy Eucharist

Father Kuriackos used to spend a great part of his free time before the Blessed Sacrament. He endeavoured to spread this devotion among the faithful of Kerala. Father Leopold, O. C. D. who wrote the first biography of Father Kuriackos says: "Father Kuriackos offered Holy Mass with great piety, humility and reverence. He spent long hours in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, immersed in deep meditation. The gracefulness and charm that adorned his face while he was lost in meditation in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament have been noted by



many of his colleagues and companions who could only describe him as angelic." The almost scrupulous attention and insistence he had on the matter of cleanliness and order within the churches and their precincts also arose from his devotion to the Holy Eucharist. He enforced in the houses of his institute the solemn performance of the office of the Blessed Sacrament before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, on all days of the octave of the feast of Corpus Christi. He started in Kerala the devotion of the "Forty Hours Adoration" of the Blessed Sacrament. It was first conducted in 1866 at St. Philomena's Monastery at Coonemnavu where he was residing at that time. In the following year it was started in the monasteries at Mannanam and Vazhakulam, and in 1868 in the monastery at Elthuruth. This devotion has later on spread to many of the important churches, monasteries and convents of Kerala. In consideration of his example and exhortation, Father Kuriackos might rightly be called an "Apostle of the Eucharist."

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Family

It has been stated above how the parents of Father Kuriackos had dedicated him as an

infant to the protection of the Blessed Virgin at her shrine at Vechoor. Later as he grew up they fostered in him a tender devotion to Mary. When both his parents and his only brother passed away within a very short interval of time during his early seminary days, and when subsequently he was confronted with the kind of pressure tactics on the part of his relatives to make him give up his vocation, it was to the Blessed Virgin Mary that he turned for light, guidance and help, and thus was enabled to get over the temptation and stand firm in his vocation. About his devotion to Mary, Father Leopold, O. C. D., has the following to say: "Imbued with a filial love and devotion to Mary, he frequently spoke about her glories and tried to implant this virtue in all those he came across. He always called the Blessed Virgin his Mother. In his sermons he often spoke of Mary and of devotion to her. In his last days when he was in bed with illness, he often invoked the names of Mary and Joseph, and felt consoled and encouraged by such invocations. A good part of his poetic work *Atmanuthapam* he devotes to speak of the glories of Mary and of devotion to her."

Fraternal Love

In his work "The Testament of a Good Father," Father Kuriackos has written: "The days in which you have not done a service to some one else will not be counted among the days of your life." The Testament as a whole is a song of love for his brethren. His whole life was dedicated to labour for the good of his brethren, particularly for the salvation of their souls. In the seminary he had a class-mate who was too old to cope with his studies. Kuriackos patiently spared much of his time to help this struggling companion. In cases of sick-calls in connection with people suffering from contagious diseases, when it was so common in those days for priests to shy away from such cases, Father Kuriackos was always ready to visit those people, administer sacraments to them, and offer them consolation. He founded in the vicinity of his parish church a house for sheltering and taking care of the aged destitutes, at a time when such institutions were unheard of in this country. For him the higher proof of charity was the exercise of charity towards those people who were themselves uncharitable. So he not only did not have any ill will for those from whom he had received ingratitude and injuries, but he also cherished a special love for them,

looked upon them as his benefactors, and exhorted the members of his institute through his last testament to do good to such people and their families. We have seen how his dealings with the intruder Bishop Rocos were full of kindness and geniality, and his attitude was highly helpful for the partisans of Rocos to go back to the authority of their legitimate pastor, after the departure of Rocos, so that the unhappy schism left no remnant whatsoever.

An Ideal Religious and Ideal Superior

Father Kuriackos had a real esteem for religious life. On hearing, just a few days before his sacerdotal ordination, of the project of an indigenous religious institute, his heart leapt for joy, and he decided to become its member. He offered his first Holy Mass with the special intention of the realization of this Project. Immediately after his ordination he offered to collaborate with the two pioneers for the founding of the institute. In God's providence he became its canonical founder, its first professed member, its first Superior and first Superior General, which last position he held till his demise on January 3, 1871.

In his last exhortation to his brethren, which he had left in writing at the time of his

demise, Father Kuriackos says:Dearly beloved brethren, this our humble institute was not made by man, but by God Himself, Who worked miracles for its inception and growth. For this you are all witnesses. And hence hatred and enmity cannot bring this to an end. Only one thing can do so: a practical forgetfulness, on your part, of the nature of our vocation, and the neglect of the virtues of humility, submission, charity, modesty and true devotion....” The late Father Aloysius, T. O. C. D., of the Latin Carmelite monastery of Manjummel, was a novice in St. Philomena’s Monastery, Coonemnavu, at the time of the demise of Father Kuriackos Elias. He was also one of those who were present at the death-bed and heard the last words of Father Kuriackos. He says: “In the observance of the rules of the Congregation, Father Kuriackos was ever like a novice. He loved his religious institute as his mother, and considered it the terrestrial paradise bequeathed to its members by God. He never neglected to be present for the community acts even in his old age, and practised all the customary acts of penance such as the public self-flagellation thrice a week.”

Father Kuriackos exhorted the local superiors under him to be firm in the enforcement of religious discipline. In one of his circular letters,

after pointing out some points of indiscipline among the members of the institute, he says: "The above mentioned evils are the result of the indiscete kindness of the superiors. Instead of correcting and, whenever necessary punishing, they connive at the failings of their subjects. When they themselves are unable to apply due remedies, they fail to report to the higher superiors. Let such local superiors know that they will be responsible before God for the endless evils resulting from such negligence." Speaking of the ceaseless effort to be made in pursuit of religious perfection, he says: "Dearly beloved brethren and children, none of us has entered the religious life for want of means for subsistence in the world. There we could have enjoyed many things. But it is for the love of God that we have left our parents and our possessions. And how sad and foolish it would be if now we forsake God by our slothfulness in the practice of virtue."

The Last Days

In the year 1869 Archbishop Leonard, O. C. D. the Vicar Apostolic of Veraploy proceeded to Rome accompanied by Father Leopold, O. C. D., to participate in the First Vatican Council. After their departure the rheumatic ailments of Father Kuriackos Elias grew worse and worse. Though

medical treatment gave him some relief, his general health continued to be alarmingly deteriorating. He was then removed to the infirmary outside the monastery building. Archbishop Leonard and Father Leopold returned from Rome in November 1870. The return of his Pastor and of his spiritual Father brought great consolation to Father Kuriackos. At the desire of Father Leopold, Father Kuriackos was taken back from the infirmary to his own room in the monastery building. His ailments grew worse and continued to torture him. On the 2nd of January 1871 he seemed to be approaching his end. In the forenoon of the same day Father Kuriackos made his last confession and received the Holy Viaticum. Father Leopold sent word to the Sisters of the neighbouring convent and asked them to pray for the dying person.

Feeling his end to be near, Father Kuriackos asked for the last sacraments. He expressed his desire to receive the extreme unction from the hands of Father Leopold, his spiritual Father. But Father Leopold was so much moved with sorrow and grief that he could not make himself comply with the desire of Father Kuriackos. Hence Father John of the Cross, the local superior was chosen to administer the sacrament. Accordingly all the members of the community were

gathered around the bed of their dying Father and Founder. Father Kuriackos then told the following words as his last exhortation: "Why are you distressed? A man, whatever he be, must pass away at one time or another. This is my hour. I was looking forward to, and preparing for, this hour. Since my God-fearing parents used to remind me often of the holy names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and since I was always remembering them (pointing to a picture of the Holy Family placed on a table near his bed), and keeping them in my mind and honouring them, their patronage has always protected me, and I feel that by the grace of God, the sanctifying grace I received in the holy baptism has never been lost to me at any time. I dedicate our humble Congregation and one and all of you to the Holy Family. You take refuge in the Holy Family. Let the Holy Family reign in you. Do not be distressed and troubled at my departure. Submit whole-heartedly to the most holy Will of God. God is almighty and infinitely merciful. God will soon give you a new superior who will in a better way serve the interests of the Congregation and of each one of you. All of you must faithfully observe the Rules and Constitutions and obey your superiors. You must with your whole heart love Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament. In the words of the prophet, draw

from that Heart the waters of life. There must reign perfect mutual charity among all of you the members of the Congregation and especially the superiors. If you do this the Congregation will promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and our Congregation will steadily prosper.” He then asked for the extreme unction. Immediately the members who had assembled around him asked for his last blessing which he imparted using the usual formula and pronouncing every word in a calm clear tone. He then very devoutly received the sacrament of extreme unction. It was about 7 P. M., on the 2nd of January. The rest of the time he spent in prayerful recollection. By the midnight he became too weak to speak or even to open his eyes, and at 7. 30 A. M., on the 3rd of January 1871, his precious soul left its bodily confinement and went to the Lord for the eternal reward. The body was interred in the monastery chapel at Coonemnavu (the present St. Philomena’s Parish Church), in the presence of a large gathering of priests and the faithful.

Father Leopold, O. C. D., in his diary entry for the day wrote a short account of the life and virtues of Father Kuriackos, which account he has concluded with the prayer, “Oh holy and beautiful soul, pray for me.”

After the Death

Father Kuriackos had left in writing what was intended to be a testament of exhortation to his brethren in religion, which he had entrusted as a sealed document to a novice who had been serving him in his last days. This novice was instructed to hand over the document to Fr. Leopold, after the death of the author. Father Leopold made copies of this document and sent these to all the houses of the institute along with certain articles used by the deceased person, to be kept as souvenirs in the monasteries. It is in this document that Father Kuriackos makes special mention of a person from whom he had received some injuries and exhorts the members of the institute to remember that person and his family and to be good to them. He has also enumerated by name all the chief benefactors of the institute and called upon the members to remember them always with gratitude.

Father Kuriackos Elias was succeeded by Father Kuriackos Eliseus Porukkara as the Superior General of the institute. During this period (in the year 1887, the Holy See separated the Syrian Community in Malabar from the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. In connection with this separation, the St.

Philomena's Monastery at Coonemmavu, where the body of Father Kuriackos Elias was interred had to be ceded to the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. Accordingly when the religious community at Conemmavu left the place, they took with them the remains of Father Kuriackos Elias, which were afterwards reinterred in May 1889 in the chapel of the Mother house at Mannanam where the Servant of God had lived and worked for thirty-three years (1831-1864).

The published works of Father Kuriackos Elias Chavara are *Atmanuthapam* ("Repentance of the Soul"); *Dhyanasallaapangal* ("Colloquies in Prayer"); *Nalla Appante Chaavarull* ("The Testament of a Good Father"); and *Maranaveettill Paadunnathinulla Paana* ("Songs of Sorrow for the occasion of Funeral Vigil"). These works together with the chronicles written by him as well as the numerous letters written by him to the members of his institute and to those of the institute for women founded by him should give a clear insight into the spirituality of Father Kuriackos, and his ardent love for God and for his brethren in all walks of life.

Soon after the death of Father Kuriackos, Father Leopold, O. C. D., published the first three of the thirteen Chapters of *Atmanuthapam*,

with a biographical sketch of the author, from which the following passage may be cited: "It must be remembered that he performed all these by the excellence of his character and virtues. All those who knew him were fully convinced of his deep humility, great charity, and his perfect obedience to his bishop, and those people had great respect and love for him. The love for the Holy Mother Church and for the Holy Father were highly remarkable in him. He ardently desired to see the spread of the Faith and the victories of the Church, while on the other hand he used to weep on hearing of her trials. However the two things that were most shining in him were his devotion to the most Blessed Sacrament, and that to the Blessed Virgin Mother of God. He spent long hours rapt in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament." Father Leopold, after describing the scene of the death of Father Kuriackos, at which Father Leopold himself was more visibly moved than any one else present, concludes the biographical note staying, "We who wish to die a death similar to the death of this venerable priest, must be solicitous to imitate him in his excellent life."

Father Marceline, O. C. D., the Italian missionary who in 1855 received the religious

vows of Fr. Kuriackos Chavara, published a history of the Church in Kerala in 1872 the year following the death of Father Kuriackos. In this book the author, while describing the religious project at Mannanam, has made the following statement: "When the religious house at Mannanam was canonically erected, it was their (Father Thomas Palackal and Father Thomas Porukkara) disciple Father Kuriackos Elias who was found worthy to be appointed the Prior of the monastery. Even if he were the only flower that were to blossom at Mannanam, yet the labours of Father Thomas Palackal and Father Thomas Porukkara must be considered to have been amply fruitful."

The fame of the sanctity of Father Kuriackos Elias gradually spread throughout Kerala and beyond. The room in which the Servant of God lived for many years in the St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, and the tomb of his remains in the chapel of the same monastery are being visited every day by numerous pilgrims from far and near, either in gratitude for favours received or in supplication for receiving favours through the intercession of the Servant of God. Numerous favours are attributed to his intercession.

APPENDIX

SOME FAVOURS RECEIVED THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD

1. An Instance of Sudden Cure Obtained for The Servant of God, Sister Alphonsa of Bharananganam

"It is now about six and a half years since I became very sick. From that time onwards



Sr. Alphonsa
Servant of God

I was under Ayurvedic and Allopathic treatments in turn. But day by day I grew more and more sick, and never got any relief. Then at the advice of a doctor I was taken to the General Hospital at Ernakulam where I was treated for about one month. The Doctors were of the view that I could not get a complete cure of my illness, but could get only some

temporary relief. Anyhow for one year I was under Allopathic treatment. Getting no relief therefrom Ayurvedic treatment was tried again. The Ayurvedic physicians too were of the opinion that a complete cure was beyond hope. Yet

they tried to do their best. In the meanwhile incessant prayers were offered for my care. Medicines also were taken without interruption.

“Finding me to have got somewhat well, my superiors sent me to the Novitiate. But soon after my old ailments returned. With great difficulty I observed the community rules and routine for about a month. If I took a spoonful of coffee or ‘kanji’, my stomach would swell up making breathing very hard for me; and I suffered acute pain, hunger and thirst.

“For a long time I was unable even to get up from my bed without the help of others; and I was mostly helpless. I used to vomit eight or ten times a day, and the vomit was thick blood. On some days I suffered acute headache and on such days plenty of blood gushed out of my nose. On some days there was haemorrhage from my eyes. Haemorrhage was accompanied by acute pain in the body. When the community was praying for me I used to feel some relief, lasting sometimes for two or three days. Then my sufferings would relapse and persist as before. Thus for about eight months myself, and those who attended me, suffered. Whenever I was left alone, I was the victim of great fear.

"At this time, Father Aloysius* gave me the copy of a prayer to Father Prior\$. On starting a novena with that prayer, some relief was felt. I was regularly saying the same prayer. I think it was in the month of May that Father Aloysius brought me a picture of the venerable priest\$. From the time I saw the picture I felt a great confidence in, and devotion to, that person\$. I kept the picture by my side and prayed to him. Before going to sleep I used to kiss the picture and pray. From the day I began to keep the picture by my side and pray to him, my fear seemed to abate.

"One night while I was tortured by hunger and thirst, but owing to the bulging of my belly I was unable to take any food or to sleep I felt I saw a person resembling the one in the picture kept by my side, standing near me and not speaking anything. Taking the person for our Novice Mistress, I tried to touch the person by my hand, saying 'O my mother, I feel that before it will be morning I may pass away due to the bursting of my belly or due to suffocation.' Then it seemed that the person told me, "Your belly will not swell up any more; God will

* The spiritual Father of Sister Alphonsa during her Novitiate.

\$ The Servant of God, Father Kuriackos Elias.

bless you." And then the person was not to be seen.

"By the next morning all my illness disappeared. From that day till now my belly has never swollen up. Previously I could not take even a spoonful of 'kanji'. Now I can take even a meal of unbroken rice or anything else as well. I have no stomach pain now, or bulging of the belly. And I have a fairly good sleep. I believe that this is a favour obtained through the intercession of Father Prior. All seem to wonder at the cure of the diseases in my stomach."

Sister Alphonsa.

2. Another Cure Obtained for Sister Alphonsa

"One day I had a severe head-ache and there was a copious flow of blood from my nose; and I suffered very much. While in that condition I prayed to Father Kuriackos Elias. One of the Sisters was sitting by my side. At about 3 A. M., I felt that I saw Father Kuriackos Elias standing by my side cheerfully and blessing me with his raised hands. Presently I happened to laugh aloud. The Sister by my side asked me why I laughed. I said there was nothing. Immediately I felt great relief. From

that time till now there has never occurred any flow of blood from my nose. Formerly whenever there was haemorrhage from the [nose, it used to last for many days. This time it was not so. The next morning I felt quite well. Moreover an ulcer on my left leg with pus oozing from it everyday, was found healed in the morning I can only think that it happened to me like this because of my simplicity, because I was praying to him and because of my firm faith that he would not fail to hear my prayers.

Since I have gained such a good health after my case had already been given up by Doctors as hopeless, I thank God and wholeheartedly pray to glorify him*.”

Sister Alphonsa.

Changanacherry,
July 10, 1936.

3. A Third Cure Obtained for Sister Alphonsa

“For six or seven years I was quite unwell, and could not take anything except occasionally some ‘kanji’ made of broken rice. Several Doctors examined me and declared that it was hopeless to look for a cure in my case. Some fifteen days

* Father Kuriackos Elias.

after I began my Novitiate at Chethipuzha (Changanacherry), my condition became very bad. It was at that time that what I had already written had happened.

“After coming here I was suffering from fever for about five months. The Doctors diagnosed my case to be pulmonary tuberculosis, and advised that I should be removed from the community. The Authorities began to think of sending me away to my house, and my relatives were willing to take me away. Feeling very sorry at this, I told Rev. Mother Superior that Father Prior would cure me, and requested her to wait until a novena of prayer through his intercession be made. The mother consented to this and the community began a novena. During this novena, day after day my fever rose higher and higher. The eighth day evening my temperature stood at 106 degrees. Every one was afraid. On the ninth day at about three P. M., the temperature fell down to 95.5 degrees. Since then I had no fever. I am quite well now. This certainly is a favour granted by Father Kuriackos Elias.”

Sister Alphonsa

Bharananganam,
March 3, 1937.

4. Sudden Cure Of A Swelling

"I am a sawyer. In April 1949, one evening there appeared a swelling in the middle of my right thigh on the front side. The swelling was about nine inches long, about two inches thick



and had the appearance of a tortoise. It gave me acute pain and disabled my right side. The pain increased day by day. Confined to my bed I suffered intense and incessant pain for full eighteen days. The affected leg had to be made to rest on three pillows. Any slight movement of any part of the body made the pain all the more acute. I was sleep-

less for all these eighteen days. My wife and children too had to remain sleepless in these trying days. An Ayurvedic physician treated me. But his medicines gave me no relief whatsoever; but only seemed to increase my sufferings. The swollen portion had no facet what-ever, to give any hope

of a bursting. I was often crying like a child in those days.

“In the evening of the nineteenth day, as usual, my uncle Mr. Thomas Kochappu called on me on his way back from our parish church to his house, which is close to mine. The old monastery building in the premises of the parish church was being dismantled in those days, and my uncle was the supervisor of the work of dismantling. Among several other things he said: “The work of dismantling the building is suspended for the time being by an order of His Grace the Archbishop of Verapoly. It was in this building that Father Kuriackos Elias of pious memory had been living in the last seven years of his life. The order of the Archbishop is that since Father Kuriackos was a saintly priest, the room which he had been occupying and which witnessed his holy demise should be preserved.”

“Those elderly people who had assembled in my house at that time, had been talking much about this holy priest. Till then I had not heard of him. Suffering acute pain at that time, as I was listening to the conversation, I felt a devotion to this Father, and at the suggestion of my uncle, I prayed to him silently for my relief and cure, and I recited one **Our Father, Hail Mary**, and

Glory be, making at the same time a vow that if I was cured of my illness, I would do two days' manual labour without wages, when the said room would be repaired and renovated.

"Within half an hour after this prayer, I fell into a deep slumber, and waking up at about 4. A. M., I found myself fully relieved of all pain. I could get up from my bed without any help and with no difficulty. I found that the swelling had completely disappeared. After taking a bath I went straight to the parish church about three quarters of a mile from my house, entered the room(*) of Father Kuriackos Elias, knelt down there and prayed and thanked God for the miraculous, as I do believe, relief and cure given me through the intercession of Father Kuriackos Elias. After hearing Holy Mass in thanksgiving, I met the Reverend parish priest and the two Reverend assistant parish priests and reported to them the sudden cure of my disease. Those who saw me in the church and on the way, were amazed and asked me how this had happened,

(*) This room has since been converted into a chapel where votive Masses are being said, and people assemble to pray for the intercession of the Servant of God and to thank him for the favours received.

for they were all witnesses of my condition and suffering during the past eighteen days,"

Joseph Rockey Anthikkatt.

Coonemmavu,
November 20, 1958.

B. Correction Of Club Feet (*Talipes Equio Varus*)

"Both legs of my son Joseph were congenitally club-footed. The feet were turned upside down; their soles were facing each other, and while walking, the heels remained raised from the ground.

When Joseph was about six years old, we happened to hear of the favours obtained by many, through the intercession of the Servant of God, Father Kuriackos Elias Chavara, and we began to pray to him for the correction of the deformity of the feet of Joseph. My daughter Annakkutty (Anne), Joseph's elder sister, was most interested in the matter. At her instance we daily recited the prayer for obtaining favours through the intercession of Father Kuriackos Elias. Joseph used to go to school in the company of Annakkutty. Very often, on the way, When treading on the sharp stones lying scattered on the uneven

path, Joseph used to cry owing to the pain felt in the feet. On such occasions Annakkutty used to lift and carry her little brother over the difficult parts of the way to the school.



Joseph Mathew,
Pennaparambil.

“A few weeks after we began to pray to Father Kuriackos Elias, one day, Joseph on his way to school in the company of his sister, felt intense pain in the right foot and he began to cry. This time his sister, instead, of lifting and carrying him as usual, asked him to pray with her to Father Kuriackos Elias. Together they recited one *Our Father*, *Hail Mary*, and *Glory be*, and

prompted by Annakutty, Joseph made the supplication, ‘O Father Kuriackos Elias, cure the deformity of my feet,’ when suddenly Joseph felt a shiver in his right foot; the next moment he could fix the sole of the right foot flat on the ground in the natural position, the deformities of ‘Equino’ and ‘Varus’ being simul-

taneously and instantaneously corrected. This cure of the right foot is permanent.

“With profound gratitude and unbounded trust, we continued our prayers for the correction of Joseph’s left foot also. A few months later, one day Annakkutty and Joseph were going from our house to a neighbouring one, the residence of my eldest son. On the way Joseph felt a pain in his left foot. While looking for the cause of the pain, Annakkutty and Joseph could see Joseph’s left foot turning back from the deformed position. The correction of this deformity is only partial. The heel does not yet touch the ground.

“We are praying with confidence for the correction also of the persisting deformity, and that God may soon deign to raise the Servant of God to the honours of the altar.”

Thomas Mathew Pennaparambil.

Koodalanji, Malabar,
November 10, 1960.

Process for Beatification

The Sacred Congregation of Rites, by their decree N. T. 65/455 of December 9, 1955,

authorised His Grace the Most Reverend Dr. Mathew Kavukat, Archbishop of Changanacherry to start the Diocesan process for the Beatification of Father Kuriackos Elias Chavara.

By virtue of this decree, His Grace the Archbishop appointed a three member commission for the collection and study of the works of the Servant of God, and of all documents related to his life, virtues and fame of sanctity. The members of the commission took the oath of office on January 3, 1958, the 87th anniversary of the death of the Servant of God,

Later, His Grace the Archbishop appointed and inaugurated on August 15, 1962, the Diocesan tribunals for the Cause.

The commission completed their work and submitted the report to the tribunals in 1969.

The work of the tribunals is nearing completion. It is hoped that the acts of the tribunals would be submitted to Rome before January 3, 1971, the hundredth anniversary of the death of the Servant of God.

The readers of this booklet are earnestly requested to kindly help the progress of the Cause

by their prayers and by making the Servant of God known more and more among others. Favours obtained through the intercession of the Servant of God my kindly be reported to the Vice-Postulator.

Copies of this booklet and other publications, leaflets of prayer, pictures, medals etc., may be obtained from:-

The Vice-Postulator,
St. Josep's Monastery,
Mannanam P. O., Kottayam Dt.,
Kerala, S. India.

L. D. S & M.

To reach Mannanam:-

Mannanam is about 5 miles to the north-west of Kottayam in Kerala State. Those who proceed from the North and the North-East, may reach Ernakulam Junction by broad-guage train and then proceed to Kottayam by meter-guage train or by bus. Those who proceed from the South and the South-East may reach Kottayam by meter-guage train or by bus. From Kottayam to Mannanam buses are available at all hours.
