



# LEAD KINDLY LIGHT

A VOYAGE INTO THE SAINTLY LIFE AND VISION OF  
**KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**

**Chevalier K.C Chacko**

**A Beth Rauma  
Publication**





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**BY**

**K.C. CHACKO**

**M.A., B.E., M.S., A.M.I.E. (Ind), A.M.A.M.S.C.E**



**ABETH RAUMA PUBLICATION**

English

**LEAD KINDLY LIGHT....**

A Voyage into the Life and Vision of  
**Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara**

by

K.C. Chacko

With an Introduction by

His Beatitude Cardinal Baseliose Clemese

Edited by

Rev. Dr. George Thanchan C.M.I.

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*Publishers Note*

## **A PROUD PRIVILEGE**

**REV. DR. PROF. THOMAS KADAMKAVIL CMI**

*Lead Kindly Light* is a revised edition of a Biographical book on Saint Chavara, Chevalier K.C. Chacko wrote in 1959. This was perhaps the first biography of the Saint Soul in a language other than Malayalam and that too written by a lay man. Chev. K.C. Chacko did an intense study on the life of Saint Chavara perusing all available records and writings and interacting with people who were versed with Saint Chavaras life. And this has helped the Author to acquire an authenticity to his narration and the observations it contained.

This book is now being re-published as a *Beth Rauma* edition precisely after 55 years of its first publication. The Book gives a real insight into the life and vision of Saint Chavara and is more relevant today in the context of the canonisation process being completed at Rome and the declaration of Saint-hood expected in the very near future. Looking at the contents of the Book from this juncture *Beth Rauma* feels it evolves itself as a voyage into the Saintly Life and Vision of Saint Chavara in its true sense. We in *Beth Rauma* realise that it is a proud privilege to be able to bring out this edition of the Book prior to this Holy moment in the history of Indian Church.

Cardinal Mar Baseliose Clemese has been kind enough to write an Introduction to this Edition and we are highly thankful to him for the same.

We thank Rev. Fr. Paul Achandy CMI, Prior General and Rev. Sr. Sancta CMC, Superior General for their notes of prelude.

Rev. Dr. George Thanchan has been good enough to serve as Guest Editor for the book; we thank him.

Our thanks are also due to Rev. Fr. Roby Kannanchira CMI, Rev. Fr. Jose Panampuzha CMI, Rev. Sr. Leonila CMC, Rev. Sr. Sophy Rose CMC, John Paul, Jolly Pavelil, Anoop Antony, Shanal Lopez and Anaswara Printers.

We are specially thankful to the legal heirs of Chev. K.C. Chacko for granting permission for this re-publication.

May the voyage into the Saintly Life and Vision of the Saint Soul lead light into our words, thoughts and deeds.





*From the Editors Desk*

## **WITH PASSION, REVERENCE AND ELEGANCE**

**REV. DR. GEORGE THANCHAN CMI**

The earliest biographical sketch on Saint Chavara Kuriakose Elias appeared as an extract from the notes in the Diary of Rev. Leopold Maria Beccaro on the day of the demise of the Saint Soul. Extracts from the chronicle of the T.O.C.D. House at Koonammavu written by Sr. Anna Vakayil gives us a picture of his last days. Rev. Leopold wrote a little more detailed biographical note as a part of his introduction while publishing a few chapters from Saint Chavara's *Aatmanuthapam* and was followed by a similar note from the Rev. Fr. Eliza Porukkara, the second Prior of the Congregation. Fr. Mathyas Pattakkaran wrote a further expanded biography of the Saint Father and a more comprehensive one was written by Rev. Valeriyen CD in 1939 compiling all the details in the earlier sketches and filling up the blanks with his observations and archival references.

All the above biographical writings were in Malayalam (with an exception of the note by Rev. Leopold which had an Italian and English version subsequently) and all were written in the point of view from within the Church and the Congregation.

Chevalier K.C. Chacko took up the task of writing a Biography of the Saint Father as a result of an intuition he



experienced while writing the Biography of Sr. Alphonse (who subsequently was elevated to Sainthood). The result was a commendable work of Biography in English. The original work published in 1959 was well appreciated for the passion and reverence it reflected with due restraint towards the central character, the elegance of language with its inimitable style and rhythm and the authentic, balanced detailing of the major events in his life. It carried an introduction from Mar Mathew Kavukatt and included as epilogue the extract from the Diary of Rev. Leopold in English as well as in Italian as a translation of a Testament Saint Chavara wrote for his Parisheners in Kainakari (Kudumba Chattom) with a foreword by Cardinal Mar Joseph Parekkattil.

I am happy *Beth Rauma* is bringing out a revised edition of this worthy biography and am confident the book retitled as *Lead Kindly Light...* would give a wider exposure and provide a deeper understanding of the everlasting values of the vision of Saint Chavara and the message of the Saintly Life he led to the readers all over the world. ■

*Prelude*

## **LET THIS BE AN EYE-OPENER**

**FR. JOSE PANTHAPLAMTHOTTIYIL C.M.I.**

**F**amily is considered to be the basis of society and civilization. When family is strong the society and civilization will also be strong. When family is weak the society and civilization will also be weak. Moreover, the society and civilization will crumble when family becomes weak. Hence, to strengthen the society and civilization what is needed is the strengthening of the family. Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was always aware of this truth. That was why he gave top priority in his ministry to the renewal and strengthening of families in the context of the Christian faith. The *Testament of a Loving Father* which he wrote was meant to accomplish this lofty goal.

Saint Chavara saw a good Christian family as "the image of heaven." In fact, he believed that it is from the family we normally find happiness and peace in this life. In the *Testament of a Loving Father* he writes, "The sweet consolation and peace for a person, in this world of trials and tribulations, is to live in a family where love, order and peace reign." According to Saint Chavara, a happy family life will guarantee heaven. He writes, "Live in love with one another and forgive the shortcomings of others. That will give you peace on earth and eternal joy in heaven."



Saint Chavara believed that "the essential worth of a family consists in its holiness and fear of God." Hence he asked parents to bring up their children teaching them to pray regularly and to put their trust in God always. He also asked them to give proper education to their children. He writes, "When children are grown up a little, send them to school. Enquire about their progress in studies from time to time, and also find out what type of companions they have." He asked the children to love and fear God as well as their parents. He also asked them to study well and avoid bad company. He advised them not to be lazy saying that laziness will breed all kinds of vices.

In the *Testament of a Loving Father* we come across pearls of wisdom meant not only for parents and children but also for all kinds of people. For example, he writes, "The day on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned among the days of your life." Saint Chavara had great awareness about the need to love and support the poor and the marginalized in the society. He writes, "Do not belittle or humiliate the poor. For, God will demand of you an account of their tears." He was also very much aware of the rights of the labourers. He writes, "Do not deny or delay the payment of just wages to labourers. For that is a sin that cries up to the throne of God for retribution."

It is amazing that the things Saint Chavara wrote about family life during the 19<sup>th</sup> century are still relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In fact, they are more relevant now than ever before. That is why his teachings need to be propagated at a wider level. In this respect the publication of the translation of *Oru Nalla Appante Chavarul* into English by Prof. K.C.Chacko is a welcome venture. I congratulate everyone who took the trouble to publish this book of divine wisdom. ■



*Foreword*

## **FIRE IN HIS SOUL**

**REV. SR. SANCTA C.M.C.**

*Superior General*

Life history of great personalities motivates all irrespective of caste, creed, culture and gender. The life of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, one of the great spiritual, pastoral, social and cultural refiners, not only of 19<sup>th</sup> century but also of 20<sup>th</sup> and even of 21<sup>st</sup> century is not an exception in this regard. All those who undergo once thoroughly through his life and activities will understand easily that he was really born for tough tasks and great challenges. The titles with which he was addressed in the Church and Society then and now... *Religious Priest, Founder Father, Spiritual Master, Social Reformer, Vicar General* and above all, a *Man of God*... recall the intensity and depth of his commitment. Saint Chavara, the first indigenous religious priest in Kerala was worthy to be called as a religious since he was always related vertically to God and horizontally to his fellow beings. This two-fold relatedness enabled him to set aside himself for greater cause.

The highly God - oriented life of Saint Chavara from the very beginning onwards paved ways for his manifold contributions to the Church and to the Society. Being the strong pillar that supported and protected the ecclesial faith and the necessities of the people beyond the boundaries of belief

systems, Saint Chavara demonstrated strongly that he is an altruist; a man for the Other and Others. This man of *dharshan* perceived the role of Monasteries and Convents for the integral growth of the people of God, Society, Nation and the World at large. Through the foundation of two indigenous religious Congregations for men TOCD (CMI, 1831) and women TOCD (CMC, 1866) along with other visionaries, the door was opened widely for the fast spreading of the Kingdom of God. Passage of time underlined very well that this man of 19th century was really under the clutches of the Spirit of God.

The life history of Saint Chavara is not only inspirational but also challenging and demanding. The book *Lead Kindly Light* which is now in reader's hands is an authentic historical work. The author, Chevalier K.C. Chacko has succeeded very well in bringing to light both the holy life and sacred mission of this faithful son of the Church and Society of Kerala. I am proud of saying that the author could write it in such an appealing way sensing the interests and feelings of the contemporaries beyond their age differences. I congratulate Chevalier Chacko wholeheartedly and wish that the readers may imbibe the enthusiasm and spirit of Saint Chavara in living for God and His people in whatever state of life they are; thus, this Prophet with fire in his soul be a light for all those who wish to follow the path of Jesus, the Light. This life sketch enable everyone to have a personal touch into his visionary and missionary life. ■



*Foreword to the First Edition*

## **GLIMPSES OF A GREAT SOUL**

**HIS GRACE REV. DR. MATHEW KAVUKATT**

*Arch Bishop of Changanachery*

**H**ere is another valuable contribution to Christian Literature from K.C. Chacko who has, by the numerous articles he has contributed to Weeklies and Monthlies and by the books he has written and published, already established a high reputation as a gifted and learned writer. Although professionally a Professor of Engineering and Mathematics, Chacko has showed himself to be well-informed in subjects relating to Religion, History and Literature. That he has chosen to write the life of a saintly monk and has completed that work in a very short time making the maximum use of the scanty time he could spare, is, I presume, a sign of the fulness of the Christian life in him and of his zeal to show to others the way of Christian perfection. With the skill of a gifted artist he has portrayed *Kuriakose Elias Chavara* and presented him before us for our inspiration and imitation.

*Kuriakose Elias Chavara* was a great Christian, a very holy monk and a successful founder and builder of many institutions. While he most scrupulously lived the life of a Religious, dedicated to the love and service of God, the same divine love in him inspired him to devote himself, as much as he could, to the love and service of men. It is a long and most praiseworthy record, his varied enterprises and activities for



the religious, social, cultural and educational advancement of his fellow-men. All his activities were the outcome of the holy aspirations of a heart that was ever pure and full of divine love and it is no wonder, therefore, that they were blessed by God and were crowned with success. The life of *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, a monk of extraordinary sanctity, man of dynamic personality with broad vision and powerful push and unabating pluck, ever remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration to all those who care to look at it.

K.C. Chacko must be heartily congratulated for presenting this life most impressively before the readers. I am sure that this well-written biography of the saintly *Kuriakose Elias Chavara* will be warmly and widely welcomed. ■

*Introduction to the Beth Rauma Edition*

## **HAIL! YE... BLESSED..!**

**HIS BEATITUDE CARDINAL MAR BASELIOSE CLEMESE**

*Major Arch Bishop of*

*The Malankara Syrian Catholic Church*

**I** am exceedingly delighted to learn that a new edition of the Biography written by K.C. Chacko portraying the amazing life and work of the Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, will soon be published from BETH RAUMA from our own soil with paramount sanctity inspired by *Saint Chavara* the love of God and men, an ardent, resolute champion of faith, founder of a Religious Order and a zealous apostle of social service with divine disposition. I am sure that he is a precious gift of God to the Church of Kerala as well as the Universal. He has harmoniously blended contemplation and dynamic activity in his personality and thus becoming an inspiration to anyone dedicated to God and His people.

Saint Chavara Kuriakose has made tremendous and admirable contributions in the ecclesiastical, social, educational and cultural avenues of Kerala. We, the people of Kerala are immensely indebted to him for the richly rewarding initiations undertaken by him especially in the field of education. He established various levels of academic institutions, and innumerable members of the Church and other Communities have taken advantages of them and become highly educated.



Even today the educational institutions run by the Congregation started by him are highly esteemed and appreciated. In the field of social communication he will ever be remembered for the establishment of the printing press at Mannanam. These had been the inexorable instruments of spreading the Gospel of Christ. It was in this press that the Prayer books and the Bible in Malayalam were printed and published for first time. He exhibited special attention to the uplift of the poor, the downtrodden and the marginalized by establishing Schools, Orphanages and Homes for destitute.

It is to be greatly appreciated that in the providence of God, he became a chosen instrument to found a Congregation both for men and women known as the *Congregation of Mary Immaculate and Women TOCD (Now it is CMC, Congregation of Mother of Carmel)*. Through a strict monastic schedule he could impart a rigorous religious and ascetic life with the insistence of extraordinary love and devotion to the Saint Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. By starting the Congregation he has rendered unparalleled service to the Church.

The Church in Kerala is proud not only for his vision and mission but also for his personal sanctity. The divine invitation of our Lord to *be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect* has made deep impression in his mind and heart that he unreservedly imitated Christ through his vow of poverty, chastity and obedience and also practiced strict asceticism. Love of God and fellowmen is the distinctive motivation in his life that made him a monk of exuberant sanctity and an inexhaustible source of holiness. He imitated Christ in such an inexorable determination that he himself became an

embodiment of love, simplicity and dedication. He has such firm and determinant faith and intimacy with Christ that he became an indefeasible source of power to St. Alphonsa when overwhelmed by pain and pangs of life. Sr. Alphonse sought his powerful intercession and was miraculously relieved and consoled. This is also true to Blessed Mariam Theresa and many other saintly people.

K.C.Chacko is greatly appreciated with reverence and gratitude for publishing the first edition of the life of Saint Chavara Kuriakose in 1959. In the preface of the book he wrote: *For God intended Father Kuriakose to be immortal and to be the medium for drawing thousands from Malabar to him.* He is the pride and glory of the Church and the world at large and will draw thousands and thousands to Jesus Christ.

We are looking forward to the auspicious occasion of the Canonization of Saint Chavara Kuriakose, Servant of God Mar Ivanios, the pioneer of Reunion Movement in India and also a good number of others from Kerala and various parts of India. It is our divinely inspired obligation to pray for their canonization and also to preserve the life and legacy of such eminent personalities. Now *Beth Rauma* edition of the book on Saint Chavara Kuriakose by K.C. Chacko is not a matter of choice but necessity for the future generation.

I wish God's blessings and prayers for the commendable work undertaken for the publication of the life and work of the Saint Chavara Kuriakose and I am sure that the book will be a treasure of inestimable blessings.

May God's abundant blessings be showered upon the Author, the Publishers and the Readers. ■



*Preface to the First Edition*

**MY OBEISANCE!**

K.C. CHACKO

**M**y association with the Carmelites of Kerala goes back to my very early years. May be, I was seven or eight years old when, for the first time in my memory, I met a Carmelite priest. I do not think that they could have wished a better representative of theirs to enter into my life for the first time. For, as I remember now, he was the very incarnation of love. He was something more than mere love. When I met him, he made me feel as if he were my age, yes, almost a child. He told me that I was his *somebody's somebody* and I remember his repeating that relationship many a time after that. He produced in me the impression of a *Carmelite priest*, the embodiment of love, simplicity, goodness.

Life has been eventful for me and the Congregation during the thirty—thirty-five years since then. We have crossed our paths in many places; I have seen among them, in this interval of time, many Scholars, Philosophers, Professors, Preachers, Missionaries, Industrialists, Physicians, Publishers, Journalists. As a sympathetic student of human nature, I have looked at them often critically, but always lovingly. The years finally have left me admiring and appreciating them.

The most impressive figure I have come to know of in the congregation is their founder, Father *Kuriakose Elias*



*Chavara*. The name must be one quite familiar to all. I once read his exhortation to his parishioners, and somehow came to feel that there was a man who had looked into my family, and told me what I should do and what I should not. (It is more than one and half a century, since that Testament was released.) Every line of it is apt today: it applies to my household, It applies to the household of every reader. Every one might feel that that was written especially for him.

All the same, it never occurred to me then that *Father Kuriakose* might have been a saintly character. The idea of a saint for India was far from even my wildest dreams. There was no precedent.\* I was not aware that prayers for his canonisation were going on behind the monastic enclosures and even outside. I had seen many institutions springing up and growing beyond recognition, in no time, under the management of Carmelite Priors. I thought of *Father Kuriakose* also as one of them, only as a little more energetic, smart, enthusiastic, adventurous, daring, pioneering Prior who started and stabilised a team of selfless workers. They would in course of time spread the message of Christ here. The prayerful, angelic, simple, devout, obedient, resolute, scholarly, imaginative hero of this study came into my mind only much later. Even then, he was more a Hero than a Saint to me.

Time went by. I was engaged in the study of Sister *Alphonsa*. Then, for the first time it struck me that possibly *Father Kuriakose* was a saint. A close study of his biography by a member of his own congregation Rev. Fr. Valerian C.D. and of another account by Prof. P. T. Thomas, made me feel

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\* The Book and the above quoted preface was first published in 1959.

it all the more strongly. *The pious sentiments of a simple unlettered nun could make saint of anybody*, a sceptic might scoff. But, here, in these other documentary biographies, there was convincing corroborating evidence, statements of contemporaries, colleagues, superiors, subordinates. More than all these, are the unquestionable records in his own handwriting; autoiographical, historical, pastoral and personal writings in large volumes. That almost a century ago, a recluse of a monk, who had run out of life so that he could spend his time on earth with his Lord and Master within the enclosures of a cloister, should have written these voluminous tracts for fame of any kind, is unthinkable. The only intelligible, justifiable motive for these essays and soliloquies is the irresistible urge on the part of the soul to give visible expression to his great love of God, intense desire of union with Him, painful consciousness of his personal limitations, a laudable anxiety about his competence for leadership and, finally, fear of the manner in which he was guiding the sacred trust he had formed for the service of the Lord. His final testament to his children in religion is suggestive of all these.

Through these outpourings of the noble heart, anybody can catch a glimpse of the heroic qualities of Father *Kuriakose*. The encouragement that tepid souls may receive from his dissertations, induced me to place before the readers extracts from them, interspersed in a biographical account. That is how this book took shape.

The Catholics of Kerala, often spring a surprise on the foreigner. Many have not heard of them. Many have wrong ideas about them. It is my intention to record in these pages the salient features of this ancient cradle of Christianity and to



testify to the popular belief that in the chequered history of the Catholics here, great souls have arisen at various times, comparable to the great founders of religious orders on the one side and *simple* Saints like the *French girl of Carmel* on the other.

The declaration of the sanctity of an individual, bearing the seal of infallibility, is known as *Canonization*. We pray that persons, reputed for their heroic virtue, like Sister Alphonse\* and Father *Kuriakose* be thus acknowledged. While the slow preliminary processes proceed, we, the faithful, must try to understand the lessons, they tried to lay before us for our imitation, emulation and acceptance. That is the proper homage within our power. That is what is expected of us also. Let us study these lives with great humility and make an effort to conform our actions to their desires. No doubt, we who are outside the monastic enclosures have not exactly the same role to play, but the essence of the message of Christ is the same in the homes, in the monasteries and in the convents:

*Love the Lord Thy God with all Thy heart, and Thy neighbour as Thy self.*

They have shown us how *they were not discouraged and how they had overcome the world*. By word and action, they have indicated how we too can overcome this world. In the world or beyond the enclosures, there are only the same means for the same end: Love, Renunciation, Service. Only the environments are different! The tools or the aids for the practice of the virtues alone are different!

I am placing this account of Father *Kuriakose* before the public, with great hopes. As His Grace Mar Matthew

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\* This preface was included in the Edition that was published in 1959 Sr. Alphonse was proclaimed a saint later.



Kavukatt, Archbishop of Changanacherry, has observed, it is for the successors of the Father to fulfil his dreams and expectations. It is for the laity of the land to provide these successors. The clergy of the land, diocesan or religious is effectively only a reflection of the laity. Good priests and good nuns can come only from good homes and good parents ordinarily. That shifts the emphasis from the religious or the clergy to the laity.

Times are changing rapidly. The question of leadership of the masses is engaging the attention of all people interested in the welfare and solidarity of the nation. Priests and laymen must zealously interest themselves in improving their quality. For such bold, rational, modern action, an analysis of our origin, our foundations, our objectives, our achievements, our social relationships, and our institutionalism has to be made. This is made possible by studying the biographies of prominent men like Father *Kuriakose*. They were pioneers who analysed these in detail, experimented with different concepts, experienced success or failure, and finally left for us precedents, suggestions, guides, indications, means and aids.

The apostolate of Christ emphasised particular aspects or activities, related to the ultimate objective, during particular periods in the history of nations. When we look at the millions outside the visible fold of the Church constituting the vast masses of people in India or China, the devout and simple minds among us may be overcome with emotion. But we should not be alarmed. There should be the great consoling thought that the Master is not unaware of these. The waters of the Sea of Galilee were rough and almost swallowing the barge with all the poor fishermen on board. Despairingly they would

wake up the *Sleeping Master* only to be chided *Ye of little Faith*. Even so, the Master desires *Faith* on our side and resignation unto His hands for the rest of it. Of course the disciples should have been rowing ahead all the time. Similarly, with courage, confidence, resignation and love, we have to live in this world showing forth in us the truth that is Christ. That is how the incarnation of Christ should fructify in different ages, amidst different nations. He gives certain aids at certain times to let us bank on Him more and more. The saints and saintly persons should be looked at as such aids, giving some concrete shape, or value, or force to some specific activity. Thus were the great religious orders founded during different periods—orders concentrating on education, contemplation, absolute material poverty, charity, salvaging of street urchins, lay apostolate, and so on.

Father *Kuriakose* came late on the scene in Kerala, though a pioneer there. His instinctive capacity for leadership derived inspiration from practically all these fields. He started weaning the clergy, the natural leaders of the laity, still further from the world than their vocation primarily intended or had voted for. His mission was really that of a Novice Master in a Monastery: namely pulling out expectant youth from the midst of an ever attractive whirl-pool of freedom, luxury, ease and self-righteousness. Father *Kuriakose* came forward almost a century ago and sounded a ringing call to those who were already *called* come ye forth to a greater calling, a further call if you like; *Give yourself up more completely to the service for which you have voted—efface your ego—surrender your likes... accept the simplicity and docility of children... if so many would leave home and relations*



*and cross the seas and come all the way here only to be driven round like obedient children, discarding their ego completely, why not we emulate them and make the same fruitful surrender, so that, in word and in deed, our interest and longing, will no longer be 'our' own, but that of the community to which faith has attracted us.*

He did not say so, in so many words. He offered to live like them and called unto him, not those whom he would, but those who would themselves go. With such a team of volunteers, he mustered confidence, courage and strength and tackled one by one the problems connected with discipline, education, publicity, contemplation, practice of poverty, salvaging of the poor, uplift of depressed classes, defence of truth. He grappled with all the social and religious problems of importance at the time, and did it so vigorously that he left his mark on them.

All this contribution becomes important and significant, against the background of the times and conditions in which he lived. There might be many men today who might have achieved a hundred times more on the material or spiritual plane drawing strength and inspiration from earlier achievements in the same field. Credit goes to Father *Kuriakose* in the main for the pioneering aspects of his work and his achievements without precedent. For this, generations would hail him as their Saviour.

In this full conviction I am releasing this short account of the life and work of the Saint son of God to the public. If people who study this seriously will give to the Church a better monk, a better nun, a better priest, a better father, mother, son or daughter, the labour behind this compilation will have

been rewarded. I believe it will give many more. For God intended Father *Kuriakose* to be immortal and to be the medium for drawing thousands from Kerala to Him. To the *Great Carmelite Mediator of the land, my obeisance...!*

In rendering this account, several children of Father *Kuriakose* have helped me. Perhaps they were only showing their loyalty to their founder and do not expect any thanks from me. However, I wish to acknowledge gratefully the special contribution of Rev. Fr. Valerian T.O.C.D. In collecting material for this study from his big, small and smaller biographies, in Malayalam and English, I have often been reminded of Boswell and Johnson. Fr. Valerian has studied his master in minute detail and given a very realistic picture of his hero in those pages. He has graciously allowed me to use all that material in any manner: translate, quote, reproduce at great length, or incorporate whole chapters as such into my book. I have made liberal use of that permission, as a perusal of my text will reveal. As long as Father *Kuriakose* is remembered, Fr. Valerian will also be remembered. My very sincere thanks to him.

Several Carmelite Priests have examined the manuscript in detail and helped me with numerous suggestions and corrections. I do not know how to thank them all sufficiently. I do not even know the names of all of them. Hence this general note of thanks to all of them.

A special word of thanks is due to Very Rev. Fr. James T.O.C.D. present Prior of the Original House at Mannanam. Without the encouragement and facilities offered by him, this work would not have been possible. I am also indebted to



Rev. Dr. Theodosius, T.O.C.D. Principal, Devagiri College, Calicut and Sri. K.T. Mathai of the University College for their kindness in examining these pages and making the account definitely more readable.

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May God bless all those who have directly or indirectly contributed to the publication of this biography of Saint Chavara.



From the First Edition published in 1959

Nikhil Obstat

Fr. Gereon C.M.I.

Fr. Dorotheus C.M.I.  
(Censores Deputate)

Imprimi Potest

Fr. Maurus C.M.I.  
(Prior General)

Imprimatur

Mathew Kavukatt  
Arch Bishop of Changanacherry

While publishing this present volume with the permission of Ecclesiastical Authorities. I declare that I submit to all the decrees of Pope Urban VIII (March 13, 1625, June 5, 1631)

Changanacherry  
23-12-1958

K.C. Chacko  
Author



*The Third Order of Discalced Carmelites referred to in this history and generally designated by T.O.C.D. till recently, has now been called the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and will henceforth be denoted by the abbreviation C.M.I.*

and the Congregation for women  
under the same title has now been called the  
Congregation of the Mother of Carmelites and  
will henceforth be denoted by the abbreviation C.M.C.

## CHAPTER I

### The Catholics of Kerala

**K**erala is the name usually given to a small strip of land on the southwest coast of India. Geographically, linguistically and culturally, this was a unit, all by itself, for centuries past. But the concept of a political unity has been attached to this only recently. It has now taken shape as a State, one of the smallest in the Indian Union, with a not so small a population crowded into its fifteen thousand square miles of area.

The land formation, the climatic conditions and the practical isolation of Kerala have given its people some distinctive characteristics in dress, festivals, customs and habits. A traveller round the world may meet only few other places which could rival Kerala in its ancient traditions, natural beauty or varied resources. Among these traditions, is the popular belief about the antiquity of Christianity in this region. Though no authentic, contemporary historical records exist, it is now generally accepted that, as early as 52 A.D., St. Thomas, the Apostle landed in Cranganore and planted the seeds of the Christian faith here. At this distance of time, it is no use attempting to establish the exact date or the place or the manner in which this event took place. It is enough to be morally assured of the probability of it and be satisfied from available evidence that it happened. Perhaps in a casual view, it might appear strange that St. Thomas, who is traditionally famous for his greater scepticism about His Master's resurrection than that of his brethren, should have come



farther than all of them: that from the familiar scene of the labours of his Master, he came into a country already noted for its culture and spiritual attainments even then. But that is merely a casual picture. Centuries before Christ, well established trade routes existed between the Indian coast and important Mediterranean Cities. Traders came and went partly by land and partly by sea, dealing in corals, pepper and other spices from this land. With the discovery of the existence of the monsoon winds in the Arabian sea by the Romans about 47 A.D., the sea route from the mouth of the Red Sea, running eastwards straight across the Arabian Sea to the sea port of Cranganore in Kerala, became the most frequented Roman trade route to India. At the time St. Thomas came, possibly there were colonies of Jews on the Kerala coast; that might have inspired him to come to India in addition to the memory of his Master's command, *Go ye forth to the world and teach all nations*. Whatever be the circumstances in which St. Thomas came, today it is sufficient to remember that he came. He probably explained the message of his Master to his own kith and kin in the first instance and later to the people of the land, It is also reasonable to assume that he would have introduced certain rites and customs for the observance of the ceremonies connected with the preservation of the faith. Considering the fact that the liturgy during the first century was only Greek or Syriac and that other local languages were introduced for it only in the subsequent centuries of the Christian era, the early christians must have had the Syrian liturgy to start with.

St. Thomas instituted a native priesthood and even high priesthood for ordaining more priests in course of time. It cannot have been otherwise. There is no established record of any advent of Christian missionaries from the time of the arrival of St. Thomas till the fourth



century. In the fourth century, a merchant *Thomas of Cnai*, is seen to have arrived on the same coast with a complement of several christian families. This new unit was received by the existing community with very great joy. These communities developed into what is now known as the Syrian Christians of Kerala. Early writers and travellers like Pliny and Marco Polo make references to the community of Christians they have seen in India.

The next important step in the history of Christianity in India is the arrival of European missionaries sometime in the 16th century and the advent of the Latin rite. The stories of St. Francis Xavier, of Robert de Nobili, of St. John de Britto, and Father Beschi are all like events of yesterday in the Christian mind, though centuries have passed over them. Kerala had the unique advantage of enjoying the presence and activities of the first among these great soldiers of Christ. Many aspects of this growth of Christianity in Kerala are more or less acknowledged by no less a person than H.H. Pope Pius XII in two historic documents. In commissioning His Eminence Norman Thomas Cardinal Gilroy, as the Papal Legate to preside over the celebrations commemorating the nineteenth centenary of the coming of St. Thomas and the fourth centenary of the demise of St. Francis Xavier, His Holiness observed:

*...Those who are conversant with the affairs of Holy Church know full well that the faithful of Christ scattered throughout the vast spaces of the East Indies show special veneration and religious love for the ancient Apostle St. Thomas and for the more recent apostolic man St. Francis Xavier. Both Saints deserved exceedingly well of the Catholic faith in those lands, for they were the foremost heralds and disseminators of that faith. In the old books of liturgical prayers and in other ecclesiastical monuments of India, the name and the praises of*



*the ancient Apostle were wont to be celebrated, and the faith, which the Apostle had preached in India, continued to flourish amongst the Christians who took their name and glory from St. Thomas. That faith throughout the long lapse of centuries seems never to have suffered eclipse. Rather it came to flourish more abundantly through the labour and the care of the new heralds of the Gospel, amongst whom the Great Xavier stands out pre-eminent.*

Again at the close of the celebrations, His Holiness in his broadcast message on 31-12-1952 set his seal of approval on the traditions and loyalty of the Catholics of Kerala in words that would be gratefully remembered for ever by the people of this land:

*Not without reason are you proud of the fact that the Lord assigned to you that Apostle who was to place his finger in the wounds of the sacred hands and his hand in the side of Jesus, so that he might bring you the divine truth about God and the redemption and with it the whole treasury of His immeasurable love and grace...*

*...Nineteen hundred years have passed since the Apostle came to India\* and in word and deed and utter self-sacrifice bore witness to Christ in your land. Mighty was the power of God working in him. During the centuries that India was cut off from the west and despite many trying vicissitudes, the Christian communities formed by the Apostle conserved intact the legacy he left them, and as soon as the sea-passage at the close of the 15th century, offered a link with their fellow Christians of the West, their union with them was spontaneous...*

*This Apostolic lineage, beloved sons and daughters, is the proud privilege of many among you who glory in the name of*

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\* The message was dated 1952, 61 years have passed since that.    □ Editor



*Thomas Christians, and we are happy on this occasion to acknowledge and bear witness to it. it is Our hope that their vigorous activity, fruitful in so many good works, and their apostolic spirit, to which Catholic India is indebted for so many ministers of Christ's Kingdom and consecrated virgins, may continue to characterize you and advance the growth of religious life...*

*...This month marks also the 400th year, since Francis Xavier closed his life and Apostolate alone on the island of Sancian. It was at the very moment when he was preparing to push on to the Imperial Court of China in the very heart of the East Asiatic World. He was only 46 years old and his work in Asia had lasted only 10 years; but it covered the vast region, from India's West Coast across Indonesia to Japan; and here in this immense field Francis showed his true greatness. He was great in his far-flung plans of spiritual conquest; he was great in his day by day activity; so great that you rightly call him your second Apostle and the highest authority of the Church has declared him to be the patron of the whole East and then Patron of all Missions, a saint, a wonder-worker, revered not only by his fellow Catholics, but by Hindus too and Moslems and Budhists...*

*...Yours was the good fortune to have had Francis Xavier sow the seed of the Gospel and foster its early growth over the years right in the southern section of your country. From that planting, watered and enriched by his prayers and sacrifices, sprang the work of the Mission, namely the growth of the Catholic Church in India during the last 400 years.*

Today the hierarchy controlling the Catholics in Kerala comprises both the Syrian and Latin Rites. The Archbishops of Ernakulam and



Changanacherry and five other Bishops form the Syrian rite. The Archbishop of Verapoly has 7 dioceses in this area all of the Latin rite. The Syro Malankara rite which has re-united with the Catholics has the Archbishop of Trivandrum and a Suffragan bishop.\*

The Christian population of Kerala is about a third of the whole of the christian population of India. Considering the whole of India, the percentage of Christians is very low. Under the Constitution which guarantees freedom to all citizens to profess and practise any religion, the Christians despite their smallness in numbers, are making distinct and praiseworthy contributions to the Indian social life through their many religious, educational and philanthropic institutions, like Churches, Shrines, Monasteries, Convents, Schools, Colleges, Orphanages, Foundling homes, Hospital and Leper asylums.

A good number of the educational and philanthropic institutions are adjuncts to houses of the religious, the monasteries and convents. They are scattered about the length and breadth of the country. The average catholic has been to a convent or monastery so often that he or she has come to look upon it as something that has always existed here. It is difficult for such a mind even to imagine that about a hundred years ago, there was not a single convent or monastery or an indigenous religious order in this part of the world. Today when they have become so common, one finds it easy to imagine their further growth or multiplication. But to conceive any one of these institutions or such a pattern of living for a people who were not accustomed to it, the vision of a genius was necessary.

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\* These division have been revised further from time to time. Equations and proportions have also been changed since.    □ Editor


Few people realise what these houses stand for. The ordinary Catholic regards them more often as places where some of his own kith and kin live in prayerful service of God. The ordinary non-catholic, perhaps sees in them places of curiosity. Some find it difficult to understand the implications of a life of able-bodied men and women wedded to obedience, poverty and chastity. Some people appreciate them only in terms of the humanitarian service like Orphanages, Dispensaries or Hospitals that some of these institutions are running. Very few people, catholic or non-catholic, do look upon them and see them in their true role as storehouses of tremendous spiritual energy. These are houses where men and women of a heroic spirit dedicate their lives to the service of God with a full consciousness that every man or woman is a member of the mystical Body of Christ and that in his or her person, can complete or fulfil the passion of Christ and thus participate in the redemption of mankind. These heroic lives are spent in prayer, mortifications, suffering and acts of reparation of various kinds unknown to the outside world. A Russian artist once painted a scene which in one corner showed symbols of all imaginable vices and in the other a severe ascetic. Possibly, he was indicating thereby that God, in a way, permitted such vices to go on for sometime, because there was such an ascetic to compensate such evils by his sufferings. Even so, some of the misery and evil and wickedness present in the world are not punished with immediate annihilation because of the redeeming value of the heroic lives led behind many of these cloisters.

That such houses of prayer and rigid asceticism should flourish on the Indian soil is not strange. Such ideas are natural to the people; but that these institutions should have been conceived, organised and brought to such a fruitful functioning form is especially remarkable. The numerous convents and monasteries in Kerala are



almost exclusively the contributions of the Catholic church. Not that they do not exist in other communal or religious groups, but that as a body, in number, variety and achievement, the Catholic contribution is overwhelmingly large.

A look at the history of the formation of religious houses in Kerala will reveal a few names as outstandingly significant. They are of the people who first visualised the necessity and possibility of such religious organisations and experimented with their own lives the formation of such units. The first Indian congregation which formed itself into a definite religious order with a canonical recognition of the status *Juris pontificis* was the *Third Order of the Discalced Syrian Carmelites*. Over a 150 years and more ago it started with just eleven members. Today its members have swelled up in its numerous houses to several 'thousands, consisting of priests, scholastics, novices, aspirants and lay- brothers. It has sent out a good number for missionary work. Among its ranks are men of eminence in the literary, philosophical and educational fields. Other native religious congregations of men and women that we find today in Kerala took the lead from the first house, this religious congregation founded on the Hills of Mannanam under the leadership of their celebrated First Prior, and Prior General, Father *Kuriakose Elias Chavara*.



## CHAPTER II

### Introducing Kuriakose Elias Chavara

The late Bishop Rev. Dr. James Kalachery in a preface to the first biography of this Son of Saint Chavara observed as follows:

*The biography of Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara who is reputed as a very saintly man, as a defender of the faith, as the founder of a religious order, as an architect of culture and as the unconsecrated Bishop of his people will not be defective even if there is no Preface to it.....*

*....The founders of practically all religious congregations were saintly men. It is a holy man that strives towards, developing holiness. There are many among these founders who have not been canonized; not because they were not worthy, but because circumstances were not congenial...*

*....This book is mostly a record in his own words which would make it easy to bring about circumstances for the canonization of Father Kuriakose.....*

I am writing this to induce the readers to pray for his canonization and to express my anxiety to thus remedy the absence of a canonized male saint from among the St. Thomas Catholic Christians or even from among the Indian Catholics.

Rev. Dr. Mathew Kavukatt, Archbishop of Changanacherry, has observed in a foreword to the biography of Fr. Kuriakose by Fr. Valerian, as follows:



*...Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the subject of this biography was a very holy man and like all holy men, he was a very dynamic personality. From his very early childhood, he seems to have been marked by Providence in a special way to perform great things and his life bears out unmistakably that it was not a vain expectation. The beautiful thing about this holy man was that in him, the colossal St. Benedict and the swift and agile St. Bernard blended in a fine harmony. While all his life was a song of love and union with God, he never forgot the song about the common man and toiled day and night for his ends. There was nothing vague about his love of his neighbour, it was as definite and clear-cut as his love of God. He was never a moody mystic lost in the hazy clouds of day dream, but had his foot firmly on the ground. Never a visionary, he had yet vision enough to see far ahead of his times. Many of his dreams have found their fulfilment today. Many await their fulfilment and it is up to his children, the Syrian Carmelites of India to see that the dreams of their holy founder are realised.....*

*A cursory glance at the labours of Father Kuriakose in the various fields of activity, ecclesiastical, social and literary, reveals the gigantic figure that he was. Great men do not pass away to the beyond without making their marks for the guidance and inspiration for future generation. Father Kuriakose has left enough marks on the Church and Society in Kerala of which we can be greatly proud...*

These posthumous comments by two ecclesiastical authorities who successively held jurisdiction over the many institutions founded by the Blessed Chavara, unequivocally express the unqualified opinion they had about the saintly character and laudable achievements of Father Kuriakose.

Carlyle, summarising the life of Burns, recorded in a short and powerful sentence, the fact that such men are given to the world only once in a few generations. Even so, generations of Christianity in Kerala have not produced another son of the soil of the eminence or stature or vision or saintliness or achievement of Father Kuriakose. At a time when ascetic living was not even dreamt of as a vocation for the indigenous priesthood, when our women folk had no ideas of a regular convent life, when printing presses had not come to stay as now, when contact with Rome was so difficult and re-assuring information from the Holy See was difficult to obtain, Father Kuriakose did more than a man's job in establishing about seven religious houses for men, one for women, a printing press, a number of schools, and a number of seminaries. More, he had the courage and faith to put up a resolute fight to prevent the spread of a Schism among members of his fold. For any one of these magnificent achievements, posterity can raise monuments to him. A true appreciation of the magnitude of his labours can be had only if we look a little more closely into the conditions amidst which he was born and brought up and he worked. In the peculiar circumstances amidst which Father Kuriakose fought the Schism, the contribution of that single service alone to the cause of Catholicism in Kerala is of such magnitude as to make one rank Father Kuriakose among the great founders of other religious orders. These men were special envoys of God, sent for specific purposes at particularly crucial periods in the history of the Church. We hear of St. Benedict rising as the champion of the economic, social and spiritual regeneration that followed the onslaught of the barbarians on the Roman Empire in the fifth century. We hear of St. Dominic and his sons countering the Albigensian heresy. We hear of St. Francis coming up to steady the edifice of the church which the Holy Father in a dream saw tumbling down. St. Ignatius of Loyola was the answer to the



reformation that shook the church in the sixteenth century. St. Don Bosco was the challenge to a civilisation which turned materialistic. St. Vincent De Paul appeared in the streets of Paris when the Church's attention was to be concentrated on the poor and the neglected. Frederick Ozanam was the natural outcome of the sceptical challenge as to what the Church was doing in the social field at the time. Similarly, one cannot be accused of exaggeration if one were to maintain that Father Kuriakose was conceived in God's mind as the chief agent commissioned to preserve the original purity and values of the Christian faith in Kerala against a powerful Schism that swept the ranks of the Syrian Church during the last century. Father Kuriakose personally and the congregation as a body could well be gratified that they played a vital part in keeping alive the flame of faith during one of its most critical periods of trial.

Who was this Father Kuriakose and what was his service to the people of his times? ■

## CHAPTER III

### An early vocation

Central Travancore is remarkable for its fairly long range of lakes and back-waters close on the western coast. Extensive coconut groves, reared on the ridges through the backwaters and on their shores, give it a garden-like appearance. Along these backwaters, there is regular efficient boat traffic. The more important terminal stations for the backwater traffic are Ernakulam, Alleppey, Kottayam, Changanacherry and Quilon. On the Alleppey-Changanacherry route, a little less than an hour's run by motor boat from Alleppey, is the Chavara house.

The family line of Chavara descends from the famous Pakalomattom family. The place of Pakalomattom in the geneology of the Syrian Christian can be best understood by the following extract from *Christianity in India and Pakistan* by Mr. P.T. Thomas:

*The better classes of Kerala Christians of the present day trace their descent from the Palur Brahmins converted by the Apostle. Four families namely Kalli, Kalian Kavu, Sankarapuri and Pakalomattom were the most important among the Palur community, and sacerdotal classes in Kerala were drawn from these families from the time of the Apostle till the arrival of the Portugeese. The office of the Archdeacon was hereditary in the Pakalomattom family and Kerala Christians trace the continuity of the family tradition from remote antiquity to the present day.*



In fact several ecclesiastical dignitaries like Mar Alexander, Mar Louis Pazheparambil, Mar Thomas Kurialachery, Mar James Kalassery claim allegiance to this line.

Fr. Valerian the first biographer of Fr. Kuriakose traces the geneology as follows:

*The Pakalomattam family migrated from Palayur to Kuravilangad. From there one branch established as the Mukkad family at Kainakary which gave rise to Meenapally of which the immediate descendant is the Chavara family. There, on the 10th February 1805, Father Kuriakose was born of parents Kuriako and Mariam.*

He was baptised on the 16th of February. He had one brother and four sisters, of whom the brother passed away leaving a daughter. Those were days when educational activities had not spread much. Though the State now holds the foremost place in literacy, in those days education was imparted mostly by village school masters and in informal unrecognised groups. Another twelve years had to go by after the birth of Fr. Kuriakose for the introduction of wider educational activities. In such circumstances, like other children in the locality, he also picked up the elements of Malayalam and Tamil from the village school. But the guardians of the boy were more concerned with the formation of his character and the development of his personal qualities which were later to distinguish him from his fellowmen. More than the training he received from his village master, the elementary education and formation of the child was mostly the responsibility and achievement of his mother. In an autobiographical recollection Father Kuriakose makes mention of this influence of his mother during his childhood. Even at dead of night she used to get up, to recite the rosary. The small child woke up with her and learned



the prayers from her lips. Such devotion naturally kindled in him, almost unconsciously, a desire to make a thorough and complete dedication of his life to God. The neighbouring church where the divine service of the mass was offered daily, attracted him. The fervent desire of the boy to serve God closely drew him to the altar to be an acolyte, responding to the prayers in Syriac, the language of the liturgy.

Even before he was physically strong to lift the missal he used to serve at Mass. This is pointed out by his biographers as evidence of his zeal to dedicate his life to the service of the Lord. Such enthusiasm and keenness attracted the attention not only of his parents and neighbours but even of relations who visited him at home. Fr. Thomas Palackal who was in charge of the Seminary at Pallipuram, happened to meet the child one day, when he was visiting some of his relations in Kainakary. The general demeanour and strong personal qualities he saw in the ten year old boy impressed him so much that he selected him to study for priesthood. He was formally admitted into the seminary to undergo the training necessary for ordination as a priest. The rigorous discipline, enforced in a new Seminary like Pallipuram, did not in any way discourage the little boy. His life in the Seminary was marked by ardent devotion, great patience, willing obedience and impressive charity. He never gave occasion for any kind of reproof. He gave such promise in his studies that he was selected for further studies in other places. Even the foreign missionaries like Fr. Leopold\* have given unqualified praise to the spirit of service, detachment from worldly achievements, orderly and godfearing habits, pleasant and charitable disposition to fellow students, and the remarkable patience unusual among youngsters, displayed by him. After two year's training he was granted the minor

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\* Rev. Leopold Mariya Beccaro O.C.D.



orders. During his period of training for priesthood, he sought the permission of his spiritual director to receive holy communion frequently. Those were days when daily communion was not so frequent as it is today. As often as the spiritual director permitted him he took to this pious practice.

He chose as his motto *The lord is my portion*. It was particularly significant in his life, for during his early seminary days his parents had passed away. His only brother too died. This made him the only male heir to the family property. So his relations called him home and persuaded him to leave his studies for priesthood and settle down to look after home affairs. But cleric Kuriakose stuck to his decision of the *Lord being his portion* and made other arrangements for the conduct of family affairs.

The studies for priesthood lasted twelve years. He was given special instruction in Latin and Syriac. During the period of his scholasticate, Father Kuriakose made an effort to abridge and compile the various canonical offices in the Syrian liturgical books to form the Breviary for the priests. Later on, the authorities accepted this as the regular breviary for the clergy with some slight modifications. The period of training and study left on the superiors very vivid memories of his devotion, humility, charity and fear of God. He was ordained priest in November 1829. He was twenty four years and ten months old at the time. Msgr. Maurilius Stabilini, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, was the high priest who officiated at the ordination of this future Vicar General of the Syrians. The ordination took place at St. Andrew's Church in Arthungal. Father Kuriakose celebrated the first mass in his own Parish church at Chennankari on the first Sunday of Advent in November 1829.

Among the written records describing the demeanour and progress of Father Kuriakose as a student for priesthood, there are

two notable entries, one by Father Kuriakose Eliseus Porookara and the other by Fr. Leopold, the foreign missionary who was his special spiritual director.

The former states:

*His life in the Seminary is admitted to have been very exemplary by all his colleagues. His devotion, obedience, and charity were outstandingly impressive. The Seminary was a new one and the discipline enforced was particularly strict. Yet throughout the rather long period of his training, there was no instance of his having been reproved for even the slightest offence. By virtue of his character, zeal and talents, he acquired great proficiency in Syriac and other languages. Also because of the great regard and esteem in which he was held by the Malpan (Rector and Professor) he was sent to other places to study Latin and Portugese also.*

The latter after an intimate and personal knowledge of Father Kuriakose has commented:

*As would be endorsed by many of his colleagues still alive, Father Kuriakose was zealous in the service of God without any consideration for worldly achievements. He zealously attended to his study. He was quite orderly and God-fearing. He was pleased with, and charitably disposed to his fellow students. He deprecated the ill-temper and impatience that often characterised youngsters.*

Anybody who has any experience of community life can easily realise the significance of observations like those cited above. A community is built up of members of different temperaments and habits and early training, coming from different families accustomed to different standards of living, inheriting particular complexes



characteristic of the parents and their own. If in such a community, for a period of twelve years, a young man were to produce a record of having been completely satisfactory to the superiors without having given even a single occasion for reproof, that speaks volumes for the great restraint in the conduct of his life. The personal interest taken by Father Palackal in Father Kuriakose also must have contributed to this unique record. Father Palackal was a very elderly priest as compared to his young protege. The elder priest was ordained in 1806 when Father Kuriakose was a one-year old child in the arms of his mother. Father Palackal selected him for priesthood, attended personally to his training, selected him for higher studies, and watched almost every step the young cleric took. Look at the efforts he made to teach Latin to Father Kuriakose. He himself secured the permission of the then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly to impart instruction to three clerics including Father Kuriakose. A missionary priest, Fr. Nicholas, was engaged for this purpose. Fr. Palackal took them personally to Verapoly and made all arrangements for the conduct of the classes and returned. But for some reason or other, the clerics were not permitted to attend the classes. They had to return to Pallipuram, disappointed and somewhat humiliated. The two colleagues who accompanied Fr. Kuriakose in this mission were so disappointed that they never turned up again. But Fr. Palackal was resolved that his young hero should have the benefit of a knowledge of Latin, so that he could gather additional information of cultural value to a priest. So he found out another Priest, the Vicar of the Church at Thanki, at whose hands Father Kuriakose learnt Latin for about six to eight months. It was during this period that he learnt a little of Portuguese also. Such personal interest evinced by the Malpan would have exercised a great corrective or steadying influence on the young aspirant for priesthood.

## CHAPTER IV

### Formation of a religious community

The history of the formation of an indigenous religious order in India is inextricably bound up with the names of three holy priests of outstanding personal integrity, worth and organisational talents. Those priests were Fr. Thomas Palackal, Fr. Thomas Porookara, and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara. They were each man cast in very austere traits with hearts of steel. They were capable of pushing on any desired objective even in the face of most discouraging experiences. They differed considerably in age. As mentioned earlier, the first of them was an ordained priest when the last was only a babe in arms. The middle one of the trio was ordained six years before the last. This is suggestive of the role which the three of them could claim in the achievement of the final objective of a body of religious priests in the Syrian hierarchy. The ascetic habits of Fr. Palackal developed in him a spirituality and a personality which inspired him to communicate a similar training to his disciples. He expected to form of them an indigenous institution, dedicated essentially to the service of God. Fr. Thomas Porookara, was also an exemplary priest who had remarkable success in parish work. He was a scholarly priest too, having mastered Latin and Portuguese in addition to Syriac. The influence which he exerted on his parishioners in general and the esteem in which he was held by all public men who came across him, won for him the attention of higher authorities. He was easily the choice to be the Secretary of the new Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly.



To be more correct, the first choice was Fr. Palackal. But he preferred to continue with the work which was too dear to his heart, the forming of priests. So he recommended his esteemed colleague, Fr. Thomas Porookara. Thus were Fr. Palackal and Fr. Porookara brought together in positions of trust and influence beside the Vicar Apostolic. Both of them were men of God, bent on withdrawing from the world. Between them they discussed the objectives and the means. Considering the difference in age and position and responsibilities undertaken, it must have been Fr. Palackal who suggested to the junior priest, certain ideas of a life of renunciation or withdrawal from the world and that the latter approved it. It is equally likely that Father Porookara as Secretary had come across the Carmelite order and by his intimate association with them developed the idea of starting a religious order. However, jointly they placed the idea before the Vicar Apostolic. Impressed by the earnestness of the two priests, but reluctant to give up their service entirely, the Pastor approved the idea partially and suggested to them the formation of a religious order in which other members may join and a strong body would ultimately result.

The youngest of the trio was Father Kuriakose about twenty years junior to Father Palackal and five years junior to Fr. Porookara. He was however the child of promise to Father Palackal. All along Fr. Palackal had been extending a protecting as well as fatherly attitude towards him. After his ordination and first mass, Father Kuriakose continued to stay in and about his own parish, zealously attending to Parish work. He had been specially careful to preach at all Sunday masses. His exhortations and guidance were received very well by his parishioners. He worked up the erring, truant, lazy, indifferent members of his folk to ardent piety and thus reformed their ways. Numerous comments have been recorded of the

penetrating power and lasting influence of his sermon. This was especially remarkable at a time when such sermons were somewhat rare. Even while thus faithfully performing his mission or vocation as a labourer in the vineyard of Christ, Fr. Palackal had called him to the Seminary at Pallipuram to pursue what he considered a much more effective service, namely preparing better labourers for the field. The veteran priest-maker, Fr. Palackal probably had a prophetic vision and he saw that Father Kuriakose was an exemplary force that would inspire, strengthen and rouse the priests from coldness and materialistic leanings. He might have mentioned to the young cleric or scholastic, his longings for creating an ascetic, unselfish, disciplined, poor, contemplative priestly congregation that would ferment the leaven of the land. This desire was so pronounced, so commanding, so absorbing in the elderly Malpan, that it made a very deep impression on the mind of Fr. Kuriakose. Even during his ordination service, while co-operating with the ordaining Bishop as co-celebrant of the mass, he had prayed specifically for the favour of the establishment and growth of a religious congregation of priests in this land. No wonder then that Fr. Kuriakose was called up from Parish work and commissioned to officiate in place of the scholarly Malpan himself whenever he was away. Thus did God bring together the famous trio of founders of the Carmelite order, around the Seminary and see of Verapoly.

When Mgr. Maurilius had approved the idea of a retired life for the two senior priests, subject to the vital modification he himself proposed, of founding a convent for themselves and other probable recruits, the group started constructive action. First and foremost, funds had to be collected to establish a foundation. The existing records show that a substantial contribution was forthcoming from Kuttanad area. This must have been due in no small measure to the



personal influence of Father Kuriakose amidst his own people. Funds did not constitute everything for an organisation even though they were absolutely necessary and meant much. The success of the whole novel organisation was mainly in the calibre and discipline of the members who were to congregate and in the natural conveniences and attractions offered by the site. Living arrangements made by the founders were also of importance.

The problems connected with the search, the choice of site, the construction of quarters, the selection of novices, their training and initiative, constitute material for a novel that would justify the saying *truth is stranger than fiction*.

Fr. Palackal, the senior most member of the group, realised the magnitude of the responsibility that was vested in him with the receipt of contribution from many parishes. He led the search for an ideal place suitable for a life of quiet retirement in contemplation of God. Good and healthy surroundings, easy accessibility, plentiful supply of drinking water, topography convenient for constructing buildings, all these were relevant factors affecting the choice. It was practically difficult to find a place suitable from all angles. Fr. Porookara also took turns in this arduous quest. The two of them explored a number of possible sites in north Travancore region, but the searches were not successful. Father Kuriakose officiated for the Malpan at Pallipuram while he was on this search. However, there were occasions when he also joined the squad or made enquiries by himself. Parishes which had contributed in money or kind for the foundation, offered probable sites all of which had to be considered.

The failure to come across any site even remotely suitable weighed heavily on the minds of the pioneering priests. However, before long the pioneers hit upon a spot somewhere near Kudamaloor. This site answered all the basic needs. The Archbishop also approved the

site. Fr. Porookara proceeded to Quilon to secure necessary permission from Government to establish a place of worship there. This permission was dependent on the consent of local Hindus. Unfortunately, there was opposition from local parties and the site was dropped. But this search led to the discovery of a more convenient location close by. This was a splendid plateau so high and captivating that it attracted the attention of the party. *Beth Rauma, The Exalted House*; they called it in Syriac. The owners of *Beth Rauma* were quite hospitable and they escorted the party to the top. The scenery all round was enchanting. The breeze was refreshing. The height was sublimating. Possibly the pioneer fathers felt elated like the Apostles of old and they decided:

*It is good for us to stay here.*

They finally stayed there as the local people agreed and Government permitted the establishment of a house of prayer on the hills. Father Kuriakose was also with the Malpan on this auspicious occasion of choosing the site. Though ordinarily he was attending to the duties of the Malpan at Pallipuram, on that day he had come down to meet him and take personal instructions from him on the subject of an epidemic that broke out in the vicinity of the Seminary.

Later Father Palackal and Father Kuriakose returned to Pallipuram while Fr. Porookara busied himself with securing further permissions. Father Kuriakose however used to come down to this place now and then and attend to the clearing of the site and other preliminary work.

Providentially at this time the Archbishop of Verapoly himself came to Kudamaloor to stay there for some time to recoup his health. He was anxious that the monastic foundation should commence immediately. But it was clear that some time would elapse for even a small chapel to be erected. So the Archbishop suggested that at



least a cross be blessed and installed on the site. This was immediately arranged. On the 28th April, 1831, a solemn procession marched up to *Beth Rauma* and installed the Cross on the top. The Litany of the Saints was chanted most solemnly. The historic foundation had unostentatiously taken root that day.

Fr. Palackal and Fr. Porookara jointly supervised the construction in progress on *Beth Rauma*. With the fervour and enthusiasm of colonisers, they pushed through their dream in prayerful activities. Father Kuriakose also occasionally came down from the Seminary and lent a helping hand to the work.

The promoters of the idea were anxious to start the construction of the monastery also immediately. They took advantage of the presence of the Archbishop at Kudamaloor. He was invited to lay the foundation stone for the monastery a few days after the cross had been installed. He agreed to it. But some very severe physical indisposition prevented his officiating at the ceremony on the appointed day. With the Archbishop on the spot, but unable to officiate, the honour fell naturally to Fr. Palackal. He, however, declined to do it and conceded the privilege to Fr. Porookara. Thus literally, Fr. Porookara laid the foundation stone for the first\* Indian religious congregation on *Beth Rauma*, which today is hailed as Mannanam, the pioneer religious foundation for indigenous clergy in India. This was on 11th May 1831.

Around and above this stone, which was *well and truly laid* by Fr. Porookara on 11th May, 1831 has grown the present edifice popularly known as the St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam. One hundred and eighty two years have gone by, and today, the spot is

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\* The author has come across a report about the existence of some indigenous religious institute in Goa during 1850 to 1887. Details about this are not available.

completely changed. Approaching Mannanam by car or bus, one is greeted by a beautiful wayside chapel of our Lady of Fatima. Crossing it on the right, you proceed about a furlong and you would round to stop in between flights and flights of steps, one set leading up and the other down. The western flight descends down to the picturesque panorama of coconut grooves and submersible paddy fields and slow streams furrowed by small country crafts. The eastern flight rises below the majestic, centenary memorial arch and leads on to the church. In spite of a recent renovation, the church retains its pristine beauty and originality. Flanking the church on either side are the monastic quarters, the house of postulants, the boarding house, the high school, the press, and the playgrounds. The Golden Jubilee Memorial chapel and statue of Christ are the chief attractions on the lawn between the arch and the church.

All these were perhaps in the prophetic vision of the Founding Fathers. The two senior priests did not live long enough to see most of it grow. Father Kuriakose, however, saw in his own lifetime most of the present day Mannanam at least in a nuclear form.

The seeds were planted in the presence of Monsignor Stabilini. It was not given to him either to watch over or nourish this infant institution for long, though he too could have claimed parentage to it. Dr. Francis Xavier, succeeded Msgr. Stabilini as Archbishop. The new Archbishop was somewhat sceptical of the concept of a congregation that was fumbling its way to a recognisable status. This led to a predicament not altogether congenial for its growth. The experiences of the pioneers in this connection are recorded by Fr. Kuriakose himself. The record is condensed and reproduced below in the first person narrative. It serves a double purpose. It illustrates the personality of the subject of this biography. It saves a



comment on the motives of the Archbishop for the stand he took. Listen to the simple and revealing account:

*...In 1832, Archbishop Francis (Xavier) came. The priests went and saw him. He enquired as to who had sanctioned the monastery and whether there were written orders. The letters from Dr. Maurilius were produced. There was neither approval nor reproof.... was then asked to go to South Pallipuram as parish priest..... I represented to the Archbishop that this would affect the construction at Mannanarn as Fr. Palackal was ill and Fr. Porookara was going round collecting alms. The only response was to obey orders. When I sorrowfully explained and pressed again, the prelate angrily scolded me and asked me to carry out orders. I obeyed and went.... Later, Fr. Porookara was posted as parish priest of Kayamkulam and Pilla Thope in Quilon. Sorrowfully, he also left, having consulted Fr. Palackal who told him that an order from the Bishop was to be taken as God's will and that the Archbishop might have been only checking upon their spirit of obedience.*

*...At that time, Fr. Varkey, a nephew of Fr. Palackal used to assist me at Pallipuram and I used to go to Mannanam to attend to the construction work of the monastery. Once when Fr. Palackal and I were away, the said Fr. Varkey punished one Kurisinkal Itty by beating him with a stick. This was resented by the members of his family though Itty was disobeying me. Itty complained to the Archbishop that Father Kuriakose was away at Mannanam, constructing the monastery and that a junior priest was deputed to do his work at Pallipuram. The Archbishop ordered that I should not leave Pallipuram for more than eight days at a time without written permission. The order was delivered at Mannanam.*

*...Sorrowfully, I returned to Pallipuram. The Malpan had also returned. The complainant was more than appeased and was sorry he had complained. Finding it difficult to push on the work at Mannanam in the face of the order, with the approval of Fr. Malpan, I proceeded to Verapoly to try to persuade the Archbishop to post Fr. Varkey as Parish priest at Pallipuram.....*

*...I entered the room of the Archbishop and requested him to release me from duty and permit me to go to Mannanam. There was no response. With the obstinacy of a child, I renewed my request to appoint Fr. Varkey as parish priest. I also pointed out the presence of Fr. Palackal at Pallipuram as a helpful factor. I was merely asked to return and send Fr. Varkey to him. Once again, I explained my desire to go to Mannanam and the competence of Fr. Varkey to be parish priest. At this indiscretion on my part the Very Rev. Archbishop noisily swung round in his chair and turned to me. I was frightened. But with a paternal charity he commanded. "You are young. Is this how you should answer those in authority? You want to have your own way. Ah! Was it for this you were ordained. I must take disciplinary action against you now. Go, go....." I just knelt down, kissed his ring, and departed, excited and afraid. I reconciled with it as an experience arising out of my imprudence and over-zealous desire for a monastery.*

*I returned to Pallipuram and sent Fr. Varkey to Verapoly. He was appointed parish priest and I was relieved. I felt as if I was a full religious thereafter, cut off from all kith and kin in flesh and blood.... (some time later) Fr. Porookara also gave up parish work and came to stay at Mannanam....*



The account shows the persistent zeal and effort Father Kuriakose maintained to sustain the foundation that was the dream of his master and colleagues. Practically, he had gained his objective when he was permitted to stay at Mannanam and work on his project full time. Other priests with like objectives gradually joined them. Fr. Palackal too came down occasionally and lived with the group as long as his health permitted. He was the virtual head of the community which conformed more or less to an invisible code based on the Dominican religious orders.

Fr. Palackal was desirous of strengthening the indigenous clergy by opening more Seminaries. He found in the proposed congregation scope for one. Clerics with minor orders would help the community to give more solemnity to their festivals and common observances. He also hoped that more aspirants for religious life would hail from these seminaries. However, these views were not fully shared by Fr. Porookara. The decline or decay of some institutions opened for this purpose earlier was a discouraging precedent in his eyes. Their whole attention should be concentrated on building up a religious order and giving it an ascetic tone. Ultimately, the wishes of the senior member prevailed. Fr. Palackal used to bring down with him two clerics hailing from Mannanam and studying at the Pallipuram Seminary, whenever he came down to stay at Mannanam. They were the first students who started the seminary attached to this house in 1833.

The growth of this new seed planted so early in the field of the religious communities is best dealt with at this stage. Some aspects of it, in proper chronology, belong to a much later date. The role played by the Carmelites is beautifully summarised by Fr. Valerian as follows:

*...St. Thomas himself had ordained and appointed men of the country to be priests of the church in this part of the world. Providentially, there has never been a shortage of priests here so far. That was primarily responsible for the unbroken continuity and progress of the church in Kerala. This sufficiency was brought about by a few Seminaries in different places. To start with, they were small institutions. Later on major seminaries were established in noted centres like Cranganore, Vaipicot, Sampaloor, Angamali, Alangat, Kaduthurthy and Verapoly. Many of these disappeared in course of time and only the one at Verapoly continued to function during the 19th century. At the time the religious house was founded at Mannanam, there was a crying need for a major Theological Seminary. Naturally the farseeing promoters of the congregation were not blind to it and a new Seminary was started at Mannanam in 1833. There was also the Seminary at Pallipuram. The success of the Seminary at Mannanam was appreciated very much by the Archbishop Mgr. Francis Xavier, who encouraged it in every possible way. He promoted Father Kuriakose to be Malpan, soon after the death of Fr. Palackal. The order promoting Father Kuriakose issued by the Archbishop is still preserved at Mannanam. It reads after the usual blessing formula:*

*"I am encouraged by your virtues and efficiency to appoint you as the Examiner for all priests of the Syrian rite under my jurisdiction and as the Malpan of all theological studies.*

*I authorise you hereby not only to permit the ordination of those (whom you have examined and found qualified) but also to allow the priests to preach sermons and hear confessions.*



*I do hereby command all those on whom this decree is binding to recognise and obey you as the qualified Examiner and Malpan...."*

**Archbishop Francis Xavier.**

*...Father Kuriakose was solely in charge of the affairs of the Seminary after the death of Fr. Porookara. But he found that the building at Mannanam was not sufficient to serve the needs of a growing community. He ambitiously planned to start a Central Seminary on a grand scale. He drew up a scheme for the purpose and sent round a public appeal seeking the co-operation of all the parishes in the diocese. In it he pointed out the necessity and responsibility of parents giving proper education to the children and suggested that two big establishments should be conducted in a central place chosen by the Bishop. In one of the two, children were to be taught Tamil, English, Latin, and Syriac. Of those who completed the course there, anybody desirous of pursuing theological studies would be encouraged to do so, if he was otherwise worthy of holy orders in the opinion of the responsible senior priests in charge. For such, the second establishment was to be constituted. All that meant money which had to come from the different parishes. Each parish was called upon to contribute a proportion, say a tenth, of its annual net income.*

*There was considerable delay in executing a suggestion such as this and the pressing need for priests did not leave much time for it. So under instructions from the Archbishop two other Seminaries were opened at Vazhakulam and Elthuruthu in 1866 and 1868 respectively. A bigger Seminary was however started at Verapoly in 1866 and in course of time it absorbed all the*

others and became a common central one. In 1887, the Carmelite Congregation was taken under the direct control of the Holy See and relieved of the control from Verapoly. This led to the progressive diminution in the strength of the Carmelite Seminary. The common Seminary at Mannanam functioned as such only till 1894. Afterwards all aspirants for priesthood had to go to the Seminary at Puthenpally, Verapoly. The Verapoly Seminary was transferred to Puthenpally (This has now been transferred to Mangalapuzha, Alwaye).

Catholic of Kerala have all along enjoyed the fruits of the loyal and steady service of Father Kuriakose in preparing labourers for the vineyard of our Lord. The service the Carmelite Seminaries have rendered to the church in Kerala is gratefully appreciated and remembered to this day. It may be recalled that Mgr. Charles Lavinge S.J., Vicar Apostolic of Kottayam, sent a note to Mannanam thanking the Congregation for the memorable work in the Seminaries.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **The Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites**

The growth of the religious community in the foundation at Mannanam seems to have been pretty slow. As stated earlier, it was with considerable difficulty that Father Kuriakose could get permission to settle down at Mannanam more or less permanently. Later Fr. Porookara also could manage to go over. Only few other priests joined the experimental foundation to form the community that had only very few organisational credentials or rules. As they were gradually shaping a constitution, Fr. Palackal was called to his eternal reward. This was in 1841. He died in Pallipuram, away from the foundation at Mannanam. But the community into which the foundation grew, still venerates him as one of the pioneer founders. This acknowledgement is specially significant as the community which thus honours him today is considerably different in name, constitution, rules and even objectives from what he saw of it in 1841. It is doubtful whether he would even recognise this child of his dreams if he were permitted to return to Kerala today. But he would certainly be glad to be told that this flourishing body of religious is the growth of his first foundation and that this body gratefully ranks him as a pioneer founder. Not that saintly souls care for such recognition or gratitude, but who would not be happy to realise that God has been glorified so much during this Century by the numerous monks and faithful that grew around the seed planted at that remote age?

Five years after the death of Fr. Palackal, the second member of the group of Founders, Fr. Porookara, also passed away. He was actually living at Mannanam as the recognised head of the group that volunteered to live under his leadership. This congregation counted four members including Father Kuriakose. The others were Fr. Geevarghese Thoppil, Fr. Kunjacko Puthenpurackal, Kanjirapally and Fr. Mathai Kalapurakal. Fr. Porookara was thus literally the head of the congregation and he died in the Mother house. He had laid the foundation stone of the house in which he lived as Superior till 1846. The congregation which has disciplined itself into the Carmelite order, has despite the new affiliations, always acknowledged and revered Fr. Porookara also as one of the founders.

The companionship in religion which Father Kuriakose cultivated and enriched with the two Malpans, thus terminated leaving him the leader of a unique body of men, bent on a life of retirement, renunciation and service. This body, though small, had seen and felt the struggle of its founders. There were difficulties of securing understanding, sympathy, co-operation and support from the authorities, from colleagues and from the people. Some of these sources were however extending, in fairly good measure, sympathy and co-operation. Between these, Father Kuriakose had to steer the small congregation. Since his ordination in 1829, for several years he had aligned himself with the Malpans to organise it. The foundations were laid. Some members had volunteered to cast their lives in this noble pursuit. It was left to him to give them necessary directions, gain for them social and ecclesiastical recognition, promote their personal spiritual acquisitions and make them more and more useful in the ministry of the Gospel. These were each challenging calls. There were no remarkable precedents, no easy approaches



to similar foreign bodies, no easy channels of propaganda and publicity. He was entering his forties at the time. His dreams now took wings and made gigantic flights. He had served under different ordinaries, some more sympathetic, others less. Monsignor Stabilini was helpful and encouraging. Msgr. Francis Xavier who succeeded him had tried his patience and obedience. Both had succeeded in *their own way and pushed the scheme ahead*. Bishop Ludovic also had not taken serious steps to establish the foundation on a recognised footing of dignity before the Holy See. By 1852, Msgr. Bernardine came. His Episcopate pursued the cause most helpfully. This prelate noted the great service the small, unique, adventurous, pioneering, sacrificing, dedicated group of men had volunteered to render. The cause was one to which his own life was dedicated and for which he himself had left home, and ventured to this foreign land. He was greatly impressed by their life which, while lacking definite canonical rules, was yet calculated to foster a contemplative, prayerful, secluded, disciplined community. They were to come out only for evangelising missions like preaching retreats, teaching catechism, training clerics, and exhorting lapsed catholics to resume pious practices. This service was available to practically any parish in the extensive Apostolic Vicariate of Verapoly. Parish priests were sent to the mother House at Mannanam for refresher courses on the sacraments. In these activities, the worthy Prelate saw the potential nucleus of great spiritual energy for the whole land. Here was a unit capable of adaptation, modification, expansion and absorption. In the fullness of time, this spark would burst into a consuming fire enveloping the whole countryside! But he wanted more information about it before granting it any official recognition.

Father Kuriakose wrote down and submitted to the Bishop the routine the priests followed at Mannanam. It was as follows:



*Rise at 5 A.M. After morning offerings the priests recite the canonical office. Then the seminarists and aspirants assemble in the Church and recite the joyous decades of the Rosary, and prayers in honour of the five sacred wounds of our Lord and the dolours of our Lady. Then they invoke St. Joseph for the favour of preserving their purity and obtaining a happy death. The priests then offer Mass. The community chants the Litany of the saints. Then comes study. By noon the priests assemble to recite the sorrowful decades of the Rosary, and the prayers in honour of the sacred wounds of our Lord and the joys and sorrows of St. Joseph. This is followed by prayers for an increased love of God and for the strength to endure sufferings and for help to carry out good works. Lunch follows in two groups, separately for the religious and the seminarists. At the angelus bell in the evening, they congregate again. One of them announces the feast of the next day's saint. Then opening prayers and spiritual reading from Gnana Muthumala follow. After a few minutes' contemplation, the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary, Litany of the Blessed Virgin, prayers in honour of the sacred wounds, Our Lady of the Scapular and the glories of St. Joseph are all recited with lighted candles on the altar. Priests and seminarists then return to their places and spend their time in study or meditation till 10 p.m. During lent, this period of contemplation and prayer after supper extends to till midnight...*

This routine is described and quoted here in full detail, to show how sincere and simple of heart the pioneering monks of our land were. They had earnestly tried to get at the constitution of recognised statutory religious orders but had failed. So they resorted to their own ingenuity and formed a set of rules based on common sense. It will be seen that the central part of their devotion was the Rosary.



Yes, the community was primarily Marian in its devotional make-up. The essential feature of the Christian, the assimilation of the passion of Christ in him, was perhaps the objective of the devotion to the sacred wounds commemorated thrice a day. Without attempting to attribute motives, it is enough to note that those simple priests only came together recited several hours a day the prayers they knew, and offered themselves to be disciplined and dedicated for selfless service as humble, chaste, poor, children of God. Beyond that, they could imagine few rules. Yes, they were like little children, characterised by an abiding faith in a good God, who had exhorted them to *become like unto the little children, so as to inherit, the kingdom of God*. That such a life of uncertain affiliation, unprecedented in the history of the hierarchy of the country, should survive nearly a decade and a half, despite the smallness of numbers, want of appreciation, and absence of any attractive or redeeming feature except the personal spiritual consolations, is itself proof of the bonafides of the founder and those others who voluntarily merged with this *group without address*. All these possibly weighed on the minds of the prelate. He strongly appreciated the fervour in their minds and hearts and gladly gave them the constitution of the *First Order of Discalced Carmelities* to serve as the basis of their rules. Some of the rules in it were too severe for the climatic conditions and the rather untrained aspirants. Slight modifications were suggested by Father Kuriakose to make provision for the special conditions prevailing here. These were approved after careful scrutiny and investigation by the Bishop. He also ordered that the constitution, as amended, should be read out to every member, and that only those who freely volunteered to accept these rules need be allowed to continue after a preparatory retreat and self-examination. The prelate also desired

that the community should profess itself as the servants of the Immaculate Conception on the 8th of December 1855.

Fr. Marcelene, the missionary priest, was commissioned to preach the retreat. He once again proclaimed the intention of the Bishop that only such of those as freely and boldly accept the rigorous code of life with its strictures on enclosure, silence and fast, should be allowed to join the order finally. Actually the idea of an enclosure, was new to the whole place and community. The rigours attempted were really very very trying, with the result, that two priests, eight clerics, and one aspirant withdrew from the group. One of the priests, however, returned to it later. Thus the trials and privations and hardship endured by the pioneers through long years, almost a quarter of a century, had yielded only bitter fruit. Almost fifty per cent of the enthusiasts had found that they had *no vocation*. Father Kuriakose felt anxious. He reported these facts to the Archbishop who encouraged him to exercise the greatest care and discipline in the selection of his aspirants and postulants. He assured him of his own prayers for the success of the venture.

The retreat preached by the delegate of the Bishop provided the first opportunity for the priests and other members to experiment with the new constitution. Time and again during the retreat, the preacher stressed the absolutely voluntary character of the formation of the congregation. Those who were finally reconciled to the rigorous life they were initiated to, were permitted by the Bishop's delegate to offer their dedicatory lives to the cause. The ceremony was fixed for the feast of the Immaculate Conception of 1855. No other date was so apt for the formation of the congregation *The Servants of the Immaculate Conception*.

The event was an unprecedented one in the history of the Church in India. It had attracted a large crowd from Mannanam and the



neighbouring parishes. Twelve priests were to take the vows that day. However at the last moment, one fell ill and stayed away. The remaining eleven came in procession wearing white cassocks. They held in their hands the scapular, the leather belt and a note bearing the formula of vows written in their own handwriting. The procession was headed by aspirants, followed by novices and clerics. The priests formed the tail end of the procession, with Father Kuriakose, their Superior, at the very end. Father Marcelene, on behalf of the Bishop, accompanied the latter. The procession reached up to the octagonal hail of the church.

Father Marcelene, the chief celebrant, officially took his seat, vested in ceremonial robes, in the southern most bay of the octagon, on a decorated chair, facing the congregation. The priests were seated on benches in front of Fr. Marcelene.

Father Kuriakose knelt in front of the Chief Celebrant, while the crowd watched in silence and awe. The choir chanted solemnly. The celebrant then ceremoniously asked of the prospective religious, the conventional questions of consent to abide by the rules of the order and fulfil the obligations arising from the vows. He then preached a very touching sermon on the basic virtues expected of a religious, particularly humility. Father Kuriakose remained in a very edifying pose on his knees and listened intently. That was a sight at which angels rejoiced, though mortals might have been surprised. Here was a priest, kneeling humbly and publicly declaring his renunciation of practically everything which the world holds dear. While everywhere else men anxiously tried to assert their selves, flatter their egos, and exact obedience from others, here was a very capable organiser of men and things promising to bind himself down to unquestioning obedience to the discipline of a community. While

everywhere else men and women rushed about seeking all sorts of sensual and sensible pleasures and carnal satisfactions, here was a healthy, robust, middleaged man reaffirming solemnly his acceptance of chastity as a life programme! While everywhere else men owed a certain amount of allegiance or loyalty to wealth or *mammon*, here was a member of a well-to-do family offering to renounce everything, to own nothing at any time for all life, that too under a vow to God! Surely these were challenging vows. These vows were written down on the paper he held in his hand. The celebrant placed a crucifix over the paper which he also supported with both his hands. The aspirant respectfully kissed the hands of the celebrant and read aloud these vows, yes, literally he proclaimed them to the world solemnly! He was then vested with the belt and scapular. Then he prostrated on the floor before the celebrant. The choir sang the hymn to the Holy Ghost. At the close of the hymn, the procession returned to the Monastery. The rules, as finally approved by the Bishop, had incorporated in them a clause commissioning Father Kuriakose as the Prior of the Community. This was officially recognised and the other priests offered him recognition by a token kissing of hands.

After a while the procession returned to participate, in the solemn High Mass celebrated by Fr. Jacob Valyara. After this they returned to the Monastery and went back a little later in procession to celebrate the profession of the ten other priests. This time, as head of the community, Father Kuriakose himself accepted the dedication of the ten priests. F. Marcelene was also present at the auspicious ceremony.

Those who took their vows before the Prior for the first time were:



1. Fr. Geevarghese *Thoppil*, Pulincunnu.
2. Fr. Kuriakose *Porookara*, Champakulam.
3. Fr. Kurian *Kochupurakal*, Athirampuzha.
4. Fr. Mathai *Munjanattu*, Lalom.
5. Fr. Mathai *Kalapurakal*, Palai.
6. Fr. Jacob *Valyara*, Kainakary.
7. Fr. Mani *Kaniyarakattu*, Palai.
8. Fr. Kurian *Palakal*, Pallipuram.
9. Fr. Chandy *Kattakkayam*, Palai.
10. Fr. Scaria *Kalathil*, Pulincunnu.

For thirty years, the congregation followed the rules under which the first eleven members commenced their formal religious community life. In course of time, the rules were modified a little here and a little there by the ecclesiastical superiors. But fundamentally they remained the same. Then they received an experimental constitution with the approval of the Holy See. This was to be tried for six years. After successful termination of that period, it was extended again for two other terms of six years each. A permanent recognition of the rules was granted by the Holy See only as late as 12th March 1906. These rules are observed to this day.

Reference was made to some changes effected by ecclesiastical superiors during these years. The more important of these changes were in the matter of nomenclature and dress. Five years after the Servants of the Immaculate Conception had professed themselves into that body, the First Order of Discalced Carmelites assembled in Rome claimed them as the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites.

They did this without consulting the party even. In fact, the religious were informed of the new affiliation by an order of the Archbishop. Possibly this change was brought about by Archbishop Bernardine himself because of his hope that such an affiliation would give them special privileges and more universal recognition. The native community did not fully relish this uncalled for affiliation without even the graceful gesture of an approach and consultation. However, the parental solicitude of the Archbishop, who guaranteed the complete independence of the Indian congregation and the maintenance of all the privileges of the prior was appreciated by the community. They finally accepted the decision of the Archbishop. Thus from 1861 onwards the congregation was known as the *Third Order of the Discalced carmelites*.

The question has sometimes been debated as to who should be regarded as the founder of the Syrian carmelite congregation. It is perhaps a fruitless debate. The roles played by the three outstanding priests to establish the congregation have been fully explained earlier. However, having completed the picture, it may be better to recall and summarise the final position. This is best done in the extremely nice and compact form in which Fr. Valerian refers to it in his account of Blessed Chavara. An extract reads:

*A portion of the building was soon built up to be habitable. In this there started the first community of priests who were anxiously awaiting the formation of a religious congregation. Father Kuriakose was with them. So they framed a set of temporary regulations for the guidance of this small group. As this congregation was thus forming up, Fr. Thomas Palakal, who was at Pallipuram all those days, passed away. It was in 1841. He was interested in the formation and development of the community which even after its reformation and new*



*affiliations, honours acknowledges him as one of its founders. Five years afterwards Fr. Thomas Porookara also was called to his reward. He was a full member of the community to which his genius too had given shape and he passed away while in the 'Mother house'. The Carmelite Congregation, to which this community developed in later years, justly venerates him also as one of its original founders, though it was not given to him either to live long enough to see the community in its present form. That rare honour and privilege, providence had reserved to Fr. Kuriakose.*

This account of the formation of the Order will be incomplete without at least, a passing reference to the present habit of the monks. Only the belt distinguished the monks from the white cassocked seculars in 1855. They wore the small brown scapular of the Carmelites inside. Four years later, a white scapular flowing over the cassock was added. Another nine years had to go by before they started using the hood also. This was the stage in which the First Prior and Prior General of the Congregation left it at the time of his death. He might not recognise his own monks in the brown habits which they got only in 1893.\* But the white cope characteristic of the original Carmelites, which his children were allowed to wear from 1916 onwards, he might easily reconcile with, as that is a privilege to which his Servants of the Immaculate Conception were entitled.

The first foundation of the religious community, in spite of the apprehensions which its sagacious, imaginative, saintly, founder, entertained, proved to be the forerunner of numerous others in course of time. The exemplary life of the first monks was a great inspiration

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\* Changes keep on being made with the passing of time. □ Editor

to both the clergy and the laity. The spiritual ministrations they rendered to the many ailing souls in the area also added to their popularity. People from far and near requested Father Kuriakose to open similar houses of prayer and monastic life in their centres. There were offers of sites and funds. Some zealous priests experimented with similar foundations. The pioneering enterprise or effort of Father Kuriakose had certainly been a success. He himself was able to organise seven other foundations in his own time, during the sixteen years he functioned as the Prior General of the Order. A short account of these branches will give an interesting insight into the conditions prevailing then.

The first of these branches was actually thrust on him by the Archbishop. St. Francis Xavier had established a church at Coonammavoo. In 1837 the Archbishop was looking after the work as a missionary priest. Later when he was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly he decided to open a monastery for the clergy of the Latin rite. But the attempt failed and he handed over the establishment for a Syrian foundation appointing Fr. Kuriakose as Prior and a number of monks from Mannanam as fellow members of the congregation. Father Kuriakose accepted the offer and commissioned one of his colleagues to function as his Vicar while he continued developing the primary house. This was in 1857. Two years later this was made the novitiate house of the order. At the express desire of the Archbishop, the Prior General moved out in 1864 to stay at Coonammavoo where he continued till his death. The original house at Coonammavoo was handed over to the Latins in course of time. The Syrians established a new one instead. This branch continues to this day.

The next in order of chronology is the foundation at Elthuruth. Surrounding the cole lands, it often appears like an island. Possibly



that is how it is called a *thuruth*. *El* in Syriac means God. Thus even the name of the place is significant. This was started first at Aranattukara on the Feast of the Purification of Our Lady in 1852. The foundation stone was laid by Father Kuriakose himself. Very soon with the help of the northern parishes mainly, the monastery and chapel at Elthuruthu were built and completed in 1856. The Prior General himself visited the monastery, and blessed the new church and said first mass there.

Like Mannanam in the south, Elthuruth in the North has been a stronghold of the faith during these years. Those who look for a quiet secluded place for retreat, or contemplation can still well look for it there, in spite of the noisy appendages to it in the form of a high school and a printing Press. Both have been of great and immeasurable service to the cause of the faith during the past years of its existence. It is perhaps the first religious house in the land which attempted to run an industrial school.\*

One of the unsuccessful foundations which were shortlived, was located at Plasanal. This was not founded by Father Kuriakose. On the contrary, it was established by one of those priests who had left the order from Mannanam. After the death of this founder, the institution was entrusted to the Carmelites. They found the place ill-suited. One of the monks died of malaria in the house. Gradually, the foundation was disestablished and the church and rectory were handed back to the nearest local parish.

The monastery at Vazhakulam is perhaps the one which has the longest history behind its inception. It was conceived as early as 1837, but was in fruition only as late as 1859. A seminary was opened in this monastery in 1866. A high school also was started in 1891.

\* There has been much more development to the premises subsequently. □ Editor

The Ampazhakad foundation was raised in view of the scope for missionary work in the area, judging from the missionary labour of St. Francis Xavier and the Jesuit fathers. It is today one of the well-established houses. Day after day, the poor of the place get a noon meal at the portals of this house of God. Ever since the novitiate at Coonammavu was lost to the Syrians in 1899, Ampazhakad was the novitiate for the congregation.

The last of the foundations which Father Kuriakose saw was the one nearest to his home. In 1861, some monks preached a mission in Pulincunnu. At the close of it, the parishioners requested the Bishop to establish a monastery there and offered full co-operation. Work on the house was completed by 1866. A seminary was established here six years later. However, this was raised to the privileges and full stature of a religious foundation only in 1885. A high school forms an attractive complement to this monastery in the home of the holy founder himself.\*

The people of Mutholy, near Palai had requested of the Bishop, the privilege of a monastic foundation as early as 1867. This prayer was granted in 1870 and the foundation was laid. But it took about fifteen years before a formal monastery was established there.

Founders of various religious orders and other holy or pious institutions had often to meet with very many trials and difficulties and failures and disappointments. They were often subject to severe and serious misunderstandings. But the case of Father Kuriakose seems quite different. The outstanding personal qualities of head and heart of this Blessed Soul won for him a respectability and appreciation which stood him in good stead in organising these foundations. The amount of personal effort by way of inspection, discussion, rapprochement, conciliation, organisation and financial



arrangements, which Fr. Kuriakose put in, is immeasurable. An idea, however, can be formed only by the magnitude of the achievements in the various fields. Primarily he worked towards the establishment of a religious community of priests. But his was not a purely other-worldly life. He knew realistically enough, that, while the Kingdom of God was not of the earth, the earth and its resources and its people were all to be oriented towards Him. He knew that, while he and his colleagues, the monks, could sanctify their lives by exclusive cloistered contemplation, they had an opportunity and an obligation to bring up their fellowmen also with them. This led him to take up the cause of social service measures like education, and publication, in both of which he achieved enviable success. He tried to make every foundation for prayer and contemplation a social service centre also. His dreams are being fulfilled by his children to a great extent. The schools, the colleges, the printing press, the daily newspapers, the monthlies, the dispensaries, the pilgrimage shrines, the catechism centres, the poor feeding centres and other humanitarian and religious activities undertaken by his spritual children are all contributions in this line.



## CHAPTER VI

### Foundation of Sisterhoods

One of the greatest contributions of the Catholic Church to the modern world is the institution of convents for women desirous of living a religious community life. These institutions have now become universally recognised as the greatest organisations for charitable and social work like the running primary and kindergarten schools, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the poor, the old, the destitutes and the fallen, and so on. There are the contemplative cloistered congregations also. But the larger number of these institutions have been engaged in remarkable works of humanitarian and philanthropic value. Any individual who has contributed to the establishment or maintenance of any of these houses for the pious, self-sacrificing, heroic women, can feel gratified that he has contributed to a very laudable and generous cause. A mind open only to the ephemeral or external, may complain about the unnatural austerities of such a life and ridicule it, but against the background of faith, these lives are the glorious examples of enduring love of God, manifested through love of our neighbour. There are those who look at convent life as a cowardly one, alleging that these women have retired into the cloister, finding it hard to settle down comfortably in the world, and expecting guaranteed food, clothing and shelter behind the convent walls. Nothing can be farther from the truth.

Large numbers of these nuns have come from well-to-do families. Many of them had every convenience for settling down well in life



like many of their sisters in the world. The fact that many of these nuns have distinguished themselves in the educational field particularly shows that they were no inferior, unwanted, unsuccessful type, that timidly retired into a convent. There are instances in which the most talented member of the household has taken to this life of service. In fact, they retired only to penetrate more powerfully and more universally into the numerous homes in this land.

If a statistical survey is taken in the Kerala State, it will be seen that a good majority of the heads of families will have occasion to record receipt of some service or other from one or another of the many convents in the State.

But where were these convents a century and a half ago? Hardly anybody realises that they did not exist in this State then. It was the genius and initiative of Fr. Kuriakose that promoted these paradoxical institutions of retirement and seclusion that have invisibly permeated into most of our homes by now.

In 1864, Father Kuriakose had moved to Coonammavoo, as desired by the Archbishop. There he was working in close harmony with the missionary priest, Fr. Leopold, and the Archbishop himself. At the suggestion of the former, Father Kuriakose took up the idea of forming a convent for pious women. It is quite interesting and edifying to follow the history of these foundations mostly in his own words as recorded in his diary with all details. Such personal description reveals the insight, sagacity and prudence of Fr. Kuriakose. Here is an account condensed from his narrative:

*It seems that God has been pleased to fulfill something which seems difficult and for which I have been praying for long. When I had finished the enclosures for a convent for women; priests were felt to be more necessary and it was converted into a*

*seminary. In 1865, Very Rev. Leopold took me out for an evening walk (and told me). "Here, there are a widow and her fourteen-year old daughter. The girl is heiress to half the property of her father. She does not like to get married. Why not separate them from their home and accommodate them in a new house to be built on their own property, a little removed from the family house? Here other girls in like situation may be trained in handicrafts and virtuous ascetic life to become nuns." I replied approving the suggestion. However, I expressed my apprehensions about possible protest from other members of their family.*

But knowing the disposition of these his spiritual children fully well, prayerfully he tried them again and finally spoke to the Archbishop. The Archbishop was quite pleased with the idea and agreed to treat them as the Third Order of Carmelite nuns. He gave their rules for translation into Malayalam. This was seen to be the rule followed by the lay carmelite tertiaries. This was helpful as it opened the way for a lay tertiary order also. The Archbishop also succeeded in persuading an uncle of the above mentioned girl to agree to putting up a separate house there for these future nuns. However there were no funds. In 1866, with a small sum of Rs. 18 only, the first convent was started. An enclosure of three rooms with one living room, one retiring room and one prayer room was built of bamboo-mat-screens. This enclosure was furnished very meagrely by whatever the priests could spare from the monastery. The women aspirants moved into it as an orderly community. The widow was the Superior and the daughter her first daughter in religion also. Soon Father Kuriakose struggled to erect a convent suitable for the safe habitation of women. His role as a Superior for them was conceded by the congregation. He made full use of all personal influences with



his one time clerics to raise sufficient capital. It is a remarkable feat of achievement to have raised at that time about Rs. 8,000 in about 8 month's time and put up a substantial convent building. It was in 1867, about twelve years after the formal profession in his own congregation. Similarly a ritual vestition was solemnly arranged for the women's congregation also. It was the first carmelite convent for women founded in Kerala. Father Kuriakose records in his diary a very unusual and significant experience of the day. Fr. Leopold and himself had seen to establishing the convent. On the first day they took those first members round the house, explained to them the use of various bells installed in the house. By about noon they returned to their own monastery. Then Fr. Leopold opened and read for the first time the following note in the writings of the great St. Teresa. *Mother Teresa received a letter from the elders of India, to go over there and found a convent. Lamenting over the misfortune (of the Indians) she decided to go to India. But as usual when she prayed to our Lord, He appeared to her and commanded "Daughter, you need not pray for this now: this is to be fulfilled through your sons. In the fulness of time, your sons, the monks, will reach there. They will found congregations for monks and nuns."* This timely discovery convinced the pious enthusiasts that the great saint was guiding them from above and that they could well rest assured of continued providential protection and patronage. Father Kuriakose ends the reference by praising the good God who had granted him the privilege of long life—life long enough to see such hopes and prophecies fulfilled.

That one reference is reminiscent of old Simon of, the Purification Temple bursting out in his hymn of praise and thanksgiving. His gratification that his eyes had seen what other generations had longed to see and that then he was glad to be dismissed in peace from this

life to life eternal, is echoed in the joyous acknowledgement of the holy man. He seems to be saying that there is little else in life which he considers worth having lived for, except the formation and growth of the organisations which stand for service and contemplation and absolute and unqualified surrender of self to glorify God.

All achievements are remembered, when they prosper. But the labours or the struggles, or the disappointments behind them are hardly remembered. While the growth of the convent is noted with gratification by all who derive immeasurable benefits from them, nobody ever remembers the pioneering efforts of heroic souls like Father Kuriakose who brought the first of their kind into existence. He worked hard on this, even at great personal risks. It is recorded by his successor in office that, once, on his mission for raising funds for this first convent, he had a severe attack of rheumatic fever and remained even unconscious for two days. Broken down in health, he returned to Coonammavu. There he was further attacked by a swelling on the leg. It was some time before he regained normal health.

This reference was made here just by way of reminding the reader that Father Kuriakose was an indefatigable worker. The sum-total of his achievements was phenomenal, in spite of poor health, adverse physical conditions and circumstances far from pleasant or congenial.

If the first Carmelite foundation in Mannanam heralded a large number of other Carmelite and other monasteries, the first Carmelite convent for women in Coonammavu, founded by the same illustrious priest, was the mother house for numerous children of considerably varied affiliations. A complete up-to-date statistical record of their number, location, achievements, and continuing activities with reference to Kerala alone will be a staggering record for the sceptic and the critic who can hardly see much good in these religious



sisterhoods. During the first seventy- five years there arose about fifty of these foundations of religious women, with the strength over 1,000. The current figures are very much higher. How kind God has been! While some of these foundations and sisterhoods may not even have heard of Father Kuriakose or Father Leopold, yet the all-seeing eye of God would have rewarded both of them for all these and other convents too in Kerala, for certainly they sowed the seeds of this *mustard* tree in His honour only. ■

## CHAPTER VII

### The Rocos Sehism

The unfortunate Schism that raged in Kerala during the 19th century was of no small order or consequence. It was a storm that shook the Syrian Church to its very core or foundations. Fortunately for the church, it has been wiped out completely. Except for the evaluation of the contribution of Father *Kuriakose* it should better be forgotten than recounted. However, for the purpose of understanding the heroic qualities of Fr. *Kurikose*, the subject of this biography, a very concise account of it is given here in the words of Fr. Valerian as recorded in his account of the Saint Soul.

...For nearly three centuries the Church which St. Thomas founded in Kerala was ruled over by native bishops ordained by the Apostle and the legitimate successors of those ordained by him. But since the fourth century, it is seen that the administration was through foreign bishops ordained and posted to Kerala by the Patriarch of Babylon. Though foreigners by nationality, they had the same rite and they got along fairly well with the people here. But in the sixteenth century, after the Synod of Diamper, the administration of the native church passed on through Don Menezis, the Archbishop of Goa, to latin Bishops. The Portuguese rulers were not familiar with the oriental congregation, its Syrian rite and social customs. Further they were lacking in a spirit of accommodation. All this ultimately led to the deterioration of the Syrian Church in many respects.



Leaders of the community, proud of their ancestry and noble traditions, very much resented this trend of affairs and organised themselves to safeguard their interests. They solicited of the authorities in Rome and Portugal the appointment of Syrian Bishops to Kerala to preserve and promote their social and cultural integrity. Somehow such requests did not meet with favour or success. This led to further alienation between the foreign rulers and the members of the old rite. The more adventurous among the latter volunteered to go in person to Western countries and fight for their recognition. Fr. Antony Kudakkachira and Fr. Antony Thondanad led a party of young men to Babylon in the first place. Here the former unfortunately passed away. The latter, while staying at Mooussal, finally succeeded in persuading Patriarch Joseph Audo to send a Bishop to study the condition of the Syrians in Kerala. Accordingly the Patriarch sent Bishop Thomas Rocos to Kerala. The news of a Syrian Bishop coming to Kerala was hailed heartily by the Syrians. But Rocos was not posted as a Bishop of Kerala. Even the commission he held from the Patriarch was without the sanction of the Holy See. But the impostors pretended that his appointment was effected with the permission of Rome. Efforts of the Latin Bishops to vindicate the hollowness of their claims were mostly ineffective. Father Kuriakose was aware of the dangerous situation and forthwith issued from Mannanam a statement under his hand and seal, explaining the position.

On the 9th May, 1861, Rocos landed in Cochin. He was received and led in procession to Thaikkattucherry, encouraged and directed by Parayil Tharakan. Fr. Antony Thondanatt, as Secretary to the bishop, wrote to all the churches intimating them the arrival of the Bishop and requesting their recognition and homage. Father Kuriakose too was informed. A great many rushed to the new Bishop



and paid him their respects and compliments and received his *blessings*. They planned to secure the monasteries at Mannanam and Elthuruth as residences for him. Father Kuriakose suspected these demonstrations and hastened to contact the Bishop and demand of him his credentials. But the satellites of the Bishop saw to it that their trick was not easily given away. They refused Father Kuriakose permission to see or speak with the Bishop. They even tried to humiliate and molest Father Kuriakose.

Father Kuriakose and his congregation tried their best to prevent the schism from spreading. Several prominent laymen were on his side. When he found that the Schismatics were unruly and interfering with his fold, he reported the matter to the Cochin Government. The strict measures the Government of Cochin adopted, soon brought them somewhat under control. But the Schism was spreading. A large proportion of the faithful lined themselves with the new Syrian Bishop and their strength grew. Of the 150 Syrian churches then existing, 86 unconditionally accepted Rocos and 36 gave him partial recognition. The position was very, grave and fraught with dire consequences. Archbishop Bernardine could think of no other alternative to fighting the Schism than giving a legitimate Syrian Bishop. His first choice was undoubtedly Father Kuriakose. But this latter, with his heroic spirit of renunciation, declined to accept such honour, but not the responsibility. So he was appointed as their Vicar General, with wide and unusual powers over his faithful. This was in June 1861, just a month after Bishop Rocos had landed. The decree appointing the Vicar General ran as follows, after the usual formula of salutation and blessing:

*For the information of Very Rev. Fr. Kuriakose, the beloved  
Prior of Mannanam and other monasteries; considering the*



*difficulties of looking after the needs of all the Christians who have been under Our jurisdiction for long, considering our advancing years and consequent weakness and dislocations, and realising that from 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, I do hereby appoint you as the Vicar General of the Syrians in Kerala, to look after their spiritual needs and to govern both the clergy and the laity, with such powers as are generally given by us in the accompanying note. I pray God to give you the grace to minister to the spiritual needs of the faithful attending all Our Syrian Churches.*

Once officially appointed as the Vicar General, he strenuously and authoritatively worked to re-establish order and tranquillity in the Church. His first concern was to expose the pretensions of Rocos. For this he formally addressed a letter to H.H. Pope Pius IX requesting information. This was on 19th June, 1861. He received an early reply on 7th October to the effect that Rocos was not legally sent by the Pope. A detailed communication from the Pope was also promised in it. The confirmatory communication under the hand and seal of His Holiness himself, was despatched on September 5th of the same year and it was duly received by him.

With the publication of the authentic letters from Rome, the pretensions of Rocos and his adherents collapsed miserably. But it provoked their spitefulness and vengeance.

They came out in the open and indulged in severe attacks on Father Kuriakose and party. Their propaganda led to serious

development in places like Arnattukara, Trichur and Ollur. They openly accused Father Kuriakose and other Carmelites of false propaganda. Defying all charges and criticisms, Father Kuriakose and his team of colleagues in religion, travelled widely in Kerala, proclaiming the justice of their position with respect to the Schism. This led to the reclamation of several parishes from the Schism and the re-establishment of several centres in the faith. It is also mostly due to the work and activities of Father Kuriakose that at least a few churches were preserved intact throughout, without ever falling into Schism at all. History records that the churches at Muttam, Pallipuram, Vaikom, Parur, Ampallur, Kumpalam, Kodavechoor, Muhamma, Tathampally, Chennankary, Champakulam, Edathua, Pulincunnu, Thuruthy, Thottakad, Vaipur, Manimala, Nedumkunnam, Kanjirapally, Areethra, Kurumpanadam, Kudamaloor and Kaipuzha never accepted Rocos. A few families under the jurisdiction of Arnattukara, Ollur, Kandasamkadavu, Parappur and Chittattukara churches also are seen to have been loyal to the lawful authority during all these troubled years.

The honour and the credit of having thus kept alive the light which St. Thomas lit in Kerala go to Fr. *Kuriakose* in a very large measure. Rocos was commissioned by the Patriarch of Babylon only to visit Kerala and report on the condition of the church there. Even that appointment was in defiance of definite, injunctions from Rome. But, once in Kerala, Rocos yielded to the inducements of his schismatic supporters and superseded the authority he held even from his Patriarch, by visiting churches and ordaining priests in the capacity of one with regular jurisdiction over the people. When the Patriarch heard of it, Rocos was immediately ordered to return to Babylon. But he defied the order with impunity and continued his unauthorised administration. As this led to breach of peace in several



places, Father Kuriakose brought the whole affair to the notice of the Civil Governments in Travancore and Cochin. Mr. Sankunni Menon, Peishkar, Travancore and the Dewan of Cochin, both interfered with the unauthorised conduct of Rocos and ordered that he should not enter the churches situated in areas under their jurisdiction. At this juncture, Rome issued instructions to the properly constituted authority of Verapoly to excommunicate Rocos, if he did not forthwith quit Kerala. The Patriarch of Babylon also renewed his order recalling him.

Driven to such helpless straits from all directions, Rocos retired to the Church at Njarackal. On 30th November, in the Cathedral Church at Verapoly, Dr. Bernardine, under instructions from Rome, pronounced excommunication on Rocos in the name of the Holy Father. Fr. Mathai Mariam Kappil, Vicar of the Carmelite Monastery at Coonanmavu, volunteered to convey to Rocos the official decree of his excommunication. He went to Njarackal, proclaimed the excommunication in the church after the community mass and later called on Rocos in person and handed over the document confirming the punishment. The supporters of Rocos, created an uproar and tried to surround and rough handle the Vicar, who however escaped from the crowd and with the help and support of one Mr. Kunjipailo Parekatt, safely returned to Coonanmavu.

Rocos found it impossible to carry on his pretension any longer. So he offered to return and secretly requested the Archbishop to finance his passage back. The Archbishop consulted Father Kuriakose and decided to pay for his return. Father Kuriakose was deputed to meet Rocos and fix up the details. Accordingly he went to Cochin and advised him to return immediately. He generously persuaded him to retrace his misguided steps and promised him, in the name of the Archbishop, absolution even from the excommunication in case of

sincere repentance and retraction. Rocos agreed to return but tactfully added that he was ready to return even when he was first ordered to, that he was delayed owing to financial difficulties and that the excommunication was therefore not binding on him.

The decision of Rocos to return, naturally enraged those who promoted the Schism under his leadership. Prominent among those who were thus disappointed and enraged, was Fr. Antony Thondanat. He tried various means to prevent the return of his *master*! When each one of them failed in turn, he was driven to desperate straits and finally sued Rocos in the Civil Court for damages valued at Rs. 5000. But the influence of Father Kuriakose finally prevailed and in March 1862, Bishop Rocos sailed back to Bagdad.

The persistent fight against this Schism, with its triumphant conclusion, was a major achievement of Father Kuriakose. Several times, even his life was threatened. But he did not flinch or waver. In recognition of the great service he thus rendered to the church, the Holy Father Pope Pius IX sent an acknowledgement, signed in his own hand.

An analysis of the role of Father Kuriakose reveals certain outstanding traits in his saintly character. Even before he was officially posted to fight the Schism, his sense of duty had prompted him to interfere in the development as the Prior General of the religious community. The notice he published in this connection is a document that reveals the sterling qualities of the Saint Soul. With a simplicity that is childlike, and a confidence becoming saints, he quotes the scriptures and appeals to the faithful not to be misled by the impostors. Here is the full text of the notification:

*St. Luke 11.23: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth...." saith our Lord*



*Jesus Christ. That shepherd who comes into the fold other than with the permission of the Holy Father who is the successor of St. Peter, Vicar of Christ, is not the shepherd of the folk. But he scatters. Because the shepherd who does not take sides with the Holy Father is against the Lord, such shepherd and those that follow him will be undoubtedly punished in hell. It is truly understood that it is the unauthorised shepherd from Bagdad that has entered, the Kerala fold of our Lord and is scattering the sheep to fall victims to the devils of hell...*

*...Hence dearly beloved brethren, know ye that according to the words of our Lord, he that doth not enter by the door is a thief, a wolf in lamb's skin. Do not listen to the words of the unauthorised shepherds who come without the sanction of the Holy Father. Be ye prepared to stay with the legitimate pastor, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. Be ye ready even to accept martyrdom, at the hands of such shepherds. Know you also that if they were duly authorised by the Pope, they would come through the right door, the Bishop of Verapoly or Quilon, and then only perform sacrifice and give, sacraments, in the churches. This notice is released to safeguard the salvation of brother priests and faithful who might be involved in an accursed new Schism...*

*By your humble brother,*

*Father Kuriakose Elias,*

*Prior of Mannanam and other monasteries.*

The heroic spirit of resignation and acceptance of martyrdom in the cause of the true faith, is unmistakably seen in this notice. This was no empty boast or vain fear. The accursed Schism had enveloped 86 of the churches completely and some partially. Only about one-fourth of the total number of churches

stayed with him. It was then that he was posted Vicar General. Several times his residence and life were in danger. But the die was cast with the seal of baptism in the child. Without the slightest fear or doubt, he pushed on his heroic resistance.

He knew that Ceasar had his rights conceded by God and that they could be used to safeguard the honour, glory, and truth that is God. When the impostor was unauthorisedly visiting churches and exercising ecclesiastical authority in several churches in Travancore and Cochin, Father Kuriakose invoked the aid of the State civil authorities to hold out against such onslaughts. The pretender Bishop was checked occasionally by the State Governments in his movements for conquest.

Father Kuriakose could forgive also like his master. When the impostor had been cornered, he agreed to return, provided he would be given his fare back. Father Kuriakose was instrumental in meeting him and persuading him to retract and return. He exerted himself to get the false Bishop and the recalcitrant priests who had tried to prolong the after effects of the Schism forgiven and exonerated. He went out of the way to secure for such people the Pope's pardon, though they might not have finally merited or deserved such pardon. What the great monk wanted was the glory of God, secured even at great personal humiliation, sacrifice and even embarrassment. The role of Father Kuriakose shines by the deep contrast with that of his contemporaries of equal talents, unfortunately, misguided. How many brilliant and clever men, wrecked their careers and possibly their souls on the rocks of the Rocos Schism! God had preserved the humble monk from all error. When the Holy Father in 1952, vouched for the integral preservation of the faith and loyalty of the Catholics of Kerala, His Holiness might have had in his mind the unique contribution of Father Kuriakose also to that historic achievement. ■



## CHAPTER VIII

### In the field of Education and Literature

We have seen that Father Kuriakose was a rare type of priest for his generation, considering his desire to retire from the secular field. But the most remarkable feature of the man was that he withdrew from the world so as to permeate it more forcibly. He retired not because he was afraid of it, or tired of it, or disliked it, or belittled it, but because he loved it: because he wanted it to become the kingdom of God. All his attempts at educating and reforming the men of the world were motivated by the one desire that they should become men of God. With a singleness of purpose he tried to perfect himself and pass on or disseminate such perfection to his fellow religious, priests and laymen.

The best means of making one's life useful and thus fulfilling one's mission is by educating oneself. Father Kuriakose tried to gain his full quota of knowledge. He learnt quite a good deal of Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit. The great difficulties he encountered in learning Latin and, incidentally, Portuguese, have been referred to already. Syriac, the language for his liturgy was also his special field of study. He gained some proficiency in Italian also towards the end of his life.\* Thus one sees a versatile linguist in him.

Possessed of such knowledge he wanted to share it with the people. One of the clearest expressions of love and fellow-feeling is

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\* Blessed Chavara was taking lessons in Spanish during the last days of his life; learning was a never ending process for him! □ Editor

the desire to share one's knowledge or possession with those whom one loves. What had Father Kuriakose, the obedient, chaste, poor monk, to share with the people other than his knowledge? So he took to setting down in writing his experiences in various fields. He was a facile writer, both in prose and verse. The diary he kept in his own handwriting for over a period of fortyone years from 1829 to 1870 is an authoritative historical record of the church in Kerala. As the stalwart champion of the cause of the faith, he recorded the history of the Rocos Schism for posterity to be proud, of the resistance and loyalty that preserved the faith intact. His appreciation of his elders and erstwhile colleagues, the co-founders, Fr. Palakal and Fr. Porookara, has been recorded in biographies that introduce us to the history of the church in the eighteenth century. The document he bequeathed to the members of his parish, known as *Dissertation of a good father from his deathbed*, has become a treasured possession, and is full of sound prudence, love and insight into human nature. That document may survive. several other supposedly more popular, more fashionable ones, by virtue of the immeasurable sincerity and practical wisdom and sagacity of its saintly author. Despite its external simplicity, its intrinsic value is such that the author deems it fit for translation and incorporation into this biography even at this distance of time.\*

He composed some autobiographical verses which were called *Repentance of a Soul. (Aatmanuthapam)* Scholarly critics have reviewed this poetical work and commented that every line is imbued with spiritual thoughts. There is internal evidence in these lines to convince a reader that the author was a very honest man and that he has recorded only his true and devout experiences.

\* Beth Rauma has taken up the publication of this translation and would be bringing out this same under the title *My Testament to You* shortly. □ Editor



No wonder then that a man of his calibre could not rest till he saw his brethren attain at least comparable standards. Governments were coming forward to establish more schools. Protestant missionaries had started, pioneering enterprises in spreading English Education. He also went all out to establish and develop as many centres of education as possible. His achievements in the field and the progress the community made after his time, are recalled by Fr. Valerian briefly under the caption Father Chavara as an *Educationist*. He says Father Kuriakose Elias was a great educationist also, in addition to his being a brilliant scholar. Till his time, the church in Kerala had not achieved much in the field of Education. But being proficient, as we have seen, in different world languages, he became a powerful influence for good in the cause of Catholic Education.

His interest in the field of education for priesthood—the establishment and conduct of seminaries, has already been dealt with. He was also concerned with the general education of the laity. The Protestant missionaries had by then started and experimented with the running of even English Schools. They did so from about 1816. He realised that the community would ever remain downtrodden, if they did not move with the times, and he decided that his new congregation should concentrate on educational work. So in 1846 the monastery developed a new organ in the form of a Sanskrit School.

As Vicar General of the Syrians, he took a very bold step, for which the country at large should be grateful to him. He issued a mandate, calling upon all parish churches under his jurisdiction to start schools attached to each of them. He even threatened to close down the churches that failed to comply with his orders. How he



executed these directions through the monasteries he founded, is well-known. He had even planned a Central College for Catholics when he was Vicar General; only it did not materialise then owing to various unfavourable circumstances. If today the Catholics of Kerala are literate to a high degree, it is largely because of the farsighted policy of Father Kuriakose Elias, in the establishment of a school for each parish! The Syrian Catholics who were thus guided and led by him, have now to their credit several Colleges, High Schools, Middle Schools, Elementary Schools, Industrial Schools, Sanskrit School and Commercial Schools. He was also anxious to spread English education. The first English High School of Syrian Catholics was founded in 1885 at Mannanam and it is now enjoying a very enviable reputation even this day.

The educational activities of the Carmelite congregation have won the esteem and recognition of both political and ecclesiastical authorities. Members of the royal family had graciously consented to be patrons of their institutions or otherwise co-operated with their activities. Mgr. Zaleski, a former Delegate Apostolic to India, has commended the congregation in an official report, for its special work in the field of education:

*Among your modern activities, the schools and boarding houses and hostels form the most important ones always. You have already demonstrated your special talents in this line.*

In a retrospective view it is a staggering vision. The great educationists we know of today were or are all great university men. What was the training ground for Father Kuriakose? He never had the benefits of a University education. Even in his own special fields of Morals and Theology, the instructions in the Seminaries were not of an enviably high order. The training of the priests was mostly



centering round the Bible. Father Kuriakose knew it almost by heart. His sermons and writings reveal the easy familiarity he developed with the sacred texts. Based on this, he could expound his Theology and Morals so perfectly as to be a challenging match to foreign missionaries who were much better instructed. Perhaps it is not right to say that all this knowledge was of a purely natural order, the outcome of an intelligent, persevering study. The Catholic Church has examples of simple women like St. Teresa of Avila who never saw the entrance to a university being exalted as Doctors of the Church! What were the qualifications of a St. Catherine of Sienna, to dictate notes and letters of such perfection as to have held Scholars, Kings and Popes spell-bound? So the thoroughness of knowledge Father Kuriakose displayed, should make one think whether God had not specially chosen him for this generation, out of the *simple and ordinary* to confound *the intelligent and the proud*.

The most far-reaching, enduring, all embracing, illuminating, edifying and even sanctifying field of activity, initiated by Father Kuriakose through the monasteries in general and primarily from Mannanam was that of Printing. It has become so common nowadays that its special service is not fully appreciated. Its influence on everyday life has become so absorbing that it is impalpable. One has to make a serious effort and have an introspective study to realise the tremendous impact the printing presses have had upon the Catholic life in the country. The prayer books, devotional books, the scriptures and the numerous other timely publications emerging from these presses have permeated every catholic home in our country. Without much exaggeration, one could assert that the prayer books from Mañnanam would have literally shown many the way to heaven. *Path to heaven*, *Perpetual Adoration* and other prayer books have become bye-words in our Catholic life.

Through the varying vicissitudes of life, these publishing centres have been rendering yeomen service to the Church. When there were dissensions, difficulties and misunderstandings, various periodicals including dailies, weeklies, monthlies, annuals, special numbers, serial publications, and well informed authoritative books were published in defence of truth. They sustained the spirit of truth and loyalty. Only a superficial critic can belittle the immensity of the contribution the Catholic Press in the country is making to the cause of the preservation of moral values and social justice. On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of a Catholic Daily one of the outstanding laymen of the community paid a glowing tribute to it.

He said:

*Neither the body of priests who sought the permission of Dr. Marcelene for publishing a newspaper from St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam, nor Mr. Parayil Tharakan who represented the laymen, nor the Bishop who sanctioned the publication and suggested Fr. Emmannuel Nidiry as the Editor, ever-dreamt of the important and mentionable place (this) has attained today among the Malayalam newspapers and Catholic publications. It is impossible for us, men of modern times to assess even vaguely, the large number of men who during the last few decades of years have been redeemed from evil ways and brought into prudent, just, charitable ways of living and above all, well established in faith in God by this organ.*

The establishment of these printing presses was no easy matter. The Prior of Mannam had dreamt of a printing press also as part of the foundation. Certainly he had no experience in the line. He had not even seen one. He knew that the finances needed were large. He had no means to buy the machinery, ink, paper and other



necessities. There were no skilled workmen easily available. Since the days of the first printing press set up by the Portuguese in Goa, sometime in 1566, they had set up two more in Kerala, at Cranganore and Vaipikot. The only printing establishments in Travancore at the time Father Kuriakose was trying for one, were the Government Press at Trivandrum and the C.M.S. Press at Kottayam. The enthusiastic pioneer went over to Trivandrum, saw a press in working order, studied its details and returned to Mannanam. He made models of what he had seen and got some local carpenters to fabricate one working model. It was not a mere model. It was a wooden press. It worked. It can work even today. It is still kept at the St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam, as a memorial of the vision of the great soul that founded the press. Today, this obsolete model is a silent witness to the latest developments in printing, set up under the same roof, fully automatic rapid printing presses. How thrilling it would have been to the *old parent* if it could have intelligently watched the vacuum action arms of its great-grand-child, feeding the paper to the press and taking it off to be stacked, some mechanical gadget counting the impression all the time. Some ethereal spirit is standing watch to switch off the machine when the papers are run out!

The press was only one problem solved for him. Other problems of types, ink, paper, funds... all these embarrassed or baffled him. A smith's skill, an agent's deal, above all, a kind providence... all played their part and pushed the enthusiast through. Even miraculous appeared the timely aid he got for this cause. At last he succeeded in pushing out the first catholic prayer book printed in Malāyalam, *Gnanapeeyoosham; Spiritual Nectar*. It was the forerunner of millions of prayer books, one at least of which has found its way in



the course of these years to practically every Christian home in Kerala. The tribute paid to the St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam, by Fr. Valerian contains no exaggeration:

*St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam was the first to publish prayer books in Malayalam. Prayer books in Tamil only were common at the time. This press was the third in Travancore, but was the first one to be set up under private ownership in the country. The first wooden press Father Kuriakose got built, is preserved to this day, as a precious relic and a tribute to his skill, foresight, perseverance and patience. St. Joseph's Press itself, more than a century and a half old, rises today as a glorious monument to its indefatigable founder and a beacon light, in the full sense of the phrase, to Kerala. There is no Christian house in Kerala where some books printed at the St. Joseph's Press is not to be found. The Malayalam translation of the Holy Bible, the innumerable prayer books—the monthly Flower of Carmel and the Daily Deepika now published from a branch house at Kottayam, were all perhaps in the dreams of the saintly founder. The Press stands for just one thing above all, to preach the gospel of Christ and to help the social life of those amidst whom it works.*

The achievements of other printing houses like those at Elthuruth and Thevara are no less meritorious. Only on the other side of the grave will many men and women realise how much they owe to these silent, retired, patient, service centres. ■



## **CHAPTER IX**

### **Reformation of the Syrian Catholic Community**

Fr. Kuriakose exerted himself considerably to establish the Syrian Catholic community at a very high social and spiritual level. He worked at it in all directions. We have seen how Schools were one of his strong points. Printing and publication also received his attention. But above all these was the most important question of personal sanctity. Form and acts of worship, interest in social welfare, disposition of the people towards charity, amelioration of the poor, destitute, depressed fellowmen... in all these he saw the real fulfilment of genuine Catholic life. He embarked on a programme of reconstruction in all these directions.

First his attention was focussed on the clergy. They were to shepherd the flock. On them depended the well-being, the safety, the salvation of the flock. If striking the shepherd was enough to scatter the flock, strengthening the qualities of the shepherd was ensuring the well-being of the flock. So, great attention was bestowed on the proper training in the Seminaries. He instituted the annual retreat for priests. To facilitate recitation of the canonical office, with permission from Rome, he codified the Breviary. In fact work on this had been practically completed during his own Seminary days. The prayers proper for the seasons were scattered about in four prayer books. They were collected together. The compilation was got approved by Rome. During his term of office as Vicar General

of the Syrians, this was made the official compulsory canonical prayer book for all priests.

His great respect for the holy sacrifice of mass drew his attention to the very meagre and concise rubrics then laid down in the missal. With the approval of the Ordinary, he set down a clear precise description of every detail, even the minutest, of the Divine Sacrifice. His directions covered all the movements of the priest from the time of his entering the sacristy for mass to the time of his return from the altar. Such a patient description is itself proof of the very great esteem in which he held the mass. See what great length of detail he was capable of going to, when the subject matter involved was our Divine Lord himself. He describes the priest going to Holy Mass as follows:

*After having vested as described, take the chalice, holding it at the round part of the stem by the left hand. The right hand should be held down on the top, gently touching the burse. Hold the chalice, the same way as it is taken, level with the breast, but not touching it. Bow to the cross or other holy statue in the sacristy, get the biretta, place it on the head and proceed respectfully to the altar. The acolyte should lead in front holding the missal in his hands propped against his chest. While crossing the main altar, bow down, but the cap need not be removed. If mass is being said, observe the same way before consecration and after the communion. Side altars need not be regarded the same way. But while crossing altars where the blessed sacrament is kept or where mass is being said, the stage being between consecration and communion bend on one knee with the cap in position. If the tabernacle be open or communion is being distributed, kneel down, remove the cap, bow, replace the cap,*



*arise and proceed. Need not stay till distribution of communion is over. If it is the time of elevation of the sacred host, kneel on both knees, remove the cap, give it to the acolyte, and stay there till the elevation of the chalice is also over, if you meet a priest coming towards you with the Blessed Sacrament in his hands, kneel on both knees, remove cap and give to acolyte and stay. When the priest has crossed you and gone away, replace the cap and proceed.*

Practically every eventuality was provided for. He did not treat any of it as trivial. Nothing connected with the Blessed Sacrament was to be trifled with. With such thoroughness, clarity and precision Father Kuriakose laid down the rubrics for the whole mass. It extends to nine chapters. This was the document in use for a long period.\* Extensive details for solemn high mass and vespers were also drawn up by him. They were so masterly and perfect that the Bishops approved them and enforced their use by the clergy.

Another of his contributions in this direction is the arrangement of the services for the Holy Week. The liturgy for the Holy Saturday was translated from the Latin into Syriac for use in the Syrian churches. The institution of the Forty hours' Adoration in the monasteries was also the outcome of the zeal and Eucharistic devotion of Father Kuriakose. It has manifold advantages in strengthening and steadying, both the clergy and the laity.

The zeal he evinced for the regeneration and the sanctification of the clergy, he extended assiduously to the cause of reforming the laity also. He concentrated on parish missions with supreme confidence. His *religious priests* distributed themselves, as ordered by the Superior, in threes and fours, to all churches Syrian and Latin.

\* In use till modifications brought in by the Vatican Synod. □ Editor



and preached spiritual retreats there. Thus every year twenty to thirty retreats were preached in the parishes. These retreats were followed by a ceremonial pastoral visit by the *Shepherd* himself. The priests celebrating Sunday masses were exhorted to preach regularly during the mass. Father Kuriakose did much to make this a regular feature in all the churches and for all time. He himself had preached in almost all the then churches of Kerala.

The outstanding service of Father Kuriakose in the fields of literature and education have been referred to already. The effect of these on the layfolk has been considerable.

Two other matters which received the special attention of Fr. Kuriakose were uplift of the backward classes and catechism or evangelisation. He opened two schools exclusively for the Christian converts from the depressed classes, at Mannanam and Arpookara. Consider the significance of this movement at that distant age when these depressed classes were grossly neglected. Hardly was it conceded that they had the same fundamental rights for knowledge and well-being as anybody else. Father Kuriakose believed, and rightly too, that the faith he professed should be shared with the less fortunate of his fellowmen, and that a correct knowledge of the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man would be the first step towards developing a very necessary self confidence in them. This would eventually lead to social uplift also. Thus he worked for the entire regeneration of the down-trodden according to the light and facilities that were given to him. He succeeded in raising their question on the social plane by creating an interest in their despicable condition irrespective of religious affiliations. It is an important byproduct of his strenuous work for them.

He also tried to establish homes for the destitute. One such is still functioning at Kainakary. This, was to be a centre where



instruction in the faith was given to those desirous of it. A small fund was also raised for running the home.

Incidentally, it should be mentioned that Father Kuriakose never failed in any attempted good work for want of funds. When any scheme was found worth implementing, he somehow succeeded in raising enough funds for it. When Archbishop Bernardine himself was in dire want and almost at his wits end for raising resources Father Kuriakose suggested the idea of a five per cent contribution from each church for maintaining a Seminary for priests. The idea was appreciated and approved by him and is current to date. The personal influence of Father Kuriakose was helpful to win the willing co-operation of the parishes in carrying out this measure. There were many parish priests who had come out of the Seminaries attached to the monasteries and to them, any wish of their revered Prior General was more than law; was a sacred duty. This helped the new measure being gradually enforced in all the churches without much opposition. ■

## CHAPTER X

### Saintliness

**F**ather Kuriakose was a model priest, an ardent and resolute champion of the faith, a founder of a religious order, and a zealous apostle of social service. In all these capacities, he displayed a saintly disposition and approach to problems in general. His contemporaries, superiors and devout children in the priestly and lay order, have generously borne testimony to such holiness of life. Oral and written evidences on the subject were forthcoming in plenty during the last few years. Even during his lifetime there were several frank encomiums paid to his personality and holiness.

Archbishop Bernardine was the most prominent among those who were in a position to know intimately and evaluate the real merits of Father Kuriakose. He wanted him to be always near him. So he persuaded him to move from Mannanam to Coonammavo for permanent residence. The Archbishop used to direct all his missionaries to visit Father Kuriakose whom he considered as the virtual authority governing Kerala. In the order appointing him as Vicar General, he makes it clear that he is appointing him with special powers as he is convinced of the steadiness, skill, prudence and saintliness of the candidate.

It is said that the Archbishop once visited Father Kuriakose in his own room and seated himself for conversation, on a box, leaving the only chair in the room to the father himself. Even on his deathbed,



the Archbishop gladly permitted the Prior to call on him, though he refused permission to others even more closely in attendance on him earlier.

Bishop Marcelene, who as a missionary had first disciplined the religious at Mannanam has recorded in many places his esteemed views of Father Kuriakose. He says:

*One of them a secular priest, Father Kuriakose Chavara, called Cyriac De Sancto Elia in religion, was found fit to be the Prior when the establishment at Mannanam was declared a formal monastery. Even if he be the only flower of Mannanam it can be justly said that the labour of Fathers Palakal and Porookara bore sufficient fruit. For since the death of these two celebrated priests till 1856, our Prior, as the only Malpan, did untold good equal to the quota of many good priests, by dint of his precept and example.*

The compliment he has paid Fr. Kuriakose in dedicating his book, the biography of the great St. Teresa to him is a document that reveals the high regard and the basis of the regard he entertained for him.

While making the dedication, he observed:

*The history of the Seraphic St. Theresa, the glory of Carmel and the mother and instructress of the discalced, rightly belongs to him (Father Kuriakose). His special filial affection and respect and devotion towards her and his great zeal to disseminate the same are in themselves strong reasons for this dedication: Yet passing silently over them, I will emphasise here only those that are known to all. Who was he who sought her intercession, when at last in God's own time, Kerala came to*

*enjoy the blessings arising from the anxious tears she shed over India? Who was the person who persistently, and stubbornly supplicated for the formation of the religious order? Ever since the happy foundation of the order, who laboured zealously to the great joy, and satisfaction of our saintly mother? From the very day the children of this saintly mother, the Carmelites in Kerala, were born, who took them over as their father and shepherd (Father Kuriakose did all these). Hence for such legitimate reasons, this offering so pleasing to his heart, and which rightly is his own.*

Fr. Leopold, the missionary priest, who was the confessor of Father Kuriakose considered him a living saint. He never made a secret of it. Often he pointed out Father Kuriakose as an exemplary religious to the many novices in the order. He was instrumental in getting the autobiographical documents of Father Kuriakose published at least in part. In a preface to the same, he has paid a, glowing tribute to the saintly qualities of the author. He says *He performed these works more because of his own virtues and saintliness than because of his obligation to do them. All those who knew him were convinced of his deep humility, great charity, devotion to duty, and obedience to duly constituted authority. So they honoured and loved him and believed in him. The outstanding qualities of this person were however his burning love for and faith in the Holy Mother Church and the Holy Father.\**

Christian life is much more than the natural human life. A christian—the saint, according to St. Paul, accepts God's invitation and strives to attain the supernatural goal to which man is elevated and ordained through grace. This acceptance of God's invitation

\* Read *Life of a Blessed Soul* by Leonard Maria Beccaro in the Appendix. □ Editor



implies the submission of man's intellect to truths which are beyond discovery by the natural light of reason. It also implies reliance on the superior power that helps man to attain that divine distinction. Above all, this acceptance is a symbol of the total and loving dedication of the whole being of man to that supreme end, God.

Many more quotations from contemporaries among the priests and laymen could be cited to show how they appreciated the saintly qualities of Father Kuriakose. Those who moved intimately with him always felt that they were dealing with a very saintly person. Many of his disciples volunteered to preserve his remains and the articles used by him. The influence he exerted on the parishes in Kerala, is also proof of his personal qualities. Many a local skirmish or dissension was settled by his mediation. Crowds thronged the churches where he preached. For years after his death, the faithful used to recall the angelic grace and the ringing tone of the sermons preached by him in the various parishes. Even Schismatics are said to have observed that only a Father Kuriakose or so might manage to get to heaven from a world like this.

Against this overall picture of saintliness or sanctity, a closer study is necessary to evaluate the intrinsic merits and heroic qualities, of heart of the Blessed Soul. These are best understood from his writings.

An analysis of his published works will bear out the great heights to which his faith, hope and charity had risen. These are interrelated basic virtues. Evidence of one is almost surely an evidence of the others also. However, if instances are noticeable to demonstrate all these qualities, that is convincing proof of the perfection of the man.

*The just man liveth by faith* says St. Paul. Father Kuriakose realised it in full. The great esteem Fr. Leopold had for Father

Kuriakose is very significant, since he was one who knew him most intimately. In his correspondence with Europe Father Leopold speaks of Father Kuriakose as *Ill santo fondatore* the saintly founder. He believed so much in the sanctity of the Saint Soul that a few weeks after the latter's death, he had his tomb opened expecting that the body would be incorrupt. He took care also to distribute to the various monasteries the belongings of Fr. Kuriakose as holy relics.

With the commendable simplicity of a child, Fr. Kuriakose records his faith in the opening verses of the Lamentation of a Soul:

*Oh Lord, Master of beginning itself,*

*Thou has created me also the son of Adam.*

*What for Oh! Lord.*

*Thy mercy... which is itself without beginning... alone accounts for it.*

*If Thou hadst made me a worm of the earth,*

*Who could have questioned Thee, in this world or the other?*

*Thy great Mercy, Oh Lord, created even me, the great sinner,*

*In Thine own image according to Thy will.*

*Thou hast willed to grant me existence as a man*

*And to raise me up to the exalted height of Thy company:*

*Though Thou madest me like a mean worm,*

*Out of the dusty earth,*

*Yet Thou hast given me means*

*And protection to live beyond harm in this world.*

This faith in the nature and purpose of creation gave him a realistic perception of true values in life. The sacraments were all rich and meaningful. He records the significance of baptism in many verses.



Probably referring to the great decision he made regarding his vocation at a critical time, when his choice for priesthood meant practical desolation of his homestead, he describes the vanity of earthly honour and glory and the futility of engaging in material pursuits.

His song continues:

*The earth and all that we see on it change and disappear in no time.*

*The green grass of today is dried by tomorrow.*

*The lovely fragrant flowers of today wither and drop away soon.*

*Today one is well and the head of a family.*

*Many crowd around him, praising his talents and skill.*

*He amasses wealth like the sands of the sea,*

*Dresses elegantly, and rears beautiful sons and daughters.*

*He is all happy.*

*But one day he becomes old.*

*He wants a stick to support himself.*

*People look askance at him.*

*Is he the same old lovely, sprightly youth?*

*And in the end, nothing of all his acquisitions stays with him.*

*He returns the way he came, empty-handed.*

*Who remembers his youth, his beauty, his suits, his skill!*

*How wonderful Oh God, Oh Lord, I (am gratified) that thou gavest me such eyes as to see all these in their proper perspective and then know, love and serve Thee only.*

One may well wonder whether this is a child's way of thinking or whether it is not an after-thought justifying the step he took. But note how honestly the author acknowledges that that vision which he got was purely a gift. He never claims the superior knowledge of philosophy, but only humbly states that the Lord gave him that insight and that he is marvelling at it. It is almost reminiscent of the Little Flower commencing her biography proclaiming from the fulness of her heart:

*I will sing the mercies of the Lord.*

Father Kuriakose had learnt to climb to great spiritual heights, stepping on material creation. He treated the universe as a stepping stone to the transcendental life. He used to spend hours lost in meditation in the gardens around the monastery. It was there that he wrote most of his works.

A living faith in the doctrines and mission of the Catholic Church was the mainspring of all his efforts in combating the Rocos Schism. Even when he had nothing to do directly with the administration of the churches in Kerala, he felt it his duty to defend the faith of the people against imminent danger of total Schism. The circular letter he sent to the churches at this time and referred to earlier clearly shows his faith in the divine mission of the church and the reverence for the legitimate authority. He was one of the most influential persons in the Kerala Church and the leaders of the Schism would most willingly welcome him as their leader, if only he joined them. They made all efforts to achieve this. But his firm stand on the side of the Catholic Faith and legitimate authority stopped the on-rush of the Schism. Once appointed the Vicar General his spontaneous act is to approach the legitimate supreme authority to expose the pretences of the intruder.



This defence of the legitimate authority against the Schismatic faction did not arise from a blind allegiance to the latin Bishop of Verapoly. This is borne out by his procedure after the Schism had subsided. For, he wrote a letter to the Carmelite General in Rome explaining the need for giving the Kerala Church a Bishop of its own rite. He recognized the legitimacy of the aspirations of Schismatic leaders; but condemned their course of action which went against the legitimate authority of the Church.

His great love for the Catholic Church and the Papacy was only a manifestation of his living faith. It was a time when the Church in Europe was bleeding under the long years of the French Revolution and its counterparts in Italy. When the sad news trickled in from time to time he used to shed tears, and besides himself spending long hours, in prayer for the suffering Church, he used also to exhort the religious under him, both priests and sisters, to pray for the bleeding spouse of Christ.

Fr. Leopold has left us a record of this:

*He had a burning love for the faith in the Church and the Pope and desired greatly that the light and illumination of the Church should spread everywhere. He was pained to the point of shedding tears when he heard about its sufferings and longed very much to see its universal triumph. Whenever he heard news about the Holy Father, he wept for devotion and joy. On account of this special faith, he showed great respect, and special affection towards the Bishop, the representative of the Holy Father, as well as for the missionaries, the preachers of the Church.*

One of the visible expressions of faith is a life of prayer. Faith permeates a man with the consciousness of the divine presence



everywhere. That transforms all activity to prayer which is nothing other than communion with God. He regarded prayers as an active fight in the cause of the Church. His great esteem for the missionaries also was a manifestation of his faith in the divine order.

Faith naturally leads to hope and trust. A person who is deeply rooted in the faith, has naturally a conviction of the goodness of God and His superior wisdom.. That He has done all things well, and that He will continue to bless every good intentioned effort of ours, made Father Kuriakose say the *Fiat* of obedience time and again, even when he occasionally saw his plans thwarted completely. However, he did not consider any objection as an insurmountable difficulty. He struggled to do what was good and right as long as he could get the permission of his superiors to go ahead. When once, that was obtained, nothing daunted him. He knew that *God fulfils Himself in many ways* and that human beings were only instruments or tools in His hands. So he made himself a tool of God, sometimes even a fool of God, in attempting to do big things with little or no resources. Look at Father Kuriakose trying to found a convent for women with only eighteen rupees; or again his trying to establish a printing press by starting with a model he could make of plantain sheath and core. But fools of God achieved more than many of his wiser knights. Father Kuriakose was thus a fool of God, whose child-like trust was rewarded by an overflowing achievement, seven monasteries, one press, several churches, a number of schools and an orphanage. This was the direct outcome of his abiding faith and hopeful trust.

Some of his writings contain records of the very humble and child-like confidence he placed in Providence. They are seen in his own handwriting. He is recording one of his soliloquies with the great Carmelite St. Teresa:



Lead Kindly Light...

*I am not qualified for deep meditation or practice of virtues.  
For I am a great sinner. But I also know that even to think that  
I am not capable of these because of immodesty or uncleanness  
or the like on my part, is an expression of pride as you teach...*

*For are all these that God achieved (through me) mine at  
all?*

*How did I come so far?*

*Who called me?*

*How did I become a priest?*

*How was the monastery founded?*

*Who gave it to me?*

*Who called me Prior?*

*How did I come here?*

*Do I deserve this place?*

*No, no, not at all!*

*Then how did these happen?*

*Thy will is fulfilled!*

*Thy will will be executed.*

*Does not God want these things to be done?*

*Why was the guest without wedding garment at the dining  
table tied hand and foot and cast into exterior darkness?*

*Was he staying out on the highways fearing that he had no  
becoming garments to participate at the regal feast?*

*No. He could have got it from those who invited him, for the  
mere asking!*

*He who had invited him was not unable to provide him with  
that also!*

*But because the invitee thought indifferently or slightly, (he did not ask for it and so) was rejected. He who brought you so far will give you similar grace if only you ask of him!*

*...I have placed my hope in the Lord. I shall not be confounded for ever.*

This hymn of the Psalmist was the motto and the genuine inspiration of Fr. Kuriakose. This supreme trust gave him the strength and encouragement to achieve all that he had achieved. The antipathy or at least want of sympathy of the Bishops in authority during the early days of the foundation at Mannanam would have shattered the hopes and determination of any pioneer less reconciled to God's ways than Fr. Kuriakose. It was the same trusting, hopeful resignation that made him dare to go out to administer last sacraments to small-pox patients on their deathbed. Wild, snake-ridden jungles also did not frighten him, if only he could secure some timber and other raw materials for his monasteries by going into them.

Real, strong faith and hope are inconsistent with absence of charity. Charity is a word comprehending very wide meaning. To ignore for a moment the inspired preroration of St. Paul on the subject, the simple explanatory meaning of charity is love of God, which, on a physical and spiritual plane, completes itself through love of our neighbour. Fr. Kuriakos's discourses on charity or love, as extracted from his writings, are perhaps the most powerful evidence in support of his sanctity. These extracts also reveal the spiritual stature of the Blessed Soul. This is particularly significant, when it is remembered that he had no access to many of the spiritual documentaries available to priests and even laymen of today. Here are some extracts from one of his notes in the form of a soliloquy to St. Teresa:



*I see from your accounts your attitude to meditation; Meditation is conversation with God, conversation with God united in love, conversation with Jesus, the bridegroom of the soul. Conversation as between friends: Also that in the so-called cold periods of the commencement (of your vocation) as you were steeped in wordly things, you withdrew from meditation fearing it to be presumption to attempt it. Mother, it is all right. When meditation is conversation with God; it becomes conversation with one whom you love. When friends are together, they cannot hold their tongue, till they part; we see it always. It would never happen that they keep silent, having nothing to say. So, if there is love, there will be matter to talk also. Nobody need teach them that. Even when the two who love each other have no common language, they can talk and converse with each other intelligently. It may even be more pleasant to hold such conversation. Even if two lovers can't talk, their very existence near each other will be a joyful experience. So my dear mother, if I love my Lord Jesus truly, I will have enough matter to discourse with Him in meditation. Or if I can't talk, I can be happy by staying near him. So if I can have such love, then you will not have the trouble to teach me (to speak with Him), for soon I will learn such talk. So you exert to secure for me such love.*

His love of God was essentially a very personal one. He could visualise Jesus by his side and identify himself with his disciples or his persecutors. Both were frightening spectacles. So he kept their memory alive.

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord* is a piercing question which has awakened many a tepid catholic to ardent devotion. Father Kuriakose not only pictured himself on Calvary



always, but suggested such recollections to many of his daughters in religion. Listen to the advice he tendered to some sisters.

*God punishes us not only for our evil deeds. If we rejoice or relish over the sins of others, then also we deserve to be punished. Likewise, if we exult in the memory of virtues in others, we can merit reward. So you offer up the repentance and the virtues of the saints of old, like Mary Magdalen as your own. Secondly offer every movement or emotion of yours as your prayer: Every pulsation of our heart, our breathing, even our walking, even the cooing of the birds.... all these, individually and collectively, they are our prayer. Thirdly, after all these join all with the works of our Lord. Thus our sins will be blotted out. And we will gain merit. We can double our merit by a (proper offering). For example, when the pulse on my left foot beats, make an offering like this: Oh Lord, wash clean all the unwholesome steps I have taken by the blood that flows from the sacred wound on the left foot.. Again I liken this movement to all such movements of all the saints till today. I wish this were like the movement of the foot of our Lord Himself. Thus augment the value, Renew the intentions in the course of the day. When you say 'Lord have mercy on me'; offer it as if in union with the prayer of the communities in the convents. Tell the Lord like that and your own prayer, "Lord have mercy on us" becomes as valuable as if you prayed with your community...*

Thus he kept alive in him and others, the consciousness of the Divine Presence. He used to remember the appearance of God on Sinai when he delivered the commandments to Moses. The thunder and the lightning and the overwhelming awe the Divine Presence produced and the inability of the terrorstricken people, even Moses, to feel at home with such sights—these were before him in contrast



to the silent, obscure, unimpressive, mysterious, presence of the Lord in the Blessed sacrament and the careless ease with which fools rushed in and out of that real presence. He felt himself unworthy of it, and when he entered it, he almost forgot himself. He saw in the Blessed Sacrament the burning ire of a just God outraged by the countless heinous crimes his prodigal children perpetrate against him. On the other hand, he saw in it also the God of love who invited all:

*All ye that labour and art burdened, come to me, I shall refresh you.*

It is said that Father Kuriakose, meditating before the Blessed Sacrament, forgot himself and had to be physically alerted and called away when duty summoned him elsewhere. ■

## CHAPTER XI

### Special Devotions

Father Kuriakose had a balanced sense of devotion. He knew that above all, perfection consisted in union with God.

*Be ye perfect, even as My Heavenly Father is perfect.*

Our Lord had taught.

In a tangible form, the perfection of a catholic consists in living in, with and through Christ. For this purpose our Lord instituted the wonderful sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

*He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, will have everlasting life.*

Our Lord had assured us.

He made it possible for us to carry out this otherwise impossible mandate by confining himself within the species of bread and wine. He did something more than that. He left it to us to call Him down from heaven, so that we could receive Him. That was the purpose of the priesthood. Father Kuriakose realised all these and made his life blaze out this conviction. He was an Apostle of the Holy Eucharist. He induced everybody to live close to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. It was he who introduced into Kerala, the devotion of the Forty Hours' Adoration of the Blessed sacrament. It was like a festival in the monasteries, both spiritual and social. If one were to examine the statistics of lapsed or lukewarm catholics redeemed to



pious practices, the forty hours' adoration in various churches might account for a majority of them. Are they not then among the fish netted in by this great fisherman of the westcoast? What about the annual or paschal confession for hundreds? The monasteries and the fortyhours' devotions again will score top credit in that also.

Apart from spreading such mass devotion which had the object of focussing the attention of the whole parish on the Eucharistic Lord, he took great personal interest in spreading this devotion among small groups like the Sisterhoods. So he exhorted them to take turns in receiving Holy Communion so that one member at least from each community received the Holy sacrament every day. The practice of daily communion for individuals, was not popular or approved in those days.

The great and sustained interest which Father Kuriakose maintained in the most Holy Sacrament will become intelligible only if his appreciation of or attitude to it is analysed. Listen to his own account of this awe-inspiring sacrament in one of his soliloquies:

*God who gave the commandment to Moses....*

*Thou art Thyself present in the sanctuary,*

*With all Thy divinity and humanity.*

*Thou receivest everybody who comes to Thee.*

*Thou comest down to whosoever calls Thee.*

*Wherever one will take you, there goest Thou.*

*Whichever tongue Thou art placed on, there Thou resteth.*

*Whichever heart receivest Thee, there Thou entereth.*

*Thou comest down from the heavens to their hands when the priest, and not only a high-priest, but any priest, pronounces the words of holy consecration.*

*Oh my God! how many times, hast Thou not condescended to come down through the hands and tongue into the heart of this miserable sinner.*

*Merciful Lord, I am now convinced that anybody will be received by Thee.*

*Zacheus, short of stature and conscious of his unworthiness, climbed sycamore tree, only to catch a glimpse of Thee as you passed through the street. Thou sawest his goodwill and condescended to call him down and visit him in his house the same day.*

*Such a merciful God has kindly come into the house of my heart, though I am a worse sinner than Zacheus.*

*Thou hast ignored the magnitude of the guilt and the bad habits and weakness of my heart to show Thy excessive, love towards all mankind.*

*To show that no sinner need be afraid or desperate to seek Thy mercy, Thou hast not only come into the heart of this despicable worm of a man; but more, hast offered to come down from heaven at the call of this unworthy servant to be touched, handled, elevated, consumed and carried about the same way as our blessed Mother and St. Joseph dealt with the baby Jesus.*

*Oh, further still, Thou hast decided to stay for ever under my own roof not caring to leave me, even for a moment, in spite of the fact that I might be running away impatiently from Thee every now and then.*

*Thou hast further asked me to ask of Thee all our needs night and or day.*

*In one of his letters to the nuns in the convent at Coonammavu, Father Kuriakose once wrote:*



*My little ones! These days you meditate well on the love Christ had on us. All these eight days, you take turns and one at least of you must receive Holy Communion. Be borne in Christ's love. Always speak with him. When some material object (or person) attracts your attention or delights you too much, the loving Lord calls you:*

*"Look at Me. If you are grieved, why should you be grieved? I shall make you happy."*

*Is not that enough? He stays by our side and never quits you for a moment.*

*His only desire is to love you and make you happy.*

*What do you want? He will do it for you. He has withheld nothing from you. He has given you Himself.*

*What more remains?*

*Heaven?*

*That was created by Him. Is it more than Himself?*

*Again consider. How are we related at all?*

*Where did you come from?*

*And from where did I come?*

*Do I know you at all? Still, Why do you love me more than any of your own relations, and I love you equally, Oh' Lord, abide with us till we are united to Thee?*

Another extract from a soliloquy, showing the great humility, on one hand, and the remarkable faith and esteem Fr. Kuriakose entertained towards the Most Holy Sacrament, on the other, can be cited.

*How often has this great sinner thoughtlessly come into this divine presence. But you never punished me as I deserved to be.*

*You never even threatened..... Holy Mother Church teaches me that Thou art present here as truly as in heaven at the right hand of God, the Father; I believe the same and yet how often have I fearlessly walked in behind these veils! How often hast Thou forgiven me? Again Thou remainedst here in the church close by, inviting me to come to Thee, to bless me, to forgive me, to listen to my needs, to grant me my requests. Yet have I wasted my days not coming before Thee. How much more difficult it is to get an audience with the princes of the world! But I did desire such interviews. Ignoring the futility of such, I wasted my time many times. Thou hast taught us "Work while it is day. I am reminded truly that if I do not avail myself of Thy mercy (while I am alive), I will have to appear before Thy seat of justice where mercy will not be possible (when I am dead). Even great saints have been excited at the thought of that moment...*

These expositions of the heart of the great soul emphasise the deep humility and holy love that characterised it.

Marian devotion came next in his spritual makeup. He had been offered as a child to the Blessed Mother at the Marian shrine at Vechoor. The memory of it ever remained with him. His earliest recollections were those of reciting the Rosay with his mother. He consoled himself as the son of the Blessed mother when his parents died. His life as a Seminarist *was* an apostolate of Marian devotion. His sermons and discourses contained frequent references to Mary.

The declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate conception in Rome was received with joy by Father Kuriakose and high mass was celebrated, and the Te Deum sung in the monastery.

The religious order of which he was the first Prior and Prior General, was styled, *The Servants of the Immaculate Conception*.



This was later changed to the *Marian Carmelite Order*. Under either name, the congregation has done much to spread various forms of Marian devotion, all in the footsteps of the founder, who will ever be remembered as the indefatigable champion of Marian devotion in Kerala.

Father Kuriakose was ever anxious to show forth in his life the appreciation of the directive given by St. John.

*He who says that he loves God and then hates his brother, is a liar.*

He loved God and man in an overwhelmingly charitable way. He went to the extent of advising all his relations and fellow parishioners:

*Do not count any day as part of your life, if you have not done a good turn to somebody that day.*

*Also that you should desire more to be beloved than be feared or honoured.*

These were remarkable traits even in the young boy and this attracted the attention of many of his superiors and colleagues. Later he organised a home for the destitutes and the dying at Kainakary.

To forgive wrongs done to him was quite natural to him. Numerous instances of it could be cited. He has left detailed instructions on this subject in his last testament meant for his parish. An almost verbatim translation of this document is given at the end of the book. Hence a rather lengthy extract bringing out this aspect is not given here. ■

## CHAPTER XII

### Religious Superior

The role and objective of religious orders have been referred to in the earlier chapters of this account. The essential element in the orderly progress of its external and internal form is discipline; observance of the rules. A strict conformity to a physical or mechanical routine behaviour may not appear *prima facie* either difficult or meritorious. But really it is so. One of the greatest ordeals of religious life is the vow of obedience. Human nature is so self-willed, so assertive, so intransigent, so completely overbearing, that it takes a long time and great effort to surrender one's will to that of others. The story of *The man who got even with God* cites an example of a religious, almost at the end of his tether bursting out in a wild temper against his superior. Instances like that may be rare, but all religious will agree that the discipline which appears easy and mechanical is really hard.

Why is it so?

And why should it be insisted upon?

It is so probably because of the original sin, which leaves man with his ego quite alive and sensitive, coeval with life. The first sin in angelic creation came from this ego *I will not serve*. The first sin in human life came from the same ego; *I must become like unto God; I will not serve*. The same *I* has survived generations, almost with the same offending emphasis. It is always the ego against godliness



that is being broken down completely by the insistence, on every member voluntarily resolving to obey a set of rules. In the Superior, the religious sees the authority of God. In obeying the slightest of the wishes of the Superior, the religious acknowledges the omnipotence of God and his own nothingness. In fact the religious, who struggles in his bed on a chill wintry morning to get up at the first stroke of the awakening bell and does so while his physical frame revolts against it, is almost echoing the words of our Blessed mother *Behold the hand-maid of the Lord, Be it done unto me according to Thy word*. It might as well be the echo of our Lord's own words in Gethesemane *Not My will, but Thine be done*. It might appear much too exaggerated. But it may not be. There is nothing trivial in God's mind. A passing thought of defiance against Him wilfully entertained and indulged in is serious sin, deserving even the creation of hell. So also even the most insignificant gesture, knowingly and intentionally made, to acknowledge the intrinsic glory of God, is greatly virtuous. That is how religious routine undertaken in the name of God becomes exceptionally meritorious. That is why the worth and solidarity of a religious order depend upon the zeal with which its routine is maintained. Remember, the Christian life has a meaning only if it is lived in, with and through Christ Himself. The consecrated routine of the religious life is Christ-centred and this fulfils all conditions for merit.

Father Kuriakose was fully alive to it. The routine he started with at Mannanam, was so rigorous and exacting that many of the aspirants did not stay on. But there was no mitigation. Even personally and even in old age, the Prior and Prior General never relaxed or excused himself from the demands which community life made on him. It is as if he realised that the highest inspiration and strength for an advancing army is the presence of their General in their midst,



not shirking responsibility and not withdrawing from the risk. The religious life was evidently one which called for heroism and sacrifice. He would lend colour, joy and sweetness to it by taking every bit of it, staying with his children. He would accept and show forth the community as his and their paradise on earth. With the zeal and loyalty of a novice, he fulfilled the obligations of his community life till the end of his life. Blessed Andrew is said to have told his abbot St. Stephen Hardinge, that he took religious life as a *Tournament of Love* that the chivalry towards God made it possible to retain the freshness of an otherwise dull routine of hymns and chants and work and silence and meditation. Father Kuriakose also was like Bl. Andrew playing the *Tournament of Love*, conscious every moment that neither he nor the congregation deserved, such a high recognition as a religious order. He knew and maintained that God had called them to Himself. Was he recalling the verse the Little Flower remembered and quoted in connection with her vocation. *The Lord calleth unto Himself whomsoever He willed*, when he exhorted his disciples: *Dearly beloved brethren, this our humble group is not man-made; You are yourself witnesses of how the Lord founded, sustained and strengthened it, working even miracles in this behalf. So no human dislike or antipathy or persecution can undermine it also.*

*Only one thing can do that. If we forget our calling, give up our obligations and think that- the virtues of humility, obedience, charity, religious modesty and true devotion need be practised only in spirit and not in our works—that is sufficient to wipe off every one of our monasteries in a short time.*

That shows the great value Father Kuriakose attached to the necessity of disciplined community life.



The example he gave to his community, of being satisfied with the community food, of continuing at Coonanamavu as desired by the Archbishop even though it was suggested that Mannanam might better suit the ailing Prior, the effort he made to recite the canonical prayers at least from memory... all these were edifying examples to his children.

He also foresaw the children getting cleverer than the parent and trying to get relaxation or concessions from superiors. He deprecated it particularly from the standpoint of the superiors who were answerable to God for the control of those under them. Anxious for the order in general and for superiors in particular, he frequently admonished them to be exceedingly careful in this matter. Some of the pieces of advice he tendered, are preserved in writing to this day:

*With a heart full to the brim with grief, I am writing this to you. That you may not be held accountable for the terrible guilt of relaxing the rules of the monastic life which is pleasing to God and most helpful to souls, and placing them on the occasion of danger, out of considerations of unjust pity, sympathy....*

*...Such faults arise because of the unduly soft stand taken by the superiors. Instead of pulling out and destroying the bad desires of their subordinates, and rebuking and punishing them when necessary, they yield to their unlawful wishes, and, when there is difference of opinion, they yield. When they are not bold enough to correct their subordinates, they refrain from reporting to their superiors on worldly grounds. Let them realise that they are accountable before God to the endless evils that will arise therefrom. To ensure that we will not be thus responsible to the Lord, and to preserve the order from dissolution because of our*

*silence on such unduly soft rule from superiors, be it known to all that I am resolved not to be lenient in such cases and to punish duly such as those that are on the way to ruin for themselves and the community.*

*The strength of the monasteries is measured not by the thickness of the walls but by the virtues and devotional attitudes of the inmates. In many places there were much bigger monasteries. God knows how, they are now forests infested by wild animals! We founded these monasteries. We are their cornerstones. Fifty years from, now, our children in religion will cite our example as authority and do much less than what we are doing. It is impossible that they do better....*

Father Kuriakose would picturesquely remind the religious of their real role in these houses and their obligation to make strenuous efforts towards perfection:

*Dearly beloved brethren, beloved children, none of us joined the monastic life for want of food or other resources to live in the world. All of us could have enjoyed the gifts of the world, had we chosen to remain in their midst. We renounced our kith and kin and resources in the name of God. And if by our carelessness or indifference we will renounce God also, how foolish and mad will we be?*

Even in his dying breath, he had held up to his children devotion to the rule.

A man of such delicate sense of responsibility, Father Kuriakose never made his life-term as Prior and Prior General a burden or infliction on the community. He did not respect the rule for the sake of the rule. God was the sum and centre of all his activities. God is



love and the great Prior knew it. His rule was therefore a conscious effort to share and diffuse the love of Christ, more by example than by precept. Holding the place of authority for twenty-five years, he guided the community and gave it a distinctive colour. From the stray incidents mentioned in this fragmentary biography and the unrecorded experiences traditionally communicated, his able stewardship may be summarised as follows:

*His standard of control was the will of God. Orders never bore any sign of authority. He shared the griefs and joys of all. He made everyone feel that he received his individual attention. He was always calm and characterised by a smile which penetrated all hearts. He was ever ready in the fulfilment of proper courtesies. He encouraged members working in distant places by visiting them and enquiring after their welfare. Even the less exemplary religious received his attention and love. He helped all, relieved their difficulties, never demanded anything beyond their strength, listened patiently to their excuses, granted reasonable requests, softened the harder ones, made some concessions even for imaginary grievances, was sometimes more liberal than requested. He maintained that it was better to be deceived in doing good to others, than attempt to be just and fair and thus occasion grief and hardship to the deserving. He gave all concessions which would not undermine the spirit of the order and which would not be a burden on his conscience as excessive. He regretted the occasions when he had to deny permissions sought. He won the confidence of all by love and kindness. He was specially considerate to the sick. He saw to it that the community food was of reasonably good quality.*

*But in matters connected with the discipline in the monasteries and the glory of God, he displayed a holy daring*

*and courage. He adopted all means, admonition, correction and chastisement, quite boldly dealing with indiscipline and scandal. He never countenanced relaxation of the discipline in monastic life out of human considerations...*

The above account, almost a verbatim translation of Father Valerian's appreciation of this founder of his congregation may look like a chronicle of all desirable virtues in the leader of a religious community. All that can be said in defence of that biographer is that there will be many who knew Father Kuriakose in person, who would have written down almost the same record, were they called upon to describe the sam. ■



## CHAPTER XIII

### Last Days

Simon of the presentation temple proclaimed in the fulness of time *Dismiss thy Servant in peace, Oh Lord?* The wise servants in the parable doubled the talents they were given and produced them before the master and were rewarded. St. Paul breathed his disposition to rest in the consoling words *I have run my race.....* Like any one of them Father Kuriakose in his sixties could have told his creator, *Dismiss Thou me in peace*, assuring Him that he had successfully run his race and rendered a fruitful account of his stewardship. The Lord was also getting ready to receive the tired servant into realms which *eye hath not seen nor ear heard*.

In 1869, when Father Kuriakose was sixty-four years old, Fr. Leopold, his trusted counsellor and spiritual director, went to Rome accompanying the Bishop of Verapoly. At the farewell party, Father Kuriakose very emotionally gave expression to his grief, that, when he was dying, his big hope and support in the spiritual realm was being taken away. Possibly the great worker had started sensing the approach of death by that time.

However, he was always in the land of the living, wedded to activity and study. Fr. Gerard, the missionary brother of Fr. Leopold, used to read and explain to Father Kuriakose and the novices, stories from Italian books. This developed in him an interest in studying Italian.

Meanwhile he received several pieces of glad news. The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined in 1854. The Dogma of Papal Infallibility was proclaimed in 1870 by Vatican General Council. His Bishop was raised to be Archbishop. The Schismatics at Bharananganam had agreed to return. All these excited him. He ordered the celebration of the first event in all monasteries by the public solemn chanting of the Te Deum. He himself conducted the vespers and preached the sermon for that feast of the year. The last event also demanded of him action. He proceeded to Bharananganam to reclaim the Schismatics. He was accompanied by ecclesiastical supervisors also. En route he visited Mutholy and located the foundation there. This was the last he himself was to establish.

He returned from Bharananganam and was laid up with rheumatic fever. When that subsided, he resumed his study of Italian and that gave rise to *eye* complaint and a general weakness. Though he was treated for these ailments, there was not much relief. It was proposed to take him to Mannanam for better treatment. He refused to move out, as he had come to stay at Coonamavu as ordered by the superiors and like Casabianca, would not leave without orders again.

Several ayurvedic and allopathic physicians treated him. There were only occasional short periods of relief. He continued to grow weaker. He was allowed to drop the strain of regular canonical prayers and was directed to say shorter prayers. Priests and deacons read out to him stories of saints and discussed with him spiritual subjects.

All secular talk was taboo in his presence after he had felt that he was sick and dying.



To the great joy and relief of Father Kuriakose, Archbishop and Fr. Leopold returned from Rome in 1870. The spiritual father and child embraced each other and relaxed themselves in the excessive joy of re-union. They conversed secretly for about two hours. Fr. Prior sought permission to return to the community from the seclusion he had been living in since he had fallen ill. He was taken back to the monastery building from the infirmary which was in the same precincts. It was suggested that a change to the Ampazhakatt monastery might do good to the patient. Reluctantly the patient agreed. But the change brought no improvement. So he was transferred back to Coonamavu to spend his last days in peaceful resignation and the consoling companionship of his spiritual Director and children.

On the second of January, 1871, he made his confession to Fr. Leopold. Perhaps he knew it was his last confession on earth. Then he received Holy Communion. Did he know that this was the last time he was physically uniting himself with his creator on earth as a prelude to the eternal union that was to follow soon? From that afternoon onwards, there was a change for the worse.

Fr. Leopold informed his spiritual daughters of the impending death:

*My dear children. It looks as though our dear Fr. Prior is in grave danger of death. Pray. Go to the chapel and pray for half an hour.*

Father Kuriakose realised that he was entering the first phase of his eternal flight. He sought the strengthening wings of the extreme unction. There was some discussion as to who was to administer it. The dying man himself expressed the desire that his spiritual director



Fr. Leopold should administer it. But the good missionary could not stand the shock. He was emotionally overcome and disabled. He was lying down, desolate and upset. So it was finally decided by all, including the sick person that Fr. Vicar, should officiate. Before giving the extreme unction, all the priests and brothers in the monastery gathered round him and sought his parting advice and blessings. They raised him up to a half sitting - half reclining posture in his bed and knelt round in grief and lamentation. In such a pathetic setting, in the most touching words, the great founder, Prior and Prior General of the congregation, consoled his children, saying:

*Why should you grieve after all? All men must die some time or other, who or whatever they be! My hour is come. By the grace of God, I constantly had the vision of this hour before me and I was preparing for it. My parents always kept me mindful of the Holy Family, which was ever my protection and in my imagination. Mercifully they protected me. I dedicate you all and this humble congregation to the same Holy Family. Rely on it. Let the Holy Family reign over your hearts. Do not be worried or upset that I am dying. Willingly submit yourselves to the ways of Providence. God is all-powerful and infinitely merciful. He would give you a new Prior, who could do much more good for you and our Congregation. Stand fast in the observance of all the rules of our elders, our congregation and the church. Love our Lord Jesus in the Most Blessed sacrament with all your heart. Draw from that fountain the waters of eternal life. You, members of the order, and particularly elders and priors among you, love one another; be truly charitable. Thus will God be glorified through the congregation which will also grow progressively.*



At the close of this farewell exhortation, he raised his hands and, clearly pronouncing the formulae of benediction in Syriac, blessed all those who stood nearby. Surely his vision was not confined to those nearby, nor in the neighbourhood, nor even limited by time. God would have kindly let him realise the growth of the tree which he had planted in His honour and all the fruits thereof. So, in blessing those nearby, Father Kuriakose certainly entrusted to God the whole congregation as it was and will be for all time.

He had done his part and he reclined back, asking for the extreme unction to march forward to his reward. Fr. Vicar said the prayers which the dying man repeated and completed the reception of the sacrament of the dying. Soon he lost consciousness. Between trances and waking, he survived till the morning of the 3rd January, 1871. Prayers were said in every house he had founded and by every soul that surrounded him. The most august sacrifice of mass was offered in the convent chapel by Fr. Vicar after he had instructed the nuns to pray specially for the dying Prior. Even as the offering of the mass was consummated by 7.30 a.m. in the morning, Father Kuriakose, the great Syrian Carmelite visionary of Kerala, closed his eyes for an instant to open them for all time in eternity, in the Kingdom which he was trying to spread on the earth. ■

## EPILOGUE

Father Kuriakose was laid to rest in St. Philomena's Monastery Church, Coonammavu, close to the Communion Rails beside the Sanctuary. When this church was handed over to the Latinites, the mortal remains were removed to the Mother House of the Congregation at Mannanam with the special permission of the Apostolic Delegate. This was in 1889. A marble slab marks the place where the precious remains are reinterred. There they await the day of Glorious Resurrection beside Him who assured us in the presence of Martha and Mary of Bethany; *I am the Resurrection and the Life.* ■



## **APPENDIX I**

### **LIFE OF A SAINTLY SOUL**

**REV. LEOPOLD MARIYA BECCARO O.C.D**

Original text written in 1871

Translated form Malayalam by

**K.C. CHACKO**

Published as an appendix to

his biography of

Saint Chavara in 1959

With an Introduction by

**CARDINAL MAR JOSEPH PAREKKATTIL**

From the First Edition of the  
Translated version published  
in 1970

IMPRIMI POTEST

*Fr. Canisius C.M.I.*  
*Prior General*  
15-3-1970

IMPRIMATUR

*Administrator*  
*Archdiocese of*  
*Changanachery*  
9-4-1970



## APPENDIX I(A)

### *Introduction to First Edition*

## **A MAN OF GREAT INTERIORITY**

### CARDINAL JOSEPH MAR PAREKKATTIL

**T**he 19th century was, in many respects, a period of crisis for the Catholic community of Kerala. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was the man sent by God to help the people tide over the crisis successfully.

The services of Saint Kuriakose in effectively meeting the dangers posed by the attempts of Bishop Rochos to win over the Oriental Catholics of Kerala from the lawful authority in the Church, his attempts at revising liturgical texts and deepening the spiritual life of the clergy and laity, notably by the compilation of the *Divine Office* for the clergy, the lead he gave for spreading among the faithful the devotion to the Saint Sacrament, the starting of Institutes for the social and educational welfare of the people, and above all, the foundation of organised religious community life both for men and women in the Church of Malabar, these are but some of the achievements of Fr. Chavara. There was, in fact, no phase of the Church in Kerala which does not bear the imprint of his dynamic personality.

The secret behind such wonderful achievements was that Blessed Chavara was a man of great interiority, living in constant union with God and dedicating his life and activities to His

service. He could declare on his death-bed that he had kept his baptismal innocence intact.

This biographical sketch does not even briefly describe all the activities of the Saint Soul. Nevertheless, it has a unique merit for the simple reason that it is a faithful translation into English of the original book written by his spiritual director, the Italian Carmelite Missionary, Father Leopold Beccarro, O.C.D. The book was written in Malayalam and was published in the very year of the death of Saint Chavara.

May the life and activities of this outstanding man of God inspire us to lead our Christian lives with greater earnestness and dedication.

I pray that the process of the beatification of the Saint Soul already begun be soon completed and crowned with success.

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\* Written in 1970 as a foreword to the English Translation of the Biographical sketch Rev. Leopold Maria Beccaro had written in 1871.



## APPENDIX I(B)

### LIFE OF A SAINTLY SOUL

Rev. LEOPOLD MARIYA BECCARO O.C.D.

#### Birth and Early Boyhood<sup>\*</sup>

Kuriakose Chavara was born in 1805 of God-fearing parents in the Parish of Chennankary. When he was a little boy, everybody admired him on account of his unusual piety and good qualities, Father Thomas Palackal from the Parish of Southern Pallippuram, who was known for his erudition and devout life in those days, happened to meet our little Kuriakose when he was eleven years old. He was impressed by the boy's character and piety. He took the boy with him to the Seminary at Pallippuram. As his fellow seminarians,<sup>\*\*</sup> who are still alive, attest, the young Kuriakose was deeply interested in his studies, in observing the rules (of the Seminary) and in cultivating fear of God motivated solely by the desire of pleasing God. He never harboured any petty jealousy or bad blood against his companions, as was usual among the young, but was always kind and charitable towards them.

#### In the Seminary

It sometimes happens that those who have genuine vocation and possess priestly virtues and knowledge are raised

\* Paragraph headings are inserted by the translator.

\*\* This note was written in 1871

to the sacred orders earlier in their life, even though they may not ask for them. It was the case with our little Kuriakose. He was privileged to receive the sacred tonsure at the age of 13 from His Excellency Bishop Peter Alekantra, the then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. But our young cleric realized that an uneducated priest was not only inefficient to do anything worthwhile in his pastoral work, but might even be detrimental to the salvation of souls. Therefore, after receiving the tonsure, he devoted himself all the more earnestly to his studies so that he might become a knowledgeable minister of God.

### **Ordination and First Mass**

He received the minor orders and the sacred major orders in due course. In November 1829, His Excellency Bishop Maurilius, the Vicar Apostolic ordained him a priest. His first solemn Mass was celebrated in his own parish the same month. After the ordination (first mass) he put himself under the direction of Malpan Thomas of Pallippuram Seminary. The young priest preached sermons in many churches, at a time when preaching was very rare, and performed many other pastoral duties with great zeal. During this time he preached a retreat in the Parish of Pulincunnoo at the request of the parishioners. Those who participated in the retreat were moved by it and derived great spiritual benefit, as is testified by many who still retain fresh memories about it.

### **Beginnings of the Religious Institute**

A priest by his vocation has the pastoral obligation to take care of the spiritual well-being of others and work earnestly for their salvation; but at the same time he has to strive for his own personal sanctification and salvation. Bearing in mind these



twofold obligation of a priest, the above said Malpan Thomas Palackal, Fr. Thomas Porukara, a God-fearing and pious priest from the Parish of Kallurkad and our Fr. Kuriakose Chavara decided to start a Monastery which might help to realize these objectives easily and unhampered by worldly cares. So they approached His Excellency Bishop Maurilius, the Vicar Apostolic, for the necessary permissions. When permission was granted, they selected a hillock called Mannanam in the Parish of Kudamaloor as a proper site for the new Monastery. The foundation stone was laid very solemnly on May 11, 1831 by the venerable bishop. While Malpan Thomas and Fr. Thomas Porukara resumed their pastoral work, collecting funds for the new Monastery at the same time, Father Kuriakose Chavara remained at Mannanam to see to the construction of the building.

### **Parish Priest at Pallippuram**

While the construction work of the Monastery was going on, Father Kuriakose by order of the Bishop had to take charge of the Parish of Pallippuram as Vicar. As a parish priest he was very careful and zealous in keeping the church neat and orderly; he attended to every spiritual need of his parishioners with incomparable interest and zeal. Anybody who had at least a very short acquaintance with him was aware of this fact. One day when Father Kuriakose was getting ready to visit a parishioner, severely attacked by small-pox, people tried to dissuade him for fear of contagion. But he said to the people, *This is my duty, and God will be at my side*, and boldly went to the sick man's house. Not only did he administer the last sacraments to the sick man but with appropriate counsels also helped him to die a peaceful death.

## **Community Life at Mannanam**

In April 1833 he was relieved from the office of the Vicar of Pallippuram. Then he could stay at Mannanam and devote himself more completely to the construction of the Monastery. There he led a well-ordered and devout religious life, striving for his own spiritual progress through prayer and meditation without discarding his pastoral obligations outside. It was at this time that he had to suffer two great bereavements. Malpan Thomas Palackal of Pallippuram, the pioneer of the Monastery and teacher and director of Father Kuriakose Chavara left this world for his eternal reward on the 13th of January 1841. Similarly on January 23, 1846 Fr. Thomas Porukara who was deeply involved in the affairs of the Monastery died at Mannanam impressing others with the signs of his outstanding piety. Thus our young Father Kuriakose, who was among the pioneers of all the new enterprises, was left alone.

## **Canonical Erection of the Religious Institute**

Father Kuriakose however made up for his lack of age with prudence and exemplary conduct. Several priests and clerics joined him for leading a devout life. Father Kuriakose Chavara was aware of the fact that, however devout and pious be the way of life, it had to be approved by the representative of the Church, the Bishop, to make it completely pleasing to God; and so he requested the local Ordinary on several occasions in different ways to grant approbation for the new Monastic Order. Archbishop Bernardine, the Ordinary of Verapoly at that time, at last granted the request. He named them the Discalced Carmelites of the Third Order and gave



them the Rules and Constitutions. In accordance with the provisions of these Constitutions, our Father Kuriakose and ten other Fathers made their religious profession in the Monastery at Mannanam on December 8, 1855 on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Upto this time Father Kuriakose Chavara, who was Malpan (Professor) in the Seminary at Mannanam, was known as Malpan, but His Grace the Archbishop changed that title, appointing him as the First Prior of Mannanam and other places. Several other Monasteries were started in course of time and the number of the religious also increased. They were actively engaged in the pastoral work in the different Parishes.

### **Father Kuriakose with his companions fight against the Schism of Rochos**

During this time a challenging situation arose which threatened serious spiritual damage to many. It however provided an occasion to test the deep faith and prudence of Father Chavara. Without any power of jurisdiction and contrary to the orders of the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, the Chaldean Schismatic\* Bishop Rochos from Bagdad came to Malabar in 1861, under the name of Bishop Thomas. Father Prior (Kuriakose Chavara) had the unshakable conviction that there was no salvation or truth except in union with the Pope, the Head of the Holy Catholic Church and the Vicar of Christ and that it was actually succumbing to Schism to withdraw himself from the lawfully constituted authority of the Vicar

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\* In fact, he was not a Schismatic Bishop but when he came to Malabar he claimed Jurisdiction over the See of Malabar against the express command of the Holy See. (Translator)

Apostolic who was ruling in the name of the Pope and obey another authority. So he did not pay any attention to the different appeals and persuasions of the Schismatic Bishop and his party, nor was he moved by their threats; he stood firm in his allegiance to the right authority. During those stormy days, as Vicar General of the Vicar Apostolic for the Syrians, he saved many ignorant persons from falling into the abyss of Schism and rescued a great many Parishes that had strayed into it. This is a fact well known to all who retain memories of those troubled days. When the crisis was over and truth prevailed, it was quite evident to all that those who had followed his advice, were enlightened, and those who had disregarded him had to undergo great sorrow and spiritual damage.

Holy Father Pope Pius IX, gloriously reigning, on hearing about the stability of Father Chavara's faith and about his zeal for saving the christians from the Schism, wrote to him a letter of high praise and deep satisfaction.

### **Codifies the Book of the Divine Office**

In the meantime Father Prior did a very useful thing for the whole clergy. Among the Syrians the different churches used different books for the divine office. Father Prior invited the Malpans from the different areas to Koonammavu to discuss the matter, to eliminate the differences and to bring about uniformity and order. He wrote out in his own hand the whole book of the Divine Office neatly and systematically with the intention of printing it. The various endeavours he had undertaken during his life give evidence to his deep interest and zeal in the proper conducting of the Divine Service.



## **Starts the Religious House for Women**

In 1864 he left Mannanam for Koonammavu, in view of the greater facilities there to manage the various undertakings on hand. During this time he carried out a number of projects under the orders of the Bishop. Never did he hold himself back from any work, nor fight shy of any difficulty as he was always prompted by two motives: obedience to his Bishop and the salvation of souls. It was his great desire to start a religious house for women with the main intention of making it a safe place for the girls of Malabar to live their religion as good christians and to learn spiritual things. A full account of all the great things he had done for the realization of this desire, when God willed it so, is beyond the scope of this short biography. It is known to all how interested and zealous he was in the orderly progress of the convent, in virtue and perfection, once it was founded.

## **The Virtues of Father Kuriakose**

It must be pointed out that Father Prior succeeded in all these holy endeavours not merely by the power of his words, nor by his logic, but by his extraordinary character and sanctity. Those who came to know him, were convinced of his unusual humility; extraordinary charity, unqualified obedience and submissiveness to the Ordinary. As a result, all loved and respected him; and they put their trust in his words. Among his virtues most outstanding was his ardent faith in and devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and the Holy Father. He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Church in all directions; he was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard of the trials and persecutions of the Church and

eagerly longed to see the days of her triumph. Whenever he happened to hear the news about the Pope, he was always moved to tears, either of sorrow or of joy. It was because of this extraordinary faith that he showed great veneration, love and obedience towards the Papal Legate who was the representative of the Holy Father, and towards the missionaries, who were the messengers of the Holy Church.

### **Special Devotions**

Two devotions, namely the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary were especially outstanding all through his life. The admirable dignity, devotion and recollection with which he celebrated the Sacred Liturgy, made a great impression upon those who participated in it. Besides the usual visits to the Blessed Sacrament enjoined by the Rule, he used to spend long hours on his knees, immersed in prayer before the tabernacle. His devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary was characterized by a genuine filial love. He spoke eloquently of her glories to others and tried to inculcate upon them her devotion. Very often when the thought of death came to his mind, he would recall the kindness and mercy of the Blessed Virgin, whom he used, to call his *Mother* to overcome the terrible fears and temptations associated with that fateful moment. He would also take refuge on such occasions in the powerful intercession and help of St. Joseph whom he venerated with great devotion and love. He would then be consoled and comforted.

### ***Atmanuthapam***

In order to give vent to the devotion, love and gratitude that were pent up in his heart, and also for his own consolation,



he composed a small poetical work named *Atnianuthapam*<sup>1</sup> (Lamentations of a Contrite Soul) included in this volume<sup>2</sup>, before he fell a victim to his last illness. Reading it, one feels certain that this book is extremely well suited to inspire good thoughts and to foster devotion to God.

### The Last Illness

Advancing age and a life of hard work exhausted his strength and in October 1870 he fell ill. Many tried in several ways to save his precious life. But God had decreed otherwise. For three months he endured cheerfully and with extraordinary patience the pangs of his last illness and the consequences of complete blindness. Having received the last sacraments of the Church with great devotion, on January 3, 1871 at 7.30 in the morning he died in peace surrounded by his spiritual sons.

He was perfectly conscious till the moment of his death, conversing with his spiritual sons on sacred matters and giving them valuable pieces of exhortation.

The following day his remains were interred in the Monastery Church amidst the tears and lamentations of all present.

Let us, who desire to be blessed with a similar happy death like his, try to imitate his virtuous life.

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1. The author mentions here only one of the several writings of Blessed Chavara.

2. The author originally published this biography as an introduction to the first phase of the work *Atmanuthapam*.

## APPENDIX 1(C)

### AN EXCERPT FROM THE DIARY OF Rev. LEOPOLD MARIA BECCARO O.C.D.

Dated 3-1-1871  
(Original Italian)

JMJ

Oggi 3 Gennaio 1871 Martedì alle ore 7-1/4 di mattina il Padre Ciriaco Elia della S. Famiglia Primo Priore dopo una vita della più grande innocenza, tale che esso prima che morisse poter attestare di non aver mai perduto l'innocenza de battesimo. S'impugnava nell'esercizio delle più belle virtù specialmente nella semplicità di cuore, fide vivissima et tenerissima obediencia e devozione verso il SS. Sacramento, Maria Santissima et S. Giuseppe, dopo aver subito immense fatiche per il bene della cristianità del Malabar, specialmente in tempo dell'inaugurato schisma di Rocco in cui nominato Vicario Generale di Siriani con esempio raro di devozione e fedeltà alla S. Sede. Combatte giorno e notte l'inazione dello schisma da cui salva circa 40 o più parrocchie per cui gli fu diretto da S. Padre Pio IX un breve del suo aggredimento. Fondatore e Primo Priore di terz. Carmelitani Scaizi nel Malabar e fondato con somme fatiche il monastero delle monache sempre sommamente amato dai Vic. Apostolici di



Verapoly, amato piu ancora dal tutto il Malabar, non esclusi Gesuiti e Nestoriani per le sue amabili virtu erudizione e profonda conoscenza della lingua Siriaca godendo presso tutto la christianita del Malabar una illimitata influenza dopo aver sofferto con invincibile resignazione anzi allegria una malattia di due anni, distaccato affatto d'ogni cosa e persona della terra perseguitato dal piu verso il fine della sua vita dopo aver ricevuto con rara pietà il SS. Sacramento con una pace di paradiso compianto da tutti e specialmente da me che io conosco quanto me stesso, in età di 65 anni spiro l'anima in pace e fu sepolto in questa santa chiesa di Coonammavu.

O anima santa e bella prega per me!

P. Leopoldo Mis. di Gius.



## APPENDIX 1(D)

### ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE EXCERPT FROM THE DIARY

Today January 3, 1871, Tuesday at 7.15 in the morning, Fr. Cyriac Elias of the Holy Family, the first Prior, died after a life of great innocence. He could declare before his death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence. He was exercising himself in the practice of all virtues, especially in the simplicity of heart, living faith, tender obedience, and devotion in the most Blessed Sacrament, to the Bl. Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. He has undergone immense hardships for the good of the Christians of Malabar\*, especially during the time of the Schism of Rochos, when he, being appointed the Vicar General of the Syrians, showed his extra ordinary devotion to the Holy See. He fought day and night to arrest the spread of the schism, from which he could save not less than 40 parishes. On this account, the Holy Father Pope Pius IX sent him a letter expressing his great satisfaction. He was the founder and the first Prior of the Third Order Carmelites of Malabar. He founded also the convent of nuns after undergoing many hardships. On account of his endearing virtues, learning, and profound knowledge of the Syriac language he enjoyed great

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\* State of Kerala came into being in 1957 only and this geographical unit was then termed as *Malabar* by those from outside till then. □ Editor



influence on the Syrians of Malabar. He was always greatly loved by the Vicars Apostolic of Malabar; much more by the people of Malabar, the Jesuits and the Nestorians not excluded. He endured his last illness for two years in a spirit of great resignation, nay, with joy. He was detached from all disorderly affections for earthly things, which was all the more true in the last days of his life. Having received the last sacraments with extraordinary piety and devotion, in a heavenly joy, and amidst the tears of all who knew him, especially of mine who knew him even as I know myself, he breathed his last at the age of 65 and was buried in this church of Koonammavu.

*Oh Holy and Beautiful soul, pray for me!*

(Fr. Leopold Mis. di S. Gius. (sd). )



## APPENDIX II (A)

### PORTRAIT

### KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

1. Born in Kainakary, Kerala on 10-2-1805
2. Baptized at Chennamkary Parish Church on 18-2-1805
3. Dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary at Vechoor Church on 8-9-1805
4. Started his primary education in Asan Kalari at Kainakary : 1810 - 1815
5. Received early seminary formation from his Parish Church at Chennamkary : 1816-1817
6. Joined the Parish Seminary at Pallipuram : 1818
7. Chavara was ordained priest at Arthunkal church on 29-11-1829
8. With Fathers Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, founded the First Indian Religious Congregation for Men presently known as CMI on 11-5-1831
9. Popularized the Sunday Homilies and introduced Retreats for Priests and Laity in Kerala with other two founding fathers : 1830
10. Established the First Syro Malabar Common Seminary with other two founding fathers at Mananam : 1833
11. *Way of the Cross* was started at Mannanam : 1838
12. Appointed as *Malpan* (Tutor of sacred subjects), Examiner for candidates for Priesthood and was authorized to give patents to the newly ordained to hear confessions and to preach in the Churches on 16-2-1844
13. Founded the first press and publishing house of Syro-Malabar Church at Mananam on 3-7-1846



14. Founded the First Sanskrit School in Kerala at Mananam with its doors open to all castes : 1846
15. Started the First Syro-Malabar Catechumenate for faith formation at Mananam : 1853
16. Became the first professed religious priest in the Indian Church on 8-12-1855
17. Wrote 10 Ecologues (Shepherd Plays) and introduced them in the novitiate at Koonamavu Seminary, the first play written in Indian language : 1856-1858
18. Appointed the first Vicar General in the Syro-Malabar Church after the time of Archdeacons on 8-6-1861
19. Took leadership in protecting the Syro-Malabar Church from the schismatic intruders Bishop Roccas : 1861
20. Authored the First Malayalam Narrative poem - *Anasthasyaude Rakthasakshyam* : 1862
21. Edited the Divine Office for priests, Compiled and composed Liturgical Rubrics, Thukkasa, liturgical calendar, set the Office of the dead for Priests, laity and children of the Malabar Church etc. : 1862-1869
22. Popularized the new *May Month devotion of Blessed Virgin Mary* from Mananam : 1864
23. As Vicar General under Bishop Bernardenose Bachanilli implemented *A school for every Church* in the in the Kerala : 1864
24. In collaboration with Fr. Leopold Maria Beccaro OCD, an Italian Missionary, founded the first Indian Religious Congregation for women now known as (CMC) at Koonamavu on 13-2-1866
25. Started the 40 Hours Eucharistic Adoration in Kerala at Koonammavu on 15-2-1866
26. Supported by Fr. Leopold OCD, started the first boarding house and school in Kerala for girls at Koonammavu on 2-1-1868
27. Prepared the first Instruction Manual, *A Testament of a Loving Father* for the Christian Families, first of its kind in the church on 13-2-1868
28. Founded the first lay charitable organization, the *Confraternity of St. Joseph for Happy Death* at Kainakary, Kerala : 1869

29. Founded the first Home of Charity, Upavisala for the sick, old and Destitute at Kainakary : 1869
30. Initiated the Catholic re-union movement of the 19th Century : 1869
31. Died at St. Philomina's Monastery at Koonammavu on 3-1-1871
32. Mortal remains after 18 years re-entombed at Mannanam the Mother house of the Congregation he founded on 24-5-1889
33. Canonization process started at the Congregation level on 21-12-1936
34. Canonization process officially started by Arch diocese Changanserry on 9-12-1955
35. Declared Venerable by Pope John Paul II in Rome on 7- 4- 1984
36. Beatification at Kottayam, Kerala by Pope John Paul II on 8-2-1986
37. Government of India released a postal stamp in respectful recognition of his social reforms on 20-12-1987
38. Government of Kerala unveiled a painting of Saint Chavara in the Kerala Sahitya Academy Hall at Thrissur honouring his contributions to literature and refinement of Malayalam Language on 4-5-2006
39. Honoured former President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam with *Chavara Sanskruthy Puraskar*. Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam delivered Chavara Memorial Lecture and inaugurated the Lecture Series on National and International platforms.
40. Declared Saint by Pope Francis in Vatican on 23.11.2014



## APPENDIX II(B)

### BOOKS WRITTEN BY KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

1. Chronicles
2. Biography of Rev. Fr. Thomas Palackal (First of its kind in Malayalam)
3. Aatmanuthapam
4. Anasthasyayude Rakthasakshyam (First Narrative poem in Malayalam)
5. Maranaveetil Paadunnathinulla Paana
6. Dhyana Sallapangal
7. Letters
8. Kudumbachattom (Oru Nalla Appante Chaavarul)
9. Edaya Naatakangal (Ecologues) (First of its kind in Indian Language)
10. Thukkasa
11. *Liturgical Calendar*
12. Marichavarkkulla Ophese



# **LEAD KINDLY LIGHT**

A VOYAGE INTO THE SAINTLY LIFE AND VISION OF  
**KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA**  
Chevalier K.C Chacko

**Chavara Central Secretariat  
CMI., CMC JOINT VENTURE**