

A.M. MUNDADAN CMI

Blessed
Kuriakose Elias
Chavara



Presented to
Rev. Sr. Edward, Superior
General & Community

Presented by
Fr. Jose Par Taplastru Hing, CM
Prior General.
Carmelites of Mary
Immaculate

Nov. 8, 2008

**BLESSED
KURIAKOSE ELIAS
CHAVARA**

A. Mathias Mundaden CMI

*Published by
Kerala Sahitya Akademi*



Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara

By A. Mathias Mundadan CMI

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Kochi – 682021, Kerala, India

First Published 2008

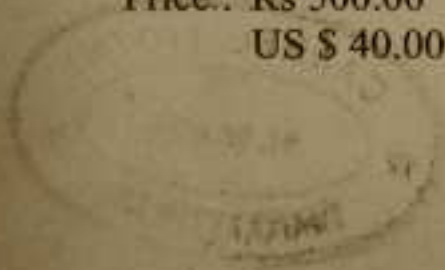
Published by

Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore – 560029

ISBN: 978-81-89958-16-9

Price.: Rs 500.00

US \$ 40.00



**Gratefully dedicated
to
our mother
The CMI Congregation**

Preface

The thirty-fifth general synaxis (general chapter) of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) held in 2002 decided to publish an authentic biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, one of the three founders of the congregation. The task of writing it was entrusted to me with assistance from Rev. Fr Lucas Vithuvattical who, as the postulator of the cause of the canonization of Chavara, has become an authority on the life, activities and virtues of the blessed. Rev. Fr Antony Kariyil the CMI prior general by his letter of 8 May 2002 gave me the mandate to plan and execute the project. It was Rev. Fr Mathew Kaniampampil, general councillor and vicar general, who gave further directions and counsels (see his letter dated 12 October 2002 and a number of periodical communications after that). I considered it a sacred duty bestowed upon me by the congregation and started working on the project from the close of 2002.

After the necessary consultations and discussions the vicar general himself prepared an elaborate preliminary scheme. A tentative list of topics to be included in the biography was drawn up. The topics were assigned to a team of resource persons (see the names in the 'Introduction' of the book). The original scheme was revised later on. A bibliography was also prepared under the supervision of the vicar general. Most of the persons assigned to write on different topics prepared their drafts which were handed over to me. In the mean time a few meetings were held together with the resource persons at the then Prior General's House, Karickamury, Ernakulam. In the beginning it was thought that the work could be rather easy with the collaboration of the resource persons. But soon we realized that it was not that simple. The periodical meetings discussed various aspects of the project. That continued till the middle of 2003. The team work went thus far. The papers prepared by the resource persons are of different quality and standard. Finally the writing of the biography was left to me. I was free to adopt whatever was relevant in the drafts submitted and do original research and compose the work.

The plan prepared in the beginning was found to be too vast. It needed to be curtailed and reorganized. The drafts submitted, as mentioned above, had their limitations. They were helpful but had to be reworked not only checking accuracy but adding a good deal of fresh matter collected through my personal research and study. Naturally all this took a longer time than expected, to complete. It also needed a lot of patient work and close attention. The readers will understand why the publication was delayed so far.

I gratefully acknowledge and deeply appreciate the help received from various persons. I have mentioned the names of these persons in the 'Introduction'. Once again I thank them. I should thank two persons in a special way. Rev. Fr Sebastian Poonolly carefully went through my draft biography and masterfully improved the language. Besides with the good knowledge and insight he has acquired through reading and study on the person of Chavara and his contributions has given me very good suggestions regarding the matter. Rev. Fr Thomas Kochumuttom minutely scrutinized the draft and provided very valuable proposals for improvement. The suggestions and proposals of both of these scholars were very helpful in the final revision of the draft. I also remember with gratitude Rev. Frs John Gallus Cheruparampil, Jose Frank Chackalackal, and particularly Syrus Mannanal who carefully read the manuscript at the instance of the authorities and gave their valuable suggestion to make the necessary corrections and to improve the text.

I am deeply grateful to Rev. Fr. Antony Kariyil, our prior general and his councillors for the trust they placed in me and for the continuous support and encouragement they gave me. Rev. Fr. Mathew Kaniamparampil took keen interest in the project and was ever prompt in giving me all help and good counsel. I express my deep appreciation of his services.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not gratefully remember His Beatitude Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil, our Major Archbishop, who was kind enough to give a very beautiful and significant message to adorn this book. So too I deeply appreciate the splendid foreword with which Very Rev. Fr Antony Kariyil, our dear Prior General, has endowed this work. I offer my warm thanks to Rev. Mother Edward, Superior General of the Congregation of Mount Carmel, which Blessed Chavara founded, for her excellent message. The invaluable services I received from Rev. Fr Antony

Madavanakkad in editing final text and in laying out the book need to be gratefully acknowledged.

I am also grateful to Mrs. Mary Jolly Sebastian and other Jeevass Kendram staff who did the whole computer work for the draft. Thanks to the printers Anaswara Offset Print. Ltd., especially to Mr V. A. Mathew, its Director who has done a fine work in getting this book beautifully laid out and artistically produced.

I am immensely happy to present to the public this modest biography, with all its limitations and short comings, of our holy founding father Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family, this account of his saintly person, his lofty vision and his valuable contribution to the Church of India.

Aluva

3 January 2008

A. Mathias Mundadan CMI

MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE

Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil

The new biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara by Fr Mathias Mundadan CMI is a very welcome work. Blessed Chavara is the pride and glory of the Syro-Malabar Church. He was very sad at the thought that his Church even after so many centuries of existence had not given birth to an officially declared saint. But because of him, who was the first of her children to be beatified, the same Church was soon able to make her own the words of Elizabeth: "The Lord... took away the disgrace I have endured among the people" (Lk 1:25). Great and many indeed are Blessed Chavara's contributions, recalling which we should feel inspired and challenged. The foremost ones among them are the CMI and CMC -CTC Congregations through which the Church of Kerala has ever since received grace upon grace. The appointment of Blessed Chavara as the vicar general for the Syro-Malabar community was found to be the only available means to fight the Roccas schism that stormed the Syro-Malabar Church then. We should ever be grateful to Blessed Chavara and his religious community at Mannanam for the decisive role they played to rout the same schism and restore unity in the Church. It is mostly thanks to Blessed Chavara's tireless and committed efforts that the Syro-Malabar Church is what she is today. The practical wisdom and common sense with which he introduced reforms in the fields of liturgy, priestly training and pastoral ministry certainly provides us with unfailing guide-lines even today in similar endeavours. He also presented well-thought out proposals for regaining and maintaining his Church's autonomy and identity, which would even facilitate the reunion of the separated brethren. The humble but daring initiatives he took in the apostolate of education, communication media and social action eventually enabled the Church to be an effective agent of social change and development leading to the establishment of God's kingdom. There are also to Blessed Chavara's credit a considerable number of literary works

which inspire and enlighten us today and will continue to do so for generations to come. In short, this new volume presenting the life and message of Blessed Chavara should be considered a treasure in the hands of the Syro-Malabar Christians which they should cherish and share with all others in the society. While congratulating the author Fr Mathias Mundadan, a well-known Church historian, and his collaborators, I wish and pray for a wide circulation and a large readership for the book. May it perpetuate the memory of Blessed Chavara in the Church and the society, and bring glory to God and his blessings on the people.

Mount St Thomas
Kakkanad, Kochi
Kerala, India
Date: 03.03.08

Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil CSSR
Major Archbishop of Syro-Malabar
Church & President, C.B.C.I.

Foreword

I am doubly delighted at the publication of this biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara. First of all it is a long overdue response to the demand for an authentic biography of the Blessed, and secondly it materializes the decision of the congregation's 35th General Synaxis (2002) to publish a scientific and detailed study of the life and contributions of the founder. This work of Fr Mathias Mundadan CMI, a widely acclaimed Church historian, very well satisfies the public demand and the Synaxis' decision. Qualifying Chavara as a great sage, and counting him among the religious and socio-cultural reformers of Kerala in the 19th century, the author masterfully presents his advent as marking a new dawn in the State's history. More than a bare life-story of Chavara, the book is also a profile of the Church and society of Kerala in the same century. Hence it will certainly interest a wider readership than the Christian community.

Blessed Chavara generously responded to the divine call to the consecrated and priestly life, and single-mindedly pursued it against all odds. With a deep desire for the emergence of religious congregation in our land, the three Founding Fathers, namely, Frs Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara and the young and dynamic Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara, founded the CMI Congregation at Mannanam on 11 May 1831. Fr Chavara and Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD founded the CMC -CTC Congregations at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866. It was Fr Chavara who was the first one to make the religious profession when the CMI Congregation was canonically erected on 8 December 1855 and the first prior general appointed on the same day. As the *Valiya Priyorachan* (Great Prior) as he was called and the vicar general for the Syrian community, he proved to be an undisputed leader with personal integrity, practical wisdom and determination. A loyal and heroic son of the Church, he defended her against the Roccas schism and other divisive forces, and initiated and encouraged ecumenical programmes. In the great providence of

God, Fr Chavara was raised to the honours of the altar and Pope John Paul II called him BLESSED on 8 February 1986.

Many indeed are the undertakings that evinced his apostolic zeal and pastoral concern. With a view to reforming and revitalizing the Church he launched innovative projects in the fields of communication media, education and social action. For the spiritual renewal of the people of God he organized retreat programmes for the priests, religious and laity, brought in order and regularity in liturgical matters, set up seminaries and started popular devotions. Through insightful instruction he clearly outlined the principles and ideals of family life. He was a model religious and an ideal superior, mature and stern but equally compassionate and understanding. The present volume from the experienced pen of no less a scholar than Fr Mundadan treats all these aspects of Blessed Chavara's life in detail and with historical accuracy. It also introduces and reviews his writings, prose as well as poetry. The final chapter stands out as a comprehensive study of Chavara's personality traits and spirituality, portraying him as a contemplative in action: a *Karma-Yog*.

The work is exhaustive and detailed, well-researched and documented. It is indeed a real achievement and solid contribution. The personality of Blessed Chavara has come out very impressively, and so too the images of his associates. The history and nature of the congregation have been depicted in the right perspective and realistically. Many details so far unknown to the public have been brought to light, and many prevalent confusions and doubts have been clarified.

My hearty thanks and congratulations to Fr Mundadan. I do admire his patience and hard work in accomplishing this task, a fitting tribute to the founder and a great service to the congregation and the society at large.

As the author has acknowledged in the Preface, he was assisted by many others in collecting the data, preparing the bibliography, scrutinizing and proof-reading the text, providing creative suggestions, and printing and publishing the book. They include the general councillor and vicar general Fr Mathew Kaniamparampil CMI, the members of the committee appointed by the general council, and some others whom Fr Mundadan personally approached. To all of them the congregation as a whole and me personally are deeply indebted. One among them, Fr Lucas

Vithuvattical CMI, deserves a special word of appreciation, who having been the postulator for Chavara's beatification, is an authority in matter's related to his life and activities. Fr Vithuvattical and his documentary work *Positio* remained a great source of information in writing this book. In conclusion I wish and pray for the Lord's favour on the author, his collaborators and the readers through the intercession of Blessed Chavara.

CMI Prior General's House
Chavara Hills, Kakkanad
Kochi, Kerala, India
Date: 01. 03. 08.

Fr Antony Kariyil CMI
Prior General

MESSAGE OF **Mother Edward**

The new biography of Blessed Kuriakose Chavara by Rev. Fr. A. Mathias Mundadan CMI, a well known historian of Christianity in India, is a unique contribution of its kind. In this competent historical study Blessed Chavara emerges as a person of exceptional calibre and varied dimensions. He is the founder of two religious communities, one for men and the other for women; he is at the same time a great reformer of the Church and society in Kerala. The author highlights Chavara's unique achievements with historical accuracy and insight. A few points he raises might appear to some a bit controversial but he presents them with adequate and unquestionable documentation.

The main focus of the book, as the title indicates, is the person and the life of Blessed Chavara. One important aspect of the undertakings of the Blessed is the spread of education among the common masses as well as the marginalized sections of humanity for which he underwent untold struggles and trials. The high percentage of literacy, higher education and high social position the Malayalee women folk achieved may not have been realized without the earnest desire and committed effort of Blessed Chavara. His deep concern for and great interest in building up a healthy humanity—well integrated in thoughts, feelings, passions and affections—come out clearly through the pages of the present book. The author has succeeded in presenting Chavara as an integral part the renaissance Kerala culture and society, especially through the valuable literary output of the Blessed, and as the path finder in social, educational and spiritual realms.

Father Mundadan has rendered to the public a remarkable service in writing this book and I am sure that the book will create a high spiritual resonance among its readers.

Mount Carmel Generalate
Aluva, Kerala, India
Date: 15.03.2008

Mother Edward CMC
Superior General

Abbreviations

ACEO	=	Archivium Congregationis pro Ecclesiis Orientalibus
ACMCG	=	Archives of CMC Generalate
AG OCD	=	Archivium Generale OCD
APF	=	Archivium Congregationis de Propaganda Fide
ASJM	=	Archives of St Joseph Monastery (Mannanam)
ASJVB	=	Archives of St Joseph's Vidhya Bhavan (CTC Edappally)
AST	=	Archives of St Teresa's (Convent, Koonammavu)
C. E.	=	Christian era (A. D.)
CKC	=	Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent
CMC	=	Congregation of the Mother of Carmel
CMI	=	Carmelites of Mary Immaculate
CTC	=	Congregations of the Teresian Carmelites
CWC	=	<i>Complete Works of Chavara</i>
(Eighty-one) '81	=	CWC Vol. I Malayalam, published in 1981.
K. E.	=	Kollam (Malayalam) Era
(Ninety) '90	=	CWC Vol. I English, published in 1990.
OCD	=	Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum
PO	=	Processus Ordinarius
<i>Positio</i>	=	Positio super Introductione Causae et Virtutibus...
<i>Stāpāka Pitākanmar</i>	=	Ka. Di. Mu. Sabhayude Stāpaka Pitākanmar

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Introduction

This is a biography of Blessed Kuriakose Chavara. He was born in central Kerala in the beginning of the 19th century (1805) and died late that century (1871). His malpan (seminary rector and life long guide) Thomas Palackal, who played a decisive role in Chavara's education and spiritual-pastoral development, was born at the close of the 18th century, sometime between 1780 and 1785. Thomas Porukara, whose influence on Chavara was significant, was born in the beginning of the 19th century (1800). It is hence very important to have a grasp of the physical, political, socio-cultural and religious features obtaining in Kerala from late 18th century to late 19th century. It is important for understanding the person, life and mission of Chavara. In this introductory section of the book we shall try first to delineate these features. It will be followed by an overall view of the matter covered in the book. Then we will have a look into the various biographies so far written and some published. A brief description of other main sources we have used for writing this account will follow. Finally a word about our methodology will be said.

India and Kerala from Late 18th Century to Late 19th Century

This period saw great changes in the world, especially in the West, in India and in Kerala. In Europe the most important event was Rationalism and Liberalism climaxing in the French Revolution in the last decade of the 18th century. This was followed in the 19th century by a reaction, which is often called the 'Romanticist' movement, highlighting the medieval thinking and ideology. This gave to the Church in Europe, which had seen the nadir at the time of the liberal revolution, a new lease of life and vigour. Anti-colonial movements, which perhaps had their beginning in the United States of America (1773: 'Boston Tea Party'), began to influence other parts of the world. Perhaps signs of these movements in India may be seen in the fights of the Marathas and the Mysore wars. In Kerala itself such uprisings as

those of the Pazhassi Raja, Kurichias, Velu Tampi, Paliath Achan were symptoms of anti-colonial feelings and desire for independence. But none of those movements succeeded but only helped the British to further consolidate their power. A change started from the time of the Sepoy Revolt in 1857 and the Hindu/Indian Renaissance that set in motion the national movement which culminated in Indian Independence in 1947. Kerala itself witnessed a new era of peace and progress which resulted in a renaissance of its own.

The restoration process in the Church in the wake of the 'Romanticist' movement resulted in a new era of evangelization and the Indian Church stood to profit by it. After a period of stagnation a new mission thrust began to prevail. The St Thomas Christians already split in the 17th century in the process of their struggle for autonomy, were divided into further groups. The Latin Rite Christians although suffered some set-back under Saktan Tampuran in Kochi, continued to prosper.

The Country

Kerala of the 19th century stretched from Kanyakumary (Cape Comorin) in the extreme south about 580 km up to Gokarnam in the north. Situated between 74 to 78 longitudes and 8 to 13 latitudes, it is bound in the east by the Western Ghats and by the Arabian Sea in the west. The highest peak of the Ghat is Anamudi in Kottayam District which rises to a height of 2742 metres. Other mountains range between 1000 and 2600 metres. The narrow stretch of land between the Ghats and the Arabian Sea is considered 'a gift of the sea', which fact is symbolized in the legend of Parasurama. Perhaps the mountains also played a role in its formation. The land, once under sea, might have been thrown up from the sea as a result of the operation of volcanic or seismological factors. The numerous rivers, which have their sources in the Western Ghats, might have also brought down in their course large quantities of silt and mud, while ocean currents might have deposited immense quantities of sand on the shore. A vast stretch of land area might have thus come into existence by the steady accumulation of silt and sand. This land was called from ancient times by a name, which eventually took the form 'Kerala', probably a Sanskritized version of Keralam or Cheralam. This word may mean *chera* (sand) and *alam* (region), or *cher/chernta* (added) and *alam* (land) indicating perhaps the land, which was

added on to the already existing mountainous or hilly country. The Arab navigators called this hilly country 'Male', which in later centuries assumed Arabic equivalents like 'Malibar', 'Manibar', etc. In Malayalam the equivalents are 'Malanadu' or 'Malavaram' or 'Malayalam', meaning the hill country. The Portuguese called it *Serra* also meaning hill country. The language which developed as separate from Tamil was perhaps called 'Keralabasha' which in course of time became 'Malayalam', Malayma', etc.

Kerala's unique geographical features—undulating mountains and hills, lakes and back waters, large and small rivers, abundant water resources—all make the land fertile and exuberant in vegetation. The forests with green foliage and luxuriant growth of grass, plantations of coffee, tea, rubber and pepper, abundance of medicinal and exotic plants and trees, rich fauna and flora, paddy fields and coconut groves, the long coastal line studded with ports and beaches—all make the country a great attraction for travellers and traders, rightly called "God's Own Country". It has been and continues to be a haven for tourists, every year their number growing. While River Periyar, with Kalady the place of Adi Sankara and the famous Christian pilgrim centre Malayattoor on its lower banks, discharges its waters in the northern section of the Vembanad Lake. River Pampa, on whose upper bank is situated the famous Sabarimala Shrine of Sasthav or Ayyappa discharges its waters in various streams at the southern end of the same lake. It is the conjunction of Pampa and Vembanad Lake that has created one of the most scenic regions, Kuttanad, which has been acclaimed as the Venice of the East. It is here that Chavara was born and brought up.

India of 18th to 19th Century

The Portuguese who started the colonial movement from the close of the 15th century were replaced by other powers from mid-seventeenth century. The Dutch by degrees drew them away from most of their possessions. The French who soon followed established their trade centres in South India, though had only Mahe as their possession in Kerala. From the end of the 17th century the English began to make their presence felt in several places. Their hegemony became a reality in India by the last decades of the 18th century. After the Sepoy Revolt of 1857 the rule of the East India Company, established by Queen Elizabeth in 1660, was terminated in 1858 and the British Crown took direct

charge of the administration of British affairs in India. In 1877 Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India.

By this time Indian Renaissance had produced the national movement. Actually Indian Renaissance had its beginning already before the Sepoy Revolt. The sleeping giant that was India was being slowly awakened by the various challenges from the West. Besides the ever-present colonialism, English education imparted by both missionary and secular agents, and the newly started missionary journalism, threatened Hindu religion and society in the 19th century. The result of liberal English education imparted by both missionary and secular agents was the creation of a group of radical young men in the Hindu fold. The missionary journalism pointed out many social abuses such as *sati* (widow burning), child marriage etc. It awakened the social conscience of Indians. This already put into motion a reform movement and the founding of the Brahma Samaj (1828). The period of fifty years following the revolt of 1857 was characterized by the rapid growth of national consciousness among the Indians which resulted in the struggle for political freedom and its achievement in 1947. Political subjugation and the resulting misery and humiliation led the educated Indians to search for 'self-identity' in India's past history. Ancient literature, philosophy, science, law, art and monuments which had been buried in oblivion for years were raised to life. In this effort they were greatly helped by the 'Oriental' scholars from the West. The rediscovery of India's past cultural heritage gave them a sense of pride in their own nation and this provided a powerful incentive to the growth of nationalism. Thus the ground was prepared for political agitation against the colonial rule. The Indian National Congress which was organized in 1885 by the educated, politically liberal middle-class became a mass-based organization, with Mahatma Gandhi assuming its leadership (cf. Mundadan 2003: 175f.).

Kerala in 18-19 centuries¹

The Dutch who wrested from the Portuguese most trade centres were driven out from Thiruvithamcore by Marthanda Varma (1729-58) with the battle fought in Kolachel in 1741. Their hold on Kochi ended in 1795, in which year the English forced

¹ For this account we have relied mainly on Sreethara Menon 1967: 307ff.

them to surrender. The rajas of both the states entered into treaties with the British and allowed the latter to exercise sovereignty on both. The first treaty signed by Thiruvithamcore was in 1723 under Rama Varma of Venad. It was actually signed by the heir apparent Marthanda Varma. The state entered into a fresh treaty in 1775 under Kartika Thirunal Rama Varma, popularly known as Dharma Raja (1758-1805). In 1795 another treaty was concluded, with which Thiruvithamcore accepted British supremacy. This was further strengthened by yet another treaty in 1805. Sreethara Menon says that this treaty, which was negotiated by Velu Thampi Dalawa, resulted in the loss of the political freedom of Thiruvithamcore. Already Col. Macaulay had been appointed British Resident of Thiruvithamcore. By a treaty between the English and the Raja of Kochi in 1791 the latter became a vassal of the English. Though these treaties curtailed the freedom of both states, they flourished under the strong protection of the colonial power. The presence of the British in Malabar (north Kerala) started by their building a factory or trade centre at Thalassery in 1683 or between 1694 and 1695. By 1730 they obtained the monopoly of trade in Dharmapatanam, and during the Canarese War (1732-36) the exclusive possession of Dharmapatanam Island. By 1752 Thalassery was brought under their control. After the Mysorean interlude (Hyder Ali 1766-82, Tippu 783-92), by the treaty of Srirangapatnam (1792) the whole of Malabar came into the hands of the British. By the beginning of the 19th century the whole Kerala passed under the British. The revolts of the heroic Pazhassi Raja in Malabar, those of Velu Thampi and Paliath Achan in Thiruvithamcore and Kochi were put down by the British arms. Pazhassi Raja (shot dead in 1805) and Velu Thampi (committed suicide in 1809) are considered by patriots, martyrs for freedom.

In 1800 Malabar became part of the British-ruled Madras Presidency and was effectively administered by a principal collector assisted by nine subordinate collectors. The tone of the administration of Kerala in the 19th century was set by the British in Malabar, that of Thiruvithamcore by Marthanda Varma (1729-58) and Dharma Raja (1758-98), and that of Kochi by Rama Varma popularly known as Saktan Tampuran (1790-1805). Marthanda Varma having entered into friendly treaty with the British and keeping good relations with Kochi successfully suppressed the feudal forces (the *Pillamar*, the *Madampikal* and the *Yogakar*), annexed one by one the neighbouring petty states

and principalities like Attingal, Kollam, Kottarakara, Kayamkulam, Ampalapuzha, Karapuram, Thekkumkur, Vadakkumkur, Purakad, Punjar, etc. Kunnathunad, North Parur and Alangad became part of Thiruvithamcore under Dharma Raja. Pantalambam and Edappally were annexed in the 1820s. Marthanda Varma thus laid the foundation for a strong and centralized monarchy. He brought in several innovative programmes for the betterment of finances, strengthened the military force and reorganized the administrative system.

Dharma Raja (1758-98) who had his training under his illustrious uncle, continued the latter's policies. He consolidated the territorial gains made by Marthanda Varma and conferred the benefits of a settled administration on his subjects, who acknowledged this by calling him 'Dharma Raja'. He patronized learning and arts and maintained good relations with Kochi and Kozhikode rulers, besides obtaining the benign protection of the British. With the help of such distinguished statesmen like Ayyappan Marthanda Pillai and Raja Keshava Das, he further streamlined the administration.

What Marthanda Varma and Dharma Raja did for Thiruvithamcore in the 18th century, Saktan Tampuran did for Kochi at the turn of the 19th century. Saktan Tampuran generally followed a strong and enlightened administrative policy. A negative remark about him is that his treatment of the Konkanis and the Latin Christians was harsh and cruel. He may have had his reasons for it. The Latin Christians who had enjoyed certain privileges and rights under the Portuguese and the Dutch were harassed by the ruler in all possible ways (cf. Thayyil 2003: 216f.). However his policy towards the St Thomas Christians offered a contrast. While he deprived the Latin Christians of their land and properties and even expelled many from the kingdom, he gave to the St Thomas Christians lands and settled them in the heart of important towns like Thrissur, Chalakudy, Kunnankulam, Irinjalakuda, Tripunithura etc. with an eye on promotion of trade. It may be interesting to note that it was during the reign of Dharma Raja, Malpan Thomas Palackal was born and that the birth of Blessed Chavara took place in the year when Saktan Tampuran's reign came to an end (1805).

Here mention may be made about the rulers and administrators of Thiruvithamcore, Kochi and Malabar. In

Thiruvithamcore Balarama Varma, a rather weak person, followed Dharma Raja in 1798 and ruled till 1810. Under his reign Velu Thampi who served Thiruvithamcore as chief minister (dalawa) from 1850 with the approval the British Resident Col. Macaulay, dismissed the triumvirate or partnership of three ministers, Jayanthan Sankaran Nampoori, Sankara Narayana Chetti and Mathu Tharakan, which had been allegedly a triumvirate of "ignorance, profligacy and rapacity", and introduced various reforms. The dalawa soon rose in rebellion against the English. He was overwhelmed by the raja with the help of the British and he committed suicide in 1809. He was followed by Ummini Tampi as dalawa.

Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bai (1810-15), ably helped by Col. Munro, the new resident who was also diwan or chief minister (till 1814) introduced several progressive measures. The reign of Rani Parvati Bai (1815-29) is considered an epoch of liberal administration. She received the assistance of Col. Munro till 1818 in which year he laid down his office of resident. During these years measures were taken to ensure social freedom and civil equality. Christian missionaries were given all facilities, such as rent free land, free timber, to promote their mission. The London Missionary Society (LMS) at Nagercoil established themselves on a firm footing in 1816 under her patronage, and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) at Alapuzha and Kottayam. The latter was given a tract of land in Kallada in Kollam District ('Munro Island') for the specific purpose of promoting education among the Syrians.

Swati Tirunal's reign (1822-47) is called the 'golden age' in the history of Thiruvithamcore. The Raja, himself a great scholar and multi-linguist, musician and musical composer of rare talents, encouraged fine arts and education. An English school (Raja's Free School) was established at Thiruvananthapuram and district schools in 1836. There are many other achievements to his credit: Trivandrum Observatory (1836), the Charity Hospital, Departments of Engineering and Irrigation, the census of 1836, review survey of 1837. He earned the title 'Garbha Sriman', a sovereign from his birth. Utradam Thirunal Marthanda Varma's reign (1847-60) is noted for two proclamations: the first in 1853 emancipated all future children of government slaves and laid down liberal regulations for their all-round progress; the second in 1859 lifted all restrictions on upper clothes of Shanar women.

Besides he opened a school for girls in Thiruvananthapuram (1859) and prizes were instituted for students of the Raja's Free School. The first post office was opened in 1857 and a factory started functioning (1859), both at Alapuzha.

Utradam Tirunal's successor Ayilyam Tirunal (1860-80) continued the progressive policies. He was helped by the well known Diwan T. Madhava Rao (1859-73) followed by Diwan Seshagiri Sastri (1872-77) and Diwan Nanu Pillai from 1877. Sirkar anchals (state postal service) were thrown open to the public in 1861, a full-fledged arts college was established at Thiruvananthapuram (1866), a number of English, Malayalam and Tamil schools were opened all over the state. Hospitals were established in select centres. In the capital itself a large civil hospital and a lunatic asylum were opened. Special attention was given to communication and travel including one of the Varkala tunnels. Besides many public buildings came up in the capital (e. g. the main building of the present University College) as well as in other places. In recognition of the all-round progress Thiruvithamcore made, the title of 'Maharaja' was conferred on its ruler in 1866. The reign of Rama Varma Visakhram Tirunal was rather short (1880-85). His successor Mulam Tirunal ruled the State for quite a long time (1885-1924) and contributed significantly to its progress on various fields, especially in that of education. He gave all encouragement to private agencies.

The rulers of Kochi were not as distinguished as their counterparts in Thiruvithamcore. But the diwans were exceptionally competent persons. Col. Munro heads the list (1812-18). The reforms he introduced in Kochi bore close resemblance to those he introduced in Thiruvithamcore. Those who followed Munro, except a few, were talented men: Nanjappayya (1815-25), Venkatasubhayya (1835-40), Sankar Warriar (1840-56), Sankunni Menon (1860-79), Govinda Menon (1879-89) and others. The progress Kochi made in the 19th century owed much to these ministers. The fact that Kochi was placed under the direct care of Madras Presidency contributed to its progress. However, a few agitations took place in Kochi, mostly directed against the diwans: the one against Diwan Edama Sankara Menon in 1834 and another against Diwan Venkata Rao (1856-60). Both of them were forced to retire at the intervention of the Governor of Madras. Owing to difference of opinion with the British paramountcy Raja Rama Varma (1890-1914) abdicated.

British Malabar became part of Madras Presidency in 1800 and it was ably administered by a principal collector assisted by nine subordinate collectors. The 19th century Kerala prospered in the comparative peace and efficient administration that prevailed in the two native states and British Malabar. Still the fact that it was under a colonial regime created at least in the subconscious a restlessness, which came out into the open only in the next century.

Social Awakening in Kerala²

Political uprisings against the British and the native rulers who supported them came to an end with the martyrdom of Pazhassi Raja in 1805 and of Velu Tampi in 1809. But the social order needed a radical change. This change was brought about by a series of reforms initiated by the liberal impulses found in the British administration and in the wake of a series of popular agitations and movements, such as the Channar or Shanar Agitation, those which were led by Chattampi Swamikal (1854-1924), Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928) and Ayyankali (1866-1941) and the communal organizations which ensued in the 20th century such as SNDP (1903), NSS (1914) and 'Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam' (1907).

Kerala society till late 19th century was not based on the principles of social freedom and equality. Its chief characteristic was the deep chasm which separated the high castes from the low castes. In spite of the centralisation of authority in the hands of the king in Thiruvithamcore and Kochi and the assumption of direct administration by the English East India Company in Malabar, the upper castes like the brahmins, the kshatriyas and the *nayars* continued to enjoy several privileges and immunities. They constituted the land-owning class and they freely oppressed the tenant class. The law that prevailed in the land was not egalitarian. The penal code was extremely severe as far as the lower castes were concerned. Slavery in the most primitive form prevailed in the land even in the beginning of the 19th century. There were a series of iniquitous taxes and cesses, which imposed a heavy burden on the under-privileged sections of the society. Consequently, the poor became poorer still. Untouchability and

² For details, see *ibid.*: 355ff.

inapproachability and practice of pollution made their life miserable.

It is against this grim context one has to evaluate the contribution of the British enlightened approach and the emancipative and educative programmes of the missionaries. The native rulers were powerfully influenced by the liberal impulses transmitted by British administrators and Christian missionaries. With the spread of education and liberal ideas in early 19th century members of the backward communities became increasingly conscious of the discrimination and grew restive.

Naturally a number of social and socio-religious movements appeared on the scene. Perhaps the first of such movements was the **Channar or Shanar Agitation** in south Thiruvithamcore. As in other parts of Kerala the low caste women were prohibited to cover the upper parts of their bodies. The Shanars enlightened as they became under missionary influence rose against this practice. During the diwanship of Col. Munro an order was issued permitting the Shanar women who had become converts to Christianity to cover their bodies with jackets. Soon conflict arose between the Shanars and traditional Hindu high castes. The agitation ended only in 1859 with a royal proclamation abolishing all restrictions in the matter of covering the upper parts of Shanar women.

Among the socio-religious movements the one started by **Chattambi Swamikal** (d. 1924) comes first. He was a *nayar* reformist who revolted against the existing social order, in which the brahmins enjoyed a monopolistic position. Though he worked in close collaboration with **Sri Narayana Guru** (d. 1928), his main concern was for the social and religious regeneration of the *nyayars*. Narayana Guru, an *ezhava* by caste, also revolted against brahmin domination and campaigned for the mitigation of the rigours of caste discrimination. He consecrated shrines in several parts of Kerala for the use of the *ezhavas*, but permitted *pulayas* and other low castes to worship in these shrines. The *ezhavas* themselves officiated in the shrines. This and many social reforms he introduced among the *ezhavas* gave a boost to that community to emerge as a decisive factor in Kerala society and politics. The reforms of Chattambi Swamikal and Narayana Guru were carried forward by the organisations, NSS and SNDP. **Ayyankali** (d. 1941) a *pulaya* by caste gave leadership to the movement started

by the socially discriminated *pulayas* and other depressed classes for their social advancement. Taking inspiration from Sri Narayana Swami and the activities of SNDP Ayyankali started organizing the harijans and agitating for rights that had so far been denied to them. In 1907 he founded the *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam* ('Convention for the Protection of the Poor'). In recognition of his services to the harijans he was nominated member of Sri Mulam Praja Sabha (People's Assembly) of Thiruvithamcore. It was the dedicated work of these leaders which effected the total emancipation of the lower classes of the Hindu fold. The complete eradication of untouchability and temple entry for harijan, etc. owe greatly to them. **Vakkam Abdul Khadar Maulavi** (1873-1932) did a similar service for the uplift of the Muslim community.

In the 19th century both in Thiruvithamcore and Kochi various movements arose demanding popular rule. British Malabar too had to face in the 19th century a phase of insolent disturbances unleashed by a series of revolts by the Muslims, which are known as 'Mappila (Muslim) Lahala'. The common feature of these revolts was that a mappila or group of mappilas would murder Hindu *janmis* (land lords) and desecrate Hindu temples. Despite various measures, both punitive and palliative taken by the government, despite the passing of the Tenants Improvement Act (1900), such factors as poverty, agrarian grievances and religious bigotry helped to keep the spirit of discontent and defiance till the beginning of the 20th century.

Cultural Kerala

A brief survey of the cultural aspects of Kerala also may be relevant to the context. Literature and various forms of art and architecture need a sketching. Malayalam language which achieved its own distinctive characters from the 9th century CE began to produce high quality **literature** by the close of the 19th century. Starting with *Pattu Sahityam* (folk songs and ballads of popular origin), it developed through early prose works and *manipravalam* (combination of Malayalam and Sanskrit) from the 13th century onwards, early *champus* (narratives alternatively in prose and verse) and *sandesa kavyas* ('message poems') from 14th century, period of Niranam poets and Cherussery and Udaya Varma Kolathiri, later *champus*, during 15th and 16th centuries to attain a classical stature by 16th to 17th century with Tunchath Ezhuthachan who has been rightly hailed as 'the father of Malayalam language'.

There followed such illustrious figures as Punthanam Namputhiri (1547-1640), Unnai Warriar (18th century) who is famous for introducing *attakatha* (dance) form of literature (*Nalacaritam* and others) and Ramapurath Warriar (author of *Kuchelavrittam Vancipattu* and other works) who adorned the court of Marthanda Varma (18th century). Kunchan Nambiar (1705-1770) who adorned the court of Dharma Raja with his epoch making *tullal* (dance) songs comes to crown this period.

There followed a period of stagnation caused by the unrest and turmoil prevailing during the Mysore invasion and various revolts. A revival started with the reign of Swati Tirunal (1829-47). Irayimman Tampi, the well known *attakatha* composer whose *tarattu* or lullaby *omanttinkal kitavo* became very popular, was a courtier of Swati Tirunal. Sankaranatha Joshier (d. 1858) and his son Attukal Sankara Pillai were other luminaries of this period. The immediate post-Swati Tirunal period was characterized by a large output of translations, letters written in poetry and the compositions of "instant poets". During the second half of the 19th century Malayalam literature arrived at a momentous stage with great writers like Kerala Varma Koil Tampuran (1845-1914), hailed as 'Kerala Kalidasa' for his translation of *Śakuntalam*, A. R. Raja Raja Varma hailed 'Kerala Panini' who wrote *Kerala Paniniyam*, and other great works. Luminaries like Kunjikuttan Tampuran (1865-1913) hailed as 'Kerala Vyasa' for his translation of the whole of *Mahabharata*. Kochunni Tampuran both of the royal family of Kodungalloor, a number of others under the patronage of the same royal family introduced the era of *mahākāvyas* (epics). Some others who composed works in the *mahākāvya* style were K. C. Kesava Pillai, Kattakkayathil Cherian Mappila, Pantalām Kerala Varma, and Vadakkumkur Raja Raja Varma. With Vallathol Narayana Menon (1875-1958), Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer (1879-1949), both of whom in the initial stage tried with *mahākāvyas*, and Kumaran Āsān (1873-1924) the modern era of Malayalam literature was ushered in. In the 19th century other literary forms such as novel, short story, drama, literary criticism, essays and works on science and technology, biography and travelogue, grammar and dictionary, history and historical criticism had their beginning.

The Christians also made their contributions to Malayalam literature and language. Starting with *Kristiya Matatattvam* ('Christian Doctrine') and *Kristiya Vanakkam* ('Christian

Devotion') in the 16th century many missionaries and native Christians wrote books, mostly religious in character. Missionary Ernst Hanxleden ('Arnos Pathiri', d. 1732) is perhaps one of the most outstanding literary composers. He as well as a few other missionaries down to Benjamin Baily (1820s), Herman Gundert (from mid 18th century) wrote grammars and dictionaries, histories and theological treatises. Gundert started two earliest Malayalam periodicals or newspapers, *Rājyasamācāram* (June 1847) and *Pascimodayam* (October 1847). Among the natives the names of Joseph Cariattil (d. 1786) and Thomas Paremmakkal (d. 1799) deserve special mention for the 18th century. The former wrote theological treatises with the name *Vēdatarkam* ('Disputations on Religion') and the latter the well known first travelogue in Malayalam, *Varttamanapustakam*. Kattakkayathil Cherian Mappila belongs to the modern era. In between comes the writings of Blessed Kuriakose Chavara about which we will speak in chapter nine.

Kerala forms of **art, architecture and sculpture** developed through the centuries. Murals and detached paintings started appearing in 8-12 centuries. After a decline in the 18th and early 19th centuries a revival took place in the last decades of the 19th century for which Raja Ravi Varma of the Kilimanur family was mainly responsible. Architecture achieved a typically Kerala style by the 9th century CE. However the common Dravidian style of buildings also continued. It is in the construction of temples and palaces these styles are visible. Painted murals are a common feature of these public buildings. A classical example is the 'Dutch Palace' of Mattanchery, actually built by the Portuguese in 1555. It is a synthesis of Kerala and Portuguese styles. Christian churches were built mostly in the simple temple style till the arrival of the Portuguese who introduced the contemporary Portuguese (Manuelian) style in the churches they built. Most churches of the St Thomas Christians were modified taking inspiration from the Portuguese architecture, so that they turned out to be a mixture of Kerala temple and Portuguese Manuelian styles. Some of the early mosques followed a mixture of Kerala and Indo-Saracenic style of architecture. This pattern of the architecture continued into the 19th century.

Various forms of **performing arts** were developed in Kerala: *Kūḍiyattam*, *Chākiarkūthu*, *Mōhini Āttam*, *Kathakali*, *Ōttam Tullal*, *Yaksha Gāna*, *Pathakam*, *Harikatha*, etc. Temple

feasts or *utsavams* were generally occasions for performing these art forms. The musical instruments used for these performances were *chenda*, *tayyambaka*, *panchavādyam* (*maddalam*, *timila*, *edakka*, *sankhu* and *talam*). Though some of these instruments were used in churches, they were progressively replaced by western style string and wind instruments.

The specific performing arts the Christians developed are *Margamkali Pattu* (and after the arrival of westerners) *Chavittunatakam*. The Muslims have not only their *Mappila Pattukal* but also the *Oppana*, *Kalaripayattu*, *parisamuttu*, *vēlakali*, *vāleru* (sword throwing), *kuntēru* (javelin throw), *ñanimmel kali* (tight rope walking) are traditional Kerala martial arts.

Vicissitudes of Christians

The Catholic mission started in the 16th century under the initiative of Padroado and continued by Padroado and Propaganda missionaries produced significant results. There was a record growth of the number of Christians till the middle of the 18th century. This was followed by a decline the causes for which were many: the 'Malabar rites' (the inculturation experiment launched by Robert de Nobili and his Jesuit followers) controversy and its eventual suppression; the disappearance of the Jesuits from the mission field (the Society of Jesus was suppressed in 1773); scarcity of other missionary personnel; the four Mysore wars under Hyderali and Tipu (1766-1799).

From the early decades of the 19th century there was a revival. As mentioned earlier, after a number of crises Europe witnessed an extraordinary renewal of Christian faith and life, which led to a great missionary enthusiasm. Many of the older religious orders evinced stronger missionary thrust; new religious communities were established to serve in foreign missions; the suppressed Society of Jesus was restored (1814). All these factors brought about a vigorous revival of mission in India. The problem that affected the progress was the conflict between the Apostolic See of Rome and the secularized Portugal. Though this problem was largely resolved in the late 1850s, the Padroado -Propaganda jurisdictional conflict continued to harm the Church in certain parts of India, including Kerala.

Reform of priestly formation which attracted the attention of Church authorities since the Council of Trent, yielded tangible results in India only in the 19th century. The Synod of Pondicherry (1844) and the measures subsequently taken by the Propaganda gave a boost to the reform attempts.³ There followed a number of provincial councils which gave serious attention to seminary formation. A central seminary ('Papal Seminary') for the whole of India was established at Kandy in Sri Lanka in 1893, which became a standard setter for other seminaries. In Kerala a seminary was started in 1762 at Varapuzha by the Carmelite missionaries under the Propaganda. It accommodated both St Thomas Christian and Latin students. After a short trial the two communities were separated: the Latin students continued at Varapuzha and the St Thomas Christian students were shifted to Alangad, where Dr Joseph Cariattil taught for a number of years. The two seminaries were again amalgamated at Varapuzha. Although Syrian and Latin languages were taught in the seminary, the chief medium of instruction was the local language, Malayalam. But the subjects taught were derived from Latin-Western sources and had only an elementary standard.

It seems only a handful of St Thomas Christian students attended this seminary, the majority continuing in local centres under priest teachers, who had the title of malpan, a Syriac term for a learned man or professor or doctor of theology. Thus in the 19th century we hear of a number of such centres or local seminaries. Fr Bernard refers to seven common seminaries that functioned in Kerala from the 16th to the 19th century: those of Angamay, Kodungalloor, Vaipicotta or Chennamangalam, Sampalur (Ampazhakad), Varapuzha, Alangad and Kaduthruthy. He also lists a number of regional or local seminaries: Kalparamb or Puthotta (Pukkota), Karakunnam, Pulincunnu, Mylacombe, etc (cf. Bernard 1921: 265f.). In connection with the story of the disturbances caused by the Chaldean intruding bishop, Mar Thomas Roccas, there is mention of a number of malpan directors running such local seminaries, e. g. Malpans Muprayil Aipe of Pala, Karakkunnel, Minattur of Anakallel, Cherian Mathu of Narakkal

³ For details see Thomas Anchukandam SDB, 1. *The First Synod of Pondicherry 1844*, Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1996; 2. *Catholic Revival in India in the 19th century: Role of Clement Bonnard (1796-1819)*, ibid. 2006.

(cf. '81: 61, 189, 194f.; Parapuram: 578f.; *Positio*: 210f.). Malpan Mathu Parayammakkal was directing the seminary at Vadayar in the beginning of the 19th century. It seems that this seminary was merged with that of South Pallipuram in 1818 (cf. Chavara '81: 61). About the seminary at Pallipuram we shall speak later on.

A more or less clear picture of the position and dignity of a malpan of 18th / 19th century emerges in the person of Malpan Abraham Thachil. Blessed Chavara refers to this malpan of his own malpan Thomas Palackal at least four times in his chronicle. In the life of Malpan Palackal he says:

As the epidemics and famine spread in the north and as there came Tippu Sultan and his army burning churches and towns and forcing people at the point of the sword to embrace his faith, people fled to those areas where the epidemic had subsided. Among these were Thachil Mathu Tharakan from Kuthiathodu and his brother, Malpan Abraham. The latter brought with him the deacons who were studying under him and set up a seminary at Pallipuram and began to teach there. Then this Thomas Palackal eager to study was admitted at his home, the food being provided by his mother according to the custom (Chavara '81: 61; '90: 53f.).

In another place Chavara speaks of the great regard and respect Palackal had for his malpan:

At Kalparambu the old Malpan Abraham Kuthiathotil was still teaching, but he was now being helped by Fr Edakulath, the present malpan. This old malpan had been of much help to Fr Palackal and so he made up his mind to visit him and get his blessing. He decided to go for the feast at Kalparambu on the first Sunday of September together with Fr Chandy Mangalath of Pallipuram (then a beginner and later the malpan at Varapuzha), Fr Joseph Pazhekadavan of Vaikom and me. Each of the first two brought from his home a length of cloth, and for me Fr Palackal himself bought a large dyed blanket from Kollachil. He took the three of us first to Kochi and there he purchased some costly sweetmeats and other eatables. With all these we reached Kalparambu and saw the hale and hearty malpan. Fr Palackal paid obeisance to his malpan with more reverence and submission than we showed to him. Then he moved away

and stood at a respectful distance. We three brought the presents and after placing them in his room, went up to his chair, knelt down and kissed his hand: immensely pleased he laid his hands on our heads (ibid.: 68f.; 60f.).

Again we see Malpan Abraham on a visit to Varapuzha. In this episode one gets some information about the title, insignia etc. of a malpan.

When V. Rev. Bishop Milesius Prendergast was the vicar apostolic at Varapuzha, Fr Palackal took some of us to be given holy orders at the time fixed for ordination. Rev. Abraham Malpan had come to get his nephew, Deacon Abraham, ordained on the order of the governador [administrator of Cranganore]. Rev. Cherian Mathu Malpan was teaching at the seminary at that time. He had been helped while a student by the former. He and our malpan with all of us, clerics, went to the riverside to receive Malpan Abraham and escorted him into the bishop's room. He had the title, "The Malpan of Malabar", wore a ring and obtained salary from Portugal. Over his cassock he wore a cope. His Grace received him with great respect. After that he came down and all the time there the two younger malpans never sat down (ibid: 69f; 61).

In another place (cf. ibid.: 8; 11) Chavara calls Abraham *Malpana d' Kolla Hendo* ('Malpan of All India'). This reminds us of the title the metropolitans and archdeacons of the St Thomas Christians had in the ancient times.

In the 1850s Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli closed some twenty 'malpan seminaries'. Many of the malpan directors thus demoted later became ardent adherents of Roccas and party. The suppressed seminaries were gradually replaced by those, which were established attached to the CMI monasteries of Mannanam, Elthuruth, Vazhakulam, Pulincunnu, while the seminary at Varapuzha continued as an inter-ritual institution. It was shifted to Puthenpally in 1866 and was accommodated in the building which was meant for a convent for women. In 1890 the Holy See declared the seminary at Puthenpally "Central Apostolic Seminary", to serve the whole of Kerala, an inter-ritual institution for that matter. It was shifted to Aluva (Mangalapuzha) in 1932.

Christian Communities of Kerala

Till the 19th century there were only three Christian communities in Kerala, the Latin Catholics, the Catholic St Thomas Christians and the Orthodox (or Jacobite) St Thomas Christians (including a small faction of the Independent 'Syrian Church' of Thozhiyur-Anjur). Protestants started arriving in the beginning of the 19th century and expanded throughout Kerala. The Anglican infiltration into the Orthodox Christians caused a division, giving birth to the Marthoma Church. The unsettled relationship of the Orthodox with Syrian Antioch created tensions and led to a division in 1911/12. The smooth growth of the Latin Christians was marred by caste factors and Propaganda -Padroado conflicts.

The first **Protestant** mission in Kerala was started at Nagercoil in 1806 by a Prussian (Lutheran) missionary W. T. Ringelaube. The London Missionary Society (LMS) soon followed suit with Rev. Joseph Mead (1817-73) and others. They established mainly in south Thiruvithamcore. The Church Mission Society (CMS) established their mission at Kottayam in 1813 and worked in central Kerala. Thomas Norton, Benjamin Bailey, Baker and Joseph Fenn were pioneers of this mission. The Basel Evangelical Mission started work in British Malabar from the middle of the 19th century; Dr Gundert did pioneer work there. All these groups gave primary importance to education and transmission of knowledge. They established schools and even colleges, printing presses and published books and journals. The main target of these activities was to educate the new converts to Christianity from the lower classes of people. In central Kerala special attention was given to the Orthodox (Jacobites).⁴

From 1806 there was an attempt on the part of the CMS missionaries to bring about an alliance between the Syrian Christians, especially the Orthodox, and the Church of England. The agents of the Church of England and a number of British officials gave the movement great encouragement. Even the East India Company, in consideration of the political advantages for Britain, was positive towards this attempt. When Macaulay was resident of Thiruvithamcore a study was undertaken by Claudius Buchanan about the feasibility of the project. His recommendations

⁴ See Sreedhara Menon 1967: 380.

were followed up by Resident Macaulay. It was Col. Munro, the successor of Macaulay, who carried it forward.⁵

The **Orthodox** (Jacobite) existence—separated from Roman allegiance and with an unsettled relationship with the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch—had undergone and continued to undergo various vicissitudes. A movement to unite with those under Rome was a continuing phenomenon ever since the vertical split in the middle of the 17th century. The movement climaxed in a short lived union under Metropolitan Thomas VI or Mar Dionysius I in June 1799. But within six months the metropolitan returned to the Orthodox communion (cf. Hambye 1997: 59ff.). For a partial reunion one had to wait till the early decades of the 20th century—a small group of bishops, priests, religious and laity united with Rome in 1930 under the leadership of Mar Ivanios and consequently the Sryo-Malankara Church was established. The unsettled and critical relationship of the Indian Orthodox with Antioch continued to create tensions.

In the mean time the Anglican infiltration into the Orthodox community created another crisis. The alliance movement, to which reference was made above, between the CMS missionaries and the Orthodox masterminded by Col. Munro, who as resident and chief minister of both Thiruvithamcore and Kochi emerged all powerful, was a great boost to the Orthodox and the leaders of the Orthodox generally welcomed it. At the same time it opened the way for undue interference of the British officials in the internal affairs of the Indian Church. The missionaries were bent on bringing about a radical reform in the faith and worship of the community. Dionysius I died in 1808. Disputes arose between the hereditary successors Mar Thomas VII and Mar Thomas VIII, and their opponents led by Joseph Ramban. These disputes were fine opportunities for Munro to manipulate things according to his designs, to play a *pater familias* role with regard to the Orthodox. When the much harassed Thomas VIII died Munro forced Thomas IX to resign and got Ramban Joseph consecrated Dionysius II by Philoxenus II of Thozhiyur. With this the hereditary succession of prelates came to an end and the principle of election was introduced. In 1817 Dionysius II died and Philoxenus II of Thozhiyur was elected metropolitan. He soon retired to Thozhiyur

⁵ Kulakkatt 2002: 370ff., gives a good coverage of this attempt.

and his secretary was elected metropolitan assuming the name Dionysius III. The reformation was going on steadily along Anglican lines. The process continued to progress till the death of Dionysius III in 1825. Munro had retired already in 1819. The CMS missionaries and Anglophiles among the Orthodox wanted the process of reform to take speed. But the new metropolitan Dionysius IV, who was consecrated in 1825, for his own reasons adopted a go slow policy. Soon differences and conflicts arose. The reform party was led by Abraham Malpan while the majority followed the leadership of Dionysius IV. Attempts at compromise were finally rejected in the Mavelikara Synod of 1836.⁶ The conflicts continued between Metropolitan Dionysius V and his rival Mathew Mar Athanasius. In 1876 a synod met at Mulamthuruthy in the presence of the Antiochene patriarch Peter III which was decisive. Those who refused to acknowledge the authority of the patriarch formed a separate group under Mathew Mar Athanasius. The group was first known as 'Reformers', later the name was changed into 'Mar Thomas Church' (see Mundadan 2003: 125ff.).

Catholic Community

A few problems affected the progress of the Catholics negatively. One was the Padroado -Propaganda conflict that became aggravated from the 1820s. The secular regime in Portugal clashed with the Church, which finally led to a break in the diplomatic relation of Portugal with Rome. Consequently Pope Gregory XVI by the bull *Multa praeclare* dated 14 April 1838 suppressed the Padroado sees of Cranganore, Cochin and Mylapore, and put all the faithful of these sees (both St Thomas Christians and Latins) under the neighbouring vicariates apostolic under Propaganda. Cranganore and Cochin were annexed to the Vicariate Apostolic of Malabar which by now began to be known as Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly. This gave rise to a revolt and disobedience of Padroado clergy and laity. The effects of this crisis continued throughout the 19th and into the 20th century, despite the fact that a reconciliation of Portugal was effected by the concordat of 1857 (cf. Anchukandam 2006: 443ff.).

⁶ Cf. Kulakkatt, 2002: 392ff.

Another problem which continued into the 20th century was the question of indigenization of the hierarchy. The Propaganda took good interest in the 17th century to appoint indigenous persons as prelates. Actually a few brahmins of Goa origin were appointed vicars apostolic of the newly created ecclesiastical units under the Propaganda (see Mundadan 2003: 148ff.). This enthusiasm soon cooled down and foreign prelates continued to rule the Latin Church in India till the early years of the 20th century, both under Padroado and Propaganda. It was in 1923 that an Indian (Bishop Tiburtius Roch, SJ of Tuticorin) was made the head of a Latin Rite diocese. This was despite the fact that in 1886/7 the Latin hierarchy had been established by Pope Leo XIII.

The **Latin Rite Catholics** of Kerala made good progress under the Padroado and Propaganda missionaries. However one or two problems negatively affected their progress. One was the ill treatment those in Kochi had to face under Saktan Tampuran. Another problem was related to caste distinctions. The community was divided into three main groups: *Ezhunnuttikar* or the 'Seven Hundred', *Aññūttikar* and or the 'Five Hundred', and *Munnuttikar* or the 'Three Hundred', who being a mixture of European and Indian parentage were also known by other names such as 'Mestiços' (mixed race) 'Parangi' etc (see Mundadan 2003: 349). Caste feelings were strong especially among the 'Five Hundred'. They were discriminated by the 'Seven Hundred', who even opposed *Aññūttikar* being ordained to priesthood. This became an acute problem under the interim vicar apostolic Maurilius Stabilini (see chapter 2). The Padroado-Propaganda conflict also affected the community adversely, especially after *Multa praeclare* of 1838.

Catholic St Thomas Christians

While the process of reawakening of Hindu ethos and of national consciousness was progressing, the community of the Catholic St Thomas Christians was moving towards the final stage of their struggle for autonomy and selfhood. Bishop Florence of Jesus of Nazareth died at Varapuzha on 26 July 1773. In his funeral the traditional functions were arrogantly denied by the missionaries to the Syrians. This became the immediate cause of an open agitation. It started with a convention at Angamaly (generally

known as the 'First Angamaly Convention'⁷). This was an occasion for the leaders of the community to give vent to their accumulated grievances against the Carmelite missionaries and take measures to remedy them. Hot discussion went on for days in the convention bitterly complaining against the commissions and omissions of the missionaries and was turning turbulent. However it ended in a temporary reconciliation, as the missionaries showed their readiness to accommodate the demands of the representatives. It was two or three years after this that the mission of Malpan Joseph Cariattil and Cathanar Thomas Paremmakkal to Lisbon and Rome took place. One of the principal objects of their journey was to procure the union of the Orthodox under Mar Thomas VI or Mar Dionysius I (1765-1808) with the Catholics. The mission was successful and Cariattil, appointed archbishop of Kodungalloor⁸ in 1782 and consecrated in 1783 at Lisbon, was granted all the faculties to receive Dionysius I into the Catholic Church. Only in 1786 he and his companion Paremmakkal returned to India. Unfortunately he got sick in Goa and died there before reaching Kerala. Subsequently Thomas Paremmakkal was appointed administrator ('governador' in Portuguese) of Kodungalloor, (cf. Mundadan 2003: 63ff.; Hambye 1997: 28ff.). The state governments of Thiruvithamcore and Kochi approved his authority.

Paremmakkal convened a meeting or *yogam* of representatives at Angamaly in the beginning 1787 (the 'Second Angamaly Convention'). Frustrated by the untimely death of Cariattil and bitter against the aggressive policies of the missionaries the community wanted to have a head for their Church from among themselves. The declaration (*padiyola*⁹) prepared by the representatives reflects this frustration, the various grievances they had suffered at the hands of the missionaries and their determination to have a bishop of their own choice. Their first choice was Paremmakkal himself. If that was not possible (they

⁷ The meeting in 1787 (see below) is known as the 'Second Angamaly Convention'.

⁸ It was also known at that time as Puthenchira where the Padroado bishops resided for many years.

⁹ The well known Angamaly *Padiyola* (cf. Bernard 1992: 667ff.); cf. also *Varthamanapusthakam* 1977: 378f.

knew the strong opposition to this suggestion on the part of the missionaries whom he had strongly criticized), some other St Thomas Christian priest. If this is also denied by Portugal, the convention threatened to have recourse to the Chaldean patriarch for a bishop. The missionaries tried all possible means to thwart the move. Paremmakkal continued as administrator ably governing the Church. In another meeting he convened, twelve canons were elected to help in the administration. He himself does not seem to have made any move to approach the Chaldean patriarch or encourage it. But soon a small group around Changanachery region emerged who took the initiative to approach Mesopotamia. In October 1797 a delegation of three young men reached Mosul. Paul Pandari of Puthenchira was one of them. He was ordained bishop and took the name Mar Abraham. He reached back to Kerala in January 1798 and was warmly welcomed in the Changanachery region but could not exercise any authority as long as Paremmakkal lived.

Already before this the Mysore forces under Tippu Sultan entered the territories of Thiruvithamcore and Kochi. He reached up to Aluva. But in 1790 he was forced to withdraw and go back to Mysore. During this onslaught in which some twenty-four churches were fully or partially destroyed in north Kerala, a number of Christians migrated from the north to the southern regions. Abraham Malpan Tachil was one of such migrants. He first stayed at Kaduthuruthy, and then at Pallipuram and taught seminarians.

Paremmakkal died on 20 March 1799. Then Mar Abraham (Paulose Pandari) presumed to exercise jurisdiction. In consultation with the twelve canonists, he appointed one of them, Abraham Kattakayam, administrator. Since Pandari had no briefs to do so the move was considered schismatic. This made many disaffected Syrians to move over to the vicar apostolic of Varapuzha. At that time Aloysius of St Joseph de Ribamar was administrator of Kochi diocese. He had also charge of Kodungalloor. He convened a meeting of Church representatives at Mar Sliba Church of Alappuzha. He presented before the assembly a panel of four persons, the names of which he had obtained from Mgr Louis Mariam, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. One of the names was that of Malieckal George Sankurickal who had made his studies at the Propaganda College in Rome and had been appointed malpan of Pukkota or Kalparamb seminary on his return to Kerala in 1787.

The assembly selected him for the post of administrator. As he took charge in 1800 both Kattakkayam in 1801 and Pandari in 1802 submitted to him. Thus the 'schism' ended¹⁰. Sankurickal was to administer the archdiocese only for a year; he died in 1801 (see details in Bernard 1992: 667ff.; cf. also Hambye 1997: 34ff.).

As mentioned above when Paremmakkal was administrator all the churches of the St Thomas Christians, that were under the Padroado Archdiocese of Cranganore had come under him. But due to the confusion that followed his death a number of churches went back to the vicariate apostolic. After Sankurickal's death it was Portuguese prelates who were appointed administrators to Kodungalloor: Dominic administrator from 1810; he was followed by Joachim Bothelho, administrator; Paul da S. Thomé d'Aquino e Almeida O. P. 1819-23, administrator up to 1821 and archbishop 1821-23¹¹; Joseph Joachim da Immaculata Conceição, administrator in 1825 who does not seem to have occupied the see; João da Porto Peixoto administrator 1826-1838¹²; Manuel de S. Joaquim Neves OP, administrator 1845-48¹³. From this list it is clear that Padroado failed to provide continuous and efficient prelates to govern the see. There were long periods of absence of prelates. Only one of the prelates was archbishop for two to three years. These prelates do not seem to have any permanent residence. Administrator Neves coming as he was after the promulgation of *Multa praeclare*, seems to have illegally governed the archdiocese.

During this time the Propaganda prelates were all Carmelites, all vicars apostolic with episcopal titles, except one or two who had only the title of administrator: Aloysius Mary of Jesus, 1784-1802; Raymond of St Joseph Roviglia, bishop of Suria (or Sura), 1803-16; Peter Alcantra, Vicar Apostolic of the Great Mogul, administrator of Verapoly till 1821; Miles Prendergast, 1818-27/-31 (appointed in 1818 but took charge only in 1821, left

¹⁰ Pandari soon disappeared from the scene. About this there were many stories doing the round.

¹¹ He was also administrator of Kochi. He is buried in the church at Changanachery.

¹² This list is compiled from Tisserant 1957: 188 and Podipara 1970: 184f; cf. also Bernard 1992: 701-3. There are confusions in the lists.

¹³ He is buried at Kanjur.

Malabar in 1827, resigned in 1831 and died in 1844); Maurilius Stabilini (interim), 1827-31; Francis Xavier Pescetto, 1831-44; Ludovic of St Teresa Martini, 1844-53 (died in 1859). Under these double-regime crossovers from Padroado to Propaganda and vice versa were common.

From 1838, in which year Pope Gregory XVI published the bull *Multa praeclare*, Kodungalloor and Kochi were suppressed and attached to Verapoly /Malabar Vicariate. At that time the St Thomas Christians are said to have requested Rome to confer on the Vicar Apostolic Pescetto the title of archbishop. This request was accepted and the vicar apostolic was made titular archbishop¹⁴ (cf. Podipara 1970: 186). The suppression of the Padroado sees resulted in the extension of the Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly from Canara in the north to Kanyakumary in the south. This vast territory, therefore, was divided after 1845 into the Vicariate of Verapoly in the centre (the territory between the river Ponnani or Bharatapuzha in the north and the river Pampa in the south), Quilon in the south, and Mangalore in the north.

Second Half of the 19th Century

After a prolonged negotiation between the Holy See and the Portuguese government a concordat was signed in 1857. The provisions of the concordat were applied to the Kerala situation only in 1864 by the apostolic commissioner Mgr Salvator Saba. He was helped by an English monsignor Howard and a Portuguese layman. Mgr Saba by a decree gave choice to the faithful to join either the Propaganda or the Padroado within a specific time. It was just two years ago that the Roccas episode had taken place (see chapter 6) and many churches had fallen victims to it. Roccas left Kerala in March 1862. Soon the churches, one after another, submitted to the authority of Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli. But a few churches remained stubborn. Mgr Saba gave these churches the option to join any of the regimes even after the expiry of the date fixed by him for the other churches. This state of affairs continued till 1886 in which year Cranganore was suppressed.

¹⁴ This title seems to have automatically accrued to his successors, although in the case of Mgr Leonard Mellano there is a fresh conferring of the title when he was in Rome to attend the First Vatican Council (cf. ch. 10). In 1886 when the Latin hierarchy of India was established, Verapoly became a residential archbishopric.

Here we may mention the names of the prelates of the second half of the 19th century under Propaganda and Padroado. It seems that the illegally appointed administrator Manuel Neves (1845-48) was followed by others. In the late 1850s and early 60s we hear of Antonio João Ignacio-Santimano in Kollam as the Padroado-appointed administrator of Cranganore and Cochin, who refused to submit to the Vicar Apostolic of Quilon (cf. Anchukandam 2006: 467f.). After the arrangements made by Mgr Saba in 1864 we have the following prelates on the Padroado side, all administrators: Antony Paul Pinto (1864-66); Joseph Ayres de Silveira Mascrenhas (1866); Antony Correa dos Reis Coelho (1867-69); Antony Vincent Lisboa (1867); Valentine Constantine Fernandes (1875); Francis Barbosa (1876); Benedict R. Gomes and Casimir Nazareth (1877-84); Narcise, pro-administrator (1885); Cajetan J. M. Abreu (1885-87). On the Propaganda side the prelates were all Carmelites: Bernadine of St Teresa Baccinelli (1853-68); Leonard of St Louis Mellano (1868-97); Bernard of Jesus (1897-1919). In 1887 Mellano became archbishop of Verapoly. Under him Marceline Berardi was appointed coadjutor in 1877 exclusively for the Syrians. The Syrians were separated from Varapuzha jurisdiction in 1887. It was under Mellano that the Melusian 'schism' occurred with the arrival of Mar Elias Melus sometime in October 1874. It finally gave rise to a small Church separated from Rome, the 'Surai' Church of Thrissur or the Assyrian Church of the East (cf. Podipara 1972: 191f.).

Sources and Studies

Our study is based mainly on the writings of Chavara (see chapter 9)¹⁵. Other primary sources used are early biographies of the Blessed written by various persons who knew him closely and were intimately associated with him during his life time. Such are two short biographies written immediately after his death: one by Fr Kuriakose Porukara, one of the first eleven priests who made their religious profession in 1855 and who succeeded Chavara as prior of Mannanam in 1864 and as prior general in 1871; the other biography is by Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD who was Chavara's spiritual director from 1864 onwards and who, as provincial delegate of the religious community of Chavara, was involved in

¹⁵ We have drawn heavily from his chronicles, Mannanam chronicles, Vol. I and II, both written by Chavara.

many ways in the building up of the community from 1863 to 1873. A short, almost romantic type of biography in poetic form bearing the title *Purāthana Pāttukal* ('Old Songs') was composed in 1890. Almost a day to day report of the last illness and death of the Blessed written by Fr Leonard Moolayil is available to us. A more comprehensive biography was composed by Fr Philip Koyipallil in 1929. Both of them were members of the CMI Congregation and knew Chavara personally during his life time. While the first two have been printed and published, the last three remain still in manuscripts. Printed biographies began to appear from 1936 on. About them we shall speak after indicating a few other primary sources.

Valuable accounts about Blessed Chavara are found in the chronicle of Mannanam Monastery, Vol. III, for years 1864-91¹⁶; the chronicle of Vazhakulam Monastery, 1859-91; that of Elthuruth Monastery, 1856-66. Special mention must be made of the diary of Parapuram, rich with a lot of information, which has been very useful to us for clarifying many points. The chronicle of the Koonammavu Convent is an important source especially for Chavara's role in the foundation of that convent, also for the last illness and demise of the Blessed. Limited information is also available in other diaries and accounts of the time, e.g. diary of Fr Mathai Mariam Palakunnel, diary of Br Rocky, writings of Fr Marceline Berardi. Testimonies of some contemporaries are of great value, e. g. that of Fr Louis of Manjummel who was a disciple of Chavara; that of Fr Marceline Alackappally, who kept a record of what he heard from Chavara's contemporaries. There are many letters and correspondence, apart from those of Chavara himself.

As the readers will realize most of these sources are scattered and kept in different archives or libraries. But the important publication which we quote as *Positio* has been of immense help in writing this biography. In it is listed almost comprehensively the pertinent documents, both published and unpublished, related to the life and death of Blessed Chavara, and to a large extent the process of his canonization. The documents are not only listed in it with introductions and footnotes, but excerpts from most of them are given in Latin. There is another

¹⁶ Volumes I & II are by Chavara (see footnote above).

collection of documents, collected mostly by the historical commission and presented to the eparchial process, called 'Processus Ordinarius'. They were later presented for the process in Rome. There is a complete set of this collection in the CMI Procura in Rome. A few volumes are kept at Mannanam office.

Biographies began to be published from 1936. The first of such biographies is the one written in Malayalam by Fr Mathias Joseph Maliempurackal published in 1936. This, being the first to be published, attracted public attention. Two reviews of it were published, one by the well known writer I. C. Chacko in (*Nazrāni*) *Deepika* and the other by equally known writer O. M. Cherian in *Malayala Manorama*.

A larger and more comprehensive and well documented Malayalam biography was published by Fr Valerian Plathottam in 1939. Being based mainly on original sources it is a very valuable work¹⁷ and later biographies depended upon it. Fr Valerian published a short biography in English in 1953. A small biography in Malayalam under the title *Karma-yogi* was published by P. T. Thomas in 1953. The best biography so far published in English is the one by the well known writer K. C. Chacko in 1959¹⁸.

Here I would mention the names of a few persons who wrote notes on various aspects which I have used for writing this account on Chavara. The name of Rev. Fr Lucas Vithuvattical comes first. It is he who, as postulator of the cause of Chavara, was mainly responsible for bringing the first phase of the process of canonization of Chavara to a happy conclusion in 1986 when Pope John Paul II declared at Kottayam Chavara Blessed (see chapter 11). He was associated with the process from the beginning and worked on several capacities. He with the help of some of his students got the whole material collected by the historical commission translated into Latin¹⁹. Although the *Positio* is published in the name of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, it was Fr Lucas who took all the pains to prepare it. It is evident,

¹⁷ It is known that it was Fr Simon Pattassery who collected the materials for this biography, and probably who wrote the first draft.

¹⁸ For details of the source material and publications mentioned above, see *Positio*. See also the bibliography given in the present book.

¹⁹ This forms the collection mentioned above, *Processus Ordinarius*. Many of these documents are published in *Positio* at least partially.

then, that his knowledge of the life, activities and virtues of Blessed Chavara is vast and comprehensive. With this asset he prepared elaborate notes for my use. I have drawn heavily on these notes and used them critically with the help of primary and secondary sources. Besides, he patiently went through every chapter of the draft and gave me suggestions to improve the text.

Another person from whom I received substantial help is Fr Thomas Kochumuttom who has written well documented and insightful articles and booklets on Chavara. The notes he prepared on Chavara as *Karma-yogi* and the booklet *Dream Fulfilled* (2005) he authored together with Sr Jossy CMC were particularly useful, the second in writing on the foundation story of the convent for women at Koonammavu, and the first for writing the section on the contemplative personality of Chavara. Fr Thomas Pantaplackal, who shows great interest in the study of Chavara, helped me in many ways, collecting local stories and some relevant documents. The notes Frs Sebastian Poonolly and Domitian Manickathan prepared on the writings of Chavara were very useful for writing chapter nine. Others who helped me with notes and comments on various topics are Frs Joseph Pathrapankal, Paul Kalluveetil, Joseph Kanjirathinkal, Thomas Kadamkavil, Antony Vallavamthara, Jose Frank Chakkalackal. Oral suggestions were received from many other friends.

Contents of the Book

This biography of Blessed Chavara is composed in twelve chapters of which the first two describe Chavara as a saint and prophet in the making: childhood and early education as the dawn of a great sage (chapter 1) and the formation to priesthood, the divine call (chapter 2). It is during these years that a firm foundation was laid, first at home under his pious mother and father and then in the seminary under the paternal care of the great sage and teacher Malpan Thomas Palackal, for the emergence of the saintly and prophetic personality of the Blessed, fully dedicated to the service of God and his people. Chavara played a vital role in the foundation of the Congregation of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and its early dynamic growth into a spiritual movement enshrined in a charismatic community, rooted in a triple tradition—Indian, East Christian and Carmelite—a community committed to a life of intense prayer and deep recollection, and to the renewal and the building up of the Church and the society at large. This role of Chavara is described in chapters three

(foundation of the community), four (the leadership Chavara provided), five (Chavara's life as an ideal religious and superior).

After this comes his concern for and direct services to the Church and society. A major service he rendered to the Church in Kerala was the heroic fight he together with his fellow religious fought against the intruder Chaldean bishop Mar Roccas and party. He faced this challenge to the unity and integrity of the Church with courage and holy determination and marvellously succeeded. This great undertaking is described in chapter six. Fully committed as he was to the cause of renewal and reform of the Church he pioneered a few projects: the guidance he gave to the Church as vicar general, reform and renewal through preaching and retreats, formation of an enlightened clergy, attending to the financial and other needs of the Vicariate of Verapoly, and the reform of liturgy. Equally concerned he was with illiteracy and inequality and discrimination among the people, especially against the poor, the sick and the neglected. To ameliorate their desperate condition, he took the initiative to impart to them knowledge through education and certain social action programmes. Chapter seven, at the service of the Church and society, gives a profile of these services.

The condition of women in the 19th century was rather pathetic. It was to lead them to the front line of the society and empower them spiritually and culturally that Chavara, with the collaboration of Fr Leopold, founded the convent at Koonammavu. The contemplative ideal of the Carmel was their goal. Together with this they were to serve the society by educating girls. It was to become a great force in the renewal and reform of the Church. Chapter eight tells this story.

Chavara believed that the dissemination of knowledge, both religious and secular, was essential for the reform of the Church and society. So he gave great importance to education. Equally important was the production of literature and print media. He himself wrote volumes and with great foresight established printing presses. Chapter nine is concerned with Chavara as the apostle of literature and print media. In it his writings which best reveal his personality are described and analysed. He was a continuous writer and even during his last illness he composed fine poems.

We are approaching the last days of Chavara's life (chapter 10). They were days of intense suffering for him. Through these sufferings, with a contented heart and a sweet smile on his face, he

journeyed to the Father's home. The Blessed suffered many physical ailments beginning from the seminary days. But these ailments did not stand in the way of his intense prayer and his undertakings for the renewal of the Church and welfare of the society. In the last year of his life, end of 1869 to the end of 1870, his health hazards became severe. Despite that he carried on his duties, which became very burdensome in the absence of Archbishop Mellano and Fr Leopold who were in Europe from the close of 1869 to the close of 1870. Already before their return he was very ill. Their coming back did give some relief. But soon he was on his death bed suffering intense pain and discomfort. The heroic patience and the sweet smile and glow which reflected on his face were marvellous. Early morning on 3 January 1871 he breathed his last at St Philomina's Monastery, Koonammavu, surrounded by his fellow religious and friends, grief stricken and praying. The next day he was buried in St Philomina's church. The funeral was attended by a huge and overflowing crowd, all admirers of this holy and humane person.

Already during his life time people looked at Chavara as a saint. After death this esteem was manifested by many in different ways. Fr Leopold, his spiritual director, after describing the death briefly in his diary, prayed: "O holy and graceful soul pray for me". Biographies of the edifying life and deeds were composed in 1871 itself. However years passed before his canonization process started officially. Requests for it came from different quarters. Finally on 9 December 1955 the cause was introduced. It culminated on 8 February 1986 with the declaration of His Holiness Pope John Paul II at Kottayam that Chavara be called Blessed. Chapter eleven describes the process and its final successful end.

Chapter twelve, the final one, may be considered the heart and the central point of this study. In it we make an attempt to unravel the multifaceted, yet integrated, personality of this great man, this prophet, this saint—the prophetic, the physical, the humane, moral-ethical, specifically Christian, and prayer-contemplative dimensions of this personality. The last dimension, prayer-contemplative dimension, enshrined in the spirituality of this *Karma-yogi* is the pivot, the focal point around which the whole life and mission of Chavara turns. It is also the focal point of our study and research.

Methodology and Conclusion

Finally, a word about the methodology we have used for producing this biography. A common style guide is followed in the writing of the different chapters. Main references are given within brackets in the text itself. This has two advantages: one, the reader can get direct access to the referred texts; two, by minimizing the cumbersome footnotes, the bulk of the book can be reduced to some extent. The footnotes are intended generally to be clarifications and explanations. Most often only the name of the author and year of publication are given in the references. The full details of the referred writing can be obtained from the bibliography, and the list of abbreviations. In the case of the chronicle of Chavara, which is very frequently referred to, we abbreviate the references to '81 and '90 followed by page number, '81 (1981) standing for the year of publication of the first edition of the Malayalam text, and '90 (1990) for that of the English translation.

Since each of the chapters was written somewhat in isolation repetitions are bound to occur; the contexts of each required reference to the same events and texts. During the final revision we have tried to reduce repetitions as much as possible. Another point we would refer to here is regarding photos of persons and places. Since the book *CMI 175 Years 1831-2006*, published in 2007, contain comprehensively all the relevant photos and pictures we thought that this biography does not need to publish them.

In conclusion, I must admit that it took a longer time than expected to write this modest biography of Blessed Chavara. One reason for this was that there were many other demands on my time, quite often for preparing papers and articles. Another reason is that the process of drawing out the matter from sources (original as far as possible) was a time consuming one which required much patience and close attention. The help my collaborators gave had a limit of its own. In spite of all that I have the satisfaction that the toil and sweat helped me to get a better and deeper insight into the person, mission and significant contribution of Blessed Chavara to whom this biography is dedicated. I do hope that the readers of this biography will share this experience of mine. Evidently this is not the last word on Chavara. As I was revising the draft of the biography I realized that there were many inadequacies and shortcomings. It convinced me that the study should go on. It would be nice of the readers if they offer their suggestions and directions for improvement.

CHAPTER ONE

Advent of a Great Sage

In the chequered history of the St Thomas Christians, of all Christians for that matter, of Kerala, great souls have arisen at various times, leaders of great movements, eminent administrators of the Church, founders of religious communities and simple saints like Blessed Alfonsa. Five saintly figures have already been acknowledged as blessed by the Church: Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Sister Alfonsa (soon to be proclaimed saint), Mother Mariam Thresia, Father Augustine Thevarparampil (Kunjachan) and Mother Euphrasia. Many more are on the waiting list. Here we are concerned with Blessed Kuriakose Chavara, the junior-most of the founders of the CMI Congregation¹, who was mainly responsible for the development of the congregation at least from 1840s, and who through the outpourings of his noble heart in voluminous tracts, gave a greater clarification of the spirit and character of this religious community.

This great sage was born in the village of Kainakari, in the midst of perhaps the most scenic region of Kerala, Kuttanad. That was in a family, which is supposed to have been derived from one of the most ancient St Thomas Christian families. In this chapter we intend to give: 1) brief descriptions of the place and times at the birth of Chavara, 2) his family line, and 3) his early childhood. This is in view of the fact that the environment in which one is born and brought up in the early years of one's life, plays a definite role in shaping one's personality.

Kainakari in the Scenic Kuttanad

The western region of Kerala from Aluva (Alwaye), situated at the bifurcation of the second longest river of Kerala, the Periyar (called 'Pūrna', the perfect river, by Sankaracharya, and also

¹ Cf. ch. 3: The Foundation of the CMI Congregation.

'Chūrni'), to Kollam in the south, is remarkable for its fairly long range of lakes and backwaters. It is known by the name Vembanattu Kayal² (Vembanattu Lake)³. Extensive coconut groves reared on the ridges through the backwaters and along 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, Alapuzha (Alleppey), Kottayam, Changanacherry and Kollam (Quilon). On the Alapuzha-Changanachery route, about half an hour's run by motor boat from Alapuzha, is the tiny island of Kainakari, the home village of the Chavara family. It occupies a central spot in the extremely panoramic landscape of Kerala, the Kuttanad⁴, which is today a great tourist attraction. It is around here that the holy river Pampa, on whose bank is the famous Sabarimala (Sabari hill) and its world famous Shiva temple, discharges its waters, forming, with the eastern shallow parts of the Vembanad Lake, diverse water channels, rivulets and streams. During the summer season 'House Boats' and other water transport vehicles can be seen

² During the Hindu Renaissance in Kerala (AD 7/8 century), there was a region called Vembanad, which is said to have, in course of time, become Vembanad. Besides the kingdom of Kochi, Thekkumkur and Vadakkumkur principalities, about which we hear in the 16th century, were situated in this region. In the neighbourhood was the Poracad principality, which later came to be called Chembakassery.

³ This lake extending from Kochi (Cochin) to Kollam has a length of 84 km, is 15 km broad at the widest point and 3.2 km at the narrowest.

⁴ There are many legends about the origin of this name. It is said to have been the Gandharvavanam (Gandharva Forest), which was burnt (*Gandharvadahanam*) and became Chutanadu (burnt land), later transformed into Kuttanad. It is said that the region up to Changanacherry was under water, later reclaimed into paddy fields and narrow strips of land or islands. It is note-worthy that from several places in this area crumpled and black burnt wood pieces were unearthed. It is also significant that a number of places in this region are known with the suffix 'kari' (charcoal) like Kainakari, Chennankari, Mitrakari, Ramankari, etc. Another legend connects Kuttanad to the Buddhist period of Kerala. Many statuettes of Buddha have been discovered here. Buddha is also known in Kerala by the nickname 'Kuttan' ('boy'). Kuttanad is said to have been derived from this word.

plying in the Kuttanad waters carrying tourists from all over India and abroad who arrive in thousands. Some daring and industrious people of Kerala had reclaimed these waterlogged places, and made them cultivable and inhabitable through a process of bunding and draining⁵. As a result there came up miles and miles of paddy fields surrounded by waterways and stretches of narrow land structures and islands strewn with fresh green coconut plants. These coconut-clad land strips and islands, paddy fields and intricate water channels make Kuttanad a romantic resort and a haven for tourists. The paddy cultivation in this fertile earth has earned for Kuttanad, the appellation 'Granary of Kerala'. Because of the charming and intricate waterways and the plying of water transport vehicles through them, Kuttanad has been given the honorific name 'Venice of the East'. Perhaps the eighteenth century great scholar Fr Paulinus of St Bartholomew was the first to call it so⁶.

Kuttanad is known for all this. But the land strips became all the more famous and blessed by the fact that Blessed Kuriakose Chavara was the first in Kerala to be elevated to the honours of the altar by the Church. Chavara, Kainakari and Kuttanad have achieved a new fame by this event. Kainakari people had the fortune to receive two letters written in Chavara's own hand. His ancestral home there, now converted into a shrine, stands in the midst of the Kainakari island. Just as Porbandar, the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi, attained fame and a place in the world map, Assisi did so because of St Francis Assisi, so Kainakari in Kuttanad, the birth place of Blessed Chavara, now obtains a place in the religious map of the history of the world. The presence of the Chavara home now turned into a shrine on this tiny island has raised the status of Kuttanad beyond a tourist haven into a place of pilgrimage.

⁵ In this process the lion's share goes to the dalits like *pulayas*, *parayas*. They raised various land strips and paddy fields known as Mundatitara (*tara* means raised land strip), Pottantara, Pazhayatara, Kochutara, Narakatara, Puthentara, etc. It is these dalits who are the sons and daughters of Kuttanad, who created this 'Venice of the East', this 'Granary of Kerala'. They may rightly be called the 'black gods' of Kuttanad.

⁶ Cf. *Positio*: 21, which quotes Paulinus of St Bartholomew OCD, *Viaggio alle Indie Orientali*, Rome: 1796, p. 69ff.

The Chavara Family

Kuriakose Chavara was, in the Providence of God, to initiate a renaissance in the Kerala Church. Kuttanad and the small land strip in it, Kainakari, were being prepared by God to receive this luminary in their lap. The Chavara family is a scion of a large family transplanted to this area from elsewhere. This land strip of Kainakari was marshes about three hundred years ago, filled with crocodiles and reptiles. On the land strips along the waterways there began to live the members of the family of Chembakassery rajas or rulers. Their houses were known as *mathams* ('muts'). A few *navars*, *ezhavas* and *pulayas* were there as dependents of these houses. It is the hard work of these people, which rendered the low-lying backwaters into paddy fields and land strips. The reclaimed fertile fields and land strips attracted more and more people to this area. Kainakari (the 'kari' land raised by *kai* [Kaina] or hand, so the legend goes) was one such land strip. Paddy fields and coconut plants yielded good harvest.

There was a belief among the higher caste Hindus that things when touched by the so-called low caste people got impure. Equally there was a belief that such articles became pure by the touch of a Nazrāni or St Thomas Christian (cf. *Positio*: 22, fn. 10; Podipara 1970: 83). Not only that, these Christians were considered well-built and strong people. This is said to be the reason why royal and high caste families desired to have one or two Christian families as their dependents. The Mukkatt *Matham*, which settled at Kainakari, had arranged a Christian family to live there. This family also slowly assumed the name of the Hindu *Matham*, Mukkatt. The Chavara family is said to have been derived from this Mukkatt Christian family. Ultimately it is derived from the ancient family Pakalomattam of Kuravilangad⁷.

According to a popular tradition the Pakalomattam family was one of the four chief families of Palayur, which St Thomas the Apostle is said to have converted to the Christian faith in the first century of the Christian era. Later, it is believed, the members of this family, together with the members of the other three, namely Sankuri, Kali and Kalikav, migrated via Angamaly and South Pallipuram to Ettumanoor near Kottayam and from there to Kuravilangad. They are said to have settled in the last mentioned

⁷ The above information was gathered from various sources by Fr Panthaplackal CMI.

place around 337 CE (A D) for purposes of agricultural activity (cf. Kurukur 2000: 19). It was a unit of this Pakalomattam that was brought to Kainakari by the owners of that land strip, the Mukkatt *Mat ham*. It must have happened around 1700⁸.

In the course of time the Mukkatt family branched off into two units, each assuming a new family name called after the places of its settlement. They are: Meenappilly and Kalassery. The Meenappilly family gave rise to four other families: Mampra, Chavara, Kaliparamb and Vallonthara. Ultimately Chavara is derived from the original Pakalomattam family of Kuravilangad. This belief was expressed by many witnesses examined during the ordinary diocesan process of the cause of canonization of Blessed Chavara (cf. *Processus Ordinarius* 3702, *Positio* 21, fn. 4). So also a number of Chavara's biographers trace this origin. However the traditions about the process of the migration of the Pakalomattam branches to Kainakari are not unanimous. According to one version three members moved from Kuravilangad to the west. A member of a *nayar* family at Kainakari happened to meet them. He invited them to settle in the compound called Mukkatt at Kainakari and he donated the compound to them. Another version has it that some members of the Kuravilangad Pakalomattam family happened to migrate to the township of Vaikom (a famous Hindu pilgrim centre). A *nayar* family from Kainakari on their visit to Vaikom made acquaintance of the Christian family from Kuravilangad and invited it to go with them to Kainakari and settle there. The invitation was accepted and some members of the Pakalomattam family started living at Mukkatt of Kainakari (cf. *Positio*: 21f.)

Whatever be the truth of these traditions, it is surmised that the Chavara branch of the Mukkatt family was at Kainakari at least by late eighteenth century. Today the house, where Kuriakose Chavara was born on 10 February 1805, is a shrine established by the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) and taken care of by the sisters of the Congregation of Mount Carmel (CMC). A boat ride of about half an hour from Alapuzha takes you to the Chavara jetty. From there begins a path, ten feet wide, lined on both sides by coconut plants. This path about half a kilometre long ends in front of a chapel-like construction in concrete, which enshrines the original home of Kuriakose—a house thatched with plaited palm leaves divided into rooms by sculptured wooden walls. The room

⁸ Cf. also Podipara 1970; Valerian 1939: 7f; *Positio*: 21f.

on the eastern side of the house is where Kuriakose was born. It is now converted into a prayer room with an altar at the southern end. On the altar is kept, in a precious casket, the crucified image of Jesus detached from the crucifix, which Chavara had always carried on his chest, and which was kept on his body when buried⁹. A piece of his mortal remains is also enclosed in the casket. This casket was deposited there on 14 February 1986 by Archbishop Powathil of Changanachery. Thus the original home of the Blessed has been converted not only into a family shrine of the CMIs and CMCs but also into a common venue for all people who come there from far and wide to seek the blessings of the holy man.

There is an interesting story of the process of the conversion of a simple house into the shrine of a blessed. The family of Mr Appachan Chavara, a fourth generation descendant of Blessed Kuriakose, was living in this house previously. It was known as Padinjare Chavara (Western Chavara) as there was another family nearby called Kizhake Chavara (Eastern Chavara). Appachan¹⁰ is said to have had a dream, in which the Blessed appeared to him and told him:

This house is mine. I do want this for me. Many people are to come here and pray. So you must leave it and go elsewhere.

This news spread among the people around. One Mr Gopalan and his son Thankappan were employees of the Chavara family from the time of Ousepachan, the father of Appachan. Thankappan vividly recollects the whole episode, which his father had heard from the Chavara family circles.

Soon negotiations started and the CMI Congregation acquired the house and the compound in 1979. In 1984 the whole compound and the house were restructured and made into a shrine dedicated to the holy memory of Blessed Chavara. The shrine and surroundings are taken care of by resident CMC sisters under the

⁹ This was the case in 1986. Recently the crucifix was removed from the casket and transferred to Mannanam and kept in the Chavara Museum there.

¹⁰ Rev. Frs Ladislaus CMI (d. 1989) and his younger brother Gonsalves CMI (d. 1949) were brothers of Appachan.

overall supervision of a CMI priest director appointed by the CMI prior general.

Kuriakose's Parents

It is not easy to determine when exactly the Chavaras made their abode at Kainakari. By the end of the eighteenth century the family with one Kuriakose, the father of the Blessed, as its head was there. Chavara in his letter to his parishioners dated 13 February 1868 writes:

In the order of flesh I am the son of Kuriakose Chavara of the parish of Chennankari¹¹ (CWC IV, 1982: 152; 1990: 116).

This Kuriakose had married Mariam of the Thoppil family of Veliyanad a few kms away from Kainakari. The Thoppils were a branch of the Chothirakunnel family of Thottakad. Kuriakose and Mariam were pious couples, who were models of a good Catholic family. Almost all the witnesses in the diocesan process for canonization testified to this. Fr Leopold Beccaro simply says that Kuriakose was born of pious parents (cf. Beccaro 2003: 5), while Fr Kuriakose Porukara, the Blessed's successor in office, extols them as excelling in virtues (cf. Porukara 1905: 1). The 'Old Songs', which found that it would take much space to describe in detail the good qualities of the parents, cuts short saying that they were more pious than their contemporaries (cf. Valerian 1939: 10). Chavara in his *Ātmānutāpam*¹² gratefully recalls:

Through baptism's grace, you made me your cherished son,
And showed me heaven's joy to tend me grow,
Gave me parents grounded in faith secure
And faith in me engraved full firm, besides...

(*Ātmānutāpam* I: 41-44, CWC II 1981: 2; 1989: 2).

¹¹ When this was written Kainakari was not yet a parish separated from Chennankari. However, there was a chapel at Kainakari. It is to the people who belonged to this chapel, Chavara wrote this letter.

¹² About this, see chapter 9. This work is referred to as follows: Part nos. (I, II, etc), line numbers, year of publication of Malayalam and English texts (1981 and 1990), page number/s of the published texts.

His parents were firmly grounded in faith, which fact made their child, little Kuriakose, to grow in faith life.

Chavara waxes much more eloquent when he speaks of his pious and devout mother:

(Gave me...) besides,

A mother to feed me while yet a feeble babe
To shield me from pain and sorrow and tend me soft.
To pour that tender love you filled her with,
That nectar, unto my tiny blissful heart.

Mixed in her sweet milk, she regaled me
With thoughts of heaven, and words of grace so pure!
And when reason grew strong, my little mind
Patiently, informed, to lisp holy names.

Huddled close to her feet, I learnt aright
Gently, of matters sublime, of my faith
As at midnight she rose and knelt at prayer
Warding off sleep and petty dullness to the air,

Long hours, on her knee in prayer she stayed.
Leaning on her then I would seat myself
While devoutly a string of pious words
To Mother of God and the Christ, King of kings.

In thanks and praise, heart strung with solid faith:
"Light Eternal, Jesus Christ, save us all;
Hail, earth-born flower, Lord Immortal!"
Thus she'd pray in her melodious voice
And I, list'ning to the lullaby sweet
Near my gentle mother quietly reposed.

And, when my infant tongue 'gan to lisp,
Up to the sky, her finger pointing oft
The holy names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
She, my noble mother made me repeat

(*Ātmānutāpam* I: 44-70, *ibid.* 2f.; 3).¹³

¹³ This is quoted from the English text (1989: 2f.), which is a rather free translation of the original in Malayalam.

Chavara goes on singing how the mother taught him piece by piece in this way the rudiments of the holy faith: Trinity, Incarnation, the passion, death and resurrection (cf. *Ātmānutāpam* I: 70-71; *ibid.* 3).

To these parents Kuriakose and Mariam, rooted in faith and piety, were born six children, four girls and two boys. Kuriakose (Jr) was the youngest of the six children. We do not get the names of the sisters in any of the available sources. They were all given in marriage to different families. One of them was married to Vallelil family of Chekidikatt (Edathva), another to the Chitallil-Kavalackal of Champakulam. The other two were married to families in Muhamma and Alapuzha —the family names are not known. The elder brother Joseph married Mariam¹⁴ and had a daughter by name Mariam. This Mariam, the niece of Blessed Chavara, was married to Antony of the Thottamattath family at Champakulam. Since her father Joseph died and Kuriakose her uncle refused to leave his priestly vocation, Mariam became the sole heir of the Chavara family. She and her progeny, five sons and a daughter, adopted the family name of Chavara. We do not know the name of the daughter; the sons were Joseph (eldest of the children), Thommi, Jacob (Chacko), Iko and Kuncheria (youngest) (cf. PO 200; Porukara 1905: 30; *Positio*: 23ff.). Joseph entered the CMI congregation and was one of the seven members expelled from the community in 1875 by the then vicar apostolic, Archbishop Leonard Mellano OCD.¹⁵ Kuncheria served as a diocesan priest (cf. PO 2159, 200; *Positio*: 23, fn. 30). Chacko also probably entered the congregation. *Positio* says that it is probably about him Blessed Chavara makes a reference in his chronicle (cf. '81: 55; '90: 48; *Positio*: 25). However, in the chronicle he says

¹⁴ Cf. Valerian 1939: 27. He also says that Antony's father Puthanpurackal adopted to Thottamattath was the maternal uncle of Malpan Palackal. No source is referred to.

¹⁵ This was consequent to the agitation for native bishops, in which some members of the congregation took part, writing to Rome directly (cf. *Positio*: 25, fn. 29, where the report of A. Ajuti, Apostolic Delegate of India is referred to). Ajuti considered the expulsion of these well-deserved members unjust.

that Deacon Jacob who died on 27 November 1848 was his sister's son.

Deacon Jacob, my sister's son, who had received the Holy Orders at the recommendation of this monastery [Mannanam, died on 17 December (*Vruchikam*) 1848 ('81: 55; '90: 49)¹⁶.

Is it not possible that this Jacob was a son of one of his many sisters? In that case the surmise of *Positio* is wrong.

Regarding the social status of the family the witnesses examined in the informative process of canonization were unanimous in affirming that the Chavaras were among the respectable and moderately rich families of the locality. Chavara's own testimony confirms this. He says:

Yet another favour, Oh Lord, you have granted me

Kings and princes there are,

And also men rich, similar to kings.

Had I been born one similar to them, what would I have been!

You, Oh Lord, did not create me the richest, or the lowest;

Thus, I live safe today

(*Ātmāmutāpam* II: 89-96, CWC II 1981 and 1989: 8)

Birth and Childhood

It is to the above-described middle-class, pious and devout Christian family of Kuriakose and Mariam that little Kuriakose was born as their sixth and youngest child, on 10 February 1805.¹⁷

¹⁶ Reference '81 stands for CWC I, Malayalam published in 1981 and '90 for the English translation (in some cases slightly adapted) published in 1990. This is because very frequently they need be quoted in the book, see Abbreviations and Introduction.

¹⁷ Biographers of Blessed Chavara are not in full agreement regarding the date of his birth. Fr Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara, the first biographer (Porukara 1905: 29) of Chavara says that he was born in 1804. This is an exception. We think this is only a printing mistake. With regard to the month, all biographers are in agreement. With regard to the date, many biographers (Porukara 1905: 29) give the

Chavara is full of praise and gratitude to God Almighty for the gift of his life as he sings:

God almighty, who was in the beginning
You created me, a son of Adam.
O God, wherefore this grace, reveal to me
O Lord eternal, your infinite mercy.

Omnipotent your will, that me a sinner
You moulded truly great in your likeness.
O God, despite my limitless unworthiness
You did show in it, your mercy boundless.

Perfect One, it was your Holy Will
Impeccable, that let me be born on earth
A human being, me, impoverished you raised
To the highest skies, Your Abode.

A worm creeping on the face of the earth
You created me from dust of dust
Granted me a guardian spirit so pure
That I may dwell on earth in grace and ease

(*Ātmāmutāpam* I, 1-4, 9-20; *ibid*: 1).

Baptism and Dedication to Blessed Virgin Mary

The devout parents had the child baptised on the eighth day in their parish church of Chennankari according to the custom prevailing then in the Church. The child was given the name of his father, Kuriakose.¹⁸ The Blessed describes in his *Ātmāmutāpam*, with a heart beaming with joy and gratitude:

O Fount of Mercy, in your crystal streams of grace
Was my soul once cleansed and made spotless fair

date as 8 February. But in the necrology of the members of the congregation written by Fr Leopold Beccaro the date of birth is given as February 10. From the Chronicles of Chavara we understand that this date has been given to Fr Leopold by the Blessed himself (cf. '81: 59; '90: 52). Hence we confirm this date. (See also *Positio*: 26)

¹⁸ This much is known from the biography written by Fr Koyipallil (p. 1, *Positio*: 551). No baptismal register is available. They are said to have perished between 1894 -1900 (cf. *Positio*: 26 & 49).

Beauteous, bright, bedecked in gems of virtue
Through my baptism, a boon, a day of days!

What shall I render you, my Lord, my God,
For all your wondrous gifts of mercy of love
For cleansing my soul, so holy, spotless and fair
At the very start of my journey of life?
Through baptism's grace, you made me your cherished son.

(*Ātmānutāpam* 1, 33-41, *ibid*: 2)

In due time Kuriakose received the Sacrament of Confirmation as was customary in the Church at that time.

One of the childhood events that Chavara recollects vivaciously is the dedication his loving and pious mother made to the Blessed Virgin Mary venerated in the shrine of Vechoor¹⁹, near Vaikom. On one September eighth, feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, the mother took the child, still feeding from the breast, to the shrine and offered him as the slave of the Blessed Mother. He writes:

The Lord of mercy in His great compassion
To His blessed mother did enslave me
And while on nectar mother on earth fed me
Laid me safely at the feet of Mary.

"Accept him as your humble slave
To your maternal love, I entrust him
My impure womb's tender fruit".

So saying, me her infant child
At Mary's feet, she humbly laid
The priest in the church into my mother's hand.
Gave water and flower in the name of the Blessed Mother
Handing me o'er to my mother, the august priest
Declared in deliberate tone thus to her,
"Tend him with care; know you that he's no more yours
But Our Lady's servant in truth".

¹⁹ We have not found in any source mention of Vechoor. It seems that the place name is known only from later biographers, e. g. Valerian 1939: 10. Probably this came from tradition.

My mother I've heard, oft repeat the tale
To me, a tiny tot, when reason dawned

(*Ātmānutāpam*: II, 1-18; *ibid.*: 6)²⁰

This dedication and its renewal every year till the mother's death had great influence on the spiritual formation of the Blessed, as he himself records:

On the day of grace, September eight
Holding her hand, to Mary's altar I'd go

Pay my ransom, never once failed unto her death;
She performed the pious deed in devotion true
And warned me oft, "She your mistress, you her serf
Beware my son, preserve this in your mind!"

(*Ātmānutāpam* II: 19-24, *ibid.*)

Bringing up the Child

The dedication and the annual renewal of it are examples how Kuriakose's mother wanted the child to grow up in faith and good behaviour. Childhood is the most important time for laying the foundation of an individual's personality. The family, above anything else, is where this takes place very effectively. As mentioned above child Kuriakose was particularly fortunate to have a very pious and devout Catholic family, a father well grounded and firm in faith and devotion, and a mother exceptionally pious. He is full of gratitude to God Almighty for the gift of a loving and caring mother to protect him. He sings in joy and gratitude:

A mother to feed me while yet a feeble babe *
To shield me from pain and sorrow and tend me soft...(see p. 49 above)

When the boy was able to grasp things the mother taught him
to lisp holy names and to pray:

And when reason grew strong, my little mind
Patiently, informed, to lisp holy names ...(see p. 5f. above)
As the boy grew in age she taught him the elements of the
holy faith:

Of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

²⁰ The Malayalam (1981) and English (1989) more or less coincide in page numbers.

The Son Incarnate in Mary's purest womb,
(A myst'ry to human minds inconceivable)
Took birth as man, this petty earth to bless!

Bore pain and agony untold, in Pilate's days
And died and thence rose from dismal death
This tale, she taught me piece by piece

(*Ātmāvatāraṁ* 1: 71- 77; *ibid.*: 3).

After this comes the brief description of how gently she disciplined the boy:

When she was not pleased with me,
She would correct me by her eyes
But that fiery stare I dreaded so to see
I feared that loveless gaze!

Never once did she use the rod to chastise
Nor with a harsh touch did she smite me
Her eyes, they wielded the mighty power to hit me
Or needs be, to fondle me, in approval

(*ibid.*: 78- 84; *ibid.*: 3).

Here we have a perfect model of child-mother relation, which had tremendous power in disciplining and integrated upbringing of child Kuriakose. Here we have a mother with a balanced deportment: appreciating whenever the child behaved well and disproving when he misbehaved—all with the "mighty power" her eyes wielded.

School Education

The mother provided the boy with a correct perspective on life and faith. But according to Chavara this good upbringing was somewhat challenged during his education under a master, who was a Hindu and with companions mostly of other faiths. There were no public schools at that time in Kerala as we have them today. The first government school (elementary) was started in the Thiruvithamcore (Travancore) State in 1817. Before that there were certain village schools called *kalaris*, conducted by teachers, mostly Hindus, who were called *āsāns*. Every village had such institutes. The course in such *kalaris* lasted for five years. But most of the children would discontinue after one year or two. In these institutes the *āsān* used to teach the Malayalam alphabet, to read and write and some elementary lessons in arithmetic. Capable

children were also taught Tamil and Sanskrit. The *āsān* used to receive some remuneration for the service from the families concerned.

From what the Blessed himself writes in his poetical work mentioned above, and from what the biographers say, we conclude that Chavara studied in such a *kalari* for five years, mastering the mother tongue Malayalam and Tamil and also some Sanskrit. He writes:

While being nurtured in body and mind
Was I beloved too of God, my Father.
Fast sped five years of my life;
And I was made to learn of a pagan [Hindu] *guru*.

He sat by my side and with my finger bade me
Write on grains of rice spread afloor
Made me repeat every object by name
And I with humble accord obeyed him

(ibid.: 87-92; ibid.: 3f.).

It is a pessimistic view we get from Chavara about his school days. This pessimism arose probably from the negative, apologetic theology of the missionaries who definitely influenced his religious outlook. This outlook must have coloured his description of the school days. Perhaps it is with some mental agony he recollects the transition from his family training — “nurtured in body and mind, was I beloved too of God, my Father”—to the schooling under a *guru* (master) who was not a Christian. It is a very dark picture he paints of the five years he was in the *kalari*:

All my colleagues save a few of them
Held not the Christian faith and I
Marking their deeds and my master's lofty words
Fell to observing rituals like ablution in tanks
And what not? A miserable fool! How oft have I
Indulged in deeds of pagan blindness!

Alas, my Lord! God of love and goodness,
Joy and peace, since from me have fled
My heart sore-pressed with sorrow and pain; I felt
I was no more the privileged child of God!

Mingling free with those my dizzy friends
 Stilled became my gratitude to God;
 Steeped in flaws; amid such godless chums
 Who could reap but dust, the dingiest clod?

Temptations abounded where'er I cast my looks.
 The scenes around me beckoned me to sin
 Indecent pranks, immodest words and deeds
 Nude forms athwart the stage of life
 Woe to me I beheld but filth around!
 Rites and rituals fit for powers of hell

(*ibid.*: 93-112; *ibid.*: 4).

After this Chavara goes on to describe with a sense of relief his call to priestly life:

Ten long years passed (riotously) by
 And on the day of days, He called me back

(*ibid.*: 113-14; *ibid.*).

The contrast is evident: the first few years at home under the loving tutorship of his mother were very blissful, while the five years in the *kalari* were difficult ones, exposed as he was to temptations and occasions for sin, relief from which came with his call to priesthood. We know the lapses he enumerates are very minor ones and yet he is full of compunction for them. He himself has testified that he had not lost the grace he received in baptism (see chapter 10). Hence we can guess how light his faults were. A negative theology and an extraordinary abhorration of sin made Chavara paint his school days so dark.

CHAPTER TWO

The Divine Call

We concluded the first chapter alluding to Chavara's sense of relief at the end of his five years of schooling in a *kalari*. At that time he was completing the tenth year of his life or turning on to the eleventh.¹ It was then that he heard the divine call. About this he joyfully sings:

When I passed ten years of age²
O God, in your great mercy, you called me.
Of this I am fully convinced
Had you not called me
By no means would I have treaded this path
Because there was no priest
Among kinsfolk to recommend me³ to this life
(*Ātmānutāpam*, I: 113- 18; 1981: 5; 1989: 4).

The Blessed does not tell us how that call came. In his life of Fr Palackal he says that he began to have a desire for priestly life from his eleventh year on but he entered the seminary only in 1818, i.e. when he was thirteen years old (cf. '81: 62f.; '90: 54f.).

In these descriptions one may notice some apparent discrepancies, which need to be solved. Besides, there is a tradition, not recorded by Chavara anywhere,⁴ that Palackal casually met the boy at home when he was eleven years old and invited him to join the seminary at Pallipuram. Hence detailed discussion of the time and manner of Chavara's calling is needed. We will first do that in this chapter, and then speak about Fr Palackal and the Pallipuram seminary. The seminary life of

¹ ദശവത്സരം ചെന്നപ്പാൾ (*dasavalsaram chennapol*) may mean: "When I crossed my 10th year of age" (cf. *Ātmānutāpam* quoted below, and *Positio*: 33, fn. 50).

² Cf. fn. above

³ This seems to be the meaning of: എന്നന്നെരമൊരുത്തൻ യദൃച്ഛയാ യൊന്നുരേ, തപാതാർശ്ശിരതറ്റുവാൻ.

⁴ Unless we understand in that sense the passage: "For, from my childhood on he [Malpan Palackal] looked after the needs of my body and soul and taught me and helped me to grow" ('81: 59; '90: 52).

Blessed Chavara will follow and finally we will deal with his promotion to sacred orders.

Vocation to Priestly Life

As pointed out above Chavara speaks of his vocation only in the life of Palackal and in *Ātmānutāpam*. His meeting at home with Palackal is recorded only by two early biographers. We will go through some of the documents, which speak of his vocation in passim and arrive at some conclusions. Fr Leopold Beccaro in his brief biography⁵ of the Blessed says:

From early childhood he [Kuriakose Chavara] was the darling of (dear to) all on account of his unusual piety and other fine traits of character. It so happened that one day, when the boy was eleven years old, Fr Thomas Palackal of South Pallipuram, who for his erudition and virtuous life was widely respected, happened to meet the boy. Pleasantly impressed by the boy's character and piety, Palackal took⁶ the boy with him to the seminary at Pallipuram (Beccaro 1871: 1; 2003: 5; *Positio*: 490).

This information Beccaro must have received from Chavara himself. Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara has this about Chavara's vocation:

The boy from his childhood so excelled in humility, pleasing manners, modesty, piety, intelligence, eloquence that he was loved by God and men. He was sent to Pallipuram to study under Fr Thomas Palackal (Porukara 1905: 29).

The short biography written by Fr Philip Koyipallil TOCD (CMI) in 1929⁷ is much clearer about Palackal's role in the vocation:

⁵ The original was written in Malayalam by Fr Leopold Beccaro in 1871 immediately after Chavara's death as an introduction to *Ātmānutāpam*. It was first published together with *Ātmānutāpam* in 1871 (cf. *Positio*: 487f.). The biography is edited by L. Vithuvattical, in a booklet published in 2003. We quote this as Beccaro 2003.

⁶ As we will see the meeting must have been when Kuriakose was eleven years old, but his entry into the seminary was two years later.

⁷ Fr Philip born at Champakulam in 1856 joined the congregation at Koonammavu before 1871 and was living there in 1871. Ordained



From childhood on his [Kuriakose's] ~~piety~~ ^{mother} particular that the boy grew up dear to God. ~~Brought up~~ in the fear of God, he was loved by all, on account of his piety, gentleness, modesty and courteous behaviour. At that time (one day) Malpan Palackal Thomas of South Pallipuram Parish happened to visit the Chavara family. Noticing the good manners, fine way of conversation (eloquence), intelligence and natural virtues of boy Kuriakose, who was running eleven years of age, the malpan discerned his brilliant qualities, as the proverb says, "The tree can be known from its seed". Delighted he called the boy's father aside and asked him to send the boy with him in order to train him for priestly life. Although at first the father and others hesitated somewhat, by the intervention of Fr Geevarghese Thoppil ⁸, the (maternal) uncle of the boy, the parents agreed to the proposal of Palackal. Thus in 1816⁹, running the eleventh year, Kuriakose was brought to the Pallipuram Seminary and was entrusted to the care of Malpan Thomas (Koyipallil 1929: 2f.; *Positio*: 551).

Now we may analyse the two texts of Chavara himself regarding his vocation. First we will take up the passage from the chronicle (life of Palackal) and then the passage in *Ātmānutāpam*. The key passage in the chronicle is '81: 62. After describing the

priest in 1881, died in 1939 at Pulincunnu. He was superior of Panapally for many years (cf. *Carmalayile Saugantikangal*, 'The Fragrants of Carmel', CMI Obituary 1831-2005, Ernakulam: Prior General's House, 2005, p. 55). In the manuscript there is no mention of the sources used. It was his familiarity with Chavara's place of birth and contemporary history, which seems to be the main source of information (cf. *Positio*: 550f.). There are a few mistakes and confusion of events and dates in the book, which we will mention when occasion arises.

⁸ This is confusion. Chavara clearly states that it was the father (a layman) of Fr Geevarghese Thoppil, who intervened in the matter. This mistake is perpetuated in many later biographies and even *Positio* does not correct this mistake (see below).

⁹ The author ignores the two years in between Palackal's visit to Chavara family (Chavara's training under his parish priest) and the actual starting of his seminary training in 1818.

beginning of Palackal's teaching at Pallipuram in 1818 (cf. '81: 61; '90: 58) he speaks about his own entering the seminary:

In that same year¹⁰, though I had expressed my desire to study [for priesthood] when I was eleven years old, my father and mother did not endorse my desire. However they were persuaded to agree to my call by my maternal uncle, the father of Fr Geevarghese Thoppil¹¹ and my paternal uncle. The son of his [Palackal's] maternal aunt about whom reference was made earlier ['81: 60] also recommended my case. So I was admitted and I also joined [the seminary] ('81: 62).

This passage needs a few clarifications. 'The same year' must have reference to 1818 when Palackal started teaching at Pallipuram Seminary and to the last sentence: "So I was admitted and I also joined". He joined the other students he mentioned earlier (81: 61f.). About the beginning of the seminary we will have a discussion later on in this chapter. It is strange that there is no mention of Palackal's call, though it is most probable that Fr Leopold and Fr Koyipallil received this information from Chavara himself, directly or indirectly. The meaning of the text is: when I was eleven years old I was called by God and I began to long for priestly vocation. At last the parents gave their permission. There is no mention of the interim period from the eleventh to the thirteenth year of age.

Now we will see what *Ātmānutāpam* has to say about all this. The first part of that passage we have seen above. Here the rest of it is quoted:

When this good tiding reached the ears of my mother
Her heart leaped with exultation.

¹⁰ This must have reference to 1818 when only Palackal started teaching (cf. '81: 61)

¹¹ This priest entered the congregation at Mannanam in 1837 and started with Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Chavara a community life at Mannanam. Please note: **the father of Fr Geevarghese Thoppil.**

How good it is to give to God
 One of the two sons.
 Yet pain of parting was there in her heart.
 God in his mercy willed to separate me from her
 In order that I may adhere to him
 Though a sinner, my unworthiness He redeemed
 O wonder of wonders, by your infinite mercy
 You disposed that I stay in the church of St Joseph
 Your foster father, which was my parish.
 The revered priest there
 With gratitude cared for me.
 He was so kind to teach me
 How to participate in the Holy Eucharist and to assist at it.
 He led me along the path of virtue and admonished me to
 avoid sinful ways

(*Ātmānutāpam*: I, 121-140, 1981: 4f.; 1989: 4f.)

From this text it is clear that Kuriakose's pious mother was thrilled when she heard the news of her son's call to priesthood but at the same time she felt the pain of parting. This must be the reason why she also joined her husband at the first instance to stand against the call of the boy. The initial hesitation of the parents was not because they were against God's call, but due to their reluctance to part with the boy at such a tender age. Perhaps they worked out a compromise formula with the help of Chavara's maternal and paternal uncles. As the boy was certain of the call, he was determined to separate himself from the family. But the parents would not like to send him so early to far away Pallipuram. So they arrived at an agreement that he stayed with the priest of their parish, Chennankari, dedicated to St Joseph, for two years or so. After that he might go to Pallipuram. It is with a very grateful heart that Kuriakose recollects the period of his training under their good pastor.

Concluding this section we may observe the following: When Chavara had passed the tenth year of age he received a call from God for priestly life. This might have occurred when Fr Thomas Palackal visited the family and told the father about his intention to take his son Kuriakose to Pallipuram Seminary. Perhaps there is a hint in what Chavara says in the biography of Palackal. He is speaking of his obligation to write the life of Palackal:

So all the more it became my duty, though even otherwise I was obliged to do it. For, from **my childhood onwards** Malpan Palackal took care of me, looked after my bodily and spiritual needs, taught me and helped me in my all-round growth ('81: 59; '90: 53, emphasis ours).

It may not be incorrect if we conclude that Palackal's concern for Chavara began very early in the latter's life ("from my childhood onwards"), already before Kuriakose joined the seminary in 1818.

The mother was happy to hear the news though felt sad when she thought of parting with her beloved son. What exactly the sentiments of the father were is not clear. Both considered eleven years too early for the boy to leave home. Finally they agreed to the compromise formula to let the boy live with their parish priest for a period of about two years. This must have happened in 1816. In 1818 when Kuriakose turned thirteen he joined the seminary of Palackal at South Pallipuram.

Pallipuram Seminary and Malpan Palackal

The old system of priestly training among the St Thomas Christians was what is called malpanate. A candidate aspiring for priestly life had to get the *dēśakuri* (the recommendation of the *yogam* or the parish assembly of the local representatives and the local clergy).¹² Once the candidate was chosen thus he formed part of the local college of clergy (priests, deacons and other clerics), belonging to the local church or parish. The newly joined candidate

¹² Cf. Podipara 1943: 17. The parish assembly that selects the candidates had also certain responsibilities during the period of his training in the seminary, to meet, if necessary, the expenses of his studies. In the case of Chavara these expenses were met by Malpan Palackal. The candidate too had certain rights, e.g.: a share of the *pasāram* (cf. below p. 12), after he had received the sacred orders. Chavara had difficulties in getting his share probably because he was not promoted by the parish *yogam*. The 'Old Songs' (p. 6, *Positio*: 540) says: "(To these) were added the sorrow caused by his parishioners, who refused to pay him *pasāram*".

Fr. Lucas Vithuvattical informs us, without indicating any source, that it was at the intervention of the vicar apostolic that the problem was solved.

received instruction and priestly and spiritual training mostly from an elderly, erudite member of the college. In that sense he was a malpan (teacher or professor or even a doctor of theology) in a restricted sense. Of course the moulding of the clergy by discipline was not maintained at a standard considered necessary today. If such was the general situation, it is evident that specialized educational centres for the training of the clergy existed, perhaps for only a select few. Many sixteenth century records say that the community had many doctors, who interpreted the scriptures and gave lessons on Fathers and theology (cf. Mundadan 1998: 46ff.). The local (parish) level system seems to have slowly vanished from the sixteenth century onwards. But the central type of seminaries (malpanates) conducted by erudite priests continued and increased in number. Priests reputed for their eminent learning and ideal life were formally installed by the bishops as malpans.¹³

A seminary started at Kodungalloor (Cranganore) in the sixteenth century for St Thomas Christians attracted many students. But it did not last long. The seminary, which the Jesuits established at Chennamangalam (Vaipicotta) was much more popular for a long time. But it ceased to exist towards the last decades of the eighteenth century. The Carmelite missionaries working under the Propaganda founded a seminary c. 1762 at Varapuzha, their headquarters. It lasted for many years but with various vicissitudes. It seems that only a handful of St Thomas Christian students attended these formal seminaries, the majority continuing in centres under the malpans. This system continued till 1854, when Vicar Apostolic Bernardine Baccinelli suppressed the malpanates and established four seminaries at Mannanam, Vazhakulam, Pulincunnu and Elthuruth, all attached to monasteries, and later also at Puthenpally. In 1890 the Holy See declared the seminary at Puthenpally 'Central Apostolic Seminary' to serve the whole of Kerala, an inter-ritual institution for that matter. In 1931/33 it was shifted to Aluva (Mangalapuzha) (cf. Mundadan 2007: 39-44).

¹³ Malpan is a Syriac word, which literally means, professor or teacher. In practice it was equivalent to the present Doctor of Divinity (DD) conferred by authorities on deserving priests. At least we have a few examples in the chronicle of Chavara himself: Thachil Abraham Malpan, Thomas Porukara, Kuriakose Elias Chavara (cf. Mundadan 2007: 41ff. for more details).

From this brief account about the mode of priestly training it is clear that at the time when Chavara studied for priesthood the malpanate system was much in vogue. The Pallipuram Seminary was such a malpanate and Fr Thomas Palackal was its *malpan*. Now we will explore how the Pallipuram Seminary (*malpanate*) came into existence and how Palackal became teacher there.

In 1764/65 (Kollam Era [K.E.] 965) there was an epidemic and famine in the Pallipuram region and it spread to other places. Not only that, Tipu Sultan invaded (1789/90) northern and central parts of Kerala and unleashed an offensive against churches and Christians.¹⁴ This made a number of Christians to migrate to the southern parts. Two prominent persons among these migrants were Thachil Mathu Tharakan¹⁵ of Kuthiathodu and his younger brother Abraham Malpan. The malpan had been running a seminary (probably at Kalparambu). So with him came also his students. The Thachil brothers settled at Pallipuram and Abraham Malpan continued his teaching in the new place. At that time Thomas Palackal must have been between ten and sixteen years old¹⁶. He also desired to study for priesthood under Malpan Abraham and was admitted to the seminary, but he had his meal at home with his mother as was the custom at that time. It is not clear whether he stayed at home and attended classes as a day scholar or stayed in the seminary (cf. '81: 60f.; '90: 53f.). From all this we might surmise that most probably Palackal took over the seminary started at Pallipuram from his own malpan Abraham Thachil when the latter retired and went to north (Kalparambu)¹⁷.

¹⁴ Cf. Thayyil 2003: 211-16, where he quotes from contemporary reports and letters of missionaries, the calamities like wars, as also epidemics and the flood during the time of Tipu's invasion.

¹⁵ A prominent St Thomas Christian merchant, who wielded for sometime great influence on the royal court of Thiruvithamcore (Travancore) (cf. Bernard 1992: 694-701).

¹⁶ According to the bio-data of members composed probably by Leopold Beccaro, Palackal was born in 1784. Malpan Abraham might have got himself established at Pallipuram between 1790 and 1800.

¹⁷ Chavara refers to two occasions on which he met Malpan Abraham in the company of Palackal: first at Kalparambu where Palackal went with three of his disciples just to pay his respect to the malpan; for a

Training in the Seminary

In 1818 Palackal started teaching at the seminary with about six students: Chandy Mangalath, the four who came from Vadayar and young Kuriakose Chavara (cf. *ibid.*: 61; 54). Chavara gives us some idea about the training the students received there. Malpan Palackal was careful to see that the seminarians grew up in proper discipline, devotion to serious study and in an atmosphere of prayer and deep spirituality. The Malpan himself was a model in all respects (cf. ch. 3).

To the northern side on the upper floor of the church there was a long veranda. The eastern end of this veranda was a room where Palackal lived. There was also a small room at the western end. The central part of the veranda served as the classroom for the students with a long table and benches on both sides. Throughout the day the seminarians were sitting on these benches, studying, reading and writing. They moved from there only for the meals and for answering the calls of nature. The malpan himself used to sit with them throughout the day on a chair at the eastern end of the table (cf. '81: 65; '90: 57). Wearing of cassocks by clerics like the Latin style was introduced during these years at the initiative of Palackal (cf. '81: 64; '90: 56f.). Seminarians at Pallipuram were asked to wear their cassocks throughout the day.

As the number of students increased, the malpan wrote out rules for daily observance in the seminary, consisting of twelve sections. They were framed and put up in the classroom. The timetable followed in the seminary was as follows: after midday meals the malpan used to retire for a short nap. At this time the

second time at Varapuzha where Palackal took some of his students to receive holy orders and where Malpan Abraham also came to get his nephew Abraham ordained. Chavara comments: "Fr Palackal paid obeisance to his malpan with more reverence and submission than we [Chavara and other students] showed to him [Palackal]. Malpan Abraham had the title, 'The Malpan of Malabar', 'Malpan de Kolla Hendo' ('Doctor of the Whole India') and wore a ring and had obtained a salary from Portugal. [He was under the Padroado jurisdiction of Cranganore/Kodungalloor]. Over his cassock he wore a cope. His Grace [the vicar apostolic] received him with great respect. After that he came down and all the time there the two younger Malpans [Palackal and Cherian Mathu Malpan] never sat down" ('81: 68-70, 8; '90: 60f., 6).

seminarians used to transcribe Malayalam /Syriac. At 5 pm the students were allowed to walk around for some time in the compound. At 6 pm, all were to assemble in the church to pray the Litany of All Saints, then it was meditation time followed by spiritual reading, and then the Rosary of Blessed Virgin Mary. For all these the malpan too was present. After these spiritual exercises all went for supper. Then they assembled in the classroom and spent some time for spiritual reading and for a conference on the sacraments and conversation on spiritual topics (cf. '81: 65; '90: 57).

This rather exacting discipline went on for some time. In the mean while, two deacons and a youngster died. This made some people to point an accusing finger at Malpan Palackal. They felt that the pattern of life followed at the Pallipuram seminary was too rigid and that it was the cause of the deaths—sitting with the malpan for several hours at a stretch without moving about and in tight cassocks. They pointed out that other malpans, e.g. of Vadayar and Kumarakam, allowed their students to go about without cassocks and study either walking outside or inside the church, or squatting on the floor. This criticism made Palackal to mitigate the discipline. The seminarians were permitted to study walking on the ground floor. They needed to wear cassocks only in the church and for public functions, and on Sundays and feast days (cf. *ibid.*: 66; 58).

There were no good books, texts or studies, for the use of the seminary. Even copies of all the books of the Bible were not easily available, as they were only in manuscripts. Fr Palackal going round the old churches began collecting the available manuscripts and got them transcribed by Chavara and a few other students. So also he used to procure, without caring the effort and expenses involved, Tamil spiritual books and also a few books in Malayalam, which existed at that time¹⁸. About the reading habit of the malpan, Chavara says:

¹⁸ Chavara gives the names of most of these books: *Punya Jeevitam* ('Saintly Life'), *Valia Ottinte Artham* ('The Meaning of the Great Pledge'), etc. (in Malayalam); *Jhānamuttu*, *Jhānasanjeevi*, *Ezhāzhcha Putuma*, *Nakshatramāla*, *Pūṛṇimam*, and *Pachimam*, 'Eight Days Retreat by Ignatius', *Jhānamarthuthan*, etc. (in Tamil) (cf. '81: 72f.; '90: 63f.). See ch. 3: 3ff. for some other details of the seminary training of Palackal.

He learned Tamil and used to read books in that language. He would have always a book in his hand and never ceased reading... From the time he was living as secretary [to the vicar apostolic] he was fully engaged in reading and writing and would not waste any moment. Hence when he started teaching he had already a collection of books ('81: 72, 73; '90: 64).

It is this taste for reading good books, which the malpan wanted to inculcate in his disciples. Perhaps it is the reading habit scholastic Kuriakose picked up in the seminary, which made him a learned person and enabled him to make good literary contributions, as we shall see below. Kuriakose Porukara says: "Besides he was blessed with a good handwriting and mastery of vocabulary" (*Positio*: 478)¹⁹

Palackal was convinced that the local languages and Syriac were not sufficient to acquire knowledge and virtue. For this study of Latin was essential, he thought. So he sent a few seminarians, found more intelligent and good in studies, to Varapuzha to learn the Latin language. This he did after having had due negotiations with the authorities at Varapuzha. One of the three students thus sent was Kuriakose Chavara (and the other two were Mathai Kadavil and Chandy Mangalath). Fr Palackal himself took them to Varapuzha and made all arrangements with Fr Nicholas, a friend of his, for their stay, food, study, etc. Then he left for Pallipuram. The three students of Palackal were given a separate room for staying and were to be under the care of Fr Nicolaus. For classes they had to go to the seminary where at that time only Latin Rite students were staying. When they went to the seminary the next day, the Latin students in the seminary refused to admit the three and to sit with them. This was an affront to the students and their malpan. They had to leave Varapuzha after a few days without achieving the purpose they came for. Malpan Palackal was still intent on giving at least Kuriakose another chance for learning Latin. He was sent to Fr Maine (Mevin?), the parish priest of Thanky. There he picked up some Latin (not to the full satisfaction of himself and of the malpan) and some Portuguese (cf. '81: 74f.; '90: 65; Porukara 1905: 30; Koyipallil: 3; cf. *Positio*: 551).

¹⁹ This sentence is not found in the 1905 edition of the life of Palackal, but *Positio* quotes it from the original.

Chavara was thus well placed on the road to priesthood. He was an ideal seminarian both in learning and virtues. There are many testimonies about this. Fr Leopold's statement is very important. He says:

As his fellow seminarians, who are still alive, attest, the young Kuriakose was deeply interested in his studies, in observing the rules [of the seminary], and in cultivating the 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 (Beccaro 2003: 5).

Kuriakose Porukara wrote:

As his companions in the seminary themselves testify they had great respect, regard and love for Kuriakose, because he was a model of devotion to God, gentleness, humility, obedience, brotherly love. In the new seminary strict discipline was maintained through chapter of faults and due punishment. But though he lived there for a long time with many companions he was never rebuked for any fault. Moreover, on account of his fine character, diligence and intelligence, he mastered Syriac and other languages. Because of all this the malpan was well pleased with this disciple and sent him to other places in order to teach him Latin and Portuguese (Porukara 1905: 3).

Porukara also testifies that Kuriakose chose his malpan himself as his confessor, which was a quite unusual gesture (cf. *Positio*: 478)²⁰.

Tonsure

Scholastic Kuriakose was given tonsure in 1818, in the very year, in which he entered the seminary. Fr Leopold writes:

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

²⁰ The 1905 edition does not have the text. But *Positio* quotes it from the original.

was privileged to receive the Sacred Tonsure at the age of 13 from His Excellency Bishop Peter Alacantra²¹, the then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly (Beccaro 2003: 5f.).

Kuriakose Porukara confirms it:

When he was thirteen years of age Kuriakose received tonsure (*āstapād pattam*) from the hands of the then Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha (Verapoly), Most Rev. Peter Alcantra. Later he also received the minor orders... (Porukara 1905: 30).

Together with the tonsure Chavara was vested with the clerical cassock. There was also the custom in the Church then of the cleric being given a solemn reception (*veedu kayattam* or 'entrance to the house') in the parish. But, according to many of the witnesses examined in the informative process, and the *Purāthana Pāttukal* ('Old Songs') the Chennankari parish refused this privilege to Chavara. The probable reason is that Chavara was directly recruited to the priestly life, without the formal approval (*desakuri*) of the parish *yogam*. This is the view of some of the witnesses. Another view is related to group politics that was prevailing in the Chennankari parish, which is said to have ensued after the separation of Chennankari from Kallurkad parish: the group of some important families like Padupurackal, Cherukattussery and so on, of Chennankari who strongly supported the division, and the other, the people of Kainakari, who opposed the division. In 1818 a Padupurackal member was the parish priest, who was not willing to give Chavara (a Kainakari person, though had nothing to do with the group politics) the reception (cf. *Positio*: 57; *Purāthana Pāttukal*: 3f.; Koyipallil: 6f.)²². On this

²¹ Peter of Alacantra (Ramazzini) of St Antony OCD was born 1760 in Italy and made his profession in 1786. After ordination he came to Bombay (Mumbai) as a missionary in 1786. Ordained bishop he was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Bombay in 1796. In 1818 he was deputed to take care of the Vicariate of Malabar/Verapoly left vacant by the resignation of Bishop Raymund Boviglia, and returned to Bombay in 1821, in which year Bishop Prendergast took over Verapoly. He died in 1840 (cf. Ambrosius 1939: 298-304, 306; *Positio*: 55, fn. 16).

²² Both the *Purāthana Pāttukal* and Fr Koyipallil confuses this occasion with the priestly ordination of the Blessed in 1829. Chavara clearly

occasion, after the formal reception, the cleric acquired the title for a share of *passāram* (*padavāram* or portion of the tenth part of certain assets of families accruing to the parish church)²³. This title also seems to have been denied to Chavara. As Chavara was refused reception at Chennankari, he proceeded to the nearby Alappuzha (Alleppey)²⁴ parish where he was received with great solemnity and rejoicing.²⁵

The Death of Kuriakose's Parents and Only Brother

It is after this that tragedy gripped the Chavara family. An epidemic broke out in the region at this time. Both his parents and his only brother were victims of the same. Only Kuriakose's sister-in-law and her only daughter survived. In this critical situation his uncles and relatives advised him to leave the seminary and take care of the family. But the young cleric, firmly convinced of his divine call, refused to leave the seminary. He made arrangements with his elder sister married at Edathva and her husband to settle at Chavara and take care of the orphaned family (cf. *Positio*: 57). About this Kuriakose Porukara says:

While studying in the seminary his father and mother and the only brother died. His sister-in-law and her only

says that he celebrated his first solemn mass on 30 November 1829 at Chennankari, as we will see later on. With both the views there are some unsolved problems. On the one hand it is difficult to believe that he did not receive the *deśakuri*. The second opinion may be more reliable. In this case the problem is whether the priest who cared for Chavara for two years cannot be the same who refused to admit him into the church for the post-tonsure function, unless it can be proved that there was change of parish priest within a year. Koyipallil (p. 76, *Positio*: 552) says that in the evening Chavara went to Chennankari parish and spent the night with the parish priest and the next day morning celebrated mass. Obviously this is the result of confusing events connected with the priestly ordination and the reception after tonsure.

²³ Cf. *Positio*: 56, fn. 19.; cf. also Podipara 1943:37; 1970:89.

²⁴ Why was Alapuzha chosen? Was it because one of his sisters was married to a family there?

²⁵ *Positio* (p. 57) refers to some witnesses in the informative process (PO, testis 33 and testis 4).

daughter survived in the family. He accepted this sad situation from the hands of God and offered himself, as he had learned from his parents, as the slave of the Mother of God and became more devoted to that Mother (Porukara 1905: 31)²⁶.

Sacred Orders

In due course Kuriakose received the minor orders from Bishop Peter Alcantra, and in 1827 the subdiaconate and the following year the diaconate. There is no reference to the dates, on which he received the minor orders and diaconate, nor does it mention the names of the ordinary who conferred them. Fr Koyipallil (pp. 3-6, *Positio*: 551f.) says that he received the minor orders from Bishop Alcantra, subdiaconate and diaconate from Bishop Prendergast in 1827 and in 1828 respectively. However, if he received the diaconate in 1828, it is not possible that it was from Prendergast as the latter was removed from office on 26 May 1827 and on 8 December of the same year Bishop Maurilius Stabilini took charge as the interim Vicar Apostolic of Malabar (Verapoly) (cf. Ambrosius 1939: 298-304; *Positio*: 55, fn. 17). So it was probably Stabilini who conferred on Kuriakose the diaconate in 1828. After he had received the diaconate, whenever the malpan went out, Deacon Kuriakose was given charge of the seminary (cf. Koyipallil: 6, *Positio*: 55).

Ordination to Priesthood

Chavara speaks about his ordination to priesthood rather casually:

The writer of this, Chavara Kuriakose, had decided from his younger days on to be of one mind with the malpan. In my first mass said together with the bishop after my ordination at Arthungal, I, as counselled by those two Fathers [Palackal and Porukara], made the intention for the realization of the monastery project already begun at Mannanam. Then in '29

²⁶ The other details are found only in the witnesses in the informative process. But the witnesses are not agreed as to which of the four sisters was persuaded to stay at Chavara (cf. *Positio*: 57f.). It is Fr Valerian (p. 27) who says that it was his elder sister married to a family at Edathva, but no reference is given by the author.

[1829]²⁷ on the first Sunday of *Sūhāra* [period of Annunciation=Advent] I celebrated the solemn mass at my parish, Chennankari ('81: 26; '90: 22).

Earlier Chavara described how he happened to be ordained at Arthungal. Malpan Palackal had scheduled ordination of the seminarians for 13 September (1829), the day previous to the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Vicar Apostolic Stabilini had agreed to the proposal. So Kuriakose and a few other seminarians²⁸ reached Varapuzha in the company of Malpan Thomas on 10 September. There they were told that, as the vicar apostolic had decided to return to Rome, the ordination on the agreed date was cancelled. They verified the truth of this information from the secretary, Fr Thomas Porukara, who confirmed it. Then they straightaway went to the prelate. He told them that he was mentally upset and feeling ill that he was not even able to celebrate Mass and that he had decided to leave Kerala (cf. '81: 5f.; '90: 4). Chavara goes on to describe how Palackal and a few other malpans and priests succeeded in persuading Stabilini to postpone his journey. He concludes this description with the words, "So we the deacons returned to our seminary", understood without receiving the order of priesthood. Then the writer informs us how it happened that Stabilini left Varapuzha and took up residence at St Andrew's Parish, Arthunkal²⁹. Immediately nothing is mentioned about ordination, but it is in the story of the foundation at Mannanam that it is told. It is in the next section of the Chronicle,

²⁷ In the published text (1981) the year is given as '30 (1830), but in the original it is '29 (1829), cf. *Positio*: 401, fn. 40. This date (November 1829) is confirmed by other sources, e. g. Porukara 1905: 30; Beccaro 2003: 6.

²⁸ According to Kaniyanthara (p. 3) 30 seminarians

²⁹ Cf. '81: 7. The reason for the bishop's decision is the objection raised by the Latin Christians called the 'Seven Hundred' (and also by the 'Thopases' or Eurasians) against the ordination of the Latin group of Christians called the 'Five Hundred' (cf. also '81: 4f.). The bishop moved to Arthunkal a few days after 10 September 1829. The year (1828) given by Br Kaniyanthara seems to be wrong. Frs Palackal, Porukara, Pascal and others accompanied the bishop when he went to Arthunkal.

as said above, that Chavara casually speaks of his ordination at Arthunkal and first solemn liturgy at Chennankari.

After the solemn Mass at his parish of Chennankari on 30 November 1829, he returned to Pallipuram to get directives from his malpan. Kuriakose Porukara (1905: 30) says:

Even after the ordination he lived according the direction of Malpan Thomas of Pallipuram. He preached in many churches, a rare thing in those days. He carried out many other pastoral activities with great diligence. He preached a retreat at Pulincunnu at the instance of the parishioners there. Even now many who took part in that retreat recollects how great emotion and what good fruit it produced.

After a short period of these pastoral activities, as desired by Malpan Palackal and Fr Thomas Porukara, he dedicated himself fully for the establishment of the monastery at Mannanam. When it was established he lived there renouncing everything in the world and spent days in that house of vision (*darśanaveedu*) in the service of God (cf. Porukara 1905: 30f.). Porukara concludes this section with the description of the life of "prayer and asceticism, preaching, begging", in which the first members were engaged. Thus Chavara started his priestly life with full commitment as a religious.

CHAPTER THREE

Foundation of the CMI Congregation

In this chapter our main concern is the role of Blessed Chavara in the foundation of the CMI Congregation: whether we can consider him one of the three founders. Before coming to that question the following points are briefly discussed: 1. Christian religious life in India before the CMI Congregation was founded; 2. the saintly trio Frs Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara and Blessed Kuriakose Chavara and their involvement in the foundation of the CMI; 3. the foundation that was begun at Mannanam in 1831. After this discussion we will take up the special role of Blessed Chavara.

Life of Religious Consecration in India

Christians living as they were in a country, which had long been venerating the *rishis* and which had cherished for a time Buddhist monasticism, might naturally have been attracted to monastic life. However, it is quite likely that organized religious life started among them only after the fourth or fifth century when the Indian Christians came into contact with the Church of Persia. The Persian or the East-Syrian Church witnessed a great era of missionary expansion from the fifth to the eighth century. The pioneers of this missionary movement were monks (cf. Mundadan 1967: 22, 24). It was quite natural to think that monastic influence must have made itself felt among the Indian Christians during these centuries. Tradition has it that there was a monastery attached to the tomb of St Thomas the Apostle at Mylapore. Some travellers and writers of the sixth and following centuries refer to this monastery (cf. Mundadan 1997: 157f.; 2001: 56, 98).

Father Joseph, a priest leader of St Thomas Christians and known in history as 'Joseph the Indian', who travelled to Europe in the company of Pedro Alvares Cabral in 1501 told his European interviewers that among the St Thomas Christians there were monks in black habit who led an ascetic life of great poverty and chastity. Similarly there were nuns too. Archdeacon George of Christ wrote in 1624 that there had been among them people who loved the contemplative life retiring to solitude even in mountains

and deserts; later, however, the patriarchs had erected religious houses for them (cf. *ibid.*: 159f.). Portuguese writers like Damiaõ de Goes, Ros, Gouvea and others came to know of religious life among the St Thomas Christians (cf. Mundadan: 1997: 157; 2001: 187f.). In 1624 Archdeacon George took the initiative to revive the monastic tradition. Rome gave the approval for the starting of a monastery. Archbishop Stephen de Britto of Kodungalloor (Cranganore) (1624-41) founded the monastery at Edappally on 26 February 1625 with the name 'Religious Congregation of St Thomas'. But it did not last long (cf. Mundadan 1997: 158-61).

The Christians of India in the course of history came into contact with a number of European religious such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, Carmelites and others. It is very difficult to assess the extent of the impact these religious orders had on the religious and ascetical life of the Indian Christians. They had kept cordial relations with the Franciscans and Dominicans. With the Jesuits and the Carmelites they had often strained relations (cf. Mundadan 2003: 39ff.). Despite the fact that the Christians of India had nurtured extensive relationship with the great European religious orders, when Frs Palackal, Porukara and Chavara started, at Mannanam in 1831, a religious community they had scarcely any specific religious tradition to rely on. The only capital was their own spiritual awareness and their sensitivity to the real needs of the Church. However, it cannot be denied that some kind of indirect inspiration was drawn from the western religious orders. There is clear allusion, in the writings of Chavara, to the Dominican way of life, which inspired the founding fathers.

A Saintly Trio and a Fresh Attempt

The aspiration for religious life in the St Thomas Christian community was dormant for some time. But it was reawakened in the early decades of the nineteenth century. A saintly trio, Frs Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Chavara were called by God to found a religious community of their choice, but at the same time were guided by the ecclesiastical authorities. This was the beginning of the revival of religious life in Kerala. In 1866 a religious house for women was established at Koonammavu. Ever since there was a revolution in the emergence of newer and newer religious communities.

Fr Thomas Palackal

Fr Thomas Palackal was the malpan (rector) of Pallipuram Seminary when he began to work for the founding of a new religious congregation. The Palackals were an ancient family of South Pallipuram. It seems that the family had a priestly tradition for many generations. We know by name Fr Geevarghese, the grand uncle and Fr Mathew, the uncle respectively of Malpan Thomas and many others after him. His mother came from the Puthenpurackal family of Kalloorkad (Champakulam), on whose side also there were many priests. His ancestors had been rich and of repute. But, in the year 1780 an epidemic of small pox and famine raged in this parish and adjoining areas. Several capable leaders of his family died, and because of this and other untoward incidents, the family declined in wealth. Thomas's father also died in the epidemic. He had one elder brother and two sisters. As Blessed Chavara testifies, the mother, who was one of the most pious women of the time, suffered a lot to bring them up. Days before the malpan said his first Mass, his mother had died. By this time one of his sisters, leaving her ill-natured husband, had returned home. It was she who prepared the frugal meals for the malpan.

Malpan Thomas, born around 1780, was aspiring from his early childhood to dedicate himself to priestly life. He was fortunate to study under the famous malpan, Abraham Thachil of Kuthiathodu. Thomas was ordained priest in 1807 (see chapter 2:5f. for details). Soon Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly (Malabar)¹ Raymond Roviglia, titular bishop of Suria or Sura, called him to serve as his secretary at Varapuzha. He stayed there as secretary from 1808 to 1816 and ever since 1816 was consulter to the vicars apostolic. In both these capacities he had gained the esteem and love of his superiors and associates alike; as malpan of the seminary at South Pallipuram, the respect and affection of his disciples as well. He had an intimate friend in the person of Fr Thomas Porukara, who was also a deeply spiritual man, a good preacher and reformer of life in the parishes. It was these two

¹ The vicariate established in late 1650s was known as Vicariate Apostolic of Malabar, later the name Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly (Varapuzha) became more popular, the reason being that the vicars apostolic selected Varapuzha as their residence (cf. Podipara 1370: 186, 187).

eminent St Thomas Christian priests who were first to be moved by the Holy Spirit with the idea of starting a religious community in Kerala in the nineteenth century. When and how this idea got hold of them, we are not quite sure. It seems that Fr Porukara had expressed his desire for a retired eremitic life very early (cf. Kaniyanthara: 1). On the other hand, Fr Palackal led, even from his seminary days, a very ascetical life dedicated to penance, prayer and study. Fr Kuriakose Chavara, his beloved disciple says:

The malpan from the day of his first Mass (it seems), and even when he went [to Pallipuram] for study, used to have full meal only at noon. In the morning he took nothing and his supper was a little *kaññi* [rice gruel]. He followed this schedule of food also when he lived at Varapuzha as secretary to the bishop ('81: 67; '90: 59).

In the Pallipuram Seminary, not only did he teach the students but lived a community life with them, joining them in their spiritual exercises, and sitting with them for study. He used to spend long hours in private prayer and study, sitting up late into the night. Chavara writes:

Once we started sitting here and studying, after *kaññi* [breakfast], we broke off only for meals or to answer nature's calls. This went on till 5 pm when we left for a walk. After the noon meal, the malpan retired to his room for a short nap. We spent this time in writing Syriac Malayalam² [translating Syriac into Malayalam or transliterating Malayalam in Syriac characters?]. At 6 pm we entered the church with the malpan for litany, meditation, spiritual reading and rosary. Then we sat together again till it was time for supper.

After supper we came back and went on engaging ourselves in spiritual reading and spiritual conversation about the sacraments, etc., until the malpan rang the bell, calling us to go and sleep—sometimes at 11 pm as we had no clock. All the day we went about wearing the cassock. Even after we

went to bed the malpan would go on reading ('81: 65; '90: 57)³

It was a sort of Dominican way of life, which inspired Palackal's seminary formation programme. The Dominican spirit, we know, is contained in the dictum, *contemplata praedicare*—to teach and proclaim what has been learned from sacred reading, subjecting it to deep meditation, or to study, pray and teach. This was the style of life Palackal followed in the Pallipuram Seminary, which was dedicated to St Dominic (cf. '81:13; '90: 10). With great zest he collected manuscripts and printed books, not only in Syriac and Malayalam but also in other Indian, especially Tamil⁴, and foreign languages. He spent time in reading them and praying over them, and conveyed the content to his disciples by translating them into Malayalam (cf. '81: 72-74, 25; '90: 63f.). He encouraged Fr Chavara and a few other select students to learn languages such as Latin, Portuguese (cf. '81: 74f.; '90: 65). It was with such deep interest in knowledge and with an open, universal outlook he formed the priest candidates studying under his care. Moreover, Malpan Thomas was a well-known preacher of the time. He was the official preacher in the Latin churches. It was he who pioneered in establishing confraternities, especially of Our Lady of the Mt Carmel in the parishes of the St Thomas Christians (cf. '81: 75f.; Kaniyanthara: 5).

Moreover we have the testimony of Chavara that Fr Palackal had envisioned for the new religious community a lifestyle modelled on the Dominican religious order. In his testament to the members of the Congregation Chavara says:

My dear children, it is by the special grace of God, that we are called Carmelites, who are very dear to the Mother of God. But this has happened not by human planning but by the counsel of God [by the Providence of God]. I am so certain of this fact as I am sure that this [on which I write] is paper. What the founders of this endeavour, Very Rev. Frs

³ Chavara describes the place where all this happened: see above p..

⁴ Palackal studied Tamil and used to read religious books in that language, so much so other malpans jokingly started calling him 'Tamil/Pandy Malpan' (ibid. '81: 72; '90: 63).

Palackal and Porukara, had prayed and organized for, was to form the community as Dominicans. It was with this intention that they started the custom, so far unknown here, of wearing white habit, etc. (CWC IV 1982: 99; 1990: 70).

Fr Thomas Porukara

Fr Thomas⁵ Porukara was an extraordinary brilliant priest and religious. His piety and saintly life and dedication to pastoral ministry were well known; his contributions to the Kerala Church in the first half of the nineteenth century place him among her most illustrious sons. He was born in 1800 C. E. in the well-reputed Porukara family of Kalloorkad (Champakulam), which was a prominent parish in the Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly /Malabar. Even as a child little Thomas was a source of delight to all as he was intelligent, pious, sincere and possessed many other good qualities. He learned to read and write very early in life and used to help in the church with the reading of the large catechism (cf. Porukara 1905:18).

Of the three founders of the CMI Congregation perhaps it was Porukara, who desired most to lead a life of prayer and penance away from the world. He must have felt that the inspiration he had was for a retired eremitical life. This is the impression we get in the first twelve pages of *Mannanam Nālāgamam* (Chronicle), about which see below. His younger brother and student Kuriakose Porukara who knew him intimately states:

In accordance with the pious intention of his father, and motivated by the desire to spend his life in the service of God without getting entangled in worldly and family affairs, young Thomas lived in the seminary with such studiousness and spiritual outlook that his life was a source of admiration and delight to his malpan [Fr Cherian Kurian Narackal], superiors and companions. For this reason he was loved and esteemed by the malpan and others (ibid: 19).

⁵ He was called Kunjithommy, and after he was raised to the dignity of malpan, Porukara Kunjithommy Malpanachan (cf. '81: 55).

His father, Ittikuruvila Tharakan, died in 1818, five years before Thomas's ordination. Being the eldest son it became his responsibility to take care of his mother, Mariam and the younger children. He spent about two years for this even after ordination. In order to relieve himself from that obligation and live according to his ideals, he managed to get for his brother Antony a clerk's job in the resident's office at Kollam (Quilon) and entrusted to him the care of the family (cf. *ibid*: 21).

Thus on one side is the desire not only to distance himself from family ties and relatives, but also withdrawing from external activities, to dedicate himself to a life of solitude, prayer and penance. On the other side we get the impression that Porukara, by his natural inclination, by education and formation, was a man reserved for the service in the Church and society. His father, a clerk in the resident's office at Kollam, was a person who had a wide vision and was sagacious, very pious and well informed in spiritual matters. He was very keen on study at home. He copied down the Tamil prayer book *Japa Pustakam* ('Prayer Book') and *Suviśeṣha Viraitura* ('Gospel Readings') and used them in the church during holy Mass. He was, so to say, a pioneer in this and many other devotional practices. He was very careful in giving his children a good education, making special arrangements to teach them even foreign languages such as English and Portuguese. When young Thomas showed signs of priestly vocation his father had him sent to the seminary at Varapuzha, which, he thought, would give the boy better opportunities for training. During the seminary years Thomas led an exemplary life both with regard to studies and spiritual duties as mentioned above.

Ordained priest in 1823, Fr Thomas was appointed vicar (parish priest) of his own parish church of Kalloorkad (Porukara 1905:19)⁶. There he introduced several good practices and abolished many that were antiquated and irrelevant. He had prepared himself during the seminary days for preaching the Word of God effectively. It is said that Fr Porukara was the first to preach homilies regularly in the church. He formed a choir at Kalloorkad.

⁶ Later K. Porukara says that he was vicar here for about two years, till 1827 (1905: 20). That means only two years after ordination, in 1825, he was appointed vicar. The two years in between he must have spent caring for his mother and the younger children.

did a lot to spread the devotion to St Joseph. He collected one *Chakram*⁷ each from the members of St Joseph's Confraternity, which he had formed, and entrusted the amount to the famous artist Kochukutty Mestri to make a statue of St Joseph.

After two years of service at Kalloorkad Fr Thomas was appointed to the church of Thankassery on 15 August 1827 where he brought about a spiritual reform. His exemplary life, effective sermons preached with zeal on Sundays and feast days, impressed the people and helped them to reform their life. The people of that locality were amazed by his exemplary life, inspiring sermons and great zeal. At that place, where the spiritual needs of the people had not been properly taken care of, there were people who had not been to confession for a long time and who were leading immoral lives, among the rich and the poor. "He shook them all by the fear of God and made them religious minded, just like the earth shaken by thunder produces the vegetation". People cherished the memory of this for a long time and continued to live pious lives. He gave alms to beggars who used to come in groups on Saturdays after giving them spiritual instruction and praying five decades of the rosary with them in the church. He made the children come to church every evening, and he prayed with them. He heard the confession of people after helping them to prepare for it. It seems that he was considered to be the originator of the pious custom of making frequent confessions. Wherever he worked as pastor he quietly brought about a spiritual renaissance. About his ministry at Thankassery his brother Fr Kuriakose testifies:

Thankassery, which, bereft of all knowledge of spiritual life, was immersed in worldly pleasure, was radically transformed. The homes of Mr Lemis, Mello and others turned out to be like convents.

Preaching the Word of God was his great weapon. With a heart burning with the love of God he used to preach with intense ardour and zeal. By such preaching as well as by the example of his saintly life and able administration he became most acceptable to the people of that place. He spent about two years at Thankassery and then he was made

⁷ It was a coin equivalent to 1/28th of Travancore Rupee slightly less valuable than the British Rupee.

secretary to Mgr Stabilini. It was at this time that he became very close to Fr Palackal.⁸

The Two Pioneers

It is quite probable that the seeds of a religious vocation were sown in the minds of these two holy men very early in their life. After a period of incubation the seeds germinated and matured when there arose occasions for frequent meetings of these two saintly priests and intimate exchange of ideas between them. About the maturing of their ideas Kuriakose Chavara in his biography of Fr Palackal, and Fr Kuriakose Porukara in his life sketch of his brother Fr Thomas Porukara, give us some details: In 1827 Mgr Maurilius Stabilini⁹ became the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. He wanted Fr Palackal to be his secretary. But since his life choice was teaching and training seminarians at Pallipuram, Fr Palackal declined the offer and proposed the name of Fr Porukara who was doing very good work at the parish of Thankassery at that time. Porukara was made secretary to Mgr Stabilini in 1828 and Palackal continued as consuler to the vicar apostolic. In connection with this office of consuler he used to visit Varapuzha quite often and even stay there for some days. These visits offered Frs Palackal and Porukara the opportunity to meet frequently, which led to the development of a close friendship between the two and exchange of ideas (cf. '81: 1, 2; '90: 1, 2).

Fr Kuriakose Porukara says about this:

⁸ For this sketch of Porukara's life, see Porukara 1905: 18-21.

⁹ Maurilius Stabilini born in 1777 in Ferrara, Italy, made his religious profession in 1794 in the Order of Carmelites of Primitive Observance (O. Carm.). In 1824 he was ordained titular bishop of Dolica and made coadjutor of the Vicariate Apostolic of Great Mughal. On 8 December 1827 he took over charge as interim Vicar Apostolic of Malabar and Cochin. In the same month on 27th he made his profession in Discalced Carmelite Order (OCD). After retiring from Kerala he worked as a missionary in Karwar from 1831 to 1837, in which year he returned to Italy and died in 1857 (cf. *Positio*: 88). The correct name of the prelate as given by Ambrosius is 'Stabellini', cf. Ambrosius 1889: 304ff. But in most writings it appears in the form given here.

Fr Thomas Porukara reached Varapuzha on 16 *Meenam* [March] 1828 and started working as secretary to Mgr Stabilini. While engaged in that work, in the very days when he was living in the seminary¹⁰, our worshipful father Malpan Thomas [Palackal], was as a luminary studying at Pallipuram under Very Rev. Malpan Abraham Thachil. Even in those days started his [Palackal's] friendship and affection for Porukara. The latter loved him as his father and a great friend (Porukara: 1905: 21).

Both Blessed Chavara and Fr Kuriakose Porukara seem to indicate in general terms that the motive of the two Fathers in starting the religious life was the glory of God and the good of the Kerala Church. Fr Kuriakose Porukara says: "Motivated by the noble desire of spending their lives in the service of God by renouncing the family and all worldly ambitions, depending on the alms of others" (Porukara 1905: 31). Chavara has described the motive thus:

[Fr Palackal] and his intimate friend Fr Thomas Porukara craved to start a monastery (*tapasubhavanam* or 'house of penance') at least for priests because they were well aware of the fact that many a good thing was not done owing to the want of a religious house. They were sad at heart, as there was no one to give support for this cause ...

These three,¹¹ in their deliberation about the starting of the monastery, were guided by the words of our Lord who said:

¹⁰ The coupling of two phrases, "ആ വേലയിൽ പാർത്തിരിക്കുമ്പോൾ സെമിനാരിയിൽ പാർത്തിരുന്ന കാലത്തിൽ തന്നെ" creates some confusion: whether the friendly relation between the senior and junior Thomases started already, when both were undergoing seminary training (Palackal, of course, at an advanced stage and Porukara just starting), or only from the time he became secretary. It is possible that Palackal came to know Porukara well and cultivated friendship with him while the latter was undergoing training at the Varapuzha Seminary. That may be the reason why his name was suggested by Palackal for the secretary's post. However, the intimate sharing of ideas regarding religious life became a reality when Porukara was working as secretary and Palackal as confessor of the bishop.

¹¹ "These three": Fr Paschal Baylon of Jesus Maria, the chancellor of the vicariate also joined Palackal and Porukara in these deliberations

"Where two or three are assembled in my name, I am in their midst" and "Ask and it shall be given to you" ('81: 1, 3; '90: 1, 2).

Brother Jacob Kaniyanthara 1800-1898

Here a word about Br Jacob would be most fitting. The CMI constitutions, in number one itself, qualities him as one who "shared the inspiration of the founding fathers and assisted them in the foundation". He hailed from Kalloorkad, the birth place of Fr Thomas Porukara. Born in the same year (1800) the two were good boyhood friends. Fr Porukara, when he was a deacon at Varapuzha Seminary, on a visit to Kalloorkad, met Jacob. He then told Jacob that after his ordination he would like to retire to some solitary place and lead an eremitic life (വാച്ചവനവാസത്തിനു / *vachā vanavāsatinu*). He invited Jacob to join him when time came. Jacob agreed. After some time Jacob forgot about it and was preparing to get married. By that time Thomas Porukara, after ordination to priesthood, was staying at Varapuzha as secretary to Mgr Stabilini. As seen earlier Frs Palackal and Porukara were then seriously discussing about starting a religious house. One of those days Porukara visited Kalloorkad and happened to meet his friend Jacob and reminded him of the agreement they had made earlier. Abandoning the idea of marriage Jacob forthwith went with Porukara to Varapuzha and began to assist him in his work. Soon the two pioneers Palackal and Porukara managed to obtain the permission of Mgr Stabilini to start a religious house. During the search for a suitable site for the monastery Jacob quite often accompanied them. Once the monastery was started at Mannanam Jacob became very much part of it. Chavara says in his chronicle ('81: 8; '90: 6):

Porukara had a helper Jacob Kaniyanthara, a young boy, who by contact with Porukara had been led to the path of goodness, as a plant, so goes the saying, is likely to have the fragrance of the tree on which it leans.

Though he was living at Mannanam participating in the prayers of the fathers and engaged in the administration of the

and later helped in the search for a place for the *darśanaveedu* (cf. '81: 2f., '90: 2). Cf. also Kaniyanthara: 1 (where there is some anachronism) and 3.

temporalities of the monastery, he was not allowed to make his religious profession in 1855 as at that time only priests were admitted to take the vows. Only after the congregation was affiliated to the Carmelite Order in 1860 brothers co-operators were admitted to the religious community. Jacob as the first among them made his profession on 2 February 1865 (cf. '81: 58). Fr Bernard (1989: 58) gives a biographical note on this good brother. He died at Mannanam on 13 July 1898, at the advanced age of ninety eight. Fr Bernard says that he received a blessing from Pope Leo XIII at the time of his death.

Ecclesiastical Permission

Frs Palackal and Porukara felt, with divine inspiration, that the time had come when they could realize their long cherished desire of founding a religious institute wherein to devote themselves entirely to the attainment of evangelical perfection and to work for the social, moral and spiritual advancement of their brethren. In 1829 they communicated their idea to Mgr Stabilini, the vicar apostolic. This is how Blessed Chavara describes the event. Slightly different is the version found in the first pages of the Chronicle of Mannanam (AMSJ 32/B/2096, pp. 1-14)¹². In it Brother Jacob Kaniyanthara refers to what Porukara had told him about his longing for eremitic life (see above). It is probably against this background Jacob reports that Frs Palackal and Porukara requested Mgr Stabilini the permission for an eremitic (വാചുടത്തും ഒരുങ്ങി പാർക്കണം) way of life, but at the suggestion of the bishop the founders changed their idea and decided to establish a monastery (Kaniyanthara: pp. 1, 6). There is difficulty to accept this version. First of all Chavara, who was intimately associated first with Palackal, his malpan, and later with Porukara, does not leave even a hint in that direction. Secondly it is difficult to believe that Fr Palackal, who considered his life mission to be training of seminarians, would think of retiring for eremitic life.

¹² These fourteen (actually only 1-12; 13 and 14 are blank) pages, not yet published, are supposed to have been written by Br Jacob Kaniyanthara (cf. '81: v). Kaniyanthara gives a vivid description of the manner in which Palackal and Porukara decided to approach the prelate and told the latter of their idea, etc. He gives some details which we do not find in Chavara (cf. Kaniyanthara: 5f.). There is no indication in the sources about any written petition submitted to the bishop, but only oral communication.

with great pleasure through the hands of the Rev. Fathers, our assistants and co-operators in the apostolic ministry, benediction, grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ...

It is necessary that, in this territory committed to our jurisdiction by the apostolic see, there are persons, who are continuously engaged in prayer and good works for the greater glory of God and the edification of the Church.¹³

.....

We know that you desire to see among you a community of men living like the holy souls who are continuously engaged in prayer, and spiritual works.

The prelate regrets that this most ancient Christian community lacked for a long time the presence of a community of such persons. But he knows that it had requested the Holy Church to establish religious houses such as existing among many other communities who had received the faith much later than the Christians of Kerala. He continues:

In order to open a door for religious life, the two priests who are entrusted with this letter, desire to establish a church and a monastery for those who are willing to embrace the religious life.

Their desire would be realized only if the necessary funds are made available to them. So he earnestly recommends that donations be given from the churches and the people to the two priests. Those who would help this project will undoubtedly share in all the benefits resulting there from:

The example of the religious will instruct the ignorant... They will be free from all worldly affairs and they will devote themselves entirely to spiritual things. By the zealous work of these elect souls, all possible blessings will be secured.

¹³ The Latin translation in *Positio* and the English in *The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar* do not agree in many details. The Malayalam original is not an easy text to tackle. We have tried to give a translation here, which we think is true to the text.

The bishop again pleads all to give generously for the purpose. The letter concludes:

To the two priests, Frs Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, who are entrusted with this letter, we, Maurilius, Bishop of Dolica, have handed over Rupees 200/-¹⁴

Chavara reports about this in great happiness:

The bishop, a mirror of virtues, who spent his days in fasting, prayer and vigils heeded to their request. As he was thirsting for holiness, he was very much delighted at the request of the fathers. He felt like the parched land after a rain in his heart and thirsted for holiness. He was delighted and issued an order appealing to all who seek to please God to support the cause by financial assistance ('81: 3, '90: 2).

This circular letter met with a hearty response from the leading churches of the St Thomas Christians, especially of Kuttanad as also from a few generous individuals. In a very short time the two saintly fathers collected sufficient funds, with which they could begin the work of the religious house they proposed to establish (cf. '81: 3, '90: 2).

From the description of Chavara we might get the impression that the vicar apostolic gave permission for the monastery immediately as Palackal and Porukara approached him with the request (see above). In Kaniyanthara's version it took a few days before permission was accorded. When the founders approached the bishop with the request for the first time he advised them to start a monastery. They told him that this was not possible in Kerala in the given circumstances; they pointed out:

Is this possible? Who are there to extend the necessary help for it? Is it not that such projects are to be accomplished by kings? Had we have some Christian kings here it would have been possible.

¹⁴ The original of this letter dated 1 November (*Vruchikam*) 1829 is in the Archives of Mannanam Monastery (AMSJ 4/B/2); a Latin version is given in *Positio*: 88f; an English translation appears in *The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar*, 1932: pp. 14-19, interspersed is a photograph of the original Malayalam text.

The prelate assured them that it was feasible because there were many generous Christians in Kerala. If an appeal is made to them they would certainly give the needed help.

The fathers took leave of the prelate to consult some of their friends and colleagues. After that they again went to the bishop with their determination to follow up the project. But now the bishop did not show great enthusiasm. But because of his love and regard for them he never used to refuse to give anything they asked for. In spite of some reservation, because of their earnest insistence, the bishop decided to give them permission and asked them to get ready a letter for begging alms. They prepared a nice letter and presented it to the former. He forthwith signed it and on his part donated two hundred rupees (cf. Kaniyanthara: 6f.).

Within a few months after the foundation stone was laid for the monastery recommendation letters, one by D. João da Porto Peixoto,¹⁵ administrator of the Archdiocese of Cranganore and another by Nicolai Giraldi of Jesu Maria, OCD¹⁶ vicar general of Verapoly, were issued. The former dated 3 September 1831 speaks of the monastery, in which

Live some fathers desiring to lead a pious life exercising in virtues and setting good example as they are inspired by the Spirit and the Gospel. As the Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit in the Cenacle to sanctify men, so, if this house is established in Malabar, virtue will increase here and many will be converted to a life of salvation and God will be glorified.

¹⁵ He belonged to the Order of Franciscan Minors (OFM) and took charge of the archdiocese in 1826 and continued till 1838, in which year *Multa praeclare* of Gregory XVI suppressed the archdiocese. The letter written in Malayalam is preserved in AMSJ, Latin version in PO, *Positio*: 89f.

¹⁶ Born in 1777, Stabilini made his religious profession in 1795; came to Kerala in 1811. Appointed vicar general by Stabilini, took care of the vicariate from June 1831 when Stabilini left for Karwar. Transferred to Bombay (Mumbai) in 1833, died in Surat 1849. The letter is in the Mannanam Archives (AMSJ, 4/B/15). Latin version in PO, *Positio*: 91f.

He exhorts the churches and the faithful to give donations for the realization of the project. The second letter dated 12 September 1831 says that some priests burning with zeal of divine love live in solitude praising God without interruption, removed from all worldly affairs. He refers to the letter of Stabilini and says that if things happen in the way, which the letter prescribes, many would be the spiritual benefits for the faithful, for the edification of the Church and the greater glory of God, the good of the people and the increase of faith. Then it urges the churches and the faithful to give, with good will and charity, donations for the purpose.

Search for a Suitable Site

The next step was to select a suitable spot whence they could, while serving God under a religious roof, radiate their activities throughout the whole of Kerala. The permission to start the monastery was given towards the close of 1829. However according to Br Kaniyanthara neither the fund raising nor the search for a suitable place for setting up the monastery did start immediately. Some friends of the fathers, like Sri Ittikuruvila Mapila Thoppil of Pulincunnu and Cathanar Ittoop Mundackal of Kothamangalam, started to inquire about the progress of the project. It is then only, that is after a lapse of three or four months, that the fathers began their journeys to raise funds. It must be some time in April 1830 that they visited Edathva and Kalloorkad for the purpose where they received the first donations. After this journey again three or four months passed and some of their friends complained that nothing was being done after receiving the funds. It is then that a serious search for a place began. For this Fr Porukara resigned his office of secretary at the vicariate, Fr Chandy Mangalath was appointed secretary to the vicar apostolic, and Deacon Chavara was given temporary charge of the seminary at Pallipuram (cf. Kaniyanthara: 7f.)¹⁷.

¹⁷ As said above Br Kaniyanthara often went with the founders and others in their search for the site. But the chronology he gives seems to be defective, e.g. he says that it was in April 1829 that the founders went about for the collection of donations. If the permission was obtained in November 1829 it must be in 1830 they must have done this. Similarly if the search started in 1830, Chavara was already an ordained priest, though Kaniyanthara says that 'Deacon' Chavara was given temporary charge of the seminary at Pallipuram. Moreover, it is very difficult to believe the enormous delay the founders are said

Blessed Chavara in his account does not mention these details. He straight away begins describing the difficult and time-consuming journey that Frs Palackal and Porukara with Jacob Kaniyanthara and others made to find out a suitable site for the monastery. They took with them one Ittan of the *ezhava* caste who, through his contact with Malpan Abraham Thachil, knew all the routes and had long explored the area extensively. They travelled along the Ithipuzha River, came up to Vettikattumuku, passed the dangerous spot known as Katanattipara and reached Mulakulam. There the landlord Periyapurath Mathan received them in his home and offered hospitality. As the hillock, which he showed, was found unsuitable, they went back by the same route and reached a site close by Kalampur Mekka. This place also was abandoned. Here Palackal had the frightening sight of a very poisonous snake hanging down from the branch of a tree just over the canoe, in which he was taking rest. They escaped unhurt. None of the places they saw on this journey was to their liking. So all returned to their places.

After a few days the same fathers made another trip, this time in the company of Padre Pascal, the chancellor of the vicar apostolic, and Cathanars Ittoop and Chandy Mangalath. The route was the same. They passed Vettikattumuku and Katanattipara and travelled up to the east of Kavalvazhichery and reached a very broad and high hill called Chemanchi. It was a good place with cool breeze, which refreshed them, tired as they were. But it was too high and distant from the river and considered unsuitable. In the third journey Chavara accompanied Malpan Palackal together with Mathan Mappila (Periyapurath). They explored localities of Porothe (Piravam?) but failed to find an ideal spot. Frs Palackal and Porukara made a fourth journey to places like Pallikunnu, Pallikayam, Vedakari, etc. to the east of Athirampuzha. But none of them was suitable ('81: 8-12; '90: 5-9). Chavara comments:

Where there was convenience of land [an elevated quiet place, which Chavara calls in Malayalam *sthalasaukhyam*] there was no convenience of water [for Chavara:

to have taken to start begging alms and searching for a suitable place. Already by 30 March 1830 the clearing process of Mannanam hill started (see below p. 13).

vellasaukhyam]; so they had to abandon the places they saw ('81: 12; '90: 8).

Then they passed over to the church of Kudamalloor, to the east of which they discovered a hill, Pullarikunnu. They were pleased with it as the land was suitable and there was a river nearby. Porukara tried to get government sanction for building a church there. But the Pullari hill they saw was reputed as the abode of the Kumaranelloor Bhagavati (goddess)! And its tenants were opposed to the erection of a church there. Hence the idea had to be abandoned. Then they hit upon another hill equally convenient to the east of the little church of Kudamalloor. This was the Mannanam hill ('81: 12-16; '90: 8-12).

It is very clear that an elevated quiet place was for prayer, penance and contemplation. Water was necessary not only for the sake of home use but for going out to preach and carry on pastoral help. The Mannanam hill appeared to them quite suitable as it was high enough (the *Besrauma*¹⁸, which was to be their *tapasubhavanam* and *darśanaveedu*) and at the foot of it was water to go out in boats, practically the only accessible means for easy transportation. Here we clearly find the twin ideals of the religious house they envisioned, prayer/contemplation and service of the people of God.

Brother Kaniyanthara gives a little different version of the journeys. The first journey made by Palackal, Porukara and Kaniyanthara was in search of a place mountainous in feature, with non-saline water nearby and at the same time having a port not far from the site facilitating travel by boat. The first journey was to Malayattoor through the Malayattoor River (Periyar). Two or three sites were found to be good but had to be abandoned because they were far away from the southern regions. The journey continued through the Muvattupuzha River (Kaliyar) and reached Mulakulam. The journey was continued to Pala region through the Pala River (Meenachilar) where they discovered a hillock called Kakathotupala, which appeared to be an ideal site but for the fact that it was all strewn with rocks. Abandoning that they proceeded

¹⁸ Syriac phrase meaning "House on Top", which was the name the pioneering fathers gave it. We do not know when they christened it so—may be, some time after the monastery ('house') was built.

to Changanachery, where they sighted a nice place to the east of the market, which was also not suitable because of its distance from the river side. Then they went to Kottayam. Jacob ends his account of the search here. He gives no information about the fixing of Mannanam. But right away passes over to the antecedents of the foundation in 1831. Places like Malayattoor, Pala, Changanachery are not mentioned in the account of Chavara.

Mannanam Hill

Chavara describes how this hill was discovered. While attempts were progressing to acquire Pullarikunnu, Palackal and Porukara with Jacob Kaniyanthara visited Pulimkunnu to collect the promised donations. On their return journey they took the route to Athirampuzha by way of Mannanam. There they sighted at a distance two hills: one was Olankannamukal and the other Kariyattam. They stopped there and made an initial exploration of both the hills. While the latter was flat and cleared of shrubs, the former was thickly wooded. While Jacob said that Kariyattam was a better place, the fathers preferred Olankannamukal because they thought that it was more open and fertile. But no decision was taken then (cf. '81: 15; '90: 11).

The Olankannamukal was an exceptionally suitable place for the proposed monastery. It was an unpopulated, thickly wooded, virgin land, situated about five miles (8 km) northwest of Kottayam. The trees filled with green foliage and lush emerald grass covering the hill created a pleasing atmosphere, a feast for the eyes of any visitor. Flanked by Arpukara and Kaipuzha villages, a canal flowed from its foot to the west, both sides of which filled with soft green grass and vast green rice fields like a green carpet, strewn with small islands of coconut plants—all provide a scenic view to the Vempanatt Lake uniquely exhilarating and blissful. Anybody stepping on the hill would automatically say, 'blessed earth, most ideal for stay'. From the hill, 147 ft (45 m) high from the sea level, one could see the lighthouse of Alapuzha harbour at night. Naturally it is this hill, which the fathers preferred as the ideal site for their proposed *tapasubhavanam*, *darśanaveedu*, where they could experience God in quiet prayer and penance, away from the 'world'; from where they could go out to preach, what they experienced in their prayer and contemplation, to the people of God.

The hill and the view towards the west naturally bring to our mind the idea of Mt Carmel in Palestine. We are not quite sure whether the fathers were conscious of it, and whether the assuming of the names of Elijah and Elisha by Chavara and his successor respectively an expression of this consciousness. Whatever it be Elijah's and his disciples' God-experience and their concern for the people of God became the substance of the spirit of the fathers, and thus of the congregation, which they founded.

Soon they came to know that two landlords Kurian Thayyil Tharakan and his younger brother Kochupothan Mappila¹⁹ living at equal distances from the hill, would be able to help them. So they went to the house of Kurian Thayyil Tharakan. He, after hearing all that the fathers had to say, told them that they need not look for any other site. Then they climbed up the hill and saw the place. They were very much impressed and decided to acquire it. The vicar apostolic was agreeable to the decision. All this took a month to finalise.²⁰

Father Porukara was entrusted with the task of getting the necessary permissions. Leaving Ittan, who was renamed Panikkar, with the Malpan, Porukara, Chavara and Jacob set out for Mannanam.

We reached the above-mentioned Kurian Tharakan's house, which is called Perumalil, just below this our *Besrauma*. We told him and his brother Kochupothan everything...

Then we all set out to have a good look over the *Besrauma* ... We reached just west of our well [see below]... We found the place so broad and breezy that all of us liked it.

After this Porukara left for Kollam in a boat of the Tharakan, and Chavara and Jacob for Pallipuram.

Porukara met Palackal at Pallipuram. "They talked together about all that God had done for them so far". Porukara left for Athirampuzha and Palackal was to go there after Easter. Porukara

¹⁹ Both the brothers belonged to the ancient Thayyil family. But the Tharakan's house was at a place called Perumaly. Hence his family came to be known Perumalil (cf. '90: 13, 15; '81: 16f., 18).

²⁰ Chavara says: "Now it was about a month since our Malpan had left Pallipuram" ('90: 14; '81: 18).

managed to get a tacit permission from the authorities to cut a passage up the hill. On Holy Wednesday, 30 March 1830, Porukara proceeded to Mannanam. He in the company of the two Thayyil brothers and Jacob and Itticheriya of Kudamaloor climbed up the Olankannamukal and started the work of clearing it of woods. Kurian Tharakan had acquired the hill on lease²¹ and the brothers were willing to hand over it to the fathers for the monastery, presumably free of any payment²². The Tharakan provided workers and supplied food and shelter to the fathers for a long time.

On Thursday after Easter Fr Chavara also came to the house of the Tharakan and went up the hill with others and sitting under a tree directed the cutting and burning of the woods. Then Chavara speaks of almost a miraculous discovery of a well:

Four days back when they were clearing the woods, one of them had said that if they could find a well there, it would have been very easy for them, and another remarked that by God's grace it would be found. Two days later when those who were cutting the woods were walking through the area not yet cleared, they came upon something that looked like an unused well. Then they started clearing it up. The next day I left for Pallippuram.²³

Laying the Foundation (cf. 81: 20-24)

By this time Bishop Stabilini had gone to Kudamaloor for bath cure. A temporary place for celebrating Mass was an immediate necessity as work for the monastery proceeded. Fr Palackal approached the bishop to obtain permission to set up a shed for this. The latter told him that a shed would be unfit and untidy for saying Mass, and that, instead, a chapel should hastily be built of stone. In the mean time Fr Porukara was making all efforts

²¹ മേലമെഴുതിയ തരകന്റെ പേരിൽ 93-ാമാണ്ട് (KE 893, AD, CE 1718) കണ്ടെഴുത്തിൽ പതിഞ്ഞിരിക്കുന്ന ഓലൻ കണ്ണാമുകൾ ('81: 20).

²² The chronicle does not explicitly say this. But it can be presumed because there is no mention of any payment being made by the fathers. A biography of Fr G. Thoppil says explicitly that the hill was given gratis to the fathers (cf. ASJM, Collection related to Cause of Chavara, file XIV, No. 8).

²³ Reference for this section is '81: 8-21; '90: 5-17.

to get the official government sanction for the constructions. While describing all these Chavara tells us:

On the eve of the feast of St Geevarghese [St George], 24 April of that year, Frs Porukara, Chacko, Malayattoor and I together sang the vespers kneeling on the tree stubs. We stayed at the *Besrauma* till very late, charmed by the cool breeze and overwhelmed by the vastness and the multitude of the burned-up woods lying spread out before our eyes. We descended very reluctantly, forced by the thought that it would be terrifying if night fell before we got down. These days the Perumalil brothers took much trouble for us, feeding us, fathers and the workmen. They got Eacharachar's farmhouse, had it cleared up for us to stay in and gave us supper there.²⁴

Soon the government sanction was received, but already preparations had started for the construction of the chapel. As instructed by Bishop Stabilini a wooden cross was got ready and blessed to be erected on the hilltop in the presence of the landlords. It was brought to the site with the accompaniment of pipes, drums and much cheering, and was solemnly erected. This was followed by the All Saints' Litany. All this took place on 28 April 1831. On this occasion Fr Porukara performed an almost miraculous cure of a snake-bitten boy (cf. '81: 23, 90: 20)²⁵.

According to Kaniyanthara Fr Porukara was insistent that Mgr Stabilini should be present at Mannanam for laying the foundation, since he feared the possibility that his absence would be misinterpreted that the bishop was not pleased with the project of the monastery. So he even approached Fr Pascal to persuade the bishop, who on hearing Porukara's concern immediately decided to go to Mannanam for the function (cf. Kaniyanthara: 8f.). He agreed to go to Mannanam and lay the foundation for the monastery. But as he fell ill he was not able to perform the ceremony on 11 May

²⁴ This is from the English text ('90: 18), which is a paraphrase of the Malayalam ('81: 22).

²⁵ Kaniyanthara (p. 10) describes the incident in connection with the laying of the foundation stone. He gives the name of the boy as Mathew Ullattuthara, a relative of Thayyil Tharakan. He later became a priest and worked as vicar of Vallarpadam.

1831. With great difficulty he was brought to the spot on the eve and accommodated in a temporary thatched structure. He and all the priests who had gathered spent the night in the improvised house. Next morning the bishop felt too ill to perform the ceremony. So he suggested that Fr Palackal or, if he was not well, Fr Porukara does it. There was a holy debate between these two fathers, each one asking the other to perform the ceremony on account of their humility and mutual regard. Finally it was decided that Porukara would do it.

Then there was a difference of opinion as to who should be the patron of the foundation. The bishop suggested St John the Baptist. Our malpan wanted the name of St Dominic because he was for long devoted to that saint and thought that the new religious community should be formed after the Dominican model. But Porukara's proposal was St Joseph to whom he had great devotion.²⁶ Finally everyone agreed upon the last. Thus the bishop had the foundation stone for the monastery church laid by Fr Porukara in the name of St Joseph.

This happened, as mentioned above, on 11 May 1831.

In a few weeks' time the chapel was completed and blessed. On the Pentecost day they celebrated the first Eucharist in it. All the priests assembled for that function donated a rupee each, and so more than fifty rupees²⁷ was collected then. From that time the constructions went on in full swing. A shed was built attached to the chapel for the convenience of the people.²⁸ Chavara, giving credit to Porukara, concludes:

Fr Porukara was a man of strong faith. He was very hard working and especially devoted to St Joseph. Thanks to all these, on Pentecost day the chapel was completed and

²⁶ We have seen above how Porukara had collected money to make a statue of St Joseph and entrusted the work to artist Kochukutty. This statue was got ready when the Mannanam monastery was started. It is still on the main altar of the church there (cf. Porukara 1905: 20).

²⁷ Kaniyanthara (p. 10), Rs. 70.

²⁸ For the above description see '81: 21-25; '90: 17-21.

whitewashed. Then the well-set chapel was blessed and we all said Mass there ('81: 25, '90: 21).

Life at Mannanam

From this time onwards Frs Thomas Porukara and Chavara continuously resided at Mannanam²⁹, while Fr Palackal commuted between Pallipuram and Mannanam. They began to live a religious life, which the founders had envisaged. There were no fixed rules but the members devoted much time for silent prayer and other spiritual exercises, and went out for pastoral ministry. At the same time the construction works progressed. About the life of the fathers at this stage Kuriakose Porukara³⁰ observes:

As soon as they had achieved their intention in some measure, the fire that was burning in their heart began to emit rays of piety. Personal prayers, meditations, fasting, vigils, the very long *Hudra* [canonical] prayer, the prayers of the three day fast, *Raza* [solemn liturgy] on Sundays and feast days, sung Masses and sermons on special feasts—this was their routine. They did manual work with the workers for the construction of the buildings. Some times during the night, singing the Psalms, they would carry to the site shells and stones...How wonderful it appears when we think of their spirit of poverty, eating very frugal meals, sleeping least comfortably (Porukara 1905: 24).

O God, when we think of the good works of these fathers, we feel ashamed. They continuously prayed and meditated, kept vigil into late at night, celebrated the Eucharist with such fervour that those who participated in it were led to

²⁹ Porukara started living permanently at Mannanam from May 1831; Chavara from 1831 or 1832.

³⁰ Kuriakose Porukara, who has been already referred to a few lines, was a younger brother of Fr Thomas Porukara. He had also joined some of the trips in search of a suitable site for the monastery. Two days before the feast of the Pentecost in 1831 he came to Mannanam with all his belongings, like table, chair, etc., accompanied by his elder brothers. They helped in decorating the chapel for the feast of St Joseph. After the feast he started studies and helped in the constructions. "From that day I began to live in the *Besrauma*" (Porukara 1905: 24).

shed tears out of devotion arising in their minds. On Sundays and feast days they went about all places preaching the Word of God and continuously instructing the people. Thus they brought about a radical change in these places removing the spiritual darkness and producing divine light. They worked hard and in all humility went to the people and received with happiness what they gave and with it continued the construction work (ibid.: 31).

As mentioned above Fr Palackal's ideal of religious life was that of the Dominicans. His disciple and the youngest of the trio, Chavara, says that Frs Palackal and Porukara were bringing up the community after the model of the Dominicans and the change to the Carmelite model came when the first eleven members made their profession in 1855 and a slightly modified rules of the Discalced Carmelites were given them by the ecclesiastical authorities, who were Discalced Carmelites from Italy. But the basic style of their life—prayer, contemplation and going out for pastoral ministry, especially preaching retreats—did not change. As necessity arose other activities were also taken up (cf. Mundadan 1997: 169).

This reminds one of the ideals Archdeacon George of the Cross had conceived for the Edappally Congregation of St Thomas the Apostle. Not only that, as the community of Edappally became involved in the revolt against Portuguese Padroado rule, many members of this new congregation got involved in the struggle for autonomy in the nineteenth century. Just as the Edappally religious house became the venue for the seventeenth century revolts, so the house at Mannanam became the meeting place of those who took up the struggle for autonomy in the nineteenth century (cf. Pareparambil 1920, Section 2: 73f., 74-76, 78f., 101; Mundadan 2003: 82-84).

Time of Stress

In the third part of his chronicle³¹ Chavara describes the difficult times ('Time of Stress')³² the congregation had to face during the few years after the foundation stone was laid. Stabilini

³¹ In the original it is named മുണ്ണമ നിരൂത (Munnam Niruth).

³² In Malayalam the author calls it നെരികുത (Nerikuta).

had courted the displeasure of the Latin Christian groups other than that of the 'Five Hundred', because he ordained some persons from among the latter group. Otherwise also he was not keeping good health. He wanted to leave Kerala much earlier but because of the insistence of the Syrian malpans and other clergy he postponed the plan (cf. '81: 5-7; '90: 3-5). But the Latin groups other than the 'Five Hundred' again opposed him. They even made up their mind neither to invite Frs Palackal and Porukara and their students to preach in their churches nor to support them. For, they believed that these two together with Fr Pascal had persuaded the bishop to ordain priests from the 'Five Hundred' group. Having lost any hope of reconciliation with this group the bishop left Kerala. This led to a period of crisis for the fathers.

Because of this or, maybe at his request, Bishop Maurilius was called back to Rome. Archbishop Francis Xavier was appointed to take his place in Malabar. We lost all our hopes on coming to know of this. The two elderly priests and many of us, young priests, went to Arthunkal and bade the bishop farewell with tears. We went to Kuññithai and accompanied him as far as the beach and from there, in canoes, up to the ship. Seeing them set sail we returned with great grief to Arthunkal. We spent that night there in mourning ('81: 27; '90: 25).

Besides there were various other bitter experiences, which Chavara describes in this section ('Time of Stress'). The relation of the new vicar apostolic to the fathers of Mannanam appeared not very cordial, which resulted in the transfer of Chavara to Pallipuram and of Porukara to Kollam. In their absence there was none to supervise the works at Mannanam. The difference of opinion between Palackal and Porukara about starting a seminary attached to the monastery was another sore point. This was followed by the attempts of some seminarians led by Antony Kudakkachira to create troubles for the fathers. Then came the bereavement caused by the demise first of Palackal (1841), and then of Porukara (1846).

As soon as Mgr Francis Xavier Pescetto³³ assumed office, some of the above mentioned Latin groups and even some Syrian

³³ Born on 25 April 1771 he received the name Raphael. He joined the OCD Genoa Province in 1789 and made his religious profession in

clergy started to raise complaints before him against Mgr Stabilini and the newly-fledged religious community. A very prominent priest even accused that the fathers were going about collecting donations and helping their relatives.³⁴ The bishop, who as a missionary had known Fr Palackal, was not perhaps inclined to believe all that. However, he thought that he needed to test their spirit of obedience. He not only asked them to show the written permission they had received from Stabilini, but also ordered the transfer, first of Chavara and then of Porukara from Mannanam. Both obeyed, but with immense mental anguish. Chavara, very much concerned about the construction works at Mannanam, approached the bishop two times to get relieved from his assignment at Pallipuram. Both times he had very bitter experience. About this we shall speak later on (see below pp. 27-29). At last the prelate relented and allowed both Chavara and Porukara to return to Mannanam. They resumed all the works they had been doing. Diocesan priests began to show greater interest in the work of Mannanam and some of them stayed there to help the fathers. A few joined the community (cf. '81: 28-33; '90: 23-28).

Starting of a Seminary and Problems that Followed

While these two fathers were continuing their work and ministry, Palackal used to make frequent visits to Mannanam, accompanied by some of his disciples from Pallipuram. Two of these students started staying at Mannanam. It is at this time the idea of starting a seminary for diocesan candidates came up. Malpan Palackal was very positive about having a seminary attached to the monastery. He argued that the presence of seminarians would be very useful for conducting church functions with due solemnity and that in course of time good vocations to religious life might come from the seminarians. But Porukara had a different view: the seminary would be a hindrance to religious life, which was the main concern at Mannanam; as for vocations they

1790 assuming the name Francis Xavier of St Anne. In 1799 he landed in Mumbai and worked in the Karwar Mission. Ordained bishop on 4 December 1831, he came to Varapuzha in January 1832 and assumed the office of the Vicar Apostolic of Malabar (cf. Ambrosius 1939: 320; *Positio*: 78).

³⁴ The English translation of this is incorrect "there was a complaint about a very capable Rev. Fr going about..." ('90: 24).

had to put their trust in God. It seems Porukara was conscious of some of the limitations of seminaries and seminarians and had fostered a negative view of them. Chavara was agreeable to both views:

I, a fool, was happy with both views. Inside I was happy with Porukara's view, and was not unhappy inside about Father's [Palackal's] view and was also externally quite happy. But since Porukara, who wanted to live according to the mind of Palackal, whom he loved more than his own malpan, submitted to the opinion of Palackal ('81: 32f; '90: 27f.).

Soon the number of candidates who joined the seminary increased.

Brother Jacob Kaniyanthara gives a few more details about the starting and early growth of the seminary. When the fathers started to live at Mannanam there were practically nobody to assist at Mass and do such other services. So it was arranged for two clerics—Ittiyavira Valiaparampil and Joseph Alancheril—to come to Mannanam and stay there. Two others joined them from Kaipuzha. It is at this time Frs Palackal and Porukara discussed the advisability of starting a seminary attached to the monastery. Though Porukara raised some objections, finally he gave in to the view of the senior colleague and agreed to teach the seminarians (cf. Kaniyanthara: 11). Fr Marceline Berardi says that Chavara took great pains alone from 1846 to 1856 to teach the seminarians and train them by exhortations and good example (cf. Marceline 1872: 363; *Positio*: 576).

The Kudakkachira Episode

Antony Kudakkachira, a very talented young man from Pala came to Mannanam to participate in the Way of the Cross devotion that was conducted on Fridays at 3 pm, "starting from below and climbing up the hill as if it were Golgotha itself". He took a liking for the place and began to stay there among the seminarians. Chavara testifies:

He showed himself to be good at so many things: fasting, praying, drawing, writing, singing, playing the instruments, discussion and even quarrelling.

This taste for quarrelling brought about another bitter experience for the fathers. After a retreat Fr Porukara gave all the candidates, both religious and seminarians, an option to select religious life. Those who opted for religious life were accommodated in the first floor of the hall to the north and the seminarians continued on the ground floor. This caused a dissension among the latter, to which Kudakkachira gave leadership. They complained to Fr Palackal about this. He was a little annoyed because he thought that the separation had hurt the feelings of the seminarians. However, he told Chavara that he did not take the petition seriously. Chavara promised him that he would see that the arrangement was reversed. But the malpan did not react to it (cf. '81: 34-37; '90: 29f.). The matter ended there and the separation continued.

In the mean time the construction of the church started. For collecting timber Chavara, together with Br Jacob and Fr Kalloothara²⁵, travelled to places like Arakkuzha, Vazhakkulam, Mailacomb, and Nagapuzha. This must have taken place sometime before 1841, because immediately after this the chronicle describes the demise of Malpan Palackal (cf. '81: 38-41; '90: 32-35).

The Devout Way of Life at Mannanam

The life style of the community of priests and students at Mannanam was organised by Fr Thomas Porukara. The day long studies were interspersed with pious practices like the following: prayers in honour of Our Lady of Sorrows, of St Joseph, scapular devotions, etc.; on Sundays at noon celebration of the Holy Eucharist, preaching, rosary; during the Lent the *Hudra* part of the Syriac Divine Office; on Fridays of the Lent solemn Way of the Cross, starting from down the hill and moving up to the top, which the pious people from the neighbouring parishes also joined. All the clerical students, irrespective of whether they wanted to join the monastery or not, followed this schedule. As pointed out earlier after an annual retreat Fr Porukara decided that those who wanted

²⁵ A disciple of the malpan, Cathanar Kora Kalloothara, stayed at Mannanam and helped in the constructions. As he did not belong to the religious community he lived in a room outside the monastery (cf. '81: 87). Perhaps he was the parish priest of Alappuzha (cf. '81: 49) and was called also Geevarghese ('81: 32). Scaria Kalloothara ('81: 53) is a different person (cf. also '81: 32).

to join the monastery, should observe all the time table with all the spiritual exercises followed during the retreat except that of silence. Those who opted for the monastic life were accommodated on the first floor with their own rules and practices together with Frs Porukara, Chavara and Thoppil (cf. '81: 34f.; '90: 29).

Common Life of the Members at Mannanam

As we have seen only Frs Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Chavara constantly lived at Mannanam. Fr Palackal only occasionally came there from Pallipuram. In 1837 Fr Geevarghese Thoppil joined them (cf. *Positio*: 80). Sometime in June 1840 those three fathers felt that they, enjoying already a common spiritual fellowship, should, after the example of the primitive Christians led by St Peter, follow a common life even with regard to their worldly possessions. So they decided that, from 18 June 1840 (the Corpus Christi Day), they would hold all their belongings and earnings in common and keep a common account (cf. '81: 208f.; '90: 175f.). This decision is recorded in the hand of Chavara in an account book of the Mannanam community. The passage concludes:

The account of the income and expenditure starting from the day we were formed a community: 10 white cups for our own use and of those who would join us later: *Chakram* 56.

Perhaps Chavara had already before this decided upon such a mode of common life. After describing his return to Mannanam, relieved of his assignment as vicar of Pallipuram Parish he writes:

From that day onwards I began to consider myself fully an ascetic and determined to keep myself away completely from my blood relations and decided that my income and expenditure to be accounted in the monastery ('81: 32; '90: 27).

Demise and Funeral of Palackal

Fr Palackal being sick could not stand the cool breeze of Mannanam hill. So he stayed mostly at Pallipuram. On his demise Chavara is rather brief and abrupt:

Early in the morning on Sunday 16 January 1841, our malpan and the founder of the monastery, Fr Thomas Palackal, Malpan of Pallipuram passed away. An

arrangement was made to celebrate one solemn requiem mass at Pallipuram every day till the 41st day, and after that one solemn mass on every 28th day. Each one of the priests who had been his students agreed to say at his place of residence thirteen ordinary masses and two solemn requiem masses, the latter on Mondays, taking turns. The 41st day was observed at the expense of his students ('81: 41f.; 76; '90: 35f, 66)³⁶

Porukara and Chavara Appointed Malpans

Fr Thomas Palackal was appointed malpan by the reigning vicar apostolic some time before 1818 (cf. AMSJ documents related to Chavara Cause, Appendix I, p. 1). In 1844 Frs Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Chavara received patent letters from Vicar Apostolic Francis Xavier Pescetto, by which both of them were appointed malpans (doctor or official teachers of seminarians). Chavara writes about this in his chronicle ('81: 46; '90: 40):

During this festival [of St Joseph] Most Rev. Archbishop sent two patent letters, one to me and the other to Fr Porukara, by which we were raised to the rank of malpans and examiners.

The patent letter sent to Chavara in Portuguese language, dated 16 November 1844, is preserved in the archives of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam (AMSJ, PO, doc. 96). It reads:

In the light of the information we have about Your Reverence's integrity of character and competency, I have the good pleasure to appoint, by this patent letter, your

³⁶ Valerian (1939: 85) quoting the chronicle describes the event a little differently. The first part, i.e. up to "died on January 1841", not found in the printed chronicle is quoted here:

Palackal's illness increased day by day. Hence Fr Chavara commuted between Pallipuram and Mannanam. The practice of virtues like piety, faith, hope, complete conformity to the will of God that had been in Fr Palackal Thomas from childhood days, shone wonderfully during the illness. He used frequently to make acts of those virtues. After having suffered with great patience the tormenting pains of the disease and after receiving with full consciousness the last sacraments, died in the afternoon of Friday 16 January 1841.

Reverence as Master [Mestre] of all ecclesiastical sciences and Examiner of all the clergy of the Syrian Rite in the whole of our vicariate apostolic...I order all concerned to give Your Reverence due honour and submission in your above mentioned capacity and position as master and examiner of the said Rite (*Positio*: 92f.).

Both Frs Porukara and Chavara were already engaged in teaching and training clerics, Chavara at the Pallipuram Seminary from his seminary days onwards and later at Mannanam, and Porukara at least at Mannanam.

In the mean time the community at Mannanam grew in numbers. Fr Geevarghese Thoppil was already there. Wherever Porukara went for preaching and collecting funds he came into contact with many parents, rich and having many children. He used to advise them to consecrate the first born male child to religious life. It is in this way, says Br Kaniyanthara, that boys like Mathew Kadaparakunnel of Kalloorkad, Isaac Kalarickal of Chennankari and a few others came to Mannanam as candidates. Both Frs Porukara and Chavara were already engaged in teaching and training clerics, Chavara at the Pallipuram Seminary from his seminary days onwards and later at Mannanam, and Porukara at least at Mannanam.

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Illness and Death of Porukara

Within five years after the demise of Malpan Palackal the 'second' founder of the congregation, Fr Thomas Porukara, also passed away at rather a young age of forty six years. He was a diabetic patient for some time. In the early years of 1840s the illness got worse. The fathers at Mannanam brought very good physicians to treat him. He stayed at St Joseph's Church, Chovvara to try bath cure in the Aluva River. But nothing helped. About the

last days and death of Porukara Chavara has this entry in his chronicle ('81: 55; '90: 48):

Then he [Porukara] heard that Bishop Bernardine³⁷ in the first year of his reign was on his visits. He sent a letter expressing his desire to see His Grace at a place he would be pleased to suggest. The bishop accepted the request. But at Mannanam Fr Porukara Kunjuthommy Malpan, the second among the founders and, at present, the head of our monastery, was in bed ever ready to die. On Friday 8 January 1846 he again made his confession to me after half an hour of preparation and asked me to give him the Sacrament of Extreme Unction [Anointing of the Sick]. On receiving it he sat up, making the sign of the cross kissed the images of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and kissing the image of St Joseph raised his head, leaned back and breathed his last.

Progress of Mannanam Institutions

Chavara was thus left alone to give leadership to the religious community at Mannanam. Even before the demise of Porukara Chavara's responsibilities increased. As Porukara was a sick person at least from 1843 Chavara had to see to every development at Mannanam. The construction of the church had to be completed. Annual feast s and celebrations had to be conducted. Besides there were a good deal of pastoral commitments outside the monastery. For this Chavara found many helpers. Fr Kuññacko Puthanpurayil of Kanjirappilly, who joined the community in 1841, was a great asset. Not only he donated much of his earnings for the constructions but also was a good fund raiser; going about the parishes he collected a good amount of money³⁸. Some of the diocesan priests like Fr Kora Kalloothara, Fr Puthenpurackal Mathu of Muttam also came to help Chavara and other inmates of

³⁷ This is Bernardine Baccinelli. He was Pro-vicar Apostolic of Quilon in 1845-53 and was appointed Co-adjutor of Verapoly in 1853 and vicar apostolic in 1855 that with the title of Archbishop of Parsala in Thessalonica. Born in Rome in 1807 and called Joseph, he entered OCD in 1824 and made his religious profession in 1825 with the name Bernardine of St Teresa. He arrived in Kerala in 1833 (cf. Ambrosius 1939: 338).

³⁸ He died in 1853, cf. *CMI Photo Directory* 2006: 309.

Mannanam. Vicar Apostolic Francis Xavier Pescetto gave generous donations. A number of lay persons helped the fathers with their monetary donations and other contributions. The Perumalil/Thayyil families continued their help for a long time. Thomman Chacko Murickan and Kollamparampan of Muttuchira, Nellipuzha lity of Cherpunkal, Kurian Kootakath of Nellipuzha and his father were others who made their contributions. Many parishes also gave donations for Mannanam. The money thus collected was spent for the completion of the church buildings, some petty constructions, and a country boat and also for the printing press about which we shall speak in chapter nine. A fund was also established for feeding the poor on the feast of St Joseph.

Two important events of these years need to be mentioned here. In December 1841 the prince of Thiruvithamcore (probably Utradam Tirunal Marthanda Varma who reigned over the state from 1847 to 1860), visited Ettumanoor. A delegation was sent from Mannanam to meet him with costly presents. They also submitted to him a petition, which the prince had read to him. The delegation accompanied the prince from Ettumanoor to Kudamaloor and were generously rewarded²⁹.

More important is the demise of Vicar Apostolic Pescetto on 7 December 1844. Only a month before that the vicar apostolic had conferred on Frs Porukara and Chavara the dignity of malpan and examiner. During the illness of the prelate Porukara managed to go to Varapuzha. Though no visitors were allowed to see the vicar apostolic Porukara was given permission to see him on the death bed. The prelate asked Porukara to pray for him. Chavara stayed at Varapuzha for a few days and was privileged to talk to the prelate who blessed him three times. The latter was touched by the parting words of the vicar apostolic who gave him a gift, a package of books. The news of the demise of Archbishop Pescetto was communicated to Chavara by the vicar general. It reached

²⁹ The Thiruvithamcore royal family seems to have had a special consideration for the Mannanam community. In March 1874 the royal prince Visakam Tirunal (who ruled the state 1880-85) visited Kottayam. Then Prior Kuriakose Porukara requested the prince for the favour of a visit to Mannanam. He was so well pleased and gave a reply in a few days and also sent to the monastery as his gift a painting of Our Lady. This painting is still kept at Mannanam (cf. Bernard 1989: 132).

Mannanam on the 9th of December. As soon as the news was received Fr Porukara, though sick, went to the church in cassock and sang the Office for the Dead together with the other fathers. Chavara attended the funeral and with other Syrian priests officiated in the funeral and also in the seventh day ceremonies. Mgr Ludovic Martini⁴⁰ succeeded Pescetto as vicar apostolic in 1844.

Promulgation of the Carmelite Rules and the Profession of the First Fathers

The new vicar apostolic, Archbishop Ludovic⁴¹, on his first visit to Mannanam decided to construct a separate building for the seminarians.⁴² With the permission of the vicar apostolic Chavara laid the foundation for the parish church of Muttar. When the vicar apostolic was at Mannanam he had promised to ratify (ഉറപ്പുവരുത്ത) the monastery, for which he wanted to get a written petition signed by the inmates. All except two signed the petition, which Chavara submitted to the archbishop (cf. '81: 56).

It was in 1855 the rules were given to the community⁴³. After an eight days' retreat the first eleven fathers made their

⁴⁰ Born 1809 at Piscaglia, Italy. Mgr. Martini professed in 1828, he arrived in Kerala in 1836. Appointed co-adjutor of Pescetto in 1839, succeeded him on his death in 1844, departed for Rome in 1851 and died in 1883 (cf. *Positio*: 93). He was followed by two administrators, Bernardine Nova Ponta of St Agnes, Italian, till 1853, and Bernardine (Baccinelli) of St Teresa till 1859, in which year he was made Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly (Malabar) (cf. Podipara 1970: 87).

⁴¹ From 1849 onwards the title of archbishop was conferred on the Vicars Apostolic of Malabar /Verapoly.

⁴² It is in this building that the St Ephrem's School began to function once the Mannanam Seminary was suppressed in 1890 (1894) (cf. Bernard 1989: 230, 234). The school had been started in 1885 in the bungalow of the monastery and was permanently shifted to the seminary building in 1890. The seminary ceased to function completely only in 1894.

⁴³ Two priests, eight scholastics and one aspirant felt that they could not observe the rules and hence left the monastery ('81: 77). This passage is wrongly translated in English ('90: 67). It seems that Mgr Baccinelli wrote to the Propaganda Congregation in Rome for its

profession of religious vows according to these rules. Chavara gives a brief description at the end of chronicle Vol. I:

On 8 December the Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mother Carmel [became] Discalced Carmelites of Third Order.⁴⁴ For this, Vicar Apostolic of Malayalam [Malabar], Archbishop Bernardine of St Teresa sent the missionary apostolic, Very Rev. Marceline to the Mannanam Monastery. I, Kuriakose Elias, made my profession before him, others made theirs before me ('81: 58; '90: 51f.)

A more detailed description of the event appears in the second volume of the Chronicle, which concludes with the statement that the Archbishop appointed Chavara as prior (cf. below chapter four) and then the others made their profession (cf. '81: 77f.; '90: 67f.)⁴⁵.

approval of his proposal to give the religious of Mannanam rules and permit them to make their profession. Gregory Neerackal (1970: 15f.) quotes two letters preserved in the archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (Scrit. originali—no number is given). The first of these letters is the request of Baccinelli and the second the positive reply of the Congregation.

⁴⁴ "അമലോത്ഭവി കർമ്മലതാതാവിന്റെ ശുശ്രൂഷകളായ കർമ്മലീത്ത ദിൻക്കാസ മൂന്നാം സഭക്കാരായിട്ട്"—these words stand almost in suspense without any word linking to the rest of the passage. Hence we give this translation. It is possible to interpret the words as the Servants of Immaculate Mother of Carmel, the Tertiaries of Discalced Carmelites. On p. 77: (Fr Marceline came here with) "the religious rules of the Most Blessed Immaculate Mother of Carmel", എത്രയും ശുദ്ധമാക്കപ്പെട്ട അമലോത്ഭവിയായ കർമ്മല മാതാവിന്റെ ദർശനക്രമവും") which was translated into Malayalam by Fr Marceline from the Latin. The English translation of the first passage: "On 8 December...sent the missionary apostolic ...to the community of the Third Order of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate", not only leaves out 'Servants' (ശുശ്രൂഷകളായ) but also lacks the nuances of the Malayalam text. The translation of the second passage also seems to be defective: "the Rules of Carmelite Congregation of Mary Immaculate" ('90: 67). The tendency is to paraphrase. Cf. also fn. 45 below.

⁴⁵ The original Syriac text of the profession of Chavara is kept in the Archives of Mannanam (AM^S I).

Rules and Constitutions

According to Parapuram (p. 21ff.) the rules and constitutions, which Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli intended to give the community in 1855, were the same as those of the First Order Carmelites. For this he had them translated into Malayalam by Fr Marceline Berardi OCD. However, they were adapted to the context of the people here. The translation was prepared in such a way as to make the rules on fasting, etc. to conform to the Rite of the members.

This Malayalam text was sent to Mannanam a few months in advance of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, on which day the profession of the fathers was to take place. At the same time the vicar apostolic ordered that the text sent be read out and explained to all those who aspired for religious life at Mannanam Monastery. Sufficient time was to be given to the candidates to study the rules and constitutions and to prayerfully ponder over them. Only after that process of study and reflection the candidates should take a decision whether to continue or not with the religious vocation. Malpan Kuriakose Chavara communicated the order of the prelate to the priests and students, who had been there in the monastery. He had the rules and constitutions read out to them several times.

Many were discouraged by the regulations on fasting, solitude and silence. Fast was prescribed on all days of Advent and Lent. Fr Chavara brought to the attention of the vicar apostolic that the Syrian Christians of Kerala were obliged to observe fast only on nine days in the year and they were exempt on all other days. The prelate replied that according to the prescriptions of the Synod of Diamper⁴⁶ all the days of Advent and Lent were fast days, i.e. only one full meal was allowed on those days. If an exemption had been given the relevant documents need be produced. In fact the prelates of Kodungalloor had obtained from the Holy See the exemption. But the related documents were being kept at Puthenchira, which was the residence of the Kodungalloor prelates for several years after the Dutch superseded the Portuguese in Kerala. There was to be delay in procuring and producing them before the vicar apostolic and effecting the necessary changes and mitigations regarding rules on fasting and abstinence.

⁴⁶ Cf. Synod of Diamper, Session VIII, Decree 10, Scaria Zacharia 1994: 186f.

The community, which, it seems, was originally known as the Congregation of the Servants of Immaculate Conception (cf. '81: 58; '90:51f.)⁴⁷ changed its name to Carmelites /Carmelite Tertiaries by early 1860s. Here we may briefly describe the reactions of the members of the congregation in 1870s. In 1877 a general chapter of the congregation was held at Manjumel Monastery. It was convened by the recently appointed coadjutor bishop of Verapoly, Marceline Berardi. Archbishop Leonard Mellano, vicar apostolic, Fr Philip, vicar general, *et al.* were present. In that the members revised the constitutions then in practice (from 1861-1878). Mgr Marceline OCD and other missionaries sent the final copy to Rome. The members of the Congregation, being not sure whether the true copy or one revised by the missionaries without the knowledge of the members, would reach Rome, themselves made a Latin translation. The translators were Frs Gregory of St Joseph (teacher in the Mannanam Seminary), Alphonse Mary (teacher of the novices at Koonammavu), Joseph Elias of the Blessed Sacrament (cf. the covering letter). In fact this copy agrees with the one, which Marceline and others sent to Rome, except for the footnotes in the former. These footnotes reflect the thinking of the community at this time and before. A study of these notes will be most interesting to understand the rules the Carmelite missionaries introduced, to

⁴⁷ As pointed out above in the Malayalam original we find "the Servants of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel, the Discalced Carmelite Third Order". In the English translation 'Servants' is missing; it translates: "to the Community of the Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites of Mary Immaculate". We know that at this time the community had not been affiliated to the Carmelite Order. That happened only in 1860 (cf. '81: 90f.; '90: 78). We are inclined to interpret the Malayalam text on p. 58 as follows: The first part represents the original name 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'. The addition of Carmel may be a reflection of the situation obtaining after 1855, in which year the Carmelite rules were given to the community, and also of the situation after 1860, in which year they were affiliated as 'Third Order of Discalced Carmelites'. The Malayalam text (which in itself is somewhat obscure) seems to mean: The vicar apostolic sent Fr Marceline to convert the 'Servants of Mary Immaculate' into 'Third Order of Discalced Carmelites' (second part). This process of transformation took five years from 1855 to 1860. The visit of Fr Marceline initiated this process. About the name, cf. *Nota in Prologum*, p. 8ff.; cf. also fn. 39 above.

most of which the reaction of the members was negative. The most important of these notes is the one in the introductory part (*Nota in Prologum*). The *Nota* covers more than ten pages (pp. 4-14). The main points are: name of the congregation, spirit and life style, motives of the missionaries, objectives, founders of the congregation and the main executors.

Name and Identity of the Congregation

The pioneers of the congregation, learning about the miracles worked and the conversion of sinners effected through the merits of the Sacred Heart of B. M. Virgin Immaculate, took this name, viz. "Servants of Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate". It is by this name Mgr Bernardine called them when he gave the rules. This, they assert, is evident from the first rules (given in 1855), all copies of which the missionaries had destroyed by committing them to flames. The four surviving of the eleven first fathers told them about this. They were: the then prior general Cyriac Eliseus (Kuriakose Porukara), Rev. Frs Alexander of St Joseph (his vicar), Zacharias of St Ephrem (rector of the seminary), Cyriac of St Brocard (procurator). It is true that the fathers of the congregation had not refused to accept the name Carmelite Tertiaries, because, by it they could share the indulgences and privileges of the Carmelite Order. Only for that, that name was added to 'Servants of Mary Immaculate', which is essential and the other is incidental.

The authors of the *Nota* attribute vested interests to the Carmelite missionaries for changing the original name and projecting new objectives. They found the newly established community thriving with their committed lives and winning the respect of the faithful. They wanted to bring it under their control—that under the pretext and false promise that the community would be received into the Carmelite Order and would enjoy all its privileges.

A Fully Indigenous Community with Its Own Objectives and Lifestyle

The *Nota* claims that they were submitting to Rome the tenor of the first rules, (which had been completely destroyed without leaving even a rough copy), as they had heard from the fathers. That would unravel what the objective and aim of the community were, who were initiators and founders, and what were

the changes made later, how the third set of rules (which were finalised by the missionaries in 1877-79) contradicted the truth when it said about the aim and reason for founding the congregation: "so that suitable persons may be made available for preaching the Word of God". It is true that the aim of the congregation is the glory of God and the salvation of souls. But the fathers on their own accord, without any pressure or suggestion from outside, with the help of God, started this good work by their example, their hard work, so that they could lead a monastic life. They did not receive any help from the missionaries except the permission given by Bishop Stabilini for soliciting alms from the faithful. They did not understand, then, why the missionaries went about telling everybody that the founder was Archbishop Bernardine, that the objective of the foundation was to have suitable priests for preaching the Word of God and to render other services.

There follows a strong protest against the 'TOCD' title in the place of "Servants of Mary Immaculate" and against the strict Carmelite rules given to them. It is a paradox, they state, that those whom the missionaries call Tertiaries have to follow the rules of the First Order, in some cases stricter eremitic rules. They ridicule the so-called "adaptations to the local conditions". The conclusion is that the condition of the congregation had become precarious; the rules and constitutions were incompatible with the objectives because the activities of the community were various; the title was of Tertiaries but the rule was of the eremites. It is true that they were contemplatives but at the same time engaged in various activities. These contradictions were the causes why their institute from early beginnings to their times was exposed through manipulation, to so many discrepancies, changes, insecurities, confusions and such other miserable experiences (cf. *Nota in Prologum*).

It was only in the middle of the 20th century that the name Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) was adopted. This was considered a recapturing of the original ethos and the original name. The original rules underwent a thorough revision from the late 1950s to the early 1980s and slight modifications after that. The present constitutions emphasise the triple roots of the community: Indian, Oriental and Carmelite. The identity of the community is defined in the CMI Constitutions as follows:

The founding fathers have bequeathed to us the noble tradition of carrying on the spiritual movement they started. Their fervent recollected prayer life, which activated their apostolate, and the apostolate which enriched their prayer life, their leadership in prayer and apostolic activity, their community life centred round the liturgical celebration, their spirit of sacrifice, their unreserved dedication to the preaching of the Word of God and work for the salvation and welfare of the people, their keen sensitivity to orientate life according to the needs and signs of times, their tender devotion to the Immaculate Mother of Carmel and Saint Joseph, their acceptance of the spiritual tradition of the Carmelite religious family, their filial attachment to the Church and its authorities and their concern for the preservation of the identity and development of the Syro-Malabar Church are the main elements of the precious heritage they left for posterity.

These elements of the precious heritage should enable the members to face the challenges of the present and the future. The constitutions continue:

This heritage should define our identity and continuously inspire and move us forward in our life and work. Faithful to the East-Syrian tradition of the Saint Thomas Christians and the example and teaching of the Eastern Fathers, we must constantly endeavour to realize and celebrate the joy of the Christ's resurrection and his personal presence in the community of our brethren. With the prophetic spirit of Carmel we must pursue a life of inner solitude and sacrifice, reaching outwards the mystical union with God so masterfully explained by great mystics like Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross, and at the same time combine it with the burning zeal of Elias for God's kingdom on earth. Looking with sincere respect upon the holy 'seers' (*rishis*) and upon the age-old religious traditions in India, we must seek God in the cave of the heart and strive to establish the rule of the spirit in our material environment and in the whole world (CMI Constitutions 1984 nos. 4&5).

The way Maniakunnel (2005: 150ff.) presents the foundation story of the CMI community is a little misleading. It seems to be influenced by the interpretation of the Carmelite missionaries,

against which interpretation, as we have seen above, the fathers of the congregation strongly reacted after the death of Blessed Chavara. The missionaries apparently concentrated their attention on the actions of Mgr Baccinelli from 1855 onwards and showed a tendency to attribute to him the foundation, considering the event of 8 December 1855 as the most decisive.

Chavara One of the Founders

As the Blessed describes the early days of the foundation in the Chronicle of Mannanam, one may get the impression that it was Fr Thomas Palaekal ("the founder of the monastery") and Fr Thomas Porukara ("Kunjithommy Malpan, the second among the founders")⁴⁸ were the first to have the inspiration and start work on the foundation. He himself came later to help in the work (cf. '81: 26; '90: 21). But the way he relates the story about the inspiration and initial work of the two pioneers, Chavara's complete identification with them, especially his malpan, and his emotional involvement in all that, becomes very evident. This may be attributed to the intimate relation he had kept with his malpan. The latter might have, from the very beginning, wished to associate in the monastery project the most beloved disciple of his. Chavara must have internalised for himself the inspiration and the intentions of the two from the start.

About Chavara's actual, physical participation the following instances are very important. Chavara had joined Palackal and others in the search for a suitable site for the religious house, perhaps for the first time during the third search ('81: 11; '90: 8f.), and a second time when the team went up to see the Olankannamukal hill, after it was finally decided to acquire it for the purpose (cf. '81: 19; '90: 15). Once a path was cleared up the hill and while Porukara was trying for government permission, Chavara was sent to Mannanam by his malpan to inquire about the progress of the affairs (cf. '81: 20; '90: 17).

It is significant that during the third search for site, although other seminarians too wished to see the places, Palackal allowed only Chavara to accompany the searching party. So too it is he who was chosen to go to Mannanam to get details of the progress of the work there. Is it not a sign that the malpan liked to enlist him for

⁴⁸ See above pp. 3-10.

the work from the beginning itself? Here we may quote Chavara about his relation to Palackal:

For, from my childhood Malpan Palackal adopted me as his protégé, looked after the needs of both my body and soul and met the expenses of my priestly studies. Until his death he took more interest in me than in any of his relatives or his other spiritual students. **He considered me as his heir, and left me in charge of the work that was his heart's love, the work of the monastery, to which he had dedicated his life** ('81: 59; '90: 52f., emphasis ours).

However, Chavara's account of the early beginnings seems to restrict them to the two pioneers. It was, as seen above, on 11 May 1831 that the foundation stone for the house at Mannanam was laid. While describing the difficult days that followed that event he says:

After laying the foundation stone for the monastery and erecting a cross, a shed was built around the latter and everyday the solemn litany was sung there. But all these had been achieved mainly by the efforts and the interest of the two priests (90: 21, 22; 81: 26).

Thus Chavara not only attributes to the two elders the original inspiration shared between them but also asserts that these two were the only persons responsible for materialising it in actual foundation. It may be this projection of the two elders the reason why a few writers, up to the early 1930s,⁴⁹ consider only the same two as founders, who had the original inspiration and who took the initiative to start the monastery. This is quite characteristic of the humility and self effacing nature of Chavara. He is particular to project others for various achievement to which he equally contributed. We shall see this spirit working when the Blessed describes foundation and growth of the Koonammavu Convent. However, we have to take into account the following facts as well as the early testimonies of some important persons.

⁴⁹ Cf., e.g. *The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar*, Trichinopoly 1932: 9ff.

Chavara's Role in the Foundation

It is after saying what we quoted above that Chavara speaks of his own direct involvement in the affairs: from his young age onwards he had been of one mind with his malpan, Palackal. He was ordained on 29 November 1829²⁰ at Arthunkal where Vicar Apostolic Stabilini was staying at that time. During the first Eucharist, which he celebrated with the bishop, as counselled by both Palackal and Porukara²¹, he made a special intention and prayed for the fulfilment of the work started by the two. The following Sunday (first Sunday of Annunciation), probably with the same intention, he celebrated the Eucharist solemnly in his parish of Chennankari. After this he returned to Pallipuram to seek the guidance of his malpan. Going back to Chennankari he stayed there for about a month. He made a visit to Pulinkunnu and strolled about for some days and preached a retreat at their filial church in the *Thekke Angadi* (South Street). Hence he felt some attachment to that place. It seems that this visit to Pulinkunnu and his activities there were not in accordance with the intention of the malpan. Chavara recalls:

This wandering about was not to the liking of the malpan. Coming to know that, I returned to Pallipuram at once. After that loitering, I have never deviated from the path set for me by the malpan and we three were the only persons dedicated to work for the new house, leaving home and relatives and everything else ('81: 26f.; '90: 22, emphasis ours).

²⁰ Cf. *Positio*: XXIX, 55f., 401f., 478f., 552. Valerian says that on 29 Nov. he said his solemn Mass at Chennankari—he interprets *Sūbāra* Ist Sunday as 29 November. In the chronicle we find: കഴിഞ്ഞ 30-ാം തീയതി സുഗന്ധമൂലം എന്നാൽ അതായതാഴ്ച. This may be interpreted as 30 November. If the ordination was on 29th, solemn Mass at the parish could not be earlier than 30th.

²¹ This seems to be the meaning of the Malayalam text: "ഈ അപ്പുമാരുടെ ബുദ്ധി പൊതുവായി...എന്നുള്ള നിരൂപണമായി തന്നെ ആ ഞാരുടെയും പുതിയ അണച്ചിടിയായി..." The English translation gives it differently: "He had, at the time of ordination, to which he had been led by these two priests, asked God." In Malayalam, Chavara was led to make the intention as counselled by the two priests, while in English he was led to the ordination by the two priests.

During the period of ordeal ('Time of Stress', see above p. 10f.) Chavara takes a few initiatives (of course with the concurrence of the elders) with youthful enthusiasm and great concern. As mentioned above Mgr Francis Xavier Pescetto transferred Chavara from Mannanam to Pallipuram. Chavara obeyed the order but it was with great mental anguish he did this, because the future of the Mannanam foundation appeared to him very bleak. It is in this context, with all good faith and with the positive approval of the two elders, who suspected that the move was to suspend the work at Mannanam that he dared to take certain steps, steps that Mgr Pescetto considered not only imprudent but even offensive. Chavara approached the prelate and in all humility pleaded with him to relieve him from his appointment at Pallipuram parish as his absence from Mannanam would very adversely affect the works started there. Chavara explained:

As the malpan was ill and Fr Porukara was to go about and collect funds, there was none but me to be left in charge of the work at Mannanam and if I were transferred, the work would suffer.

The stern reply of the bishop was that his order should be obeyed. As Chavara insisted with his plea, the former rebuked him saying: "You want to move about where you like to. You did not relish the order of your prelate". Then Chavara "with fear and trembling withdrew and forthwith took charge of Pallipuram" (81: 28f.).

The Blessed tried his best to do full justice to the new job. At the same time whenever possible he would go to Mannanam and supervise the work there. This became possible because he got the help of Cathanar⁵² Varkey, a nephew of Malpan Palackal. This made things worse. Fr Varkey behaved a little imprudently in punishing a member of the parish. Complaints went to Varapuzha. The vicar apostolic forbade Chavara to stay away from Pallipuram for more than eight days at a time without the written permission of the prelate. This grieved him very badly. However, the dedicated work of Palackal at the seminary and of Porukara along the southern coastal areas appeared to appease Pescetto. Chavara thought that the prelate would now be better disposed towards the

⁵² Cathanar: this is how a St Thomas Christian priest was called generally and stands for 'Father'.

cause of the monastery. He was mistaken: "My ignorance and immaturity led me to act imprudently" ('81: 31f.; '90: 26).

After consulting his malpan, Chavara proceeded to Varapuzha again to plead with the bishop for a change. But the latter kept silent first.

Then like an obstinate child I went on to say that Fr Varkey could very well replace me, as he was an able priest. He could also get guidance from Malpan Thomas who would, on account of his illness, be always there. I pleaded that His Grace be good enough to appoint him vicar. But the prelate ordered me to quit. I looked sad. But he wanted me to send Fr Varkey to him. I replied I had to go to Mannanam as soon as I reach Pallipuram. I assured the bishop that Fr Varkey knew to administer the sacraments and everything. Hearing my imprudent answer His Grace noisily shifted his chair turning towards me. I got frightened. Then he gently reprimanded me asking whether this was the manner, in which one should talk to superiors. He asked me how a young priest could speak the way I did. He added that I deserved to be suspended at once. I was terrified on hearing this; I knelt, kissed his hand and came away.

Fr Michael⁵³ had gestured to me several times to shut up. But my indiscretion and zeal for having the monastery built had led me to give answers grave enough for suspension. Regretting my words, and grateful that he had understandingly forgiven me, I returned to Pallipuram. I sent Fr Varkey at once to Varapuzha. His Grace was good enough to appoint him as vicar ('81: 31f.; '90: 26f.).

The way Chavara acted was imprudent but the intention was pure and simple: his great zeal for the cause of the new religious community. It is interesting to note that while the two elders keep a low profile, Chavara is in the forefront in all these undertakings. We get the impression that even before the demise of Palackal and Porukara, Chavara assumes a leading role, with which the other two are happy.

Chavara Left Alone

Even before the pioneers passed away, Palackal in 1841 and Porukara in 1846, Chavara took several initiatives on his own in

⁵³ Padre Michael Corinju, secretary to the vicar apostolic.

consultation with the seniors. However, it is after the death of Thomas Porukara the full responsibility of leading the newly founded religious community fell on his shoulders. About this Fr Kuriakose Porukara writes in his short biography of Chavara:

In the meantime our first superior and the first founder of the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites, Malpan Thomas Palackal on 16 January 1841, and the second superior and founder Malpan Thomas Porukara, on 8 January 1846, departed to face God without seeing the culmination of the works they had started, to receive the reward for the labours they had undertaken. Both of them entrusted everything in the hands of the Prior [Chavara]. He has written the life story of both⁵⁴. He was grief-struck at their departure and at the heavy burden of the work, which he inherited. But in extreme humility trusting in God and the intercession of the Blessed Mother and St Joseph, with his humble nature he started to walk in the path of his predecessors, carrying their burden (Porukara 1905: 32).

The picture we get of Chavara in this description is of a person struggling under the heavy burden that fell on his shoulders. There is the material aspect of the burden. But the spiritual dimension is of much greater importance. Chavara had been in the process of assimilating the vision and life orientation of the deceased elders and developing a spiritual vision and lifestyle of his own. The dimensions of that vision and style were: deep contemplative prayer, penance, study, teaching, proclamation of the Word of God, preaching of retreats, celebration of the Holy Eucharist, administration of other Sacraments and many other socio-pastoral activities. From his seminary days onwards Kuriakose had internalized and made his own the spiritual vision and lofty aspirations of malpan Palackal, and by his life and writings gave clearer expression of what was internalized. The retreat he parched at Pulimkunnu might have been a new experience. Perhaps it was the beginning of his evolution into a well-appreciated preacher and spiritual leader of Kerala. Chavara, who had learned from his malpan the spirit of prayer, high spiritual thinking, the orientation for proclaiming the Word of God, and the lessons of community living, started his pastoral ministry under the

⁵⁴ No particular biography of Porukara by Chavara has come to us. Many details of Porukara's life can be found in the chronicle of Mannanam written by the Blessed.

leadership of the same malpan and was led to monastic life. His stay at Mannanam in the company of Fr Porukara seems to have deepened and broadened his pastoral orientation.

Now it was left to Chavara to assimilate the vision and life orientation of the deceased predecessors with his own life vision and bring up a new generation filled with that spirit. This was the spiritual aspect of the burden that he was to carry on. It was, indeed, a very exacting task. That must have created a great struggle in him. His personal assimilation may have attained a measure of maturity and he must have experienced the ecstasy derived from that. But the agony was always there: how to incarnate that spirit into the life-style of the growing community; how it was to take flesh in the ever growing variety of activities; how to express it in terms of rules and constitutions. It is this process, which must have caused the greatest pain and struggle in his mind.

Where do we find the parameters of the above process? The integral vision, which the Blessed made his own, is no doubt the spirit and charism of the CMI Congregation. It is the basis of the individuality of the community. But where have we to seek and search for it? Is it in the rules given to them in 1855? But many are reluctant to admit it, as we have seen above in the comments (*Nota in Prologum*) that some of the fathers sent to Rome in late 1870s. Why? Because these rules were neither composed by Chavara nor received from the other two founding fathers. They were the rules of the Carmelites of Europe. Although slight modifications were made in them, could those rules, developed as they were in a foreign cultural milieu, absorb the spirit and the particular vision of the early fathers of the CMI Congregation?

Perhaps the spirit and concern behind the rules might reflect a universal spiritual ethos common to all human kind; thus it may contain the Indian spiritual vision. There is no doubt that the prime contents of the vision of Elijah of Mount Carmel can be found in those rules. There is no incongruity in thinking that elements of the spirituality and mysticism of Eastern Christianity also found their way into them. In that way those rules, especially the old "regula", may be considered to have imbibed and reflected, to a certain extent, the vision of the early fathers of the congregation. Yet when we consider the circumstances in which they were developed, we see them as evolved from the Medieval European spiritual background.

If the unravelling of the ethos of the fathers is not in those rules, where can that happen to be? It is in their life style, in what they have on their own accord spontaneously expressed in words, that we may search for that revelation. We have no evidence of any writing coming down to us from the pens of Palackal or Porukara; although it is quite possible that they had written some kind of chronicle or other notes. In the case of Porukara his brother Kuriakose explicitly tells us that he had started writing chronicles from the time he received minor orders (cf. Porukara 1905: 19). Unfortunately nothing of them has come to our knowledge. However, their disciples have noted down for the posterity what they had experienced about their life and vision. It is in the writings of Blessed Chavara that we discover to a great extent the revelation and elucidation of the original spirit and vision—in his chronicles, letters, spiritual writings as well as his literary compositions.

We have already referred to the fact that the original community at Mannanam moulded its lifestyle after what it had known about the Dominicans. From 1855 onwards a slow change came about. But at the same time some essential elements continued without change. When they received the Carmelite rules the Mannanam Hill might have reminded them of Mount Carmel of Palestine. Is it not because of it that Chavara and his successor Kuriakose Porukara assumed the names Elijah and Elisha respectively, perhaps names not found among the saints of either reformed or original Carmelite Orders?

It may here be asked how far the Indian spiritual vision and the Indian tradition of *sannyasa* influenced the first fathers? When Chavara describes the foundation of the congregation, it is words like *tapasubhavanam* and *darśanaveedu* that he uses for the monastery. These words are imbued with the Indian spiritual vision. There seems nothing wrong in thinking that the seer who wrote *Ātmāmutāpam*⁵⁵ had imbibed at least indirectly the rich meaning the Indian seers attribute to them. There are indications in his writings that he had some knowledge about Indian tradition of religious life. One instance, which we find in his biography of Palackal, may be referred to here. Miles Prendergast was Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly from 1821 to 1827. It was at this time

⁵⁵ In Chavara, *Complete Works*, Vol. II: *Literary Works*, Mannanam 1981 (Malayalam), p. 1ff.

that the custom of bishops directly making visitation of churches started. Chavara writes about it:

The new bishop started the practice of visiting churches. Earlier bishops used to send missionary priests for visitation. But they themselves never went, probably following the custom of Indian ascetics (*munimār*) who never went out, so as to be respected by the rajahs of Malabar (*81: 71f.; *90: 63).

Chavara Kuriakose inherited not only the more contemplative spirit of Palackal but also the more active dimension of Porukara's spirituality. Thus, through the vision he made his own and observing the Carmelite rules, he tried to give to both these aspects a texture of his own in a very dynamic manner. The Church of St Thomas was still in the grip of foreign rule. Hence it was not easy at that time for achieving a free, integrated, fully Indian growth. It is the task left to the generations that followed. The present constitutions, which, with the needs of the present and future in view, were formulated after many years of prayerful study and discussion, might lead the members on that path.

Early Testimonies of Some Important Persons

Fr Leopold Beccaro of St Joseph OCD, the confessor and spiritual director of Chavara, wrote in his diary on the very day Chavara died (3 January 1871):

Today...Fr Cyriac Elias of the Holy Family, the first Prior, died after a life of great innocence... The **founder** and the first Prior of the Order of Malabar founded also the convent of the nuns...(Beccaro 2003: 17f., emphasis ours).

A biography, which the same author wrote in Malayalam in 1871, says:

Bearing in mind this two-fold obligation of a priest, the above said Thomas Palackal and Fr Thomas Porukara, a God-fearing and pious priest from the parish of Kalluorkad, and **our Fr Kuriakose Chavara** decided to start a monastery, which might help to realize these objectives easily and unhampered by worldly cares (ibid: 7, emphasis ours).

In a report to OCD prior general (probably submitted in 1870) Leopold repeats the same idea:

In 1834 or 35⁵⁶ (I do not remember the precise date) **three Syrian -rite priests** of the Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly, exemplary models of that clergy ...built a monastery with an attached church on a solitary hill called Mannanam ... (*Positio*: 189f., emphasis ours)

Fr Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara, the second prior and successor of Chavara, has this in his short biography of Chavara:

Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family, **the founder**⁵⁷ and first prior of the newly established Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites, the malpan and vicar general of Kerala ... (Porukara 1905: 29, emphasis ours).

There are many others who testified that Chavara was one of the founders of the congregation, e.g. Parapuram, Moolayil, Koyipallil, Bernard of St Thomas.

It may be observed that despite these weighty testimonies there emerged in early twentieth century a trend to consider Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara as the founders of the Congregation, almost to the exclusion of Chavara. It is this view which the authors of *The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar* (1932) seem to hold, as mentioned above. This slowly changed in 1930s itself. As the cause for the canonization of Chavara progressed, and especially after his beatification in 1986, the tendency became the opposite, namely to look upon Chavara as the founder and to relegate the other two to a secondary position.⁵⁸ Here we would like to call the attention of the readers to two important documents. The first is *Positio* to which frequent reference is made in this book. It is a document approved by Rome and on the basis of which the beatification process was concluded, and on the basis of which Pope John Paul II declared Chavara Blessed, on 8 February 1986. This document presents all the

⁵⁶ It is disturbing that Leopold makes no distinction between the first beginnings and later events. He is not precise about the dates. By 1834/35 Chavara was quite active at Mannanam.

⁵⁷ അടിസ്ഥാനപാത്രൻ

⁵⁸ See two articles (in Malayalam) in *Karamla Sandesam* (a semi-official publication of the CMI Congregation): June 2004, pp. 79-87 and September 2004, pp. 21-28.

three—Palackal, Porukara and Chavara—as founders (cf. *Positio*: viif., xxixf., 79). The second document is the CMI Constitutions, which were revised and updated after the Second Vatican Council and approved by the Holy See in 1983. These constitutions accept all the three as founders ('founding fathers'):

It [the community of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate] grew out of the intense God-experience in Christ of our founding fathers, Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara and Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara (CMI Constitutions 1984: no. 1).

Finally we might observe that it is unbecoming to call these two venerable persons, Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, 'cofounders'—persons, whom Blessed Chavara, his successor Fr Kuriakose Porukara and many early fathers of the congregation so reverently addressed as the 'founders', 'the first', and 'the second among founders'; 'the first' and 'the second superiors' (see above). It is these three most revered founding fathers that bequeathed to the CMI the most precious heritage referred to above. The CMI constitutions, after prolonged studies and discussions, have firmly established that the CMI community "grew out of the intense God-experience in Christ of our founding fathers, Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara and Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara".

CHAPTER FOUR

Leadership of Chavara and Growth of the Congregation

The religious profession of the first eleven fathers at Mannanam in 1855 was a great event in the history of the Kerala Church. Many people from far and wide came to Mannanam to witness this rare ceremony (cf. Parapuram: 30). The religious community now with their new rules and constitutions would work with renewed zeal for the spiritual and cultural progress of their own and of the faithful at large. Kuriakose Porukara gives the following assessment of the new thrust:

After this Chavara and companions led a quiet life in the monastery as if in the House of God. They faithfully observed the given rules and constitutions as if they were the Word of God. By this and the practice of virtues such as humility, obedience, love of God, love of neighbour, they soared high in their own spiritual journey and stimulated others with their good example and wise counsels. [After alluding to the six new foundations, he continues:] Many persons, noted for virtue, knowledge, preaching talents, zeal for the salvation of souls, and administrative ability, lived in the monasteries.

Then comes the description of the zealous work of the members for a radical reform of the Christians of Kerala. Alluding to the miraculous catch of fish by Jesus' disciples in the New Testament (cf. Lk 5: 4ff. and Jn 21:5ff.), he says:

These brethren, as ordered by the bishop, proceeded to parishes having flocks of one thousand, or two thousand or even five thousand. They, by preaching retreats and delivering sermons, catechising and hearing confessions, completely destroyed the rule of Satan and netted men for life eternal. Witnessing this the bishops, parish priests and the faithful rejoiced and thanked God. In order to augment these good results many came forward requesting the fathers to start monasteries in different places, and accompanied the members in the search for sites and gave good counsel and helped them in the work of new foundations (Porukara 1905: 33f.).

New Foundations

In 1855 there were eleven priests who made their profession. There was one more (Fr Thomas Nellisseril of Pazhayur Parish)¹, who due to serious illness, could not participate in the retreat and could not make his profession. Chavara says that he was admitted to the monastery by Fr Marceline sometime after 1855. The Blessed gives a touching description of the heroic and edifying manner, in which Fr Thomas accepted his illness and sufferings, which made Chavara feel that he was the first fruit the Blessed Mother gave to the community (cf. 81; 82-84).

Two deacons and five aspirants also were there. Of the aspirants, we do not know whether more than one persevered. Soon one of the eight deacons, who had left, returned. Thus there must have been at Mannanam Monastery 12 priests and four deacons in late 1850s. Fr Varkey Parapuram lists them very systematically (cf. Parapuram: 25-28). By and by more candidates came to Mannanam. As the number of members increased new foundations were started in different parts of Kerala. New foundations, as Fr Kuriakose Porukara says, attracted very qualified candidates. According to a letter dated 29 June 1860 Mgr Baccinelli wrote to the OCD superior general that there were in all 63 members in the congregation. Item wise he gives the following numbers: 18 professed priests, 5 scholastics, 24 choir novices, 14 lay novices which actually total only 61, 2 short of the total he gives (cf. *Positio*: 184). The choir novices must have been all priests, as at that time profession was made only after ordination to priesthood.

Baccinelli in the same letter, perhaps with an element of exaggeration, speaks of the heroism of the candidates. He extols the extraordinary zeal of the priests who had given up their parishes and possessions; of adult laymen, some of them even renouncing marriages that had been already arranged; of young boys "who ran off from home, as if naked, even refusing the inducements the parents offered them to dissuade them, or even suffering great torture meted out by the parents and relatives". They insisted: "We want to be Carmelites; we want to join the monastery", or "I am rich enough with the scapular and I do not need your money". Much of this may be exaggeration, as we do not find any such description in the writings of Chavara or

¹ Parapuram (p. 27) says that he belonged to Palappattu Parish.

Kuriakose Porukara or any other member of the congregation. We cannot also believe what the prelate says about the dress, the religious "dressed in the holy habit of the Carmelites".² However the message of the hyperbolic description is clear: many priests, many grown up persons, many youngsters enthusiastically entered the new congregation making great sacrifices.

In 1870 Fr Leopold reported that there was lot of religious vocation s from educationally and socially forward families. When he was writing there were 46 young men undergoing training in the novitiate or in prenovitiate courses. The joy, which they manifest with restraint, in the midst of religious observance of rules and customs, is a clear sign that they had the true spirit of their religious vocation (Report of 1870, *Positio*: 195).

Before the passing away of Blessed Chavara in 1871 seven (besides Mannanam) new foundations were started: 1. Koonammavu (1857), 2. Elthuruth (1858), 3. Plasnal (1858), 4. Vazhakulam (1859), 5. Pulincunnu (1861), 6. Ampazhakad (1868), 7. Mutholi (1869). Of these Plasnal was soon given up. But preparations were being completed for a new monastery at Chethipuzha (Changanachery).

St Philomina's Monastery Koonammavu (1857)

There was at Koonammavu a small beautiful church, with a modest presbytery attached to it (cf. Parapuram: 181 ff.)³. The religious profession of the eleven fathers at Mannanam inspired Archbishop Baccinelli to think of starting a religious house exclusively for the Latin priests. It must have been sometime in 1857 that he got the presbytery enlarged, and he sent to Koonammavu from Varapuzha Seminary two scholastics and a priest to live there as a community. The experiment did not succeed as all the three, one after another, left. It was then, that

² The members at that time were not yet given the Carmelite habit. Their dress was the simple white cassock as worn by the diocesan clergy, with a leather belt around the waist and a small scapular inside the cassock.

³ Fr Parapuram gives a long account of the Koonammavu foundation. The church and presbytery were built during the time of Vicar Apostolic Francis Xavier. The expenses were met by the mission (cf. *ibid*: 181).

after consulting other missionaries, the archbishop decided to request Chavara to take over that house and send there three priests and two scholastics of Mannanam.

Missionary Marceline communicated this decision to Chavara in a letter dated 14 August 1857. In this letter he pointed out the constitutional provision for Chavara to take over Koonammavu. According to the provision of the rules and constitutions of the congregation, if a place is offered for starting a monastery, the religious could accept it with the permission of the local ordinary. When a person receives a patent letter transferring him from one house to another, he has to go to the new place without delay. When he goes to the new house, he automatically becomes member of that house. Then the letter speaks of the order of the archbishop: Rev. Mathew Munjanatt, Mathew Kalapurackal, Scaria Kalathil, and Scholastics Thoppil and Geevarghese (Varkey Parapuram) of the parish of Parur⁴ should go to the monastery at Koonammavu as early as possible, immediately after the feast of Assumption. In case it is difficult to send Fr Scaria Kalathil and one of the scholastics, two others whom the superior deemed fit, could substitute them. Chavara is asked to accompany them. The archbishop is expected to give a present for the monastery (cf. *Positio*: 179f.).

This letter reached Mannanam when the Prior had gone to Pallipuram for preaching on the feast of Assumption. He knew about it only when, after the feast, he went to Varapuzha to visit Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli. By this time Fr Marceline also reached Varapuzha and they had some discussion about the new venture. Chavara returned to Mannanam and after consultation with other members decided to send to Koonammavu all but Fr Kalapurackal. Although there are a few discrepancies in the lists found in the letter of Marceline, Chronicle of Mannanam and the Diary of Parapuram⁵, we may assume that what Chavara says is to be taken

⁴ "Paroecianus Paravurensis" (of the parish of Paravur). This must be the South Paravur, near which was Amballoor from where Varkey (Geevarghese) Parapuram hailed.

⁵ We have three (apparently) different lists of the persons sent or to be sent to Koonammavu: a) Letter of Marceline: (Fathers) 1) Munjanatt, 2) Kalapurackal, 3) Kalathil, (Scholastics) 4) Thoppil, 5) Geevarghese (Parapuram); b). Chronicle of Chavara (81:84f.): (Fathers) 1) Munjanatt, 2) Kalapurackal, (Scholastics) 3) Thoppil, 4)

as correct: Fr Munjanatt, Scholastics Thoppil, Parapuram, Kanatt Paulose were sent. May be Fr Kalathil's case was settled in the discussion at Varapuzha.

The four received the blessing of the Prior and the good wishes of the other members and started from Mannanam sometime after 15 August. Their first stop was Pallipuram Parish. There they visited the Kootungal family to which Ithamma of the Porukara family had been married and condoled the bereavement of their two children in an accident.⁶ On the way they visited the Konthuruthy Parish. The parish priest, Kanatt Jacob, who was desirous of entering the religious congregation, received them well and offered them hospitality. Then they proceeded to Varapuzha where Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli and Missionary Philip and others wished them well and sent them off to their destination. At Puthenpally they received the hospitality of the parish priest there. On their way to Koonammavu they met the only Latin priest who had stayed back at Koonammavu as companion to Fr Marceline. He was leaving Koonammavu for Varapuzha. Later he joined the Manjummel Latin religious community.

At Koonammavu Fr Marceline gave them a hearty welcome and accepted them as members of the monastery. Chavara says: "From that day Koonammavu became a monastery of ours". Under one of the missionaries who always stayed there they lived as one well ordered religious community. The vicar apostolic used to visit them every Thursday. Chavara says: "Every thing is going on there with greater discipline and order than here [at Mannanam]" ('81:

Parapuram, 5) Paulose of Konthuruthi. Chavara says all the five except Fr Kalapurackal were sent.; c) Parapuram: (Fathers) 1) Munjanatt, 2) Kalapurackal, (Scholastics) 3) Varkey (Parapuram), 4) Chandappilla. If we can consider Chandappilla as Thoppil, Parapuram may be right when he says that four were sent. According Chavara also only four were sent. The remaining problem is about Kalapurackal, who according to Chavara, was not sent to Koonammavu, but is found in the list of Parapuram. Besides Paulose Kanatt is found in the list of Chavara but not in that of Parapuram. Isn't it possible that Parapuram, who was one of the four sent, is right?

⁶ On a visit to Malayattoor their children died by drowning in the river. This couple afterwards shifted to Mannanam and spent their last days in (prayer and) practice of virtues (cf. Parapuram: 216).

85). Soon Fr Paulose Manavalan of Kuthiathodu and Fr Jacob Kanattt of Konthuruthy joined the community as novices. A young man, by name Jacob, also was there as unprofessed brother co-operator. Thus the monastery commenced with seven members (cf. '81: 84f.; Parapuram: 116 ff.). The monastery was named after the patroness of the church, St Philomina.

For some time nobody was appointed superior of the community. Fr Marceline himself discharged superior's duties or gave interim charge to some other missionary. Soon it was decided by the archbishop that some one from among the professed priests of the congregation should be appointed superior. For this Chavara was asked to go to Koonammavu.⁷ After due considerations Fr Mathew Munjanatt was appointed vicar of the monastery and Chavara himself was asked to give him the patent. Parapuram (cf. p. 291f.) comments that this was a proper action on the part of the archbishop who recognised the autonomy of the religious congregation started at Mannanam.

Elthuruth Monastery (1858)

In the mean time the faithful and priests of the churches in the northern parts of Kerala were clamouring for a foundation in that region. For this they collected some money from several churches in the north and bought a large compound called Eluvathuruth which was surrounded on three sides by a canal and fields. Only on one side, near the Aranattukara church, there was solid earth (cf. Koyipallil: 42 f.). Here they also constructed a two-storey building with a chapel. Fr Ittira Valiyath of Anakallunkal was reappointed parish priest of Aranattukara to oversee the arrangements. At this stage Vicar Apostolic Bernardine, in February 1858, ordered Prior Chavara to establish a monastery at this place.

⁷ There was another reason also for asking Fr Prior to go to Koonammavu. Marceline had misunderstood the immature conversation of a novice and suspected that at Mannanam the discipline of prayer was not kept properly. He wanted to discuss this point with the Prior. It was made clear that the suspicion arose from a gross misunderstanding (cf. Parapuram: 57 ff.)

On 2 February 1858, the feast of the Purification of the Mother of God, Rev. Fr Prior, as per order,⁸ laid the foundation for the church of the monastery, to be named after the Blessed Mother. That day he said Mass in the chapel of the two-storey building already constructed. Several priests and laypersons from the nearby parishes came there on the occasion. They thoroughly enjoyed the functions. The Aranattukara parish provided the requirements like candles for the church. A gentleman named Iyakunona of the same parish gave a banquet for the priests and also presented the Prior a length of cloth. As ordered the Prior sent from Mannanam to Elthuruth in April the same year, Fr Geevarghese Thoppil and two aspirants, and again in May, Fr Augustine Kadavil. A white and red chasuble of damask and some other items like alb were also sent for use there (cf. 81: 85). Thus monastic life started in the above mentioned building at Eluvathuruth. Fr Koyippallil (p. 43) says that it was Prior Chavara who changed this name into Elthuruth (El = God, thuruth = island, 'God's Island'). In 1861 Fr Mathew Munjanatt died at Elthuruth and was interred in the small chapel there (cf. 81: 92).

Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli ordered the churches from Udayamperur to north to contribute the excess balance of income of a year for the construction of the monastery and church at Elthuruth. He encouraged the faithful also to make their contribution. A good fund was thus raised before the Roccas disturbances started. With this the monastery was built. But the construction of the church had to be suspended from 1861 to the end of 1865 (cf. Parapuram: 1098f.; cf. also Valerian 1939: 115). Fund was raised by the *pidiyari* system (cf. Parapuram: 1185).

In 1866 Fr Mathai Mariam Kappil was appointed vicar of the Elthuruth Monastery. This was particularly for building a church there. On a mission entrusted to him by the vicar apostolic, he visited Edathva and Champakulam churches in the south. From these churches he collected about Rs. 700/-. This prompted the churches in the north also to contribute.⁹ Thus the construction of

⁸ Archbishop Bernardine had authorised Chavara to perform this ceremony.

⁹ The archbishop himself donated Rs. 300/- first and again Rs. 200/- and a few articles for the newly constructed church. Parapuram gives us the names of a number of priests and lay persons who contributed

the church was completed. It was "most becoming and elegant" of all the churches of the congregation. Parapuram says (p.1108) that it was built in a new style and all were pleased with it. For consecration Frs Leopold Beccaro, the provincial delegate of the congregation, about whom we shall speak later on, Prior Kuriakose, Varkey and four novices started out on 3 September Monday from Koonammavu in the big canoe which Fr Prior had, with due permission, brought to Koonammavu from Mannanam. This was its first trip. Chavara imaginatively describes: "It was the new [first] trip in the new canoe for the consecration of the new church" ('81: 136).

In the next few days the final touches and decoration of the church were completed. On 8 October, when "everything looked fresh and fine", Fr Prior celebrated the Eucharist in the chapel. People from the nearby parishes started pouring in from midnight onwards. At 6 am the consecration started. It was Chavara who performed the consecration ceremony. The archbishop had authorised him for this, saying that since Chavara had laid the foundation, he should himself consecrate the church (cf. Parapuram: 1105). At 7 am Delegate Leopold celebrated Mass in the consecrated church. After this the delegate made a canonical visitation of the monastery, which was followed by a grand recreation. That was on a Wednesday. The same evening all left Elthuruth for Koonammavu, where they reached early next morning (cf. '81: 136; cf. also Parapuram: 1105).

In course of time Elthuruth Monastery attained a status in the north equal to that of Mannanam in the south. Soon a seminary was opened there attached to the monastery and it flourished day by day. During the Roccas episode Elthuruth played a decisive role. Visitor Apostolic Mgr Leo Meurin made this monastery his residence in the north. Again it was in this monastery that Mgr Adolf Medlycot, the first vicar apostolic of Thrissur, was solemnly received (cf. Valerian 1939: 116; Bernard 1992: 788). Now there is a higher secondary school and a first grade college here.

Plasnal Monastery (1858-59)

In chapter three we have seen how seminarian Antony Kudakkachira was refused admission to the religious community at

to the cause. The members of the monastery went about Thrissur, Pappur, Chittattoor, etc. and collected funds (cf. Parapuram: 1099ff.).

Mannanam. He went out vowing with a vengeance that he would establish a monastery of his own. He, with the help of the parish of Aruvithura, built a monastery of a sort on the land made available by that parish at Plasnal. The life there was patterned after that of St Antony of Egypt. Later he left for Baghdad with a few candidates of the monastery to get a bishop from there. Unfortunately on his second visit to Bagdad he and many of the candidates died there (cf. chapter 6), so much so that only one priest was left over at Plasnal.

The Aruvithura Parish wanted the property back and to convert the monastery into a filial chapel. But Vicar Apostolic Bernardine wished it to continue as a monastery and advised Fr Chavara to take it over and convert it into a house of the Mannanam community. As desired by the Prior the only remaining priest, at the order of the archbishop, requested the Prior to receive him as a member of Mannanam Congregation and take over the Plasnal establishment. As it was the wish of the ordinary, the Prior accepted the offer and he himself visited the place. As it was a malaria-infected locality the Prior had expressed his reservations before the archbishop. But the latter was insistent. So after the rainy season Fr Prior sent to Plasnal Fr Kuriakose Kochupurackal together with two candidates. Thus started the monastery at Plasnal (cf. '81: 86-88).

This was in the year 1858. It seems that it continued for two years, i.e. till May 1860. Meantime, it seems, Fr Kuriakose Kochupurackal was substituted with Fr Mathew Kalapura ckal. Chavara says:

On the 15th [May 1860] we were informed that our brother, Fr Mathew Kalapura ckal at Plasnal was laid up with malaria...('81: 91; '90: 78).

The Prior sent Fr Alexander Joseph to Plasnal to bring Fr Mathew to Mannanam. When he reached Pala on foot, Fr Mathew was there in the church. Fr Alexander proceeded to Plasnal and entrusted the chapel and properties with the parish priest of Aruvithura. He brought Fr Mathew to Mannanam, where after due preparation he succumbed to the malady on 22 May 1860 (cf. *ibid*: 91f.). Thus ended the monastery project at Plasnal.

Vazhakulam Foundation (1859)

The people of Vazhakulam had been feeling the need of a church separate from that at Arakuzha to which they belonged. But

the Arakuzha people were not favourable to the idea. An attempt of a prominent member of the Nambiaparambil family called Vareed to build on his property a filial church under the Mailacomb Parish had failed to realize. His brother, a priest, was living at the foot of the Vazhakulam hill with his old mother. Chavara in early 1830s, while touring these places in search of timber for the constructions at Mannanam, also visited Vazhakulam and lived in the house of the same Fr Nambiaparambil. The latter told him the whole story. Chavara felt very sad about the predicament of the old lady, who had hoped to attend Mass, etc. in the proposed chapel there, the construction of which at that place was forbidden by the vicar apostolic on complaint from the Arakuzha people (cf. *ibid*: 38-41).

It seems that Fr Nambiaparambil had sometime before 1859 constructed a chapel attached to his house. In 1858, while the vicar apostolic was on a visitation of the Arakuzha Parish, Fr Nambiaparambil informed the prelate that he would donate his property with the chapel he had in it for starting a monastery at that site. The archbishop gladly accepted the offer and called it Carmel. On the third Sunday after Easter, on the feast of St Joseph, Fr Jacob Kanatt was appointed vicar of Carmel. He together with Fr Mathew Kalapurackal and Kurian Palackal and two brothers co-operators from Koonammavu were sent to form the community in the new monastery. Mannanam provided it with a chalice, vestments, clock, etc. (cf. '81: 89'). On 21 June 1859, the monastery was inaugurated and in 1866 a seminary was attached to it (cf. *Positio*: 174).

Pulincunnu Monastery (1861-66)

It is strange that Blessed Chavara, who was very much familiar with Pulincunnu, does not say anything in his chronicle about the foundation of the monastery there. The main information we have is from the history of Fr Bernard (cf. '89: 93f.), which seems to be based on Parapuram's chronicle (pp. 645-48).

In the beginning of 1861 Frs Kurian Kochupurackal and Alexander Kattakkayam together with Missionary Joseph Elias OCD conducted a retreat in the Pulincunnu Parish. This retreat did a lot of spiritual good to the people there and they were greatly appreciative of it. After the retreat the vicar apostolic made the canonical visitation. The people, conscious of the great benefit they would derive if a monastery were established in their midst, approached the prelate with the request to allow a monastery be built there. They were prepared to gift the chapel of St Sebastian

and the property around it for the purpose. The archbishop inspected the place and accepted the offer. He ordered the church authorities to give the necessary documents. The chapel was 25 *Kol* (about 50ft) long and on both sides of the sanctuary there were rooms. The parish assembly officially donated the chapel and property for the monastery. Work started soon by two religious, Frs Scaria Joseph Thattasseril and Joseph Manakunnel. Missionary Joseph Elias also joined them. The work progressed rather slowly. It was Fr Thoppil Geevarghese who, appointed here in 1864, completed¹¹ the work in 1866. Fr Valerian (1939: 132 f.) says that only in 1885 it was made a regular monastery. In 1872 a seminary also started functioning here.

Foundation at Ampazhakad (1868)

The first pages of the chronicle of St Teresa's Monastery, Ampazhakad, are in the hand of Chavara (cf. '81: 209-30). There we can find Chavara's description of the beginning of the monastery.¹² The importance of the place was realized by all especially the vicar apostolic. Once, in this region, there stood the Jesuit establishment of St Paul's.¹³ Here famous Jesuits like Arulantharu (St John Britto), Veeramamuni (Fr Baschi), Ernest Hanxleden (Arnos Pathiri) and others lived for some time. Naturally the vicar apostolic, Fr Leopold and Fr Chavara aspired to have a monastery somewhere there.

Mr Thomas Ittoop Kanichai (Chakkolamattathil / Chakkalamattthil / Chakkalamadathil)¹⁴ was a landlord of the

¹¹ Parapuram says (cf. p. 1184f.) that it was Fr Thoppil who initiated the movement called *pidiyari*, and that for the construction of the monastery. It was organised successfully at Pulincunnu and a good deal of help was received from this source.

¹² Parapuram describes the event in his chronicle, pp. 1150-67, 1187-93, 1221-25.

¹³ When Vaipicotta or Chennamangalam came under the influence of the Dutch, the Jesuits had to abandon their seminary there. They moved to Ampazhakad area and continued the seminary there. Hence the place is even now known 'Sampalur' ('St Paul's Village').

¹⁴ All these forms are found in the manuscripts. The present name seems to be Chakkalamattathil. Parapuram (p. 1150f.) gives this last version. For a brief history of the family, see *Horizons* (The Annals of the Kanichai Family), revised edition, (Vainthala): Kanichai Family Concord, 2004.

place. He was residing at Vainthala near Ampazhakad. He had acquired the long stretch of land around what had been once Chotar fortress (Kottakkal) owned by Kodassery chieftains, living at that time at Kodassery forests east of Chalakudy. These plots were at that time in the hands of scattered occupants—some tenants and some smallholders. Ittoop bought them off one by one and in course of time got possession of all the adjoining lands, including areas of paddy fields. He set up bunds, dug canals, cleared up the well and the pond, put up a barn and carried on cultivation. He prospered and became the biggest landlord in that area. He had also a bungalow (one storied house) there.

Under the auspices of the Koonammavu Monastery an 'Association of the Supplicants of St Joseph for Happy Death' had been formed. Mr Ittoop joined the association and became a great devotee of St Joseph. For some quarrel with a neighbour he was jailed. While in prison a worthy idea dawned on his repenting mind: to donate the Kottakkal bungalow with the plot of land and also some fields around for the purpose of establishing a monastery. Out of prison he proceeded to Koonammavu in the company of his youngest son-in-law, and met Fr Leopold and Prior Kuriakose and made the offer.

But nothing more happened for some time. Ittoop's three daughters (he had no male issue) had welcomed the idea, because they hoped that the establishment of a monastery would help to soften up the ruffian ways of their father who had his periods of eccentricities and idiosyncrasies. But they were not quite sure whether their unpredictable father would carry out the offer. In the mean time Fr Leopold was making inquiries about the place. He was satisfied with its location and suitability. He talked about it to the vicar apostolic. The latter who always had in his mind the idea of a monastery at old Sampalur, asked Fr Leopold to proceed with it without any delay. On 5 August 1867 Delegate Leopold and Prior Kuriakose reached Ampazhakad and met Ittoop and others. After going round the Kottakkal compound the delegate was satisfied with everything there. He and the Prior then had a discussion with Ittoop, his wife, his brother Kuññuvareed, his nephew Kochittoop, his daughters and the husband of the eldest (Kuññannam, married to the Ukkan family of Edakulam) who happened to be there at that time. All wanted that the idea be executed. So too were the other relatives. The next day, after Mass, Ittoop drafted an agreement or a sale deed with the help of

Advocate Kuriappilly Mani of Koonammavu. It was signed by Ittoop in the presence of the vicars of Ampazhakad and Angamaly, quite probably on 6 August 1867¹⁵. Two other documents signed were deeds of consent: the first by the wife and daughters of Ittoop, and the second by Kunjuvareed and others.

But the next phase of the project became somewhat intricate and difficult. Things did not move as easily as Mr Ittoop had envisaged with regard to the transfer of ownership of the property which was still vested with the Kodassery family. The quarrel among the members of this family and the idiosyncrasies of Mr Ittoop himself complicated the matter and caused enormous delay. Meanwhile Ittoop went on a pleasure trip to the southern regions of Kerala.

During the absence of Mr Ittoop Fr Leopold initiated a direct deal with the Kodassery family with the help of Sankunny Menon, the diwan of Kochi.¹⁶ In the mean time Ittoop died in an accident during his trip. After the last rites and burial, negotiations restarted. On the forty-first day of the death of Ittoop a deed was executed with the Kodassery family transferring the land at Kottakkal for the purpose, as advised by the diwan, of a school. In the negotiations

¹⁵ The date of the signing given is K. E. 1043 Chingam 21, i.e. 5 August 1867 C. E.. But according to the description given above it was on 5 August that they arrived at Ampazhakad and had the discussions and the decision was taken to sign the agreement the next day. According to Parapuram (p. 1153ff.) the document signed on this date by Ittoop was only a promise that he would duly execute proper papers soon. For this Fr Alexander (Chandappilla) Joseph stayed behind and got the sale deed signed by Ittoop and others. As witnesses Frs Thomas Thekkekara of Akaparambu (vicar of Ampazhakad), Paul Kallarackal of Vallam, and others signed the document. Fr Alexander returned to Koonammavu. After a few days Ittoop came to Koonammavu with all these documents. Fr Leopold took him to the vicar apostolic, who asked him three times whether there were any obligations involved in the agreement. Ittoop replied all the three times that the only obligation was that the religious pray for him and his family. The prelate was wonder struck at such generosity in these lands.

¹⁶ The diwan was approached through Mr Genthru [an English official], who was a good friend of the diwan. The diwan advised the parties to mention the purpose of the transfer as establishing a school.

the role played by Rev. Fr Chully of Angamaly Parish was decisive.

Difficulties were not yet over. The family members of Ittoop raised claims and counter claims. Fr Leopold managed to reconcile them and arrive at a compromise. By now Fr Chully arrived at Koonammavu with the deed of settlement with the Kodasserys. At the initiative of Kochittoop and some gentlemen of Mala like Kadicheeni and Manneeni under the leadership of the parish priest of Ambazhakkad, had been raising funds for the various expenses of the monastery. On 20 October 1868 many fathers and brothers from Koonammavu and Elthuruth assembled at Kottakkal, Ambazhakkad. The vicar apostolic elect Mgr Mellano also arrived together with Frs Marceline and Philip. In the presence of all, at 10 am the new vicar apostolic Leonard Mellano (Archbishop Bernardine had passed away on 5 September 1868) laid the foundation for the new monastery named after St Teresa of Avila.

By this time two testaments of Mr Ittoop were presented to Fr Leopold. The gist of both was that Ittoop entrusted his family members to the care and protection of the missionary. Ittoop requested the missionary to bring about a just division of his property among his inheritors. In the light of these wishes of Ittoop, Fr Leopold dealt with the family members who had continued their claims and counter claims, and brought about reconciliation among them.

The first members assigned to the Kottakkal establishment seem to have been Frs Sebastian and Philip from Aranattukara and Fr Jacob from Koonammavu. Later Fr Mathew Maria of Carmel Monastery also joined them, and on 15 December 1868 took charge of the constructions and collection of funds. Initially they had to go to Ampazhakad for saying Mass. To do so daily proved to be a hard task. So Frs Leopold and Prior went to Kottakkal with some novices and made plans for constructing a church and a residence at the site. Kadicheeni, Manneeni and others of Mala were to help in the work.

In all the undertakings with regard to the founding of this monastery, Fr Chavara gave the leading role to Fr Leopold who was the delegate of the vicar provincial (the vicar apostolic). But Chavara was actively present in all the events. It is significant that the Chronicle of Ampazhakad observes, after the part written by Chavara:

This chronicle from the beginning (from section/*sahaz* one) to this page [i.e. p. 28] is in the hand of Very Rev. Fr Prior, Kuriakose Elias, the first Prior. He was present in all that happened and had seen and conducted everything ('81: 230.).

Mutholy (1869)

There is a good description of the foundation of Mutholy Monastery in Fr Bernard's brief history of the congregation (cf. Bernard 1989: 172-78). Fr Bernard speaks also of the completion of the constructions and later developments up to the year 1902 (cf. *ibid.*: 255-57). Although he does not give any references to the narrative, we know it is authentic, quite likely based on the description in the chronicle of Parapuram (pp. 1331-39). Chavara gives only a brief reference to Mutholy ('81: 166). It is in the context of a reconciliation mission that he undertook in 1870 in the company of Fr Gerard OCD, the brother of Fr Leopold who had arrived at Koonammavu in 1869. The vicar apostolic and Fr Leopold had gone to Rome in connection with the First Council of Vatican. Frs Prior and Gerard visited Bharananganam, Pala, etc. in the eastern regions where he had not gone since the Roccas disturbances. They had to deal with two problems: one was the consequence of the Roccas episode, and the other the confusion that arose in the wake of the so-called 'Padroado Schism'. The priests and people in this area received the two fathers well. Fr Prior preached to them and made arrangements for retreats for them (cf. '81: 156ff.). On their way back they visited Mutholy and took the initial steps for establishing a monastery there:

On the way back [from Pala] we went to Mutholy and saw a site [for the monastery]. On being satisfied, we fixed up on that. We met the owner of the family Mannukav [Mannoor] and got a letter from him assigning the marked land to us ('81: 166; '90: 141).

We get a little more of original information from the chronicle of Mannanam, Vol. III, p. 241:

On 4 January [1870] in order to carry out the constructions at the demarcated place, Fr Prior [Chavara] prepared a list of persons in the parishes of Pala and Cherpunkal for collection of funds and sent it from Koonammavu. The list is: Fr

Kuncheria Arakkal, Vicar of Cherpunkal, Rs. 1000; Mr Itty Nellipuzha of the same parish, Rs. 1000; Fr Mupra of Pala, Rs. 1000¹⁷; Mr Itty Kuncheria Menampampil, Kottuvapally [Kottukapally] of the same parish, Rs. 1500; Mr Mathai Theruvil of the same parish Rs. 1000; Mr Kuncheria Vayalil of the same parish, Rs. 1000¹⁸ (*Positio*: 504).

Then the chronicle says that since the letter written in this connection is so beautiful and splendid, both for the ideas and the style of composition, it needs to be quoted here:

For Mutholy means *m'in Berole*¹⁹ [fountain of pearls]; God created from eternity this fountain of pearls [God preserved the monastery with this name till our day] in order that, duly collecting these precious pearls, we might distribute them among the people of the place (*ibid.*, *Positio*: 504, 175).

Fr Bernard starts his description with an introduction saying that Vicar Apostolic Bernardine Baccinelli was convinced that churches in the vicinities of the monasteries effectively resisted Roccas. Hence he wished that monasteries came up in all parts of Kerala. He then quotes from a letter which a number of priests and leading laymen of the locality wrote to Mgr Leonard Mellano on 3 May 1869. In it they informed the vicar apostolic that his predecessor Bernardine had with great interest looked forward to the establishment of a monastery in the region and had asked some of these priests and lay leaders to take the necessary steps. But his desire failed to materialise because many of the parishes in that locality were fully or partially under the Padroado jurisdiction. All that had now been solved and all the parishes were brought under the vicar apostolic and united. Hence it was a good time for the

¹⁷ Against this name the author of the letter adds a note: "it does not seem possible to get it".

¹⁸ Against the names of Mathai Theruvil and Kuncheria Vayalil the letter gives a note: "These two may be eliminated and the rest may be collected and preparations for constructing the building may be started and stones may be brought".

¹⁹ Syriac words meaning fountain of pearls, cf. *Positio*: 504, fn. 23. Malayalam: *Muth* = pearl; *Oly* = fountain

monastery project to be realized. They requested Mgr Leonard to give his permission and delegate some religious priests to select a site. They promised that they would raise the necessary funds for land and buildings from the parishes, priests and lay people. Mellano was very much pleased and gave them a reply in which he made it clear that the Prior of the monasteries, Kuriakose Chavara, and Delegate Leopold were authorised to find out and decide about the proper site.

The vicar apostolic left for Rome to take part in the First Vatican Council and Fr Leopold accompanied him. Before that Fr Gerard was appointed delegate of the monasteries. Hence it was the latter who accompanied the Prior in search of the site and for other arrangements. They reached Mannanam on 1 November 1869 and started for Pala, to bring to the Verapoly jurisdiction some parishes which were still under the Padroado. During that journey they settled Mutholy hill as the site for the new monastery as described above. This hill is about 300 ft. above the water level in the river (Meenachilar) and is situated almost at equidistance from Pala and Cherpunkal. It was then in the possession of the Mannoor family. They readily yielded the ownership of the necessary land (Kudavakannucherickal) for a monastery of the Third Order Carmelites. The deed was signed on 26 Thulam 1045 K. E. (2 November 1870). The Prior and Fr Gerard returned to Koonammavu taking with them the deed of transfer.

The supervision of the place was entrusted to Fr Kuriakose Porukara, the rector of Mannanam Seminary. He acquired more land. Many laypersons and priests of the neighbouring places had promised financial help for the monastery. In January 1871 Pro-vicar Apostolic Philip OCD laid the foundation for the same. Parapuram starts the story of Mutholy with the journey of the pro-vicar apostolic and others via Vazhakulam to Mutholy. There he gives the background described above. His is a detailed and systematic presentation (cf. Parapuram: 1331-9). In May the same year the construction of a bungalow started. Meantime Blessed Chavara had passed away.

The work was being carried on by the fathers from Mannanam. Only in 1875 one priest, Fr Varkey Thaliath, began to reside there. Soon work started for a chapel which was consecrated on 24 November 1878, the feast day of St John of the Cross, in whose name the monastery was dedicated. For some time a

seminary for fresh candidates functioned there. Eventually they were shifted to Mannanam. Fr Bernard gives the names of the persons who and churches that supported the work for the monastery at Mutholy. Thus Chavara's dream of gathering spiritual pearls from this fountain and distributing them to the people of the locality was eventually realized.

Chethipuzha (attempts started from 1870)

Fr Bernard says that the two founding Fathers of the congregation, Malpan Palackal and Fr Porukara, during their journey in search of a site for the first monastery, had visited Changanachery (cf. Kaniyanthara: 8). Although their desire to establish a monastery there was not fulfilled in their lifetime, by the grace of God one came up there in the course of time (cf. Bernard 1989: 179ff.).

The first initiative for this came from Fr Mathai Palakunnel,²⁰ a disciple of Blessed Chavara. He had already built a chapel and a residence at Koothrappally in the property he had inherited from his family. There he had started a mission for the evangelization of the people of the *pulaya* caste. In the beginning of 1868 he visited his malpan, Chavara, at Koonammavu and offered him the said chapel and residence together with much of the property he had inherited, for establishing a monastery. The matter was also referred to Vicar Apostolic Bernardine. Chavara writes in his letter to Fr Cherian Chakkalayil:

Fr Mathai Palakunnel came here and gave in writing that he would donate his chapel and residence and all his possessions, except his patrimony, for a monastery. He also entrusted a letter with Fr Leopold to be given to the archbishop (CWC, IV 1990: 122f.).

²⁰ Fr Mathai Mariam Palakunnel, born in 1831 at Kootrapally; entered the seminary at Mannanam in 1844 and studied there for 11 years under Chavara. Ordained in 1855 zealously worked as a priest and co-operated with Chavara in the struggle against Roccas, in the re-union movement and evangelisation of dalits. He wrote his chronicle covering the years 1856-90. It was published by P. J. Sebastian in 1971 (cf. *Positio*: 512). A second edition was published in 2000.

In the mean time Fr Cherian Chakkalayil, vicar of Changanachery happened to meet some of the TOCD fathers, Chandy and others, who were preaching a retreat at Perumanur. Being informed of the offer of Fr Palakunnel, he told the fathers that Kootrapally was a remote forest area and a monastery there would not be of much service to the people at large. His suggestion was that Changanachery which was well populated and situated in the middle of the people in the east and in the west was the best place. Fathers Chandy and others, when they returned home, informed Fr Prior about all this. In the same letter of Chavara we read:

When our fathers, Chandy and others, returned after a retreat, they told me: if we need to build a monastery, it should lie where the vicar of the Changanachery Parish indicates; he would find the apt site provided he gets the permission of the archbishop; moreover, he would himself construct the monastery according to the plan we would give; if there is permission he would immediately register the land (ibid.).

When the archbishop came to Koonammavu he was told of all this. At his order Prior Chavara wrote the letter mentioned above to Fr Cherian on 7 April 1868. In the letter Chavara prescribes the norms to be followed in the selection of the site:

1. The land should be registered in the name of the prior of the monastery of Mannanam.
2. The place should be sufficiently distant from the market place so that the noise of the market may not disturb life in the monastery.
3. There should be good water. There should be a river close by so that we can conveniently reach the place by boat.
4. The place should be sufficiently large with big trees around to moderate the heat. Besides the space for the construction of the monastery, there should be place also for gardens, etc. (ibid.: 119f.)

Fr Cherian chose Chethipuzha as the site for the monastery and informed Fr Prior accordingly. After this Fr Bernard says that since at the very same time arrangements were being made for the establishment of a monastery at Ampazhakad the work at

Chethipuzha was delayed. Fr Prior communicated this to Fr Cherian Chakkalayil. Meanwhile, the Blessed passed away. It took more than twelve years to resume the Chethipuzha project. The foundation stone for the monastery was laid only in 1883.

Affiliation of the Congregation to the OCD

By 1860 the Mannanam religious congregation had established four monasteries: Mannanam, Koonammavu, Elthuruth and Vazhakulam, and had about sixty-three members in all. In the same year Archbishop Baccinelli sent to the OCD superior general in Rome a very good report about the institute and its members²¹. Although this is the only report we know of, the vicar apostolic and other missionaries must have sent periodically reports to the OCD superior general on the Kerala mission, including the affairs of the Mannanam congregation. These reports may have set in motion the idea of affiliating the Kerala religious institute to the Carmelite Order. That must be the reason why we find a reference to it as early as April 1860.

It is in a casual manner that Chavara refers to it (cf. '81: 90). Fr Marceline was on a canonical visitation of the Mannanam Monastery. The visitation started on 27 Meenam (April) 1860. He told the fathers there that the congregation was accepted as Third Order Regular of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites; that he was entrusted to make this visit in preparation for the same.²² It is from a 'decree' or letter the archbishop sent to the monasteries we get more details. The letter of Baccinelli is reproduced both in the chronicle of Chavara ('81: 169f.) and of Parapuram (p. 649-53). The way both introduce the letter is a little confusing. But the letter of Baccinelli is clearer. Here is the letter:

By the grace of God and the favour of the Apostolic See,
We, Frere Bernadine de Santa Thresia, the Vicar Apostolic
of Malabar and the Archbishop of Parsalia, invoke peace and

²¹ Cf. above p. 2f.

²² The letter of Archbishop Baccinelli informs us that the OCD general council took the decision on 1 October 1860 ('81: 170). Fr Marceline had conducted his visit towards the end of April 1860 and the decision was taken only after about five months. That means the idea had been floated much before the decision was taken and the vicar apostolic was asked to prepare the ground.

the blessings of the Holy Spirit on you, our beloved sons the Rev. Prior and the other members gathered in the Monastery of St Joseph at Mannanam.

On 1 October 1860 the superior general of our Carmelite Order met in council at the generalate in Rome. We have received from that council a document which decrees that the monasteries and the members thereof, which we founded in Malabar under the name 'The Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel',²³ be received as Carmelite Third Order. The same grants me the authority to accept also the monasteries to be established in future. We, therefore, in virtue of the authority conferred on us, by this letter canonically institute and confirm the aforesaid monasteries as a religious congregation. Besides, as affiliated to our Order of Carmelites, we make you participants in the special privileges, benefits and indulgences which the Supreme Pontiffs have conferred on us. Similarly we declare that you and those who would in future be admitted into this congregation will share in the merits earned by meditation, prayers, works of penance and acts of charity of this Order.

In return for these blessings you, beloved children, are exhorted to agree in your general assembly to surrender part of these spiritual merits of prayer, meditation, indulgences, good work, etc. in favour of the suffering souls in Purgatory, and to have it recorded in the book of the monastery.

This from the church of Amballoor, during our visitation, 27 *Kumbham* (March) 1861 ('81: 169-73; '90:143f.).

The most important fact that emerges from this letter is that the OCD general council resolved to affiliate the 'Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel', already living religious life in Kerala (from 1855 following more or less the rules and constitutions of the Discalced Carmelites) as their Third Order. Another point to be noted is that Baccinelli claims that he founded the congregation of these religious. He may have raised this claim because, in 1855, it was he who gave them the rules and

²³ Perhaps these religious were before 1855, called 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'. In 1855, when they received the Carmelite Regula, 'Mount Carmel' was added, see chapter 3 above.

constitutions of the Carmelite Order. This claim will be severely disputed by the members of the congregation. Again the archbishop considers that it is the affiliation which gave the congregation a canonical status. This view will also be seriously contended.²⁴ Another observation to make is that Chavara does not make immediately any comment, either when he refers to the visit of Fr Marceline in April 1860 or when he reproduces the letter of Baccinelli. He simply quotes, without any comment, what he and the fathers did in response to the letter of Baccinelli:

In response to the above exhortation we, the present members of the congregation, on our own behalf and on behalf of those who are yet to join it, of our own free will, agree to surrender for ever in favour of the souls in Purgatory, one third portion of the spiritual merits and indulgences which may accrue to us. This agreement signed, certified and recorded on 2 April 1861. Prior Fr Kuriakose Elia (Sd). Superior Fr Kuriakose Elisa (Sd). Writer Fr Kuriakose Albert (Sd) (ibid. 170f.; 144).

There is nowhere any mention about consultations with the Prior and other members before the decision to affiliate the congregation to the Carmelite Order, was taken. Though the visit of Fr Marceline early 1860 is said to be in preparation for the affiliation, there is no hint that any consultation was made. As things stand, it was a *suo motu* action of the general council of the OCD. We do not understand how they could do that. Maybe the presumption was that Baccinelli 'founded' the congregation! But no indication to this effect was given at that time.

The letter of Baccinelli was sent not only to Mannanam but also to the other three monasteries; it is not clear, whether (cf. Parapuram: 653) with the same addressing ["gathered in the monastery of ... Mannanam"] or differently to each of the monasteries. Parapuram brings to our notice the following fact. True copy means, not of the original decree of the OCD superior general, but of the circular of Baccinelli, which contained the

²⁴ For Baccinelli, and for other Carmelite missionaries, what happened in 1831 was not foundation but what happened in 1855 was foundation, and the affiliation of 1860 was the 'canonical institution'. Actually the congregation had been founded by ecclesiastical approval in 1831. Was it not the foundation and canonical institution?

essential points of the original decree. The decree itself in Latin had not yet then been translated into Malayalam. Later it was translated and sent from Koonammavu to all the monasteries (ibid: 653f.).²⁵ Then he gives the text of the action taken by the members of the congregation. Parapuram too against his usual practice, does not give any comment. He also simply speaks about the action taken.

Chavara's comments are perhaps to be found in his testament to the members of the congregation. Probably this was written in a context in which discontentment and negative reaction arose among the members at the action taken by the Carmelites in imposing the affiliation on them (see p. above)

Chavara explains how this happened in the providence of God. The first exhortation he gives in this testament is about perfect obedience: obedience to the vicar apostolic, delegate Leopold, and even, to a certain extent, to other missionaries. Could we not read in between the lines the discontentment against the Carmelite mission entertained by the members of the congregation?

Implications of the Affiliation

Perhaps nothing new was added to the way of life, as it was being lived from 1855 or even before that.²⁶ The most important change concerns the system of governance. The superior general of the Discalced Carmelites assumes the supreme authority in the congregation. He nominates the vicar apostolic as his vicar provincial to whom the superior general gives vast faculties. He is to accept all the monasteries, already established and those to be established in future, and the members thereof into the order. The vicar provincial administers the congregation through a delegate of his.²⁷ Thus in 1861 Fr Marceline and in 1863 Fr Leopold were

²⁵ This document, either in Latin or in Malayalam translation is not available to us.

²⁶ Fr Leopold in his report of 1870 does not speak of this affiliation. He presumes that affiliation was effected already in 1855 (cf. *Positio*: 190, 191). Leopold wrongly assigns 1853 as the year.

²⁷ This is clear from the above-mentioned report Fr Leopold submitted to the superior general in 1870.

appointed delegates. As a consequence of this new regime the members of the congregation who had been vowing obedience to the vicar apostolic and to Fr Prior and their successors in office,²⁸ now on had to make it to the vicar apostolic occupying the place of the superior general of the Carmelite Order.²⁹ The new regime is described by Fr Leopold in his report of 1870:

The system of administration introduced differs slightly from our other provinces in Europe. The first superior is our prior general. They depend on him through the vicar apostolic to whom, as to their immediate superior, they make the profession of total submission and obedience; they depend upon him not only in external matters but also in matters of religious observance. The vicar apostolic appoints as his vicar [delegate] one of the missionaries. This delegate is their immediate superior and guide (*Positio*: 194).

As regards the constitutions practically there were no changes, except some minor ones effected by delegate Leopold. The members shared, as mentioned in the letter of Baccinelli, the special benefits of the Carmelite Order. The name of the congregation was changed to 'Third Order of Discalced Carmelites' (TOCD). But in most constitutions extant today the words, "of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel;" are found attached to the name.

Now the question arises: what was the position of Blessed Kuriakose in the administration of the congregation? Did he continue with the same authority he had before this affiliation or only with that of a local superior? Before the affiliation he was the 'Prior of all religious', i.e. common Prior of the 'Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel'. He used to appoint, of course with the authority given to him in the rules by the vicar apostolic, his vicars for other monasteries. This is very clear from a letter he

²⁸ Cf. formula of profession of Fr Scaria Thattacheril, 1859, *Positio*: 182: "... and to our Very Rev. Fr Bernadine, bishop, and to you, our Prior Kuriakose".

²⁹ Cf. report of Leopold 1870, *Positio*: 194.

wrote to Fr Jacob Kanattt on 14 May 1858,³⁰ appointing the latter his vicar of the Monastery of Vazhakulam. In this letter Chavara introduces himself as "Fr Kuriakose Chavara, Servant of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel and Prior of the religious". He tells Fr Jacob: "I selected you with the consent of the council...With the authority of Very Rev. Lord Bishop Bernardine, Vicar Apostolic of Malabar, and with the authority I have received from him over this religious community. I, Prior, appoint you as my vicar" (*Positio*: 181).

It is also to be noted that in the religious profession of the members they offer their vows to the vicar apostolic and to the Prior. It was the Prior who received the profession formula of Fr Scaria Thattacheril dated 1 July 1859. Similarly he received the professions of all the fathers from 1855 to 1859 (cf. *Positio*: 176). From all this it is clear that before 1861 the Blessed was acknowledged as Prior of all monasteries. The Carmelite missionaries in their letters and reports call him 'common prior', 'prior', of Mannanam monasteries.³¹ The position of Chavara was that of a major superior or of the present day 'prior general', though this way of speaking was not usual at that time. Perhaps from 1861 on he began to be called 'great prior' (cf. *Positio*: 175), which title survived till very recently and is now substituted with 'Blessed'.

Things were clear till 1861. What happened after that? We may once again analyse the system described by Fr Leopold in 1870, part of which we have seen above, in which the positions of the OCD superior general, his vicar provincial (Vicar Apostolic of Malabar) and the latter's delegate have been clarified. Leopold continues:

There is yet another superior over all the monasteries, with the title 'Prior'. But this title was given by Mgr Bernardine

³⁰ The original of this letter written in Syriac is not available, but it is copied in the chronicle of Vazhakulam (cf. *Positio*: 180f.; 507; PO, doc. 38). This is not published in CWC IV.

³¹ Cf. the 1870 report of Fr Leopold (*Positio*: 194); Circular of Chavara to the Prefect of Propaganda in 1869 (ibid: 395): "superior of all the monasteries", letter of Chavara to Pope Pius IX, dated 25 April 1870 (ibid: 396): "prior", "superior of the monasteries". Chronicle of Palakunnel (ibid.: 513): "was prior of monasteries", etc.

in consideration of his high position as the only surviving one of the three founders. But he does not exercise his authority except in some special circumstances³². The superior of each monastery, with the title of vicar, is directly appointed by the vicar apostolic every three years.

He goes on to say how the appointment is made:

The vicar apostolic selects the vicars. The triennial chapter, consisting of the delegate, the Prior and the vicars of monasteries, can propose modifications, but it has no authority to appoint but has to accept the candidates selected by the vicar apostolic.

Parapuram seems to give a different version (p. 1427f.):

Fr Chavara was named Prior in the very rules of 1855. No other paper of appointment was given to him. When more monasteries were established each had its own superior, and Chavara became common superior. After his death the Vicar Apostolic appointed Fr Kuriakose Porukara as the successor and informed all monasteries about this selection (election) and confirmation (cf. also *ibid.*: 25).

From this it seems to be clear that the title and authority of the common prior was not something personal conferred on Chavara for reasons mentioned by Fr Leopold. After the affiliation in 1860 Archbishop Bernardine seems to have given the Prior the same respect and consideration as before. His successor, Archbishop Leonard, also seems to have followed the same policy.³³ It is interesting to note what he told the Prior, when

³² What these circumstances are and in what capacity the authority is exercised, are not clear. One wonders why Fr Leopold makes all these clarifications. Was it not for confirming the affiliation status of the congregation? It would appear that Fr Leopold was the architect of the affiliation and its juridical implications!

³³ Leonard began to entertain some grievances against Chavara from the time he came to know that the latter shared the idea of Fr Leopold in the matter of the division of the vicariate (cf. Parapuram 1465; cf. also *ibid.*: 1296f., where there is reference to a letter drafted by Fr Leopold, a fair copy of which was signed by Chavara and his co-religious).

Fr Leopold prepared a comprehensive report about the congregation and submitted it to the superior general as mentioned above (cf. *Positio*: 189-97). He was also invited to speak to the general council. Then Parapuram says:

The general and his councillors expressed great satisfaction and happiness about the Third Order of Kerala. They decided to attach it to their order and establish it as a province. The general told Fr Leopold about this decision.

Now there was a problem: the practice then existing was that superiors were appointed directly by the vicar apostolic. This needed to be changed and the system of election of superiors, as was being done in Europe, had to be introduced. For this change some time was needed. So the general told Fr Leopold: "I entrust you with the responsibility to make arrangements to bring about this change". Fr Leopold, in a letter, informed Fr Marceline and others in Kerala about the decision of the general council. The missionaries and the TOCD members felt very happy and delighted (cf. *ibid*: 1327-29). It was, unfortunately, a premature reaction!

It seems no action was taken on this decision. May be the circumstances were not conducive. Fr Leopold, who had differences of opinion with Archbishop Leonard even before the latter became vicar apostolic (cf. Parapuram: 1143-49), incurred the latter's displeasure for attempting to divide the vicariate into two. Moreover in 1870 itself Superior General Dominic had passed away. In his place his first councillor Fr Luke was appointed interim general. Fr Luke was not so well disposed as Fr Dominic was towards the Carmelite Third Order of Kerala (cf. Parapuram: 1349 f.). He entrusted all the affairs of the Third Order to Archbishop Leonard. That means the mission given to Fr Leopold by Superior General Dominic was no more valid.³⁵ It is in this context that the TOCD general chapter of 1873 took place, not at Koonammavu as the previous custom was, but at the instance of Archbishop Leonard (Frs Marceline and Philip were party to this), it was held at Manjummel. In this chapter it was decided that the common prior (then Fr Kuriakose Porukara) be also at the same

³⁵ For a number of details regarding the related developments, see Maniakunnel 2005: 210ff. His description, as pointed earlier in ch. 3, is colored by the interpretation of the OCD missionaries.

time local superior of Mannanam (earlier there was a vicar at Mannanam besides the common prior). Fr Leopold was removed from the office of delegate and Fr Philip was appointed delegate in his place. Fr Leopold was called back to Italy in 1875 at the insistence of Archbishop Leonard (cf. *Positio*: 488f.). In these circumstances it is understandable why the proposal to make the TOCD a province, was shelved. Perhaps that was providential. If it had been made an OCD province, it would have been very difficult for the TOCD to emerge as an independent Indian religious community.

CHAPTER FIVE

An Ideal Religious and Superior

The three founding fathers of the CMI Congregation, Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Chavara, lived and worked with understanding and unity of purpose. That does not mean that each of them did not have his own views and opinions, which they exchanged with great gentleness and personal regard. But the final word was with the one who was senior among them. For example in 1833, when the idea of starting a seminary was proposed, though they had different views, in the end Palackal's proposal was accepted by the other two. Again when there were some complaints regarding discipline in the seminary they referred this to Fr Palackal, residing at Pallipuram, for a final decision. When Palackal died in 1841, it was Porukara who led the community at Mannanam and directed the affairs there. In 1846 Porukara died and immediately Chavara took over the full responsibility of the life and activities of the community.

If we include the years from 1831 to 1846, Chavara functioned as superior for forty years, i.e. up to his death in 1871. And yet we have no trace of any complaint, either on the part of his superiors or of his subordinates about his style of functioning. On the contrary almost perfect harmony prevailed in the community. It is with extraordinary respect and affection the members, contemporaries as well as of the first generation after them, looked up to him and spoke about him, and cherished his memory. The missionaries, his superiors, in their reports to Rome extol the fine spirit that pervaded the community under Chavara (cf. *Posito*: 189ff.). The following analysis of his stewardship of the community will reveal the secret of his success.

Chavara Prior

As mentioned in chapter three, in 1855 the Carmelite rules and constitutions, with slight modifications, were given to the

religious community of Mannanam, probably known at that time as 'Congregation of the Servants of Mary Immaculate (of Mount Carmel)' (cf. chapter 3, p. ff.). Fr Chavara was acknowledged as its superior and called 'Prior'.¹ There is no trace of any patent of the vicar apostolic appointing him Prior. In the introducing sentence of the rules given to the community in 1855 the wording may have been:

We, [Frere] Bernadine Baccinelli, by the grace of God, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, to the beloved sons Kuriakose Elias² and other brethren under obedience to him in the monastery at Mannanam, greetings in the Lord and blessings of the Holy Spirit ...³

Parapuram recalling the history of the beginning of the Carmelite Order on Mount Carmel says that the head of the community there, Brocard, was named Prior in the rules, which Patriarch St Albert of Jerusalem gave them and was thus confirmed as their superior. Likewise Archbishop Bernardine gave a rule to the religious at Mannanam as requested by Chavara. In that rule Chavara was addressed and thus confirmed as superior of the

¹ In a circular dated 25 March 1850 (CWC IV 1982: 129f.) Chavara signs as Prior ("This, Prior of the Monastery "). It seems that the actual year of this circular is 1865 (cf. *Positio*: 287f.). Probably he was not Prior that early as 1850. Just as in the rule given to the religious on Mt Carmel Brocard was called Prior, it may be presumed Chavara was called Prior in the rules Archbishop Baccinelli gave to the religious at Mannanam.

² It is doubtful whether 'Elias' was in the original, as it is the name probably Chavara took at the time of his profession.

³ This conclusion is arrived at through an examination of the indications we get in the rules and constitutions of 1863 available in Ms and also from the diary of Parapuram, see below. The wording corresponds to the wording in the Regula given by Patriarch St Albert to St Brocard of Mt Carmel, between 1202 and 1214:

"Albert, called by God's favour to be Patriarch of the Church of Jerusalem, bids health in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit to his beloved sons in Christ, B[rocard] and the other hermits under obedience to him, who live near the spring on Mount Carmel (Wilfred Mc Greal O. Carm., *At the Fountain of Elia: The Carmelite Tradition*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999, p. 21).

community at Mannanam. No separate patent or appointment letter was issued for this. Later when more houses were established, each had its own local superior and the title 'Common Superior' was reserved to Chavara. It was according to the same rule that Kuriakose Porukara, successor of Prior Chavara, was made Common Superior. The choice was the community's; Vicar Apostolic Leonard Mellano only confirmed it, though his counsellor and provincial delegate, Leopold was not happy with the choice (cf. Parapuram: 1426-28).

Sometime after his ordination Chavara, as directed by his malpan, proceeded to Mannanam and played an important role in the foundation and building up of the monastery there. When he was appointed vicar of Pallipuram by Vicar Apostolic Francis Xavier Pescetto, he felt very unhappy. As was pointed out in chapter four, in his appeal to the prelate to reconsider the matter he told the latter:

Staying at Mannanam it is I who take care of the constructions there. As the malpan [Palackal] was not keeping well and unable to live at Mannanam, and Fr Porukara was continuously going about to collect funds, there was none but I left in charge of the works at Mannanam. If I were transferred the work would suffer ('81: 28; '90: 24).

However only in 1833 he was relieved from the post at Pallipuram and able to take full charge of the works. When a seminary started functioning at Mannanam, it was mainly Chavara who directed and taught the seminarians (cf. Parapuram: 1423). Porukara was the superior since 1841, but it was Chavara who was running the affairs of the community, of course, with full understanding of the former. We see the Blessed personally taking many initiatives even before the demise of Porukara in 1846, e.g. starting of the printing press (cf. chapter 9).

From 1846 on he is the sole superior of the religious and rector of the seminary. There was no special appointment or nomination. It was the exigency of the situation, which made him the 'third' superior, the natural successor of the two deceased founders, the 'first' and the 'second' superiors, and take up the responsibility of carrying on, with ever widening avenues, the operation of the monastery at Mannanam. And all the inmates

considered him their superior and cheerfully lived under his wise and gentle direction. As pointed out above, even in 1855 there was no formal appointment but only acknowledgement in the rules as superior. It is in this capacity, after making his profession before the delegate of the local ordinary, that he received the profession of the other ten members.

In 1861, when the congregation was affiliated to the Discalced Carmelite Order, a hierarchy of authority was established: the highest authority in the congregation vested with the superior general of the Discalced Carmelites and his council, the vicar apostolic was appointed vicar provincial (not provincial because the TOCD was not a province of the OCD), one of the missionaries was to act as the delegate of the vicar provincial.⁴ The vicar provincial directed the affairs of the congregation through this delegate.

After the death of the Blessed another was elected by the members to whom the vicar apostolic gave patent letters. At the close of a meeting on 21 February 1871 the vicar apostolic (vicar provincial) "read out the patent letters by which Rev. Fr Porukara, who was elected by the monastery of Mannanam, was nominated new prior" (cf. *Chronicle of St Philomena's Monastery Koonammavu*: 144, *Positio*: 461; cf. also *Parapuram*: 1427f.).

Chavara's Relation with the Vicar Apostolic and the Missionaries

Blessed Chavara was trained as a cleric under Malpan Palackal Thomas and received an intense religious formation from Fr Marceline OCD before his religious profession. Both these elements of formation had inculcated in him the spirit of humble submission to his superiors. Chavara, though the acknowledged superior of the religious at Manna nam, always acted in subordination to the vicar apostolic and his delegate. His approach was always conciliatory and he never gave way to any conflict with them. If ever he had any complaint about the measures taken by the vicar apostolic or his delegate, he would directly approach the superiors and gently explain to them his views and would, in all submission, ask for changes. The Pallipuram appointment is a

⁴ In 1863 Fr Leopold was appointed delegate (cf. *Positio*: 177) and he continued in that office till 1873.

classical example. He would not take the case to anyone else but, with the consent of his malpan, directly to the vicar apostolic himself. The situation arising out of the severity of rules given in 1855 is another such example (cf. chapter 3 and below).

However, this does not mean that Chavara was blindly subservient to the missionaries. He had his independent views, which he would gently and persuasively put forward when occasion arose. Fr Leopold Beccaro was the delegate of the vicar provincial (the vicar apostolic himself) of the CMI Congregation from 1863. Besides, he was the spiritual director of Chavara. The latter had great regard for him and vice-versa. Chavara acted in perfect concord with Fr Leopold. Yet there were occasions when the former did not agree with the latter. One instance is narrated by Parapuram (pp. 1430-32). Parapuram is narrating this event in connection with the appointment of Fr Kuriakose Porukara as successor of Chavara. As pointed out above Fr Leopold was not happy with this appointment. The reason is explained. The late Prior Chavara lived for many years at Koonammavu. At that time the Prior and Fr Leopold were of one mind and soul and carried out jointly the affairs of the congregation. Fr Leopold knew that Fr Kuriakose Porukara, the new Prior, would not be able to transfer his residence to Koonammavu, nor did he expect him to be as agreeable to him as Fr Chavara was. Parapuram continues: "But the deceased Prior and Fr Leopold...happened to take contrary views in a particular instance".

The instance was this. Fr Scaria Kalathil was at this time the superior of Mannanam. His uncle priest, seriously ill, wanted to see Fr Scaria. Fr Leopold was of the view that Fr Scaria might not be given permission to visit his sick uncle. But Fr Prior's opinion was that Fr Scaria should go and visit the sick priest. At that time the superiors of other monasteries were present at Koonammavu. So Fr Leopold suggested that a decision might be taken in the matter according to the majority view of the superiors (Delegate Leopold, Prior Chavara and the local superiors) by secret vote. When the time came for casting the votes Fr Leopold held a black (negative) pellet between his fingers and raised it to be seen by others. Then Fr Prior held in his fingers a white (positive) pellet and showed it up. This development created for the other superiors a difficult predicament. They pleaded that the two major superiors (Leopold and Chavara) take an appropriate decision in the matter. But Fr Leopold was insistent that votes must be cast. Reluctantly all put

their pellets into the pellet box. When the box was opened it was found that all the votes except one were white; that meant all supported the opinion of the Prior. Fr Leopold's displeasure was reflected on his face. Fr Scaria was allowed to visit his uncle who was on his deathbed.

This incident is not only an indication that Chavara could oppose the personal views of his superiors and intimate colleagues when necessary, but also of the humane personality that was Chavara. He had no difficulty to raise his objections most gently, without giving offence.

Chavara gave to the vicar apostolic, who was his superior in a double capacity—vicar apostolic and vicar provincial—unflinching obedience and support. He was conscious that the congregation of which he was the superior, was established in the Catholic Church for the promotion of all-round good of the Church. All his actions were orientated towards this purpose and offered full cooperation to the vicar apostolic.

Chavara's submission and obedience to his superiors is clearly manifest in a few instances. As seen earlier the severity of the rules and constitutions given to the community in 1855 scared many members, especially the youngsters. Blessed Chavara sadly sensing this fact referred the matter to Vicar Apostolic Bernardine for reconsideration. The answer of the prelate was rather discouraging:

You need not worry about this. Only those who have firm determination need be taken into the congregation. I will also pray to God to keep the small herd of sheep (Parapuram: 26)

Chavara, though with great pain, submitted to the decision of the vicar apostolic, felt very sad when two priests and nine students left the congregation due to the severity of the rules (cf. '81: 77, 55)⁵

⁵ In the first reference (p. 77) Chavara speaks about the 8 days retreat Fr Marceline preached for the whole community. Then he casually adds: "2 priests, 8 scholastics (deacons) and 1 candidate left saying that they were not able to observe the rule". In the second reference (p. 55) he speaks of six deacons, whose names are given, who left the Congregation. One of them left on the pretext that he could not put

There are several instances, in which Chavara's obedience to authority was severely tested. When Vicar Apostolic Bernardine asked him to accept the institute of Plasnal as a monastery of the congregation, he personally went to the place. He found the place to be in a malaria infected area that would pose a health hazard to any one who might live there. He reported the matter to the prelate and waited for his further orders. Despite the negative report the latter was insistent on Chavara taking over the place. The Blessed instantly obeyed the vicar apostolic, his superior, and sent two priests to Plasnal to take possession of the establishment there and carry on the pastoral ministry in the locality. Within a month Fr Kuriakose Kalapurackal, the superior of Plasnal, was down with malaria and soon succumbed to the malady. This made the vicar apostolic change his mind and permit the closure of the house.⁸

It is interesting to note here how he acted to remove a misunderstanding of the vicar apostolic. The latter had asked Chavara to go to Plasnal with two or three members to take over the institution. But before doing that Chavara personally went there to assess the situation. This irritated the prelate. So Chavara personally went to Varapuzha and explained everything to the prelate showing no resentment (cf. '81:88).

In another instance Fr Marceline had to be similarly appeased. In the conversation of a novice at Koonammavu mention was made of a particular event at Mannanam. The missionary thought that there was some transgression of discipline and called the Prior to Koonammavu and reproved him. Chavara calmly explained what really happened and pacified Fr Marceline, who must have been the delegate of the vicar apostolic then (cf. Parapuram: 241-47).

When Chavara was asked by the archbishop to take over Koonammavu Monastery, the same submissive mind of Chavara worked. He, without any hesitation complied with the directive of his superior and sent there four inmates of Mannanam. Later in 1864 when Archbishop Bernardine asked him to go to

up with continuous abstinence from meat. Neither in the chronicle of Chavara nor in that of Parapuram we get the names of all the 11 who left in 1855. So it is difficult to come to a conclusion whether the two references are to one and the same event.

⁸ Cf. above chapter 4 for details

Koonammavu he did not raise any objection, though it would have been very painful for him to leave the motherhouse, which he had built up and in which he had lived over thirty years (cf. '81: 59). In a brief note written on 13 *Dhanu* (December/January) 1863/64⁷ he says: "As it is the order from His Excellency I should live at Koonammavu, I am living there" (CWC IV 1982: 81).

Once the parish priest of Lalam invited Chavara to preach on the occasion of the celebration of the parish feast. When he arrived at the place he learned of a prohibitive order of the vicar apostolic. The prelate had stayed celebration of the feast unless and until the parish submitted its annual accounts to the episcopal curia and paid back an amount due to one of the parishioners. Chavara left the place refusing to participate in the functions. Only later when the parish had complied or agreed to comply with the orders of the prelate Chavara participated in the celebrations (cf. CWC IV 1982: 44f.).

Chavara himself tells about a Chaldean priest, Denha by name, who about 1853 came to Mannanam. The Prior received him cordially and gave him hospitality in the monastery. But since he had no *celebret* (certificate which allowed him to celebrate Mass) from the ordinary, Chavara warned him that he may not celebrate Mass in the monastery. The priest left the place early morning without celebrating Mass (cf. '81: 182; see chapter 6). It may also be recalled here how Chavara behaved when he was allowed to visit Roccas at Thaikkattussery. He informed the Roccasian party that he would not kiss the episcopal ring of Roccas, because that would be against the liking of the Vicar Apostolic and hence would cause scandal to the faithful (cf. '81: 207).

As seen above, the congregation was officially affiliated as Third Order to the Discalced Carmelites. As far as we know this was effected by the vicar apostolic and the general council of the OCDs. There is no evidence that Chavara and his community were even consulted. Yet Chavara considered it, as coming from the higher superiors, the arrangement of the Divine Providence. He tried to persuade his confreres to accept the event in that spirit (cf. CWC IV 1982: 99).

⁷ The date *Dhanu* 13 must be interpreted as 13 January 1864 (cf. *Positio*: 419).

Earnest but Suave and Humane in Enforcing Discipline

The spirit of humble submission to superiors was an edifying example to the Prior's fellow religious. They used to speak about this to the younger generation (cf. Alackappally, *Positio*: 566ff.). Fr Louis TOCD of Manjummel, who joined the congregation in 1863 and had his early training at Koonammavu under the care of Frs Leopold and Chavara, testifies: Fr Chavara lived always as a novice, loved the congregation as his mother and considered it a terrestrial paradise; he used to exhort the members of the community to have always the desire of acquiring perfection, and was a living example to all (cf. *Positio*: 562ff.).

Chavara's example of obedience on his sickbed was marvellous. During his last illness, as insisted by Fr Philip OCD, pro-vicar apostolic in the absence of Vicar Apostolic Mellano, he was shifted from his living room to an out-house in the campus. He quietly obeyed the order of the superiors. But it was a painful experience for him. When Fr Leopold, his spiritual director, returned from abroad Chavara told him how mentally annoying was that stay in the out-house (cf. Moolayil 5; *Positio*: 546, 547). Again, during his last illness, the physician who examined him suggested that a change of place to Mannanam would help. Pro-vicar Apostolic Philip and Pro-delegate Gerard permitted that he might be taken to Mannanam; it would improve Chavara's health. But Fr Prior said:

As His Excellency the Bishop and Fr Leopold have told me to live here, my conscience does not permit me to leave this place in their absence (Moolayil 5; *Positio*: 346).

According to the chronicle of Koonammavu convent Chavara first agreed to go to Mannanam, and arrived at the convent on 28 October 1870 to bid farewell to the sisters. The mother superior suggested that he continue to stay at Koonammavu and not depart for Mannanam. Chavara answered:

Have I a will of my own? I don't desire either to go and stay there or to stay here. I am ready to do as I am told. I don't wish to do anything according to my own will. I am ready to do only what I am commanded to do (CKC 2002: 203f.).

The chronicle of Koonammavu Convent continues:

Like this he went on speaking to us for a long time about giving up our own will and about the greatness of obedience, and then giving all of us his blessing, he returned to the monastery. This very reverend father used to obey everyone like a little child. The good example, which he has shown us till his death, is something that everyone marvels at. Isn't it then right and lawful that all of us learn from him and live accordingly? As he was the prior and the head of all the monasteries and also because our very reverend father delegate was not here to give him a command beyond it, all were bound to do according to his command. Even then, he did not like this because he lived giving up his will completely and thus setting a good example for all (*ibid.*)

The Prior's inclination was to go to Mannanam. This seems to be clear from what he wrote to Fr Kuriakose Porukara in which he says: "I accepted this cicatrice [scar] with the hope of dying at the feet of St Joseph" (*Positio*: 345, PO doc. 25)⁸

However, the plan to take Fr Prior to Mannanam was soon given up. The Convent Chronicle says that Fr Gerard, the interim delegate, did not like the idea of shifting him to Mannanam. So he went to the Prior and asked him whether he would like to go to Mannanam. The Prior's reply was quite characteristic of him:

Father, do I have a will different from yours? I am prepared to do whatever you fathers wish that I should do. I don't will that I should go there or that I should not go there (*ibid.* 203f.; cf. also Moolayil 5; *Positio*: 546).

He was suave and tactful in correcting the members of the congregation. But at the same time he was earnest in fulfilling his duty as superior to correct any indiscipline. In the chronicle and his letter to the Kainakari community he speaks about the fine and heroic service Fr Valliara rendered to a domestic who was suffering from loathsome piles. In this connection Chavara hints that the priest was not living an edifying life before that and that the Blessed had to correct him several times (cf. CWC IV 1982: 160f.).

⁸ This letter does not appear in CWC IV.

It was first and foremost by his own good example that he induced others to keep discipline. About his scrupulous observance of the rules and discipline, many of his contemporaries speak highly. We have already seen what Fr Kuriakose Porukara observes about it in connection with the religious profession of 1855 (cf. Porukara 1905: 33; cf. also Mannanam Chronicle III: 240). Similarly the sisters of the convent extol him (cf. CKC 2002: 204). Fr Louis TOCD of Manjummel's testimony is eloquent (cf. Positio: 561, 562).

The life of the Blessed was as if a silent exhortation to his brethren so that they might follow the discipline of the community. By words also he reminded them of their duty to observe discipline. About Valliara, as seen above, he had warned him several times. In his circulars to the members he comes out strongly against abuses, exhort them to work for God, for their own sanctification, to practise silence and recollection, to engage in study, to avoid familiarity with lay persons unless it was for their spiritual progress, to live in such a way as to fully respond to their vocation, etc. (cf. his pastoral letters of 1866, 1869, 1870 – CWC IV, 1982: 89ff.)⁹

A Concerned Superior

The concern and solicitude of the Prior for his subordinates is evident in many instances. When Plasnal was offered to the congregation his first thought was how the health of the inhabitants would be affected. Another example of this tender love for the members is found in sending the special, delicately sweet mango he had received from some person, to the monasteries. Reference to this is found in a letter he wrote to Fr Kuriakose Porukara, vicar of Mannanam in 1870 (CWC IV 1982: 70f.). He wanted this rare variety of mango be planted in every monastery compound and be called 'our memory' (*dukran*). The monasteries complied with this

⁹ The first of these circulars was written jointly by Chavara and Fr Leopold, and the second by the Blessed and Fr Gerard. The third was written at the direction of the vicar apostolic. Naturally the wording might have been inspired by the rather western legal mind of the missionaries than the congenial, sympathetic spirit of Chavara. This becomes clear when these circulars are compared with the testament to his fellow religious.

desire and the mango variety eventually came to be called 'Prior Manga' (Prior Mango).¹⁰

The Blessed wrote to the sisters at the convent that they should remain united with a supernatural love that excels the blood relationship (CWC IV 1982: 114). Chavara's sincere and true love for the members is manifest in the esteem in which he held them and in generously appreciating their good examples and achievements. He praises the work of Fr Jacob Valliara (cf. *CMI Photo Directory*: 309; '81: 78f.), who was the first to die in the congregation in 1855. Similarly he describes at length the edifying life of Fr Nellissery 'the first fruit' given to the congregation (cf. '81: 83f.).

The attitude Chavara had shown in the case of Fr Zacharias (Scaria) Ephrem Kalathil is touching. As pointed out above, even against the express wish of Fr Leopold, his intimate friend and spiritual director and delegate of the vicar-provincial, the humaneness in the Prior comes out very touchingly (see above p. 15).

What Chavara wrote in about the year 1866 to Fr Kuriakose Porukara, vicar of Mannanam Monastery, shows his loving concern for the sick and at the same is an example of how he corrected his subordinates:

I have anxiety about a monastery, in which no one is sick. If on the contrary, there is a sick person in a monastery, that too continuously, it is the house, in St Teresa's view, the most pleasing to Jesus Christ. Thoman [probably a male servant appointed to look after the sick and the aged at Mannanam] says that you do not show much love for our *Valliachan* [elderly priest], that bread and milk are not served to him properly and that hence he seems very weak now (CWC IV 1982: 72).

Fr Scaria Kalathil says that the Prior used to spend a lot of time attending to and consoling the sick members (Mannanam Chronicle III, 30, 175; *Positio*: 347). In his second letter to his

¹⁰ Fr Prior sent to the convent of sisters two mangoes, from two varieties he had received from Parayi Tharakan. It is not clear whether these were of the same variety as 'Prior Mango' or not (cf. CWC IV 1982: 116).

parishioners at Kainakari his tenderness of heart regarding the cause of the invalid and the aged comes out very eloquently. He gives the examples of St Francis Assisi and others, including that of Fr Valliara who experienced spiritual change after serving the sick. After describing the story of Fr Valliara he says: "See how pleasing to God is caring for the sick" (CWC IV 1982: 160f.).

There was an occasion when Fr Chavara had to be examined in the magistrate court of Alapuzha on a criminal case filed against him. Accordingly the court met him in the Church of the Holy Cross at Alapuzha and questioned him. After hearing him the judge understood that it was a fraud played by his opponent. The judge was greatly impressed by the personality of Fr Chavara and wished to have an informal talk with him at his residence. Chavara could not oblige him immediately because he got information that Missionary Fr Joseph Elias, who had been preaching a mission to the new converts at Kainakari, was laid up seriously ill, and he wanted to go to him at once. He went to Kainakari and took in his boat Fr Joseph to Alapuzha and arranged for his treatment. Only when he was better, Chavara went to the judge's residence. Their talk lasted more than two hours covering spiritual and religious subjects. Chavara left carrying a very good impression of the knowledge and moral integrity of the judge (cf. Mannanam Chronicle III: 168f; *Positto*: 502f.).

Love and Compassion for All

Chavara had love and concern for the members. More than that he was concerned also for the families of the members. Fr Kuriakose Porukara records in the chronicle of the Mannanam Monastery a special case related to the matter. There was an occasion when one of the candidates (aspirants), a member of the Perumalil family had to be sent back home, as it was discerned that he had no vocation. When Chavara came to know that the parents of the candidate, on this account, were very much annoyed and offended he went in person to the family and explained to them how and why the boy had to be sent back home. When the parents came to know the truth, they were very much consoled (cf. Valerian, 1939: 290 who quotes *Alocana*¹¹: 51).

¹¹ This is the 'Book of Consultation' in which the discussions and decisions of the local synaxis (chapter) were recorded. The *Alocana*

The Blessed's concern for the poor, sick and dying comes out very forcefully in the letter he wrote to his Kainakari people on 15 October 1869, in which he asks them to start a 'Confraternity of Happy Death' and also build a modest 'House of Charity' to accommodate and serve the destitute, aged and street beggars. The members of the confraternity, following the examples of saints like Francis Assisi, many nobles, princes and princesses of Europe, and the example of Fr Jacob Valliara, are to visit and help the sick, especially those on the death bed. For this the members should take turns so that they are always near the dying, helping him or her to die a good death. They are to form voluntary groups who would visit the sick in hospitals and even in families and nurse them, or would, if necessary, take them to the 'House of Charity' to be constructed. They are to do all this by begging alms and thus collecting funds (cf. CWC IV 1982: 153ff.).

Forgiving Love and Concern

Sri Mathen Kalapurackal was a local gentleman and for some time was also the steward of the monastery at Mannanam. He had unjustly taken some of the properties of the monastery in his possession. Though he was punished by the civil court for the unjust appropriation of the properties of the monastery, later he filed a complaint against Fr Chavara in the criminal court of Alapuzha (see above). Though Chavara tried to get him reconciled to the monastery, he did not succeed. In spite of all these, Chavara in his testament to the members of his congregation recommended him to the superiors to have a special consideration for his family and to support it in times of need (Mannanam Chronicle III, 502f.; cf. also CWC IV 1982: 102).

Concern for the Universal Church

Motivated by a universal vision, in his letters to the members of the congregation, the Blessed often gave information about the universal Church, about the Pope and about the persecutions of the Church in different parts of the world: news that he collected from journals and reviews. He also requested the members to pray for the Pope and the Church. In a letter he wrote to Fr Kuriakose

('Reflection', a note by Chavara) to which we referred to earlier is not part of this book.

Eliseus Porukara, vicar of Mannanam, reference is made to the war in Italy against Papal States (Rome fell in 1870). Victor Emmanuel and his captain general Garibaldi were forging on towards Rome. In that connection Chavara wrote:

This is the law in Europe: 'Anyone who does not like to join the group of the wicked in the street should shut himself up in the room. If anyone goes out of doors and refuses to join the group, the royal command is that he be hanged' (CWC IV 1982: 63; 1990: 38).

In another letter written in 1869 to Fr Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara, Chavara gives several details about the First Vatican Council. In the same letter he gives also information about the Obelisk that was erected in the St Peter's Square on 8 December to commemorate the anniversary of the declaration of the Immaculate Conception (cf. CWC IV 1982: 67).

In a letter written to Fr Alexander Kattakayam in September 1870, Chavara writes among other things:

The important session of the ecumenical council is over by the 20th of August. On that day the infallibility of Pope was defined as a dogma of faith. Excluding those who left the council for various reasons, there were 540 bishops. Of these only two voted 'non placet' [negatively]. That night the whole city of Rome was illumined as day, as a miniature heaven (ibid: 77f.; cf. also Mannanam Chronicle III, p.260).

In his chronicle Chavara records a miraculous event concerning Pope Pius IX:

A serious disease affected the Grand Lady Odeschalchi staying in the city of Rome. She requested the Holy Father to give her the blessing and the plenary indulgence at the moment of death. In response to the request of the Grand Lady, the Holy Father knelt down and prayed without giving any special blessing to the Lady. At the same time the Grand Lady, who was remaining in bed, unconscious, opened her eyes and called the servant and said: "Bring my dresses, I am completely cured. The Holy Father had come here and told me: you are cured, get out of your bed". Accordingly the lady, having dressed herself, went to the church and thanked God. Then she visited the Pope, thanked him for the

blessing, and after receiving the blessing of the Pope returned home' ('81: 57f.).

Cooperation with Others

Chavara could easily develop friendly relations with any person and get his or her cooperation for his endeavours. During the troubles caused by the intrusion of Bishop Roccas, Chavara realized that many of the means, such as issuing of pastoral letters or imposing excommunication, had not succeeded much to deter the faithful from following the intruder bishop. He sent word to some influential people, like Unnicheria Kappil, Pallivathukal of Palai, Anthraper of Chertala, to meet at Mannanam to deliberate on the point. Sri Unnicheria records in his diary how Chavara received him when he came to Mannanam in response to the invitation:

As soon as Chavara saw me, he came and embraced me very emotionally, saying: "My dear son don't you see how the schism is spreading swallowing most of our parishes. What shall we do to check him?" (Unnicheria Kappil, *Positio*: 364).

Their influence helped Chavara to get the intervention of civil authorities in the matter and thus prevent the progress of the Roccasian movement. Chavara writes:

After getting all these letters and sending them to him we succeeded in getting an order from the peshkar prohibiting Mar Thoma from going to churches where the people were of rival groups. Mar Thoma continued his visit, but he did not go further than Punnathara.

.....

We thought that the reported rumours about him were true but God did not let this visit to happen. The Catholics in the northern churches presented a petition to the diwan mentioning the peshkar's order and the diwan gave a similar order. So he did not go to Ollur, as there Kallukaran and others were still Catholics or to Aranattukara as Tharakan etc. remained Catholics ('81: 105).

Chavara was ever grateful to his benefactors. In his testament he mentions some of the benefactors like Archbishop Bernadine, Fathers Philip, Marceline, Leopold whom he

recommends to the special consideration of the congregation. In this category he specially mentions also Dom Meneses the Archbishop of Goa whom many of the St Thomas Christians curse for the harm he did to their Church. But Chavara sees the good he had done to the Kerala Church, for which he recommends him to the congregation to be grateful to him.

Chavara's Concern and Care for All

The special concern and paternal affection for the sisters of the convent comes out in his writings (see chapter 8). In the letters he wrote to them, he instructs them regarding spiritual life, transcribing for them books to read; instructs them how to cultivate the land, and how to write the chronicles, etc. As a model, he wrote for them the first seventeen pages of the chronicle of the convent.¹² As the vicar apostolic did not permit the sisters to go to the church to participate in the Forty Hours' Adoration, he consoled them writing a very thoughtful letter. He wrote to them a similar letter when the sisters were denied permission to go to the church on Maundy Thursday (see chapter 8).

A Prudent Superior with a Sense of Discretion

Fr Leopold who knew the person of Chavara very intimately and the latter's role in the development of the CMI Congregation, rightly observes:

Fr Kuriakose however made up for his lack of age with prudence and exemplary conduct (Beccaro 2003: 9).

It was this prudence and sense of discretion that induced the authorities to entrust to him to deal with difficult situations that arose in the administration of the vicariate (cf. *Positio*: 163ff.). Archbishop Baccinelli in his 1861 report to Rome praises the various good qualities of the Prior, especially his prudence (*uomo...prudentissimo*, 'a most prudent individual') (cf. *Positio*: 259).

In 1869 Chavara wrote to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation, informing the latter that things had settled after the episode of the intruding bishop Roccas and that

¹² See his letters to the sisters and also the Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent.

there was perfect peace. But he says that the peace may not last, as demands for a ritual bishop would continue. Hence he suggests that the Vicariate of Verapoly be ritually divided into two, each with its own ordinary, one for the Latins and the other for the Catholic St Thomas Christians. How far-sighted and prudent a suggestion this is clear from the struggle that ensued in the Church during the 1870s and 1880s (cf. Mundadan 2003: 72ff.).

In the short note dated 13 January 1864 to which reference was made above (p. 5) Chavara expresses his view that it may be prudent not to admit candidates belonging to the Latin Rite and to the Southist¹³ community. He says that this he said because of the possible disturbances that would be created in the community, not because he was uncharitable and did not wish the good they might reap. He leaves it to the will of God and to the discretion of the superiors (CWC IV 1982: 82). In a second similar note (*Alocana* dated c. 1865¹⁴) he reflects on the reason for the continued disturbances in the Vicariate of Verapoly. He thinks that the cause is that the faithful belong to different Rites, Latin and Oriental, and that the pastors of Latin Rite are in charge of the Orientals also. Hence, although he feels that the Carmelite missionaries of the Latin Rite may continue to administer the vicariate, they should learn Syriac and celebrate in that language and Rite. If those who were already ordained priests find this difficult, the missionaries should come before ordination (*adhuc clerici*) and should learn Syriac language and should celebrate in the Syrian Rite (ibid.: 83-85). In both these cases Chavara is not anti-Latin or anti-Southist but only shows his prudence and considered view. In the second letter he writes at length the reasons for his views and suggestions. It is a well thought-out document (see chapter 12).

Chavara conceived bold and far-reaching plans for the development of the congregation. The monasteries he built and others he had in mind were part of such plans. The establishment of the printing press, starting of the "House of Charity" at Kainakari, and many such other undertakings also can be counted among the plans. The programme he envisages for the congregation in his testament to the members also is to be noted in

¹³ In CWC IV in the place of this you find only dots, as the text is illegible. However *Positio*: 422 expressly mentions 'Southists'.

¹⁴ About this, cf. *Positio*: 419f.

this context. He proposes the division of the congregation into two provinces, one in the south and the other in the north, with sufficient number of houses to serve the whole of Kerala, both Vicariates of Quilon (Latins) and of Verapoly (both Syrians and Latins) (cf. CWC IV 1982: 100f.). This proposal was in view of the increase in the number of the members, who should serve well the objective of the congregation, namely the salvation of all.

The Last Will or Testament

This chapter may be concluded with a brief description of what has been called the last will or testament of Blessed Chavara addressed to the members of his religious community. He calls it his 'powered sermon' (*kazhivu padārtha*), last exhortation and *chāvarul*. *Chāvarul* is a very significant Malayalam word composed of *chāv* (death) and *arul* (mandate). There seems to be no equivalent expression in English and may be described as 'the mandate or task marked out by a dying person and addressed to his/her progeny'. They are the words of a *paterfamilias* or the head of a household giving his directives to the descendants just before his death. It is the last testimony of the head of the family. There is another document similar to this that was addressed to his family members and other parishioners of Kainakari (CWC IV 1982: 137ff.). This has been popularly known as *Nalla Appante Cāvarul* ('The Last Will of a Loving Father') which will be analyzed in chapter seven. But this title is not in the original. The word *cāvarul* does not seem to occur anywhere in this document. Chavara calls it a family order or discipline, which they are requested 'to accept as good counsels from their ancestors'. In the postscript (cf. *ibid.*: 152) Chavara says that this is his *dastment* (testament) "to you my family members and only brothers and sisters who are in a double capacity my children".

Though there are slight variations in the terminologies used, Chavara's intention was similar in each case. For the Kainakarians their loving father is delineating a programme to guide their family life, both spiritual and temporal. For the religious community, which he had been leading for the last twenty-five years or more, the document is his final farewell message, which emphasizes the fundamentals of religious duties, and which gives some guidelines for the future development of the two congregations—of men and of women—both of which he directed for so many years.

The original of the testament to the religious has not been discovered. But the chronicle of St Philomena's Monastery, Koonammavu (1863-71, p. 148ff.), and of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam (Vol. III, 1871-1908, p. 7ff.) have it copied. They agree with each other in all details. References to this document can be found in several writings.¹⁵ The reference in the Chronicle of Parapuram (p. 1419ff.) is the most comprehensive. We may first analyse what he says and then proceed to describe and comment upon the main points in the document itself.

Parapuram's Account of the Testament

Fr Parapuram calls the document *Maranapatrika* (the will of a dying person) and *Destament* ('Testament'), and also *saporul* (more or less the same as *cāvarul*). Chavara himself indicates in the document the date of its composition as August 1870 when, though still leading a rather active life (cf. Moolayil: 2-5; *Positio*: 545), he seems to have had the premonition about his approaching death, which happened after five months, on 3 January 1871. Parapuram (p. 1420) introduces the document:

The prior had composed a last will intended for the religious. It contained many wise counsels. A few days before his death he called one of the novices¹⁶, who had been attending on him during old age, and gave the testament to him saying: "After my death please entrust this to Fr Leopold".

As the document was enclosed in a sealed cover the above mentioned novice did not have any idea of the contents. He kept it safely and after the death and funeral of the deceased Prior, submitted the sealed cover to Fr Leopold. The latter opened it and read it. He was so impressed by its contents that he immediately arranged for copies to be made. He sent the copies to the different monasteries (Mannanam, Vazhakulam, Pulincunnu and Elthuruth)¹⁷ with share of mementos of what the Prior had left behind as clothes, etc. All the religious read the testament of

¹⁵ E. g. There is a reference in the biography of Chavara written by Kuriakose Porukara, 1905: 37.

¹⁶ Parapuram does not give the name of this novice. Kuriakose Porukara (p. 37) gives it as Leopold.

¹⁷ Mutholy and Ambazhakkad are not mentioned by Parapuram.

Chavara and were greatly inspired by and pleased with its counsels and tried their best to live them. After this Parapuram gives briefly the contents of the document, limiting himself to a few select topics. He concludes his description (p. 1423):

The monasteries received with great respect the copies of the testament and mementos as very important treasures and preserved them with extreme care, as precious keepsakes to perpetuate the memory of the deceased Prior among them.

Contents of the Testament

The opening words are very personal and touching:

I, your servant brother Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family, swear my fidelity to the Lord, with all of you, my dear Rev. Brothers, the religious priests, my dear children the novices and brothers co-operators. I address you with this as my powered sermon, last instruction and *cāvarul* [farewell message as if from my death bed] (CWC IV 1982: 99).

The document is similar to a sermon preached in all seriousness (with all his internal powers), it is his last exhortation and his final spiritual testament. Its author sees the congregation as a fraternal community of love. He is convinced that one's primary commitment is to Christ, the Lord and therefore swears fidelity to Him united with all his confreres. It is only then he starts with advising and bidding farewell to them.

The body of the document has five numbered paragraphs. However the subject matter treated in each paragraph is not logically arranged. Any paragraph may contain matters that are not logically connected. Hence we need to arrange the contents in slightly different order. The first point Chavara makes is his conviction that the congregation became Carmelite due to a special providence of God:

Dear children, by the special grace of God, we have been called to be in the Carmelite Order so pleasing to our Blessed Mother. This has been so, because God willed it so and not because man planned it thus. I am as sure of this as I am sure that this material, on which I am writing, is paper. For the founders of this, Rev. Malpans Palackal and

Porukara, had sought¹⁸ and made arrangement for a Dominican Order. That is why we started the unprecedented custom of wearing the white cassock¹⁹ and took other steps. But our Holy Mother, realising our weakness, took us into her special love (ibid.).²⁰

One may wonder why this is stated so strongly just at the beginning of the testament. It seems that the Blessed considered this was necessary in the given circumstances, to inculcate in the minds of his religious their supreme duty of obeying their higher superiors, who were Carmelite missionaries. It is interesting to note that the theme of obedience follows immediately after this statement on divine providence, and explains who the superiors were. The large majority of the members of the congregation (including many of the fathers who made their religious profession in 1855), as already pointed out (chapter 3), were quite unhappy with, 1) the manner, in which the Carmelite missionaries imposed upon the community at Mannanam the rules and regulations of the Discalced Carmelites; 2) the procedure they adopted in affiliating the new religious community as their Third Order; 3) with the change of the original name (probably 'Servants of Mary Immaculate') into another.

This displeasure became very clear in 1870s (cf. *Nota in Prologo*). The opposition to the missionaries must have been brewing from late 1850s onwards. But as long as Chavara was

¹⁸ The Malayalam word used is അപേക്ഷിച്ചതും (*apekshichatum*). It can mean either that they requested the authorities or that they prayed God for it. *Positio* prefers the second interpretation (cf. p. 443, fn. 17).

¹⁹ It is not clear what exactly the author implies. The St Thomas Christian clerics started wearing the Latin form of cassock from the early years of the 19th century and that too was white in colour (cf. '81: 64f.). May be Malpan Palackal, who had great regard for the Dominican way of life interpreted the white colour as a symbol of that life, which he envisaged also for the new religious community. At that time only the Dominicans wore white habits while other religious like the Carmelites, Franciscans or Benedictines in the West and monks in the East used to wear black, grey or brown coloured habits.

²⁰ This has already been quoted above in ch. 4, p. 15.

alive no one dared to come out in the open, not because they were afraid of him but because it was inconceivable for them to cause any pain to the tender heart of this their loving father. They knew that he had the highest regard for the missionaries, whom he looked on as his superiors (as also of the whole community) and entitled to command unconditional obedience. Probably Chavara had discerned the negative feelings of the members hushed up in their hearts. Hence he thought that the only way to assuage their hurt feelings and prepare them for continued loyalty to the missionaries, was to impress upon them a fact, of which he was quite convinced: it was the hand of God, which was behind all the developments in their religious community from 1855 to 1861 and after, and also behind the actions of the missionaries.

Practice of Obedience

After this statement on the working of providence we find the highlighting of the idea of religious obedience. Of course Chavara's concept of obedience must have been formed from such spiritual books as those of A. Rodriguez, J. N. Grou—a sort of blind and deaf obedience as was usual at that time. He emphasizes:

But so far, neither you nor I have become true monks. The one sign of a monk is a complete surrender of self and practice of obedience, as if he had no eyes and ears. If one has that, he is religious. Although this is not a difficult task, consider that its practice falls below perfection and make strenuous effort in its practice (CWC IV 1982: 99f.; 1990: 70).

The author proceeds to mention the persons whom his religious should obey [and grow in the practice of perfect obedience]: The vicar apostolic, the missionary appointed over the community as his delegate; in so far as it is not against the will of God or the will of the above mentioned superiors also the other missionaries. He admonishes the members to take courage; though in the beginning they might feel such practice difficult and repugnant, in course of time they would find it the best way to cultivating the proper attitude and to great peace of mind. This is the first level of obedience. The second level is obedience to subordinate superiors (those under the major ones mentioned above), and the third is mutual obedience. He assures them that if

obedience were practised at all these levels they would enjoy heavenly peace in the monastery, which is a mini-heaven.

Here some may ask why the Blessed prescribes obedience to the 'other missionaries'. Most of the missionaries, if not all, were called missionary apostolic—men specially sent by the Holy See. That may be the reason why Chavara considered them as quasi superiors deserving obedience. He, being conscious of the feelings of dissatisfaction and antagonism brewing in the minds of the members against the missionaries, as pointed out above, may also be implying that criticism of the missionaries and disregard for them might adversely affect religious discipline.

Two very positive emphases visible in this exhortation are: 1) the Will of God is the supreme norm of obedience; 2) the virtue of obedience demands not only the subjection of the subordinates to the superiors but also mutual subjection and obedience. In a way the will of God manifests in every one of the brethren and hence the need to obey him.

Fraternal Charity

In paragraph two Chavara calls upon the superiors to give serious attention to fostering true fraternal charity by developing "a cordiality and affection as between children born of and bred by the same mother, in the same family". To keep up such affection and cordiality each superior must be anxious to attend to the needs not merely of his own monastery but also of others. When they approach him with some need he should be ready to meet it. The superiors should keep regular correspondence with each other, enquiring of the well being of all and communicating to them their own affairs and needs. All should hasten to render whatever helps possible to those in need (cf. *ibid.*: 100; 71).

Plan for the Growth of the Congregation

Since the congregation is founded for the salvation of the fellow Christians, it must have sufficient number of members to carry out that task. With the permission of the vicar apostolic they might start a second novitiate at Mannanam. Thus Koonammavu novitiate could be assigned for houses in the north and that at Mannanam for those in the south. Eventually the two regions could be constituted into two provinces. He feels that there is need for establishing more monasteries and convents attached with boarding houses. It will be easy to do so in the south, i.e. to the east, west

and south of Mannanam. He suggests two specific places: one at Thathampally, another at Mavelikara; two others to the south on the eastern and western regions. These establishments would be able to cater to the needs of the two vicariates under the Propaganda and administered by the Carmelites, namely Kollam (Quilon) and Varapuzha (Verapoly). There is need of establishing convents and attached boarding houses at Mutholy²¹, and Mannanam (paragraph 3, *ibid*: 101; 71f.). With a little effort and zeal the members of the congregation could realize these projects.

Here one may be tempted to ask whether these proposals in the last will of Chavara were implemented. The circumstances that followed the Blessed's death were least conducive to an immediate execution of the projects. The rather negative attitude that Vicar Apostolic Mellano took ever since he learned that Chavara wrote to the Holy See for a ritual division of the Verapoly Vicariate, was not at all helpful. The whole of the last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the last stage of the final struggle of the Catholic St Thomas Christians for selfhood. Many members of the congregation were also involved in the struggle, for which seven of them were expelled from the congregation²² (cf. Mundadan, 2003: 81ff.). Besides, the members of the congregation were airing in public their own dissatisfaction with the Carmelites as mentioned above. The situation being such immediate execution of projects mentioned in the testament was almost impossible. Then perhaps the community preoccupied with other priorities almost forgot them. Only after more than eighty years, in 1953 the congregation was divided into provinces (initially three) and more novitiates were established. However a few new houses both in the north and south had come up before this. A convent was started at Mutholy

²¹ Probably in the original the name Chavara uses is the Syriac *M'in Berole*, meaning 'Fountain of Pearls'. This is clear from the copy in the chronicle of Mannanam. In that of St Philomena's, after leaving a little space, may be to be filled with the Syriac word, Mutholy is written (cf. *Positio*: 445, fn. 18; cf. ch. 4 above, p. 17).

²² Andrea Ajuti, the delegate apostolic in India, in his report to the Propaganda congregation dated 13 April 1887, speaks among other things, the questionable actions Archbishop Mellano took with regard to the members of the Congregation (ACEO, *Scritture riferite malabaresi*, 1878-89, f. 1431; cf. *Positio*: 25, fn. 29, where a whole passage of the document is cited).

in 1888 but none at Mannanam, although a number of convents were begun in other places.

Gratitude to the Missionaries

In paragraph three itself the author speaks of some missionaries, starting from the sixteenth century to the current era, missionaries to whom the Christians of Kerala, and his own religious community owe a debt of gratitude. He considers that it was Archbishop Meneses and the Jesuits who came from Portugal, who saved the St Thomas Christians from falling a prey to Nestorianism.²³ However Chavara is aware of the limitations of the work of the Portuguese missionaries (cf. CWC 1982: 101; cf. also chapter 12).

After these comments the community is recommended to remember gratefully the services Archbishop Bernardine, Missionaries Philip, Marceline and Leopold had rendered to them. They led the community on the right path, taught the children the truths of faith and made them practise the same.²⁴ This has helped the community from falling into schism,²⁵ as is clear from the

²³ Here we find a particular interpretation of the work of the Portuguese missionaries, especially the Augustinian Archbishop Meneses, who convened and got celebrated the so-called 'Synod of Diamper' in 1599 and brought about a Latin ecclesiastical model of reform in the Church of St Thomas Christians, and the Jesuits who prepared the ground for this reform and followed it up in the first half of the 17th century (cf. Thaliath 1958). This is the western missionary interpretation, which prevailed for a long time under the Portuguese and even under the foreign Carmelite missionaries. From the Carmelites it passed on to the founding and early members of the congregation. This interpretation was quite often opposed by the leaders of the St Thomas Christians. The 'Coonen Cross Oath' (1653) and the vertical split that followed were signs of strong protest. Among the Catholic St Thomas Christians the opposition gained momentum from the last decades of the 18th century and continued to grow stronger till they achieved a measure of autonomy by the end of the 19th century (cf. Mundadan 2003: 55ff.).

²⁴ May be this is a reference to the schools started attached to parishes as ordered by Bernardine (see ch. 7).

²⁵ Of course Chavara did not live to see the intrusion of the East-Syrian Bishop Melus and the schism he caused in the community (cf. Mundadan 2003: 79).

Rocco's episode. Hence the community should in their prayers, gratefully cherish the memory of these four (Bernadine, Philip, Marceline and Leopold)²⁶ persons. He recommends to them to remember and pray for the Peter Beccaro family of Aquiri,²⁷ in Italy. They have stood, he says, with us in uniting ourselves in Christ. They helped Christians of Kerala, the Nazranis or St Thomas Christians, the 'Seven Hundred', the 'Five Hundred', the 'Three Hundred'²⁸ and the 'Sixty-one'²⁹ to remain united as one body in Christ. Other benefits would follow from this association with that family. Finally he once again mentions Vicar Apostolic Bernadine, who was mainly responsible for bringing about all these blessings for the community³⁰ (cf. *ibid*: 101-102).

In paragraph four the Prior recommends two things: 1. No one should involve in the affairs of the convent and the attached boarding house, unless anyone is officially assigned for helping them. 2. He would like that the relic, which he had received from Fr Gerard for his personal use³¹ might be donated to the House of Charity at Kainakari (cf. *ibid*: 102).

In the fifth and last paragraph he asks three of the monasteries to remember/help certain families. The monastery of Mannanam must render as much help as possible to the family of

²⁶ There is no mention of Fr Gerard here. He arrived only 1869.

²⁷ Fr Leopold was from this family. His younger brother Fr Gerard arrived in Kerala in April 1869. Soon he got very much involved in the affairs of Chavara's religious community (cf. *Parapuram*: 1273ff.). Their family must have, in many ways, helped the congregation.

²⁸ For a brief description of these 3 groups, cf. *Mundadan* 2001: 349ff.

²⁹ We do not know which group this is.

³⁰ It may appear rather strange that no mention is made here of the reigning vicar apostolic Leonard Mellano. Maybe he had no great involvement in the affairs of the congregation before he assumed the post. After assuming the post hardly one year passed before Chavara wrote the testament and he was in Rome for several months during 1870. When he returned Chavara was on his deathbed.

³¹ This consisting of a piece of the Holy Cross and relics of 32 saints was given to Chavara by Fr Gerard on his arrival at Koonammavu on 13 April 1869 (cf. *Parapuram*: 1274f.).

Mathen Kalapurackal of the parish of Muttuchira in Manjoor. "In so doing you will be imitating the disciples of Christ and setting a first (best) model".³² Mannanam, besides, ought to remember with affectionate regard the two families of Thayyil and Perumalil who had given the plot of land to build the first monastery. The Carmel Monastery of Vazhakulam owes a great debt of gratitude to the Parayi³³, that of Elthuruth to Tharakan and Kallukaran, and that of Ampazhakad to Kanichai Ittoop (cf. *ibid.*).

Chavara concludes his *cāvarul* asking pardon from all persons concerned for his omissions and commissions. He does this in a heart-warming tone, thus setting a model for others:

Finally I beg pardon from the Very Rev. Vicar Apostolic, the delegate, all missionary priests and all my colleagues. With God as my witness, I beseech you all to forgive me the shortcomings in my obligations to serve you. Once again I beseech you, my brethren in the order: I was the first to profess in the order; I was your first prior. But I have not been able to observe in full all the rules myself, nor did I get the same observed in full by you, too. I have not given you good example. Forgive me the scandals I have given in the order. Ignoring my example and making up for my shortcomings, be ye especially devout (*ibid.* 102f.).

This is what the 'Great Prior', the father of the Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel had to tell his children when he was about to depart. Despite the great esteem, in which he was held both by the authorities and the fellow religious, the simple pious soul was anxious as to how he had fulfilled his mission. With the characteristic humility, devotion to duty, abiding faith in providential guidance, and sincere anxiety for the future of the sapling he had been nourishing with versatile skill and care, he has described his religious community. He acknowledges that this was an organisation conceived and fulfilled in God's mind for the salvation of the land through devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Evidently it was not a human institution or concept. Such an institution was to grow into strength not on the assertive will of anyone of its clever or intelligent members. It would grow into perfection, the more the members voluntarily and willingly

³² About this person, see above.

³³ May be he had helped to construct the monastery.

surrendered themselves in a spirit of renunciation and obedience; obedience to the hierarchy, obedience to superiors, obedience among colleagues, obedience to one's own conscience.

Naturally he was afraid of the weakness in human nature. He was perhaps also afraid that there might be differences of opinion among his children. If there would arise such differences, he would silently admonish them from his grave: "Dearly beloved superiors love ye one another, as if you were born of the same mother. Give more consideration to your brother's need than your own". What more can a father demand of his children? Yes, he would like them to keep one another informed of their well-being. Was it the relationship of flesh and blood—of the same mother's milk? Not quite; there was something deeper than that; stronger than that, the fatherhood of God, binding him to them, binding them together. That was his wish. The various houses and institutions, he conceived, should assure him that there will be no rivalry other than a healthy emulation; that there will be a sincere and understanding co-operation. The Blessed calls his children to the challenge of a heroic love that transcends all self—a love that finds joy not in the fulfilment of one's material dreams, but in the salvation of the people one would draw into one's path! He dreamt not essentially the multiplication of institutions for their own sake. He would have them no doubt, for winning more souls for Christ and in that objective each monastery should strive to promote more the interests of its neighbour. A heroic model of charity he placed before them. Let them do that; they will learn to be considerate to those outside the monasteries too. He would go one step further. He would request his brethren to remember and help specially some who were not friendly towards him. He cited that especially as a demonstrative illustration of Christian charity—loving one's enemies. He wished his death and grave to be survived by the memory of this Christian Gospel of commanding charity (cf. Chacko 1959: 157-59).

CHAPTER SIX

A Staunch Defender of Unity of the Church

Blessed Chavara loved the Church very deeply. Whenever he heard about any good thing that happened in the Church (e.g. the First Vatican Council, the definition of the Immaculate Conception, etc), he rejoiced. He was grieved whenever any calamity occurred (e.g. the occupation of Rome by the forces of the Italian government). He was eager to collect whatever news he could get about the Church and the Pope and communicate it to the members of his religious congregation and to the general public (cf., e.g. '81: 57f, 154, 159.; CWC IV 1982: 66-68, 77f.). He considered union with the head of the Church, the Pope, and with the ordinaries appointed by him, essential for salvation. So he ardently wished that all Christians be united under the Pope. In this chapter we propose to deal with Chavara's concern for the unity of the Church in Kerala. After briefly alluding to his earnest desire and attempt to bring about the reunion of the divided community of the St Thomas Christians, we will describe in detail the heroic steps he took when the community was freshly threatened with a crisis of unity created by the illegal entry into Kerala of Mar Thomas Roccas, a Chaldean bishop.

Reunion of the Divided Community

In Kerala the Church of St Thomas Christians had vertically split in the middle of the seventeenth century, as a consequence of the rebellion unleashed against some of the highhanded actions of the Portuguese missionaries from the sixteenth century. Thus from the second half of the seventeenth century there came into existence the *Pazhayakuttukar* ('Old Party') who continued to give allegiance to the prelates appointed by Rome, and *Puthenkuttukar* ('New Party' or Jacobites /Syrian Orthodox) who refused to acknowledge those prelates, and by 1665 gradually drifted to the

allegiance to the Jacobite /Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. Ever since that there have been several attempts for the two separated communities to reunite. In all these attempts the Orthodox prelates insisted that their episcopal dignity be recognized and, if necessary, ratified. This, they considered, was essential to maintain their autonomy, that they might be governed according to their laws and customs. But the Carmelite missionaries generally were opposed to such claims. Rome was only gradually seized of the need to recognize their autonomy. Only in 1930 a decisive action was taken, which gave birth to the Syro-Malankara Church with Mar Ivanios as its head. Even before that there were occasions when Rome showed its willingness to accede to petitions of the prelates. But almost always the foreign missionaries in Kerala successfully foiled any such action being taken by Rome.

Blessed Chavara was sadly aware of these facts and was ready to do anything for bringing about a reunion of the separated communities. This is very clear from the correspondence he had with his disciple Fr Mathai Mariam Palakunnel. This priest to whom reference is made a few times in this book, was a zealous missionary. He was creatively engaged in the work not only of the evangelisation of some dalits, but also in the movement for reunion. He gladly reports that he had the fortune to see about two thousand *pulaya* Christians baptized, despite opposition not only from the Hindus but even from his own fellow priests. Then he speaks of the interest he together with Blessed Chavara had taken for the union of the separated St Thomas Christians (Palakunnel 1972: 113-15):

Thinking that my younger generation may be stimulated to dedicate themselves to the reunion movement, if you come to know what I and Prior Kuriakose Elias [Chavara] have together done, I reproduce here a letter I received from him.

Fr Palakunnel had written to his malpan, Chavara, regarding the negotiations that were going on between him and some leading personalities among the *Puthenkuttukar*. In that latter he pointed out some of the problems that were standing against the efforts for reunion. One of them was the kind of bread ('azym' or 'leavened') used in the Eucharist; the second, priestly celibacy. Then there was the question of what sacred vestments were to be used. Here it is clear that those who wanted union with the Catholic Church would

like to follow the customs and practices then prevalent among the *Puthenkuttukar*.

Blessed Chavara took the matter very earnestly, and referred the points raised by Fr Palakunnel to the pro-vicar apostolic, Fr Philip OCD—at this time Vicar Apostolic Mellano had gone to Rome to participate in the First Vatican Council. The pro-vicar apostolic wrote to Bishop Mellano to get a clarification from Rome. Rome's answer was not very encouraging. Mellano himself was not interested in the matter (see below). But the Blessed requested Fr Palakunnel not to be frustrated but to follow up the matter, gathering further information and communicating them to him either in person or through a letter. He wrote:

If we pursue our investigation further without any delay we may succeed in our endeavour. It will help us to send a more detailed report to Bishop Mellano, before he leaves Rome.

Palakunnel says that he made further inquiries counselled by his malpan and sent to the latter a detailed reply. Then he sadly remarks:

But before seeing and reading it this venerable father [Chavara] passed away after a serious illness. Therefore, Lord, kindly open a door!

But even before this Fr Palakunnel went to see Bishop Mellano, when the latter had returned to Kerala after the Council sessions, and told him about the desire of some Jacobite priests to join the Catholic Church and also about the opinion of Blessed Chavara in the matter. The prelate's reply was that one could not trust those priests. He showed least interest and refused to do anything positively.

Blessed Chavara's interest in this regard is expressed also in his letter to Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda in 1869. He informs the latter that a ritual bishop for the Syrian Catholics in Kerala would expedite the reunion of the Jacobites:

This would be very opportune and useful. There are also many non-Catholics in our midst who are our own kith and kin, now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce schism and return to the unity of the Catholic fold (CWC IV 1982: 29; 1990: 14).

The same idea is found in his 'Reflections' of 1865 (see below 4).

The Roccas Affair

As mentioned in the 'Introduction', the Catholic St Thomas Christians were going through the final phase of their struggle for autonomy from late eighteenth century to the close of the nineteenth. There was an interim cooling of ardour in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Perhaps it was the result of a combination of circumstances. Under the Padroado Archdiocese of Cranganore they were practically left to themselves, as the administration there was rather weak. The Propaganda administration in the Vicariate of Malabar /Verapoly was also not very strong. Some of the vicars apostolic like Mgr Stabilini appear to have been more favourably disposed towards the community than their predecessors. The affair of the Chaldean Church was in a flux during these decades (cf. Mundadan 2003: 75f.). But in the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century things changed. The Verapoly regime which for some time following the Rome - Portugal conflict, exercised jurisdiction over the Padroado territories also, tightened its grip and tended to disregard the genuine aspirations of the St Thomas Christians. It was under such circumstances the struggle started again.

By the middle of the century the East -Syrian Christians in communion with Rome, though not numerous and strong, became fairly organized and found in Patriarch Joseph VI Audo (1848-79) an able leader. Complaints and petitions began to flow from Kerala to Rome and Mosul/Baghdad, in which they asked for ritual bishops to lead them. The whole movement paved the way for the illegal entry into Kerala of a Chaldean bishop, Thomas Roccas, which led to great confusion and turmoil. In history it is known as 'Roccas Schism'. Blessed Chavara qualifies the event as 'religious rebellion' (*vēdakalāpam*). He describes it with its background in two places: first, in the general chronicle in connection with the listing of the good things that happened in Kerala during the time of Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli. He spent about fifty pages in the original¹ describing the causes and course of the event. He reproduces various original documents related to it. The second account is found in "Some Episodes of the Past History" section,

¹ Original m/s., pp. 24-72, printed in CWC I 1981: 92-126.

about fifty pages in the original manuscript.² The second account consisting of an introduction and five chapters is a systematic treatment of the affair but is not complete. It abruptly ends with the Blessed's journey to Mar Roccas in the latter's residence at Thaikattussery. The first account is almost a continuation of the story and ends with Roccas's return to his country. The introduction of the second narrative speaks of certain persons, e.g. Pandari, Denha, Kudakkachira, who in some way prepared the path for the Roccas crisis. The two accounts together give us more or less a complete picture of the related events. Although the author keeps, as usual, a low profile of himself in the narrative, his extraordinary courage, the fine qualities of his leadership, and his zeal for preserving the unity of the Church, come out very clearly in these pages. It was these qualities which finally brought the episode to a happy conclusion. Fr Varkey Parapuram has devoted several pages of his *Diary* to the Roccas story.³

The Antecedents

In Blessed Chavara's opinion the East-Syrian connection of the St Thomas Christians has always been a cause of disturbance. He begins his account of Roccas affair with the following statement:

As the magnetic needle always points towards the north, the brethren of my own flesh and blood called the Nazranis of Malankara had their hearts set, from the earliest times, on getting Syrian bishops. This had often endangered their

² There is in the archives of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, a manuscript (AMSJ 22/B/4/2118), consisting of six fascicles (in all 106 pages), bound together. Of these fascicles 1-3 (pp. 1-48) are in the hand of the Blessed. They are printed in CWC I, pp. 173-208, '90: 146-175. The other three fascicles (pp. 49-107) are not in his hand, although they also describe some other events of the Roccas affair (cf. *Positio*: 232; '81: vi).

³ Pp. 368ff., 385ff.: beginnings; 620-139: reasons; 664ff.: beginnings and progress, Chavara's role begins; 770-884: revolts in the north; 845ff.: in eastern regions, government intervention; 896: return from the north and preparation to go back; 919ff.: Roccas leaves Kerala; 993ff.: restoration process; 993ff.: Aranattukara; 1309, 1336, 1354f.: various.

spiritual life and led them to split away from the communion of the Holy Church ('81: 173, '90: 146).

But the root cause of all the recurring disturbances is that the Catholic St Thomas Christians are deprived of a leader of their own Rite and nationality. In a note ('Reflections', cf. CWC IV 1982: 83-85) he wrote about 1865 (cf. *Positio*: 419f.) he says:

I was reflecting upon the dangers that have hitherto happened and may happen in future as well to the people of Malabar through the people of Babylon, and upon the means of preventing them for the future (CWC IV 1982: 83; 1990: 57).

He regrets that the ruled and rulers follow two different languages and two different Rites (cf. *ibid.*: 84; 57).

Why do the Christians of Kerala have predilection for persons from Babylon (East-Syrian s)?

It is natural for people to feel a liking for those of the same religion, caste or creed and who have the same convictions based on them.

The people of Malabar see in the Babylonians a kind of conformity regarding all these three points; on the other hand, they fail to see such conformity with the missionaries, either with the bishops or even with the missionaries apostolic (*ibid.*).

The solution the Blessed proposes is the appointment not of a national bishop but a missionary bishop from Europe, one who knows the Syriac language and who is prepared to adopt the Rite of the St Thomas Christians. That is the only means of weaning the Christians in Kerala from the people of Babylon. He describes the various advantages of such an arrangement:

If we succeed in getting European missionaries in whom are combined the knowledge, devotion, and familiarity with our Syriac language and our Syro-Malabar rites, there can be no greater blessing possible to our community. And when such missionaries will be appointed as vicars in our parishes, we will get several blessings, our Church will also give rise to saints.

Further, if we succeed in the plan proposed above the one objection put forward by the Jacobites that we Syrians have no bishops of our own Rite will be solved and there is every chance for the Jacobites of Malabar joining our fold (ibid.: 84; 59).

In any case the weaning of the Keralites from the attraction for Chaldean prelates is very essential. It is the lesson the Roccas affair taught Blessed Chavara. He is writing these reflections after that chapter was closed.

Blessed Chavara was convinced, as was his malpan Palackal Thomas, that no good would come from 'Babel'. The malpan had advised him to remain faithful to the Carmelite superiors and was of the opinion that *Varthamanapusthakam* "written at Vadayar and kept as a sacred book", deserved to be burned rather than read.⁴ From these observations of the Blessed we can more or less figure out the unfavourable stand he takes against the Chaldean prelates and his regard for the Carmelite missionaries. Even though we may not agree with everything he says, it was quite evident that the dependence of the St Thomas Christians on bishops from Persia, was not conducive to the good of the Church here.⁵

New Movement for a Chaldean Prelate

The initiative for the latest movement for a ritual bishop, according to Chavara, was taken by a certain cathanar, Kuriype Panamkuzha of Kuravilangad (cf. '81: 177ff.). Following the conflict between Portugal and Rome, Pope Gregory XVI, by his brief *Multa praeclare* (1838), transferred the jurisdiction of the Padroado archdiocese of Cranganore and the diocese of Cochin to the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. Consequently the churches of Cranganore Archdiocese (Padroado) began to be annexed to the vicariate. Fr Panamkuzha was at that time the parish priest of Edappally. When that church submitted to Verapoly, Vicar Apostolic Francis Xavier Pescetto (1831-44) was unwilling to

⁴ In this book its author Thomas Paremmakkal lashes out at the Carmelite missionaries for many of their alleged misdeeds, especially their opposition to the aspirations of the St Thomas Christians to have a ritual and national leader.

⁵ Cf. Bernard, *Marthoma Kristianikal* 1992: 234.

appoint Panamkuzha vicar of any of the churches under his regime, for the latter's alleged deeds, 'which befitted least a Christian, not to say a priest'. The disgruntled cathanar turned out to be the kingpin of the new movement to bring to Kerala an East-Syrian bishop and set him over the Catholic St Thomas Christians. He, together with Fr Nidhiri⁶ of Kuravilangad, proceeded to Kollam where the 'schismatic governor'⁷ or the banned Padroado administrator of Cranganore, was residing at that time. They informed the latter that they were submitting the church of Edapally to him and thus secured his support.⁸ Then they started to send petitions after petitions to the Chaldean patriarch. Patriarch Nicolas I Isaias (1840-47) wrote to them that he had no authority over them, and so Rome had to be approached for obtaining what they were seeking. He encouraged them to go forward.

The Denha Episode

At this time a Chaldean priest, by name Denha bar Jona, arrived in Kerala to collect alms, without the permission of the patriarch. Panamkuzha and party received Denha and accommodated him at Kuravilangad. They even spread the rumour that he was a bishop. He had studied in Rome and could speak Syriac and Latin quite fluently. He could easily make an impression on people. His presence gave great boost to the agitation. Denha soon realized that people looked to Chavara as leader and spiritual guide. He thought it was absolutely necessary

⁶ Probably this Nidhiri is Cathanar Varkey Nidhirickal (1805-1867), uncle of the well-known Nidhirickal Mani Cathanar (Fr Emmanuel Nidhiri). Fr Varkey was the vicar of Kuravilangad for many years from 1829 (cf. *Nidhiyirickal Manikathanar: Keralathinte Saradhi*, Kuravilangad: Nidhirickal Manikathanar Foundation, 2002, pp. 128, 119).

⁷ Since the Padroado priests and prelates did not obey the 1838 declaration of Pope Gregory XVI they were deemed schismatics belonging to the so-called Padroado/Goan schism. The governor mentioned here was Manuel de Joaquim Neves OP (1845-48) (cf. Tisserant 1957: 188).

⁸ Cardinal Tisserant rightly says that the new initiative to obtain a Syrian bishop had its origin among the Syrians who refused to submit to the Brief *Multa praeclare* and clung to the Padroado (cf. *ibid.*: 105; cf. Parapuram: 409, 451).

to win him over to the side of the agitators. He first wrote a letter to the Prior and then made a personal visit to Mannanam. The intention of the Chaldean priest was to bring pressure on Chavara and his community to sign a mass petition which the agitators had prepared under his supervision. But Chavara refused to oblige. He writes:

Taking all these bluff for truth, Malpan Karakunnath and a few other priests met him, and he made them sign some petitions to Babel. All these set afoot disturbances in parishes. Being close by we at Mannanam received the reports of all these frequently, but we did not pay any attention to him. Because of this, or, on somebody's counsel, Denha sent a letter in Syriac. "My beloved religious brothers, I came here, hearing about you and out of love for you. I hoped that you would come to see me before anyone else. But you have not yet come while several others have, and I am surprised at it. So I am now sending this loving note. As soon as you get it, I hope in the Lord that at least your superior, Malpan Kuriakose, will come and meet me. Peace of our Lord be with you." This was written on a small piece of paper and it was sent by a messenger. We received it, but did not give a reply, as we did not deem it necessary. Yet he went on attempting either on his own or on the advice of the others to get us associated with him ('81: 179f., '90: 151).

Soon Denha and party went on canvassing support. He easily won over important persons like Fr Illikkal, "a virtuous ascetic", Fr Philip Edavazhikkal, a Southist Jacobite priest whom Chavara describes as one "who excelled in the art of scheming and manipulating and was resourceful enough to tie together even hairless heads", the latter's son equally crafty like his father. The result was:

The Catholics among them said that here was one fit to be their prelate. The Jacobites jibed at them for going on submitting to the Latins and the Italians, instead of getting from Babel some Syrian prelates of their own, someone as learned and eligible as this Denha ('81: 180f.; 90: 152).

Denha either on his own accord or at the counsel of the local leaders, was keen on implicating the Prior and the Mannanam community in the agitation. So he set out for Mannanam:

Denha left for Kudamaloor. From there he set out with Fr Edavazhikkal serving as secretary and attendant. He was accompanied by a crowd which looked more like one of urchins following a rutting elephant or a raving lunatic than a set of people attending on any honourable person. We were surprised why this was so ('81: 180. '90: 152).

It was at 4 pm the party reached Mannanam Hill. The Prior and his community had already decided not to allow him to say Mass in the monastery church. Chavara gives a vivid description of the whole event:

We at once met together and took the decision not to let him say Mass here as it was being done in every church without asking for his credentials or authorisation. However, we received him with due respect while inside the church and led him upstairs into the monastery. Some people brought their children to be blessed. He blessed them, some with 'Bendicat Vos Omni... and others, with, the Syriac formula "Almighty God". After attending our evening prayers he expressed his appreciation. He suggested that this monastery can be called 'Dayra of Manna', for from here should spread these prayers which are Manna. He went on talking in this laudatory way. Even when the clock struck five he did not show any sign of leaving. That put us in a bad fix. It was too late for reaching another church. To send him to a private house was not proper. But if he stayed here he would insist on saying Mass here in the morning. When we refuse, there would be displeasure. To send him off now was not proper and people would go about saying that we pushed him out without giving him supper. So we got a rooster cooked, served him a good supper and gave him a room ('81: 181. '90: 152f.).

Denha wanted personally to talk to the Blessed. The latter came to his room accompanied by a confrere. Denha showed them many testimonial letters he had with him. At the end of the conversation he requested the Prior to sign the mass petition they had prepared.

Then he showed me some papers signed by several of our priests and people, after having written above "I too agree to this", and asked me to sign. He assured us that if we signed this, it would bring much good; there would be no censure from the Bishop of Verapoly and that he would not tell anyone. We just listened to all these and said nothing in answer. After holding out the paper for some time he at last withdrew it ('81: 182, '90: 153).

The fathers suggested to Denha to go to sleep as he was tired and promised to hear him in the morning. Early in the morning Denha woke up and talked about saying Mass in the monastery church. But the fathers politely told him about their inability to oblige him, as he had no patent letter from the vicar apostolic.

He rose in rage and left at once shouting that he had said Mass in so many churches and none of the vicars raised any objection and that he would say Mass within hours at Athirampuzha Church (ibid.).

He celebrated Mass at Athirampuzha and stayed there happily till he left for Kuravilangad.

Evidently it was with great reluctance that the community at Mannanam, just out of courtesy, allowed Denha to stay in the monastery overnight. Yet the vicar apostolic seemed to have been unhappy even with the minimum the fathers did for the Chaldean priest. Fr Charles of Conrad, the then rector of the seminary at Varapuzha and later Vicar Apostolic of Quilon, in his charity wrote a long letter to the community at Mannanam, pointing out that it was a mistake that Denha was allowed to stay in the monastery. Chavara comments:

We let him stay here not of our own accord, but because there was no alternative. In spite of this truth, people, when they hear that he stayed in the monastery, would think that we too were with him. This is why the bishop corrected us. Hence, let it be borne in mind by all and be more cautious in future ('81: 183, '90: 154).

The Chaldean priest was soon exposed. The Vicar Apostolic of Bombay received a letter from the Chaldean patriarch, which denounced the in-subordination of Denha. Already before this he

had fallen apart from the agitators. The contents of the letter of the patriarch was published in the churches in Kerala. Denha fled without any delay (cf. *ibid.*: 186f.; 156f.). The episode of this Chaldean priest is a sort of mild adumbration of the great storm that was soon to shake the Kerala Church in its foundations.

Kudakkachira and His Activities⁹

By this time Fr Antony Kudakkachira, the monk of Plasnal, had already taken over the leadership of the new movement. It is with great delicacy Blessed Chavara introduces Kudakkachira:

Now there lived at Plasnal a singular person who belonged to Pala and whose name was Fr Antony Kudakkachira. As he soon joined Denha and started working for him, something should be said here about the man and his past. But here my heart and this hand that holds the quill tremble. For though I will be writing only what I have heard and seen, it would affect his reputation. Some people would read into my words more than what I intended and begin to think the less of him. Yet I feel obliged to write about him, because he has been causing much spiritual destruction and is likely to cause more. A few words about him may prevent further spiritual disaster by acting as a warning to my brethren against being snatched away from our blessed and beloved Mother, the Church of Rome. So I pray to my Guardian Angel to keep me from slipping away to the left or right out of human weakness and make myself guilty ('81: 183f.; '90: 154f.).

We have seen in chapters three and four a few things about this 'singular' person. Chavara recollects all that in this context: his days at Mannanam, his monastery at Plasnal, etc. Then the Blessed speaks of his conflict with the vicar apostolic, his departure for Babel (Babylon / Mesopotamia), his return and the second visit to Babel, his eventual passing away while there. Before Fr Antony left for Mesopotamia for the second time he had been excommunicated for his various offences and disobedience.

Chronicler Varkey Parapuram (pp. 386-467) gives us lot more information about Fr Antony and his enterprises. His parents

⁹ Kudakkachira's activities are described in the *Chronicle of Mannanam* ('81: 183-189), and by Parapuram (pp. 386-467).

belonged to the church of Pala, which at that time was under the Padroado regime. They wanted their son to become a priest. For the necessary permission they took him to Mgr Pesoth (Peixoto, 1825-38)¹⁰, the administrator of Cranganore. After keenly observing the boy, the prelate remarked: "This boy is fit to be a government official much more than a priest". Yet he gave him permission to join the seminary attached to Pala church. After receiving some minor orders he moved to Mannanam. Parapuram gives a number of details about his stay at Mannanam under the loving care of Blessed Chavara. The latter had a special liking for him because of his brilliant qualities.¹¹ But complaints against him, because of his scheming character and his actions, which disturbed the peaceful atmosphere of the seminary, increased day by day.¹² Finally Chavara had, with great reluctance, to take the decision to send away cleric Antony from Mannanam. He continued his studies again at Pala and received ordination from Vicar Apostolic Louis (Ludovic) Martini (1844-53). After a few years he established a monastery at Plasnal (Plachinal).¹³ If the monastery at Mannanam was modelled on the Dominican tradition, that at Plasnal was patterned after the Eastern monastic tradition of Abbot St Antony. Fr Antony used to boast that a saint would come from his monastery before one from Mannanam. Parapuram (p. 406f.) notes how Chavara was impressed by the asceticism practised at Plasnal. The infant institution attracted many young members. When time came for the ordination of some of them Fr Antony approached Vicar Apostolic Martini. But the latter refused to ordain them on the ground that they had no patrimony or any guarantee for their future maintenance. This created a rift between Antony and the prelate. Displeased as he was with the decision of the prelate he soon launched himself into the movement for a Syrian bishop for the Syrians and joined the company of Denha.

¹⁰ The full name of this prelate is D. João da Porte Peixoto (cf. *Positio*: 89). His name is missing in the list given in Tisserant's book, 1957, p. 188.

¹¹ Cf. chapter three: 26f., where the qualities which Chavara appreciated in this young cleric, are described.

¹² Fr Geevarghese Thoppil got so tired of this cleric's activities that he threatened before Chavara that he would leave the monastery unless Antony was expelled from the seminary (cf. Parapuram: 394f.).

¹³ Parapuram calls the place Plachinal.

Despite stern warning from the part of the vicar apostolic (now Bernardine Baccinelli), Kudakkachira went about preaching retreats especially in the northern regions. Because of his ascetic appearance and power of speech he easily won over many to his side. Among them were Chiramel Tharakan of Aranattukara and Mathu Tharakan. In a personal talk with the latter Fr Antony revealed his mind: "The vicars apostolic are out to beat me down, I will reciprocate them in kind". This made Mathu Tharakan less enthusiastic about the monk. Mgr Baccinelli, sensing the troubles that were brewing, called a meeting of the leading priests and laity of the north regions. Kudakkachira, though uninvited, managed to intrude. Seeing him the prelate discontinued his talk. But the former started talking and obstinately argued that a Syrian bishop for the Syrians was an absolute need, that not only the mature and grown-up intelligent persons but even a new born baby would agree with it. The prelate dispersed the meeting and arranged to give him a personal warning to desist from his pernicious activities and remain shut up in some place. But this was of little avail. Fr Antony, without the permission of his ordinary, left for Mesopotamia in 1854. The patriarch (now the well known Joseph VI Audo) encouraged him and his companions to keep on writing to Rome. In 1856 Kudakkachira came back to Kerala in the 'Babel' style. Living there and eating fine mutton and nutritious dates, he was fattened and his skin freshened up. This fact and the new Eastern religious habit he wore and the long beard he had grown helped to increase his appeal to the people.

Despite the opposition and even excommunication from the part of the vicar apostolic Fr Antony went about canvassing support for the cause he championed. However, Parapuram says that most of the priests and lay persons remained loyal to their prelate. The more intelligent of them were of the view that the reestablishment of relation with the Chaldean Church, now decadent under the Turkish rulers, would be of no benefit to the people in Kerala. They considered the administration by the educated and well-equipped western missionaries much better. Yet there were a few who thought that if by the efforts of Kudakkachira, they got a bishop of their own Rite that would be fine. Parapuram mentions the names of some of those who had thus supported Kudakkachira before they came to know of the interdict

of Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli.¹⁴ There were a few others among the priests and people, both Latins and Syrians, who still adhered to the Padroado and supported Kudakkachira.

After doing whatever possible for his cause Fr Antony, in spite of some premonitions about his illness, travelled back to Mesopotamia probably in 1857. There his illness became acute. On his deathbed, it is believed, he obtained absolution from the excommunication he had incurred. He breathed his last in Baghdad, after having made the possible amendments, reconciled to the Church. This may be considered a grace given to him for the ascetic life he had practised.

Antony Thondanatt¹⁵

Fr Antony Thondanatt of Anakallu parish joined Kudakkachira on his first journey to Baghdad and remained there even after the latter's departure for Kerala. After the death of Kudakkachira, Thondanatt assumed the leadership of the movement left over by the former. From Kerala he was supported by Frs Thomas Mundamattam¹⁶ and Kunnel, and also by Deacon Poondikulam who had been denied priestly ordination for some reason or other. They sent petitions after petitions to the patriarch on behalf of the churches. Finally Patriarch Joseph VI Audo (1848-78) sent a letter addressed to Thondanatt and his followers. This

¹⁴ One of the cases, which Parapuram reports, is that of the vicar of Eranakulam. The vicar apostolic called him and asked for explanation. He answered: "My dear Rev. Father I gave my consent [to the movement] because I saw the signature of a professor in your seminary". The said professor was Malpan Minattoor Anakallunkal parish. He was teaching Syriac at the Varapuzha Seminary. When questioned by the prelate the Malpan confessed his fault and apologized for the same (cf. Parapuram: 446f.).

¹⁵ This is the name by which this person is generally known. But Chavara writes the name in different other forms: 'Thondinakath' (81: 187, 206). Later he is addressed as Mar Abdisho. It seems that he was also known as Kochanthony, Cheriya Anthony cf. 81: 189. Parapuram (429) calls him Tondakath.

¹⁶ He was vicar of Plasnal after Kudakkachira left for Baghdad. It was he who negotiated with Chavara for handing over the establishment at Plasnal to Mannanam (cf. Parapuram: 468-75).

must have happened sometime between 1858 and 1860.¹⁷ In this letter the patriarch said that he had been striving for the last eight years to fulfil their desire to have a prelate of their own for restoring their language (Syriac), culture and tradition. He warned them against approaching Patriarch Simon (i.e. Simon XVII Abraham of the Nestorian line, 1820-61) with the request and thus incurring excommunication.¹⁸ He further told them that he had already written to Rome and hoped to receive a favourable reply within fifteen or at the most twenty days. If the reply were negative he would not consecrate any bishop for Kerala, because he did not want to turn into a patriarch of hell! (cf. '81: 189f.; '90: 159).

According to Chavara a copy of this letter was sent to Kerala. It was followed by another in which Thondanatt broke the news how Bishop Thomas (Roccas) had been consecrated on 29 September (1860).¹⁹ He exhorted the leaders in Kerala to stand together and "boldly fight the opposition without even the slightest doubt or fear about the ultimate victory in this last battle". He asked them to give wide publicity to this news by distributing these letters and at the same time arranging for reading out every Sunday a chapter from *Varthamanapusthakam* written by their ancestors and thus put courage into the hearts of the people. They should further send representations to the government to secure its

¹⁷ In a letter the patriarch wrote to Rome on 24 Dec. 1849, there is reference to two petitions received by him from the Christians of Kerala. The purpose of the petitions was to obtain for Kerala a bishop chosen from among the Mesopotamian clergy (cf. Tisserant 1957: 105).

¹⁸ Parapuram (p. 631f.) speaks of the news that was doing the round in Kerala a few months before Roccas was sent to Kerala. The news was that Joseph Audo had rejected the request of the persons from Kerala, and that hence they (Antony Thondanatt and party), against the advice of the Catholic patriarch, proceeded to the Nestorian Patriarch, Simon (XVII Abraham) residing at Kordisaram; that there they were trying to get a Nestorian bishop for Kerala, etc. Probably Thondanatt already before 1860 had contacted the Nestorian line patriarch. It is to be remembered that he returned to Kerala after having been consecrated bishop (Mar Abdisho) by the Nestorian patriarch (probably Simon XVII Ruben, 1861-1903).

¹⁹ Tisserant says Roccas was elected bishop on 12 and consecrated on 30 September 1860 (cf. Tisserant 198f: 108).

support. Finally he requested them to send some money (Rs. 2000) for the journey back to Kerala, saying that it was "easy to get a few of us ordained or consecrated".

Accordingly the letter was shown to several people and "all of them rejoiced so much as if the dead Kudakkachira had risen again." Fr Kunnel sent copies of the letter to all the malpans in the north and the south pointing out in a note the urgency to respond positively to the request of Thondanatt. Otherwise they would let the people in Kerala lose their face (cf. '81: 190f.; '90: 160f.).

Consecration of Roccas

Mar Roccas was consecrated as Bishop Thomas on 29 or 30 September 1860. Thondanatt reported that Patriarch Audo did this in the presence of many bishops and with the consent of many others (cf. '81: 190; '90: 160). The circumstances which led to this event are briefly described by Tisserant. In his letter to the Propaganda dated 12 December 1859 the patriarch threatened to resign if Rome did not allow him to consecrate a bishop for Kerala, as such a refusal in his eyes would mean an intolerable infringement on the rights of his Church. In the spring of 1860 Rome answered, sidestepping the main problem and requesting the patriarch and the Chaldean bishops not to interfere in the affairs of Kerala. But Mosul remained stubborn and against the express opposition of the Apostolic Delegate, Amanton, the patriarch consecrated Roccas, with the title of Perath d'Maisan (Basra). He was an old servant of the patriarchate, promoted to sacred orders without any serious preparation. Already two years previously, when the patriarch was thinking of him for another see, Propaganda had expressed serious doubts regarding his fitness (cf. Tisserant 1957:108).

Parapuram collected a good deal of information about the situation preceding the consecration of Roccas. He says that when the Jesuit Panceth was delegate apostolic of Mesopotamia things were rather quiet. After his removal by death at the hands of Bedouin terrorists, there was an interim period before his successor, Henry Amanton, a Dominican took charge. This period of vacancy was for the patriarch, the bishops and people a free-for-all time. There was a group of lay leaders called 'Kokils', who were very strong-willed persons. When they asserted their will the patriarch and bishops had to yield to their pressure. They became

champions of the cause of Thondanatt and party. That made the patriarch and bishops helpless. It was at this time the newly appointed delegate apostolic, Amanton, arrived in Mosul. But the patriarch, bishops and people ignored and even despised him. But he was not scared. He went to the assembly of the patriarch and bishops and warned them against what they were contemplating to do, thus bringing harm to the Church of the St Thomas Christians (cf. Parapuram: 622f.). He forbade the newly consecrated bishop any exercise of pontifical prerogatives, and as early as 4 October 1860, Roccas was forbidden to leave Mosul under pain of major excommunication. This order had its effect: it cooled down the enthusiasm of the Chaldean hierarchy and of the people of Mesopotamia; they were running head on into a schism, which nobody wanted. Moreover it induced the British Council of Baghdad to prevent Roccas embarking for India (cf. Tisserant 195: 108).

It seems the delegate reported to Rome about the consecration of Roccas and of the imminent danger of his departure for Kerala. Having received this information, Rome, in the beginning of 1861, sent a letter to Mar Audo calling him to Rome (cf. '81: 207f.).²⁰ The delegate sent a letter to Mgr Baccinelli probably before the consecration took place.²¹ As soon as the vicar apostolic received this letter he had it translated into Malayalam and published in all the churches. This was towards the close of 1860 (cf. Parapuram: 624f.). Patriarch Joseph, probably not in good faith, interpreted the summons from Rome as an approval of his policy. He informed his priests at Baghdad that he was invited to Rome with two bishops in order that an agreement might be arrived at regarding his rights over the Indian Christians. Roccas could claim to be in good faith when he sailed for India (cf. Tisserant 1957: 108f.).

²⁰ Among the documents which Chavara showed Parayi Tharakan of Thaikkattussery, one was the letter summoning the patriarch to Rome (cf. '81: 207f.; '90: 174f.).

²¹ In the letter the delegate speaks about the conspiracy being hatched by the patriarch and his bishops; describes how he tried to dissuade him; how in spite of that he thought they might consecrate a bishop and send him to Kerala together with those who had come from Kerala (cf. Parapuram: 624f.).

When the letter of Apostolic Delegate Amanton was published, some churches believed it and acted accordingly. But the churches in the east and north, though acknowledged it, were of a different mind: they wished that the consecrated bishop arrived soon. In the beginning of 1861 Archbishop Baccinelli received a letter from Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, the prefect of the Propaganda Congregation. The context of the letter was: he came to know from the delegate apostolic of Mesopotamia about the conspiracy being hatched by the Chaldean patriarch and his bishops to consecrate a bishop for Malabar; he reprimanded the patriarch and asked him to withdraw from the proposed action; perhaps the latter might not yield and would proceed with the consecration. He wrote this letter so that Archbishop Baccinelli took the necessary steps to prevent the sinister movement. This letter was published in the churches. The parishes reacted to this in the same manner as they did when the letter of Delegate Apostolic Amanton was published. After describing these facts Parapuram gives a few reflections. Since there was the ancient tradition of the East-Syrian patriarch sending bishops to Kerala, the people had an emotional attachment to it. This tradition ended many centuries early and the Holy See directly appointed bishops for the St Thomas Christians. Yet the priests and people in Kerala could not easily understand that the right of the patriarch to send bishops had ceased to exist. This was because they were blinded by their passionate attachment to Mesopotamia. If they wanted they could have grasped the reality. For in one of the letters the patriarch wrote to the people of Kerala he had confessed that it was against the will of the Pope he had dared to send a bishop to India. The letters of Antony Thondanatt and party also helped to confuse the minds of the priests and people. Here also if they had the willingness to understand correctly evidence was not lacking. For example the newspaper published from the Protestant press at Kottayam clearly said that the whole thing happened without the permission of the Pope. Besides there was doing the round in Kerala the rumour about Antony Thondanatt approaching the Nestorian patriarch for his cause (see above fn. 18). Archbishop Baccinelli, being informed of this, sent a circular about it to the churches. This happened a few months before he published in the churches the letters of Delegate Apostolic Amanton and of Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda. In that circular Baccinelli had praised Patriarch Audo. This became a tool in the hands of the agitators to contradict Baccinelli later denouncing the patriarch.

But the information provided later by the higher authorities like the delegate apostolic and the Cardinal Prefect were to be believed above all by those who had a balanced mind. It was clear from the letters of these persons that, even if Patriarch Audó was right earlier, he had subsequently deviated from the correct path. But because of passion the agitators were rendered unable to discern the truth.

Archbishop Baccinelli, finding the people quite confused, thought out a plan to conform them to the Catholic faith. For this he wrote down a formula of faith, which all were to swear. He sent a number of priests both religious and diocesan to the churches with this formula. A minority swore by the formula. Many others criticised the attempt saying that the prelate had recourse to this measure because he was afraid that his authority over the Syrians might be lost. But this criticism also was the fruit of blinding passion (cf. Parapuram: 627-39).

Roccas and Party in Kerala

The skilful interpretation by Patriarch Audó of the summons sent to him from Rome facilitated the departure of Roccas for Kerala. The journey through desert and later probably by slow-moving sails ship did not give them time or opportunity to communicate with Kerala. This fact, Parapuram says, lulled the enthusiasm of the agitators (cf. Parapuram: 666f.). But as soon as the bishop and party landed in Kochi, Fr Antony and party sent letters to all the parts of Kerala. This rekindled the fire and many ran to Kochi to meet the bishop.

We have already seen how Chavara reacted to the movement initiated by Cathanar Kuriyipe Panamkuzha of Kuravilangad, and carried forward by the Chaldean priest Denha and the monk Kudakkachira. He not only keenly observed this movement and the later activities of Cathanar Antony Thondanatt and Metropolitan Thomas Roccas and wrote accounts on all of them, but also perceived the great peril of disunity into which the Kerala Church was heading forth. So he did whatever possible first in his capacity of a religious superior and religious leader wielding great spiritual authority over the priests and people, and later also in the official capacity of vicar general of the Vicariate of Verapoly. Denha, Kudakkachira, Thondanatt and Roccas tried all means to get him and his religious community to their side, but with least success.

He was quite sure that Archbishop Baccinelli was the legitimate authority over the Christians of Kerala. So he fought the troublemakers tooth and nail, but with the calmness and serenity of a deeply religious person and with full resignation to the will of God, and in pursuit of truth and truth only.

Thondanatt wrote letters to Cathanar Kunnel, great confidant and friend of the former, describing the developments in Mosul and the preparations to bring the newly ordained bishop.²² The first was about the money needed: he requested to raise it and send it to Mosul through some merchants. This would manifest, it said, that the people were with them. That would also serve to contradict the report the vicar apostolic had sent to Rome, saying that only the deceased Fr Kudakkachira and a few churches that were insignificant, were with the new movement.

The second letter was rather long and gave the details of the consecration of Roccas. In it the priest expressed strong feelings against Latin superiors, who were all to be expelled either by law or by force. He said that there was instruction from Rome to the patriarch that no one from Kerala should be consecrated bishop. But this instruction was from Cardinal Barnabo, prefect of the Propaganda Congregation. But Thondanatt believes:

If we accept the bishops now going there, and if we all together request them, and if we nominate those among us who deserve the episcopal dignity, for example, Rev. Fr Chavara and others, they have the faculty to consecrate them in Kerala.

He tells his readers that any punitive measures taken by the vicar apostolic against those appointed by the patriarch will not be valid and nobody need to be scared on that account. He asks Fr Kunnel to send special missions to malpans of Aranattukara, Kuthiathodu, Kalparamb, Karakunnam, etc., and especially to Rev. Fr Chavara and inform them all about what had happened and thus make use of them to influence the churches (cf. *Positio*: 210f; cf. also '81: 190f.)

²² See two of such letters, one dated 9 August (before consecration of Roccas), the other dated 6 November (after consecration), published in *Positio*: 207f.

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The second letter was rather long and gave the details of the consecration of Roccas. In it the priest expressed strong feelings against Latin superiors, who were all to be expelled either by law or by force. He said that there was instruction from Rome to the patriarch that no one from Kerala should be consecrated bishop. But this instruction was from Cardinal Barnabo, prefect of the Propaganda Congregation. But Thondanatt believes:

If we accept the bishops now going there, and if we all together request them, and if we nominate those among us who deserve the episcopal dignity, for example, Rev. Fr Chavara and others, they have the faculty to consecrate them in Kerala.

He tells his readers that any punitive measures taken by the vicar apostolic against those appointed by the patriarch will not be valid and nobody need to be scared on that account. He asks Fr Kunnel to send special missions to malpans of Aranattukara, Kuthiathodu, Kalparamb, Karakunnam, etc., and especially to Rev. Fr Chavara and inform them all about what had happened and thus make use of them to influence the churches (cf. *Positio*: 210f; cf. also '81: 190f.)

²² See two of such letters, one dated 9 August (before consecration of Roccas), the other dated 6 November (after consecration), published in *Positio*: 207f.

I, your humble brother, Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Prior of the Monastery of Mannanam, am writing this to you, my brother priests in the east and north and to you my dearest people (*Positio*: 215).

The circular starts with quoting the Gospel words "He who is not with me is against me, and who does not collect with me scatters" (Lk. 11: 23). Chavara tells the priests and the laity that the lawful authority in the Church of Kerala is the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly appointed by the Pope, that anyone who enters the Church claiming that he is sent by the Pope should first present his credentials to the vicar apostolic. Only with his knowledge and approval anyone, even a bishop, could exercise his power over the Church in Kerala. Chavara is convinced that those who have started from Mesopotamia on their journey to Kerala will be entering the sheepfold of Kerala without authorization to do so from the Supreme Pontiff. They were coming here to disperse the people here from the sheepfold of Christ and give them over as victims to the tigers. If anyone submits to them he would be falling into schism reserved to the Pope. The circular exhorts the readers/listeners to be prepared to die at their hands²⁴ in defence of unity of the Church. It concludes with a short prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary, which every one is asked to recite frequently:

Mary Immaculate Mother who always averts every calamity in the Church, allow not our Church to be disturbed by this schism. Grant that all, everywhere in the world, may be subject to the Holy Father, who has obtained the authority of St Peter. Amen (*ibid.*)²⁵.

This letter was published in the churches in the early months of 1861. Immediately after this Mar Thomas Roccas, his secretary

²⁴ It is believed that Chavara composed his poem *Martyrdom of St Anastasia* in this context in order to motivate people to fight heroically the impending schism.

²⁵ See the whole letter in CWC IV 1982: 192f.; 1990: 97-100. As a postscript canon 1 of session 2 of the Synod of Diamper (cf. Searia Zacharia 1994: 81) is quoted, which is an oath by the faithful that they would not accept bishops coming here without the permission of the Roman Pontiff and would accept anyone who comes with his permission.

Fr Antony Thondanatt and party landed in Kochi on 9 May 1861. Chavara says:

In the month dedicated to Our Lady, which was celebrated in our monastery at Mannanam, news came that the Syrian bishop had landed in Kochi. It was heard that he was met at once by some people including a few from Pala and Bharananganam and by a few priests on their way back to their parishes with the holy oil from Varapuzha. Then rumours rose and news spread like the floods ('81: 192; '90: 161).

Within a few days Fr Prior received a letter from Thondanatt²⁶. The content was that they had landed with Archbishop (this is the title in Thondanatt's letter) Thomas Roccas.

This archbishop has been at our desire consecrated and sent by our patriarch with the permission of the reigning Pope, His Holiness Pius IX. We are looking forward to your coming and meeting us. But we hear everywhere that the religious priests are scorning the person whom we ourselves have brought. We feel grieved, as we don't see why they do it and what they know about this matter. But the truth is as given above. I would like that you should inform all of this and lead everyone to the truth ('81: 96; '90: 82f.).

Chavara says that Fr Antony wrote this because of the circular sent round under the name of the Prior (cf. *ibid.*). After this Fr Antony sent letters to the malpans in different places. Many of them went to see the archbishop.

Soon after arrival in Kochi Bishop Roccas stayed with the Jacobite bishop Kurillos, and then in a rented house. The idea of his supporters was to take him to Thaikkattussery where Avira Tharakan Parayi lived. The latter at first was reluctant to associate with them but soon they succeeded to change his mind²⁷. He went with them to Kochi, where they were joined by a few people from churches like Narakkal and Konthuruthy. They together took the

²⁶ This letter is reproduced in two places in the Chronicle ('81: 96, and '81: 192). There are slight variations in the two versions.

²⁷ Chavara explains why he was first reluctant and how finally they won him over ('81: 196f.).

archbishop to Thaikkattussery. Then they wrote letters to one church after another in the north and the south.

Blessed Chavara came to know from the messenger who brought to him Thondanatt's letter that many malpans and others were going to meet him and some were joining him. So the Blessed thought that in order to authoritatively convince people it was necessary for him personally to go to Roccas and inspect his credentials. He decided to go to Varapuzha after the annual retreat that he used to preach to the priests from the end of May, and get the permission of the vicar apostolic and then proceed to Thaikkattussey to have a personal interview with Bishop Roccas.

During the retreat Chavara noticed that the participants were rather agitated and that at the intervals they assembled and talked about the newly arrived Chaldean prelate. So initially he gave a general clarification. But it did not help.

So the Prior went out of his way to declare boldly that he was ready to swear with his hand on the crucifix on the altar that this bishop had come without any order from the Pope, and that anyone who submitted to him would fall under the excommunication announced by the archbishop. This convinced most of the listeners, because they thought that he would not have asserted so strongly unless it was true. But it did not convince Fr Jacob Kochupurackal at all. On the other hand it hurt him as if it were an insult directed against him. "Without seeing or hearing him how could Fr Prior say this? You need not honour him. But why should you insult him?" asked Fr Jacob with indignation and grief ('81: 193; '90: 162f.).

Fr Jacob sought the advice of the Prior about going and meeting the Chaldean prelate. The Prior answered that he had said what he knew to be the truth; each one was, however, free to act according to the light God has given him. The next day a few boys who had gone to Mesopotamia came to Mannanam for sight seeing in their Chaldean clerical outfit. The Prior did not go out to meet them. Some members of the monastery out of courtesy received them warmly.

The events that follow are: a letter of Archbishop Roccas to Chavara dated 3 June 1861; Chavara visiting the vicar apostolic to get his permission to go and meet Roccas; appointment of Chavara

as vicar general for the Syrians (8 June 1861); Chavara and party at Thaikkattussery seeking an audience with Roccas. It is not easy to establish the chronological sequence of these events. Blessed Chavara in his account of Roccas episode does not make any mention of his appointment as vicar general. Probably he was made vicar general on the occasion of his visit to vicar apostolic or immediately after that. In that case the visit to Thaikkattussery took place after this appointment. Parapuram seems to indicate this sequence. He mentions the appointment before Chavara's journey to Pallipuram and to Thaikkattussery. So he calls Chavara vicar general when he enumerates the names of the persons who reached Pallipuram and from there proceeded to Thaikkattussery (cf. Parapuram: 702, 708). So we follow the events in the order given above.

Day by day the number of supporters of Roccas increased. Pala was the centre of many of these. Fr Kunnel was the main campaigner. He succeeded in gaining some influential people of Pala to the cause he was canvassing. They managed to get Malpan Kattakkayam Muprayil Aipe of Pala, rich and very influential among Chavara's former students, involved in the agitation. He gave his signature to the letters the plotters had brought to him, although he was warned against joining the dissidents by Prior Chavara and Fr Alexander, the nephew of Fr Aipe. The Roccasian group planned to take Malpan Aipe to Kochi to meet Bishop Roccas. But the malpan suggested that before proceeding to Kochi they might go to Mannanam and get the opinion of Prior Chavara. He told the gathering of Malpan Karakkunnel and some other priests and people of the place:

Among us Fr Kuriakose Chavara, Prior of Mannanam, is an important person. Before we take any action in this matter we should go and meet him and act according to his opinion (Parapuram: 678f.).

Nobody objected to this suggestion. But the ringleaders planned to torpedo the plan as they suspected that meeting and discussing with Prior Chavara would endanger their plan to go to Kochi and meet the bishop. On the way from Pala in boats, the malpans fell asleep. Fr Kurisumoottil and others, who did not like the idea of going to Mannanam, thought it good opportunity to play a trick and deviate the journey away from Mannanam. They instructed the rowers accordingly. When the malpans woke up they were informed that the rowers missed the right route to Mannanam

and that at that time they were so far away from there that it was very difficult to go to Mannanam. So they succeeded to take the malpans directly to Kochi (cf. Parapuram: 678f.; cf. also '81: 196). They inspected some of the letters which Bishop Roccas showed them, and came to believe that Roccas had all the necessary credentials, on the basis of what Malpan Karakkunnel said after reading the letters.

These malpans, priests and lay leaders now suggested taking the bishop to Thaikkattussery where the dissidents had already won over Parayi Tharakan to their side. But the bishop had to receive from government authorities a reply to his request to move about. So they visited Narakal where the vicar was Fr Itticheria Valiaveetil of Erattupuzha, a renowned and revered priest, and a relation of Parayi (cf. '81: 199). Parapuram says (cf. p. 727ff.) that he was outwardly loyal to Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli but was secretly working with the agitators sending letters to the leaders in the east²⁸. When Bishop Roccas arrived he openly joined him and accompanied him to Thaikkattussery. Narakal soon became a hotbed of the dissident movement. Since the bishop and party were accommodated at Thaikkattussery, the dissidents came to be called "Thaikkattussery Kakshi" (cf. Parapuram: 658ff.).

In the mean time a rumour spread that the Roccasian party was out to encroach on Mannanam Monastery by force. Although there was a suggestion that the Prior approach the tahsildar and police for protection, he did not act immediately, trusting in the help of St Joseph. Many other rumours were reported:

Thus rumours came one after another more swiftly than by telegraph. It was very disturbing. But we were sure that God would guard us. Also the government authorities will support us for even though not Christians they would protect the right of possession against any encroachment ('81: 199, '90: 168).

²⁸ Some people in the parish knew this and complained to the vicar apostolic. When questioned by the latter, he feigned innocence. Believing this the vicar apostolic sent him back to Narakal. He continued to send secret letters. Some people intercepted one of his letters and presented it to the vicar apostolic. Thus Fr Valiaveetil was exposed. But he did not relent (cf. *ibid.*).

One evening Malpan Aipe of Pala and Fr Kurisumoottil, vicar of Lalam, and two others came to the monastery. They were received in the bungalow outside the monastery. They started a conversation. The visitors stated that Fr Antony Thondanatt assured them that there would be no orders from Rome against Bishop Roccas and his party.

The Prior asked them how this could be taken as the last word, and whether they had in their hands any proof of authority strong enough to demand our submission. They replied that there was enough—the patriarch's letter and the letters of a few bishops certifying the consecration. The Prior enquired if they had with them copies of those letters and how exactly they were worded. The malpan of Pala answered that copying those lengthy letters was not easy nor could he remember the exact wording. He revealed that it was not he but Karakunnath who had read the whole and assured them that it was enough. He even asked if the new bishop was not, after all, one of us. They felt that it was not proper to leave him among the strangers in Kochi and so they had brought him to Thaikkattussery. Now they were leaving it to the Prior and his men to take matters further. He showed us the precious present they had been given—an abridged textbook of theology printed by Propaganda. The Prior suggested that they could all write to Rome and wait for an answer. The malpan agreed to that but Kurismoodan insisted that we should write to the patriarch, but not to Rome. This reply puzzled us ('81: 200; '90: 169).

The Prior and community were in a dilemma as they thought that the visitors would request for celebration of Mass in the monastery chapel next morning.

So we thought it would be better to make matters clear now. Hence immediately after the meditation at 6 pm the Prior passed on to him a note written on a small piece of paper: "As you have come after kissing the hand of Bishop Thoma, we are afraid that we will be indicted by the archbishop if we let you say Mass here. On the other hand our refusal will be humiliating to you. So it would be better for both of us if you go away quite early tomorrow without showing your intention to say Mass here". The malpan read it and next morning they left very early (*ibid.*: 200f.; 169f.).

Chavara to Meet Roccas

As it was decided earlier Chavara set out to Varapuzha to get the vicar apostolic's permission to visit Bishop Roccas. On his way to Varapuzha he received a letter from Roccas at Vechoor. The letter is dated Thaikkattussery, 3 June 1861.²⁹ It invited Chavara in a respectful and genial manner to go, see and advise him on how he should proceed (cf. '81: 92, '90: 83). Here is the letter:

By the grace of God Metropolitan, Visitator of the Chaldeans of Malabar. To our son, Most Rev. and Venerable Father Kuriakose, superior of the monastery at Mannanam. Greetings, peace and apostolic blessing in the Lord to you. We wish to inform you that in response to your desire and petitions, we came to Kochi on 9 May. Now rejoice, I say, rejoice in our Lord Jesus Christ that we have come to you in peace. We wish you know that we are now residing in Kochi. For, we have written to the residents in Bombay and in Madras and we have already received their permission. We will visit the churches and the faithful according to their permission. This enables me to visit without anyone impeding my programme. With this certitude now we have proceeded from Kochi and have come to Thaikkattussery escorted by the people of this region. Hence, I eagerly look for your presence. I wish to see you personally so that my joy may be complete. I have many things to consult with you. We pray that as soon as you receive this letter, come and meet me. We pray God that He may give you all blessings and shower his kindness on you.

With this letter the Prior reached Varapuzha and met the vicar apostolic and told him everything.

The archbishop [Baccinelli] replied that he was permitting not only me but also every vicar and malpan from the north and the south to go and see him. His Grace even expressed his willingness to allow us to submit to him if we found that he had orders from the Holy See or Propaganda authorizing him to rule over us ('81: 202, '90: 170f).

²⁹

The original in Syriac is kept at Mannanam: AMSJ, 32/B/4/2099, p. 4. It is reproduced in '81: 112f. Its Latin translation can be found in *Positio*: 215f. Chavara gives a Malayalam version ('81: 201f).

As said above, probably at this time the vicar apostolic gave him the letter of his appointment as vicar general. This is dated 8 June 1861. It was a feeling on the part of the vicar apostolic that things were going beyond his control, that prompted him to have recourse to this measure. The prelate gave the Prior ample faculties as is clear from the letter³⁰.

On account of the difficulties, which we feel for a long time, in the administration of the churches under our jurisdiction, and on account of our advanced age, and of the consequent weakness and ill health, and above all, since I do not find the desired spiritual fruits either among the priests, or among the laity, and in the present circumstances, and as the Council of Trent decrees to constitute vicar general as found necessary, hereby I nominate you vicar general so that you may administer, as regards the spiritual matters, the priests and laity of the Syro-Malabar Church under our jurisdiction. For, I am convinced that you have the fortitude, ability and the virtue necessary to carry out this office. Hence, besides the authority and privileges, which the common law acknowledges, I grant you all those privileges, which I am entitled to impart in accordance with my patent letters. Therefore I pray the good God that He may grant you all heavenly blessing, by which you will be able to administer the spiritual matters to the priests and laity included in the Syro-Malabar Church under my jurisdiction and thus to govern the churches.

The letter is signed by Archbishop Baccinelli with the seal of his office and by Fr Peter Thomas, who probably was the chancellor.

It is to be noted that Chavara does not speak anywhere in his writings about this appointment. The vicar apostolic refers to it in his report dated 15 June 1861, to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation (cf. *Positio*: 259). Parapuram (pp. 770-702) describes the event:

Prior Chavara Kuriakose and some other priests went to Varapuzha. Archbishop Bernardine and missionaries and other priests discussed the emerging serious situation. They

³⁰ The original in Malayalam is preserved at Mannanam: AMSJ. Its Latin version is given in *Positio*: 216f.

decided that in order to recognise the intruding bishop it was necessary to see a document, which showed that he had the permission from the Pope — a document similar to the ones the Vicars Apostolic of Verapoly had with them, which were shown to those present. If the new bishop had a document like that he may be recognized, if not it would be a great schism and ruin for the soul to accept him and to receive from him any faculty. In order to convince the priests and people of this Archbishop Bernardine appointed the Prior his vicar general and gave him the faculties in a written document.

Then he decided to go with some priests and meet the new bishop and examine the document, they claimed, he had received from the Pope.

This is the first mission Chavara undertook as vicar general.

The Prior decided to invite a few malpans of the north, all students of Malpan Abraham Thachil. These malpans, unlike malpan Kattakkayam Aipe, had not joined Roccas. A few other priests and prominent persons like Aranattukara Tharakan also were invited. They were to meet in the church of South Pallipuram, where Malpan Abraham had resided and taught for a long time. The purpose of the gathering was to go together to Thaikkattussery to meet the newly arrived bishop and to see his credentials. But it did not work as planned. Many priests went to Thaikkattussery separately. In the mean while the Roccasian partisans were working to persuade them to go directly to Thaikkattussery avoiding the proposed meeting at Pallipuram. Those from the north as a whole did not respond to the invitation. So Fr Prior together with some members of his religious community and a few other priests from nearby churches met at Pallipuram (cf. '81: 205)³¹.

³¹ Fr Geevarghese Konnankara of Pulincunnu parish was at this time the vicar of Pallipuram. He was one of the prominent disciples and a close relative of Malpan Palackal. After the death of the latter he had taught in the Pallipuram Seminary. A few days before the Prior and others assembled at Pallipuram a few fellow religious of the Prior had gone there to preach a retreat. Fr Geevarghese told them: "Do not use opium, do not consume toddy, and do not bring Syrian bishops. My uncle [Malpan Palackal] has taught me these wise counsels". This he told them to encourage their opposition to the intruding Chaldean bishop (cf. Parapuram: 704f.).

Bavu Tharakan of Aranattukara was also there but he remained at Pallipuram while the others proceeded to Thaikkattussery (cf. Parapuram: 708). By this time they came to know that Parayi and others had filed a petition before the peshkar to get the services of the corporals of the police. So the Prior sent a letter to Thondanatt, secretary to Bishop Roccas:

Bishop Thomas and you wrote to me intimating your arrival and expressing your desire to meet me. But I could not come earlier, because in our monastery, the annual devotion (for a month) of Our Lady and a retreat were going on. Now as they are over and as I have got permission from our archbishop I have come to Pallipuram. So please intimate the time when it will be convenient for the bishop to let me come and see him. Also kindly send copies, if available, of his credentials ('81: 205, '90: 173).

Thondanatt replied:

The archbishop is ready to see you at any time you choose. Copies can be seen at the time you come. So he does not feel any need for sending them now. The test has come too late. For if it is found that he is authorized, then your earlier presumption to the contrary would fall flat. It is the duty of the elders to reprove promptly the younger ones, when they are found to go astray, if they omit it what would happen is known from the fate that befell Elley and his house. More on meeting, Fr Cheria Antony ('81: 205f., '90: 173).

On the way they heard that Parayi had complained to the police that these priests were going to Thaikkattussery to attack and loot the church and the properties of Bishop Roccas. They also heard that as soon as they reached the church the police would arrest and detain them. So they did not proceed to the church but instead went straight to Ayyanatt, the house of the Parayi (cf. '81: 206f.; '90: 174; cf. also Parapuram: *ibid.*).

Parapuram says that Parayi first refused to see them. It was at the intervention of Fr Mathu Palackal of the Pallipuram parish, a close friend of the Tharakan, that finally the latter gave the Prior who was quite tired, and others, a place to rest in his house (cf. Parapuram: 711f.). Chavara reports:

Avira Parayi came out as if he was doing an unwilling favour, because we were now in his house. The Prior took him aside and sitting together apart from the others asked how he got convinced of the bishop's authenticity so as to join him. His reply was that the malpans were convinced that he had come after being authorized by Holy Church and that he thought that we would all be only happy about it if he had joined. Avira Parayi did not also have any axe to grind ('81: 206f.; '90: 174).

Then Fr Prior explained to him at length the series of events that had taken place and showed all the letters and correspondence he had with him. Seeing and hearing all these the Tharakan was a bit shaken. He asked the Prior what they were to do then. The latter replied that they all should together sign and send a letter to Rome and wait for three months for a reply and act accordingly. The Prior read out to him a provisional draft.

Avira agreed and urged the Prior to go alone and meet Bishop Roccas. But the Prior needed the permission of the bishop for this. If he got the permission he would see him within closed doors, because he would not kiss his ring, though he was prepared to kiss his hand or foot. The ring being the symbol of authority illegally gained, kissing it would be equal to acknowledging the authority of the bishop. But within closed doors no one would notice what transpired inside. Chavara made it clear to the senior and junior Aviras that his main concern was that their family, which had been and would in future be of great help to the community at Mannanam and many others, should not be led astray (cf. '81: 207f.; '90: 174f.)³²

After hearing this Avira went to consult Bishop Roccas, Fr Antony and others. He came back and told the Prior what their reply was:

We need not wait to see Mar Thoma as we had come only to insult him; what letters we had with us were known to him as exactly as if he had seen them; there was nothing else to show him, and there was no need for writing to Rome ('81: 98, '90: 84).

³² The description in "Some Episodes of the Past" ends here. The rest is recorded in the main body of the Chronicle.

So Chavara and those who had come with him left the place and boarded their boat. At that time a police squad came to the shore to arrest them. But the boat had already left the shore. When the police enquired some of the persons left behind, they prudently replied that they had gone there to meet the bishop and they got into their boat and left the place in peace (cf. '81: 98f, '90: 85). They reached Pallipuram and humbly thanked God for their safe journey back.

Feeling very sad at the fact that many people were being deceived by the tricks of Roccas and party, Blessed Chavara and others decided to send a letter to the Pope requesting clarification about the intruding bishop. The letter is dated 19 June 1861²¹. It was entrusted to the vicar apostolic for safe delivery to Rome. Parapuram (pp. 716-19) says that all these happened in June 1861. He also gives the contents of the letter. After the usual formalities of addressing the Supreme Pontiff, the signatories inform him: how Mar Thomas arrived in Kerala, how he went about announcing to all the faithful that he had been sent to Kerala at the order of His Holiness, how everyday priests and lay people went to him and acknowledged him, how all the churches were in danger of turning to him, how he continued this even after the vicar apostolic declared that his claim was false. Then they request the Pope to let them know the real truth about the bishop. They express their desire to have the reply in Syriac language. This they did obviously because the priests could read and understand it, as many of them did not know Latin. After this the Prior and fellow religious wrote another letter to Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of Propaganda. Chavara says that they had sent four letters, one after another, to the Pope and Propaganda, but had not received any reply till the beginning of November (cf. '81: 100f.).

²¹ The original Syriac of this has so far not been traced. An Italian version is kept in the archives of the Congregation for Eastern Churches and a printed copy of the same in that of the Propaganda Congregation, PO, doc. 5. *Positio*: 218-20 reproduces the Italian version. A free Malayalam translation of this Italian copy is published with an introduction in CWC IV 1982: 5-7. The letter is signed by the Prior and some of his fellow religious. In this list there are 12 names: 3 times Alessandro, 2 times each D. Giuseppe, D. Ciriaco. It is possible that these are repetitions.

Roccas opposed by the Religious of Mannanam

Being supported by Parayi and other powerful persons Bishop Roccas went about visiting churches, imparting sacred orders to priestly candidates, even to those denied ordination and expelled from the seminary, exonerating those who had incurred just punishments, cancelling suspensions, granting faculty to hear confession to those from whom it had been withheld, permitting some priests to celebrate in their parishes, which they had been prohibited to do.³⁴ To make sure of all these a meeting was held on 20 August in the church of Thaikkattussery. In it the bishop was authorized to carry on all his pastoral activities. Besides, it was decided to ask the churches to remit to Parayi, in four instalments, their excess income, and to appropriate two monasteries, one in the north and the other in the south,³⁵ where the bishop was to reside for six months each. All these facilitated the triumphal march of the bishop through Kerala.

The main opponents to the intruder turned out to be the religious of Mannanam and other monasteries. Under the leadership of Prior Chavara they went about relentlessly exposing the truth in public.³⁶ Bishop Roccas, who came to know well this stiff opposition, cast away all courtesies and dared to write to Chavara a threatening letter full of mean abuses.³⁷ The letter was given wide publicity sending it to the churches. The Prior writes with great anguish and sorrow:

Because of this notice and because some churches had given their submission to him, many turned against us. Among them were two priests and some deacons who had grown up drinking the spiritual milk of the word of God from this our

³⁴ Chavara in this context describes the manner of ordination in the Chaldean rite as it was performed by Bishop Roccas (cf. '81: 99f.).

³⁵ The intention seems to have been to confiscate monasteries of Mannanam and Elthuruth.

³⁶ Parapuram says (p.722, 742) that Fr Chandy Kattakkayam fought against the Roccasians like St Michael against Lucifer. The vicar apostolic gave him an order to fight like that.

³⁷ The original in Syriac of this letter dated 24 June 1861 is not available. An ancient copy of it is preserved at Mannanam (AMSJ 32/B/4/2099, p. 55). A Latin translation is given in *Positio*: 220f.

monastery seminary. From them as well as from the Jacobites and the Protestants we had to suffer much humiliation and oppression. They threatened to force us out of our monastery and install there the intruding bishop ('81: 100, '90: 86).

The author of the letter sees Chavara as his great opponent who preaches against him in churches and public places and prohibits people from following him. The bishop threatens the Prior with excommunication and expulsion from the monastery. This letter is a telling witness to the stiff opposition the Prior put up against the intruder and his followers.

Reply from Rome

As stated above Chavara received no reply to any of his letters to Rome till the beginning of November. On 7 November 1861 a letter from Cardinal Barnabo, dated 21 September 1861, reached the vicar apostolic. In paragraph four of this letter there was reference to the letter which the Prior and others had sent to the Pope. It plainly said that it was against clear orders of the Pope that Patriarch Audu consecrated Roccas. It further assured that their letter to the Pope had reached him and they would be receiving a separate reply soon. The Prior communicated this information to Bishop Roccas and Avira Parayi. But they refused to believe it and reacted to it by propagating false arguments (cf. '81: 102, '90: 87).

On 22 November Archbishop Baccinelli received a mail containing three letters of the Pope: 1. a sealed letter both in Latin and Syriac, which was his reply to the Prior and other religious; 2. another addressed to the vicar apostolic; 3. a third one written in Syriac by Patriarch Audu as ordered by the Pope and addressed to Bishop Roccas, asking the latter immediately to return home. As soon as the letters reached Varapuzha the vicar apostolic sent for the Prior and showed him all the letters. The latter took copies of them. In the letter to the Prior³⁸ and companions the Pontiff

³⁸ This letter in Syriac dated 5 September 1861 is published in '81: 103f. The original Latin is preserved at Mannanam AMSL. It is published in *Positio*: 225f. The Syriac version and its Malayalam translation are published in Bernard 1921: 272-75. The Malayalam translation is reproduced in CWC IV 1982: 8f.

expresses his esteem and regard for them for approaching the Holy See to discern the truth in a critical situation like this; he compliments them for their zeal and devotion and clearly explains the real truth in the case of Bishop Roccas.

The letter of the patriarch was immediately dispatched to Bishop Roccas. He received it on his way from Punnathara to Thaikkattussery. On reading the letter of the patriarch he seems to have had half a mind to return to Mosul. But his supporters like Avira Parayi insisted that he should not yield but go on with his pastoral visits, etc. So he left for Ollur on a visitation, after convening a meeting of his supporters at Ārackal (cf. '81: 105.; '90: 89f..)

But "God did not let this visit to happen", says Chavara. Sankunni Menon, Peshkar of Travancore, was a good friend of Mr Varkey Antraper, a loyal Catholic. Fr Prior sent a letter to the latter requesting him to get an order from the Peshkar in favour of those who remained faithful to the legitimate ordinary, the vicar apostolic. The Peshkar issued an order prohibiting Mar Roccas from going to churches where the people were of rival groups (cf. Parapuram: 854f.; cf. also '81: 105). Those in the north managed to get a similar order from the Diwan of Kochi. So Roccas could not go to Ollur or to Aranattukara (cf. '81: 105; '90: 88.).

Excommunication of Roccas and His Departure

As stated earlier, after receiving the letter of the patriarch, Bishop Roccas had a mind to return to Mosul. But the encouragement he got from Parayi and others made him to change the mind. He pretended that the letter was not genuine and declared before the Ārackal assembly that he would not leave on the basis of this suspicious order. His supporters said that they would not allow him to return. They wrote down an agreement for this signed by the bishop and his supporters. The Ārackal assembly decreed some arrangements for the future work.

The vicar apostolic realizing that there was no hope of mending the ways of the dissidents alerted Bishop Roccas about the order of the Pope to excommunicate him, if he did not relent. He did not relent. Finally on 28 December 1861 he was solemnly

excommunicated³⁹. This excommunication order was made public (cf. '81: 106; '90: 88f.). At this time the Ñarackal assembly was going on with fury and passion. The only person who opposed the Roccasians with logical arguments was Kunji Pailo (Paily) Parecadan.

The vicar apostolic was considering ways to communicate to Bishop Roccas the excommunication order. He had it written in Syriac and searched for a priest to take it to Ñarackal and hand it over to the bishop. There were eighteen priests at that time at the vicariate office. None of them appeared to be ready to take the risk. Then the vicar apostolic said that if no body dared, he himself would go to Ñarackal. Then Fr Mathai Mariam Kappil, the vicar of Koonammavu Monastery, came forward and volunteered to go to Ñarackal and deliver the order. He managed to deliver it to Fr Thondanatt, the secretary of Bishop Roccas. He had to undergo many a trial to do this. The people who had gathered there even sent after him some ruffians to insult him. But the above-mentioned Kunji Pailo gave him refuge and hospitality in his house. Escorted by some Latin Catholics of Vadayil church, Kappil reached Varapuzha safely (cf. Parapuram: 863-880; cf. also '81: 107).

Even after this Bishop Roccas continued his visitation of the churches, and other activities. Parayi and a few others from the churches wrote a letter to the vicar apostolic saying that they were writing to Rome and the patriarch, and would no more go to Varapuzha and see the vicar apostolic. Bishop Roccas himself wrote to the vicar apostolic saying: he did not believe the letter said to be from the patriarch was really from the latter; the people from the churches would not let him leave Kerala; he had written to Rome. He requested for the withdrawal of the excommunication threatening that, if not withdrawn, its perpetrators would themselves have to regret it. He went on like this for two months without showing any sign of repentance.

In the meantime it was heard that while Bishop Roccas was visiting Malayattoor he received a second letter from the patriarch. Although it was kept secret, there was news that the patriarch was

³⁹ Both Chavara ('81: 106f; '90: 89) and Parapuram (p.863ff.) describe the solemn pontifical ceremonies of excommunication according to the Latin pontifical.

calling him back. After this the bishop got ill, returned to Kochi and got the services of a European doctor. He stayed on in Kochi for some time. But he started to think more positively and decided to send a letter to the vicar apostolic. He secretly sent it through Fr Cherubin OCD to Varapuzha.⁴⁰ The vicar Apostolic was very relieved when this letter reached him. He immediately sent for Chavara and showed him the letter. The prelate was for giving all reasonable and possible help. He authorized Chavara to convey the decisions of the prelate to Bishop Roccas and to hear his confession and withdraw the excommunication on certain conditions. The money needed for the return journey also would be made available to him. Fr Chavara and Fr Geevarghese John were to convey this promise to Bishop Roccas and not to leave the port before the departure of the bishop.

Outwardly the bishop promised his followers that he would not immediately leave but secretly was preparing for his journey back. By this time a steam-ship was ready to leave Kochi and the bishop planned to leave by it. The news however leaked out. Some influential persons like the Parayis and a few followers filed a suit against Bishop Roccas. This suit failed. Bishop Roccas managed to get the permission of the government to leave Kerala. Then Fr Antony Thondanatt promised the Roccasians that he would go to Mosul and bring another bishop. He was given the expenses for the travel. He together with two deacons boarded the ship on a Tuesday⁴¹ at 10 am; the bishop himself under police protection boarded the ship at 4 pm and the ship set sail at once (cf. '81: 107ff.; '90: 91ff.).

By the time Bishop Roccas left Kerala eighty-six churches had completely surrendered to the Roccasian faction, in thirty-six there were both groups. Now it was the great task of Chavara and his community to bring all of them back to unity.

⁴⁰ This letter, dated 20 February 1862, is reproduced by Chavara in his chronicle ('81: 108f.). There is in the archives of Mannanam (AMSJ, 32/B/4/2099, p. 49f.) an ancient copy. A Latin translation is in *Positio*: 226f.

⁴¹ The precise date is not given. Bernard (1989: 105) says that it was in March 1862 that this happened. Parapuram also seems to indicate March but no date is given. Fr Luke states it was on 10 March 1862 that the bishop left Kochi.

After the departure of Bishop Roccas the Roccasian group was in disarray. Parapuram says that once their sorrow and lamentations had somewhat subsided they discussed the future plan. The wise counsel of Avira Tharakan was that they should repent and humbly reconcile themselves with the vicar apostolic. A few churches including Narakal followed this counsel. But there still remained a hard core of churches. It was through the spiritual ministry of Prior Chavara and his fellow religious that almost complete unity was restored. Parapuram describes the constructive work the fathers of Mannanam, Vazhakulam and Elthuruth undertook in this connection. However most people of Ollur, Thrissur, Aranattukara and Kuravilangad remained obstinate and were waiting for the return of Fr Antony Thondanatt and others who had gone to Mosul (cf. Parapuram: 962ff.). The church of Athirampuzha also remained obstinate (cf. '81: 116).

The Adventure of Antony Thondanatt

After describing the departure of Bishop Roccas, Blessed Chavara remarks: "Thus they have gone for the second misery" (ibid.: 115). He must have meant the troubles Fr Antony Thondanatt who had gone to Mosul in the same ship as Bishop Roccas travelled, would bring with him. Thondanatt and his companions reached Mosul in the company of Bishop Roccas. But the Chaldeans did not show any enthusiasm for them, but even expressed contempt⁴². Bishop Roccas retired to a quiet place and managed to live with what he had earned from the churches and people of Kerala. Nobody cared for Thondanatt. He had to wander about in the beginning. But slowly he gained the good will of many influential people, including Deacon Joseph. He tried in different ways to influence Patriarch Audo and get some one consecrated bishop for Kerala. The patriarch was not in a mood to take the risk for a second time and clearly told Fr Antony that he would no more interfere in the affairs of the Kerala Church. Fr Antony threatened to approach the Nestorian patriarch in Kurdistan. This was a

⁴² Parapuram (p. 960) observes: Deacon Joseph who had financially helped Roccas to travel to India despised him on his return greeting him 'Hamar Thoma', which could mean 'Hallow: Mar Thoma' if the 'a' after 'H' is long (Hāmar), but if it is short, 'Donkey (Hamar) Thoma'. It was in the second meaning the deacon used the expression just to revile him.

provocation for Mar Audo to excommunicate Thondanatt after sufficient warning. With the help of Deacon Joseph Fr Antony crossed the forests and safely reached Kurdistan. Patriarch Simon XVIII Ruben heard him patiently and finally consecrated Fr Antony himself with the title 'Archbishop Abdisho'. With all the patent papers which the patriarch gave him, Archbishop Abdisho returned to Kerala towards the close of 1863. Immediately he let Parayi and others know about his return as bishop. But they refused to accept him as they came to understand that he was consecrated by the Nestorian patriarch (cf. Parapuram: 960-82; cf. also Tisserant 1957: 118f; Bernard 1992: 726 and Podipara 1970: 190)⁴³.

Blessed Chavara starts the story of Thondanatt's activities with these words: "And, now it has started again", i.e., 'the second misery' he foresaw was now a reality. He continues:

Then he [Thondanatt] reached Thaikkattussery and the vicar there sent letters to the churches which were still under the schism, summoning them to assemble at Thaikkattussery to consider what should be done now that our Fr Antony had returned as Archbishop Abdisho. This letter was not so well received ('81: 116f., '90: 96).

As soon as Thondanatt reached Thaikkattussery he sent a letter to Chavara requesting support:

Greetings to Malpan Kuriakose, Prior, from Antony Abdisho, Archbishop of Malankara. During our previous visit we wrote to you, but you did not send a reply. And you need not be told of the unfortunate events that resulted from your failure to show some goodwill. All the sufferings that followed can now be redressed if you show some goodwill this time. It is not to bring honour to me or to my family, but to do some good to our people that I have been striving at the risk of my life during the last eight years. The losses I have consequently incurred are not beyond your understanding. Therefore you too must please come to Thaikkattussery. If you come and give your counsel, it will,

⁴³ Parapuram gives very interesting details about the adventure of Thondanatt.

as you know, be widely accepted and wordy dissensions will be prevented. Please send a reply." ('81: 117f).⁴⁴

Chavara received this letter at Varapuzha where he had gone to attend a meeting convened by Commissary Apostolic Salvador Saba who had come there to solve the problems related to the 'Padroado Schism'.⁴⁵ Reading the letter of Mar Abdisho, the Prior was rather surprised how he dared to write like this after having directly experienced the attitude of the Prior in his dealings with Bishop Roccas. The Prior immediately passed on the letter to the vicar apostolic who after reading it, explained the content to the commissary. The latter at once decided to send a circular to all the churches. The circular reads:

Without the permission of the Holy See, Bishop Roccas came and caused so many religious conflicts here. To add to this Fr Antony Thondinakath of Anakal —it is heard—is now going about claiming that he himself is bishop. So everyone is warned against falling into his trap and thus endangering one's soul; if he wants to save his soul, he is advised to come most expediently before us with repentance ('81: 118, '90: 97).

The appeal of Bishop Abdisho had least response. There was no church to support him. He first went to Plasnal and stayed there for some time even putting on his bishop's robes and ring. Then he moved between Thaikkattussery and Plasnal. At Plasnal he suffered an attack of fever and other calamities. When he was almost well Kochousep Edamattath, the steward of Mannanam monastery, happened to visit this area to collect coconuts.

He came across Fr Antony and seeing his sad plight, advised him to come and stay at the wall-bungalow at Mannanam and assured him that the fathers would only be happy to have him there. The time was very appropriate for this advice to bear fruit. It sank deep into Fr Antony's mind ('81: 120; '90: 98).

⁴⁴ This is what is found in the chronicle of Chavara. No date is given. An ancient Malayalam copy of Thondanatt's letter is at Mannanam (AMSJ, 32/B/4/2099, p. 60). Latin translation is in *Positio*: 230.

⁴⁵ This was in 1864.

When fully recovered he proceeded to Thaikkattussery and stayed at the church there. Avira Parayi, though not happy with him, helped him for his meals. More than one year passed like this. He was very much down and little happy. It was at this time Fr Paulose Parampil of Muttuchira happened to go there. Observing the miserable condition he asked Fr Antony about reconciliation. He was diffident whether the vicar apostolic would receive him. Fr Parampil suggested that he write to Prior Chavara who was at this time residing at Koonammavu. He assured him that the latter would find some way. Those words touched him and he sent to the Prior the following letter on 23 January 1865:

Recently, often I wanted to come and meet you. But I have been putting it off for several reasons and on the advice of some important persons. Now that I no longer listen to their counsel, I have decided under God's guidance to come and talk to you at length about everything. It is to get your permission that I am sending this letter by this hired man. I beg you to allow me to see you. I will be able to explain to you all about my action and show to you several relevant records. As I am not inclined to explain matters in writing but only in person, I am not putting down anything in this letter. As any delay would make it only more difficult for me to come and see you, I request you to consider and send a reply immediately by this man himself. As it is well known, there are so many here who take interest in obstructing me from approaching you. But as I trust that this time the idea has been put in my mind by God Himself, I would yield to no one else ('81: 120f.; '90: 99).

Chavara showed the letter to the vicar apostolic and with his permission as well as that of Delegate Leopold replied that they would meet at the fort in Kochi. Before long the Prior received another letter from Fr Antony dated 8 March 1865 after the latter's arrival in Kochi. Chavara consulted Fr Leopold who told him that he should get him converted even at the cost of an eye. The Prior started immediately for Kochi. He gives the following account of their meeting:

I reached the church at Kochi at 11 am and waited there. As he did not turn up even by 4 pm I began to have doubts, but sat on. Then at 5 pm he came along the southern lane, as if by stealth. He had a long black beard reaching down to his

neck. He was wearing a black gown over his white cassock. Holding up the former with his right hand in which he held an umbrella also and with a stick in his left hand, he came followed by a deacon. I went forward to receive him at the gate, gave him the peace-greeting and together with him walked into the southern veranda of the church. Sitting on two chairs we began to talk. He showed me the patent of his ordination as Bishop by Nestorian Patriarch Simon. Among the letters shown to me was one he had lately received from Deacon Joseph in which he reported that the [Chaldean] patriarch had ordained one more bishop to be sent out to Malabar at once, if the people here would together write requesting that ('81: 122, '90: 100f).

Fr Antony went on to tell the Prior that he no more cared for all these letters and his desire now was only to spend the remainder of his life as a priest doing penance for the wrongs he had done. He requested Chavara to help him to get a sanction from the vicar apostolic enabling him to fulfil that desire. The Prior replied that under the circumstances such a sanction had to come from Rome and that the prelate would take the greatest interest to get it as early as possible. But Fr Antony expressed his fear that the authorities would deny or delay the necessary permission. Chavara continues:

No wonder, for people expect others to behave as they themselves do. I told him that he need not have such fears. I assured him if he trusted God to welcome back a really repentant sinner, he could also trust God's representatives on earth to do the same ('81: 123, '90: 101).

The Prior departed promising to send a reply after submitting the matter to Archbishop Baccinelli. Fearing the possibility of another Chaldean bishop coming to Kerala (this was mentioned in one of the letters Fr Antony showed Chavara), the vicar apostolic dispatched a letter to Rome on the spot; letters were sent to Fr Antony inviting him to go to Mannanam for a retreat preparatory to a good confession, to the vicar of Mannanam asking him to let Fr Antony stay there and, if necessary, to meet his expenses. He also was authorized to hear his confession and to give provisional absolution (cf. '81: 123). Fr Antony sent on 11 March 1865 the following letter to Chavara:

Received and read your benevolent letter. I am wonderstruck. Oh my spiritual father: until I read this letter I had no peace of mind as I was perturbed by the thought of possible refusal of my request. But now you my V. V. Rev. Father, have blessed me and showed mercy, on my weakness by fulfilling my desire to be accepted, though unworthy, as not a son but a servant. Henceforward I will act only according to your will. God be my witness, that even if my request were refused, I would not have gone to the Padroado group and my only desire is to be enabled to live in penance and solitude until my death. With God as my witness I now resolve to abide by your counsel, V. V. Rev Father, and the instructions of the archbishop, and am starting immediately for Mannanam in obedience to His Grace's order. I trust that there will be no departure from the assurances given in the letter. Kissing His Grace's right hand and seeking his blessings and pledging absolute submission ('81: 123f., '90: 102).

The vicar apostolic was very much pleased on seeing this reply. But Fr Antony did not go to Mannanam at once. This delay gave rise to some suspicions. However after two months he reached Mannanam and began staying there. He made his confession to Fr Thoppil and was ready to go to Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday. Fr Thoppil advised him, since he was to receive Communion from the superior together with others, it was unbecoming that he alone went with the beard. So it was better to shave it off. He refused to do so and abstained from Communion that day. Later he decided to oblige his confessor and went for Communion on Saturday, explaining away that he did not go to Communion on Thursday, as he could not fast up to noon (cf. '81: 124f., '90: 102f.).

Now Fr Antony was moving towards the process of complete conversion. However occasionally he would waver, especially when his old friends provoked and teased him. But recalling to mind how they had deserted him at the time of his crisis he did not show any trust in them. On the other hand he trusted the Prior and other religious who cared for him, and stayed on till the orders came from Rome. The vicar apostolic, according to the order he had received, deputed Fr Kuriakose Porukara, the vicar of Mannanam, to perform the absolution ceremony copied in

Syriac from the Latin Pontifical, condoning the irregularities and withdrawing the excommunication. After this Fr Antony went to see the vicar apostolic, who received him warmly. At the latter's instruction he wrote a letter in Syriac to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda describing his deeds and expressing his gratitude. As Fr Antony complained that he was not well, the vicar apostolic allowed him to go to Bharananganam for treatment and gave him sixty rupees both for the treatment and to clear some of his debts. Further the prelate issued a declaration stating that Fr Antony was permitted to say Mass in any Catholic church, and that all his impediments had been lifted (cf. '81: 125f; '90: 103f). Thus the "second misery" also was got over, and Chavara perhaps thought for good. He did not live to see the third misery, the disturbances caused by Bishop Melus.⁴⁶

As we conclude this chapter a question may arise whether the Roccasian affair was a schism at all. The ordinary people who followed him believed that the bishop came with the permission of the Pope. Even most of the leaders believed so. Bishop Roccas and Fr Antony Thondanatt acted in bad faith. They knew that Patriarch Audu had sent the bishop as visitor. But once he landed in Kerala, the support and enthusiasm of the Syrian community made him exercise jurisdiction, discarding the authority of the vicar apostolic. Technically speaking even the patriarch did not believe that he questioned the authority of Rome. He sent Roccas as his visitor. Of course his hope was that once the bishop worked in Kerala he would be able to gain the support of the leaders and through them that of the people. That eventuality could be used to bring pressure on Rome and thus restore what he thought was his right, his authority over the Syrian Church of Kerala.

As said above the common people and most of the leaders never felt that they were under schism. Both Bishop Roccas and

⁴⁶ The Vicar Apostolic appointed Fr Antony vicar, first of Edamattam and later of Vilakkumadam. When Mar Elias Melus arrived in 1874 Fr Antony joined him. Although he repented after one year, there came from Melus an offer. He willingly accepted it and resuming his episcopal status, ruled the southeastern region as the representative of Melus. When Bishop Melus left Kerala early 1882, he appointed Thondanatt as one of his vicars. He reigned over the Melusians of Thrissur and Elamthottam till his death in 1900 (cf. Bernard 1992: 726, 756; Tisserant 1957: 118; Podipara 1970: 192).

the leaders told the people that they would write to Rome and get things clarified. Only very few priests refused to subscribe to this idea. Once Bishop Roccas left Kerala Avira Parayi advised all to reconcile with the vicar apostolic. Most got reconciled, although many of them preferred to be under the Padroado. When Thondanatt came back as Archbishop Abdisho, the Parayi and most of the leaders refused to accept him. All this shows that their intention was to get a Catholic East-Syrian as their bishop, that too with the approval of the Pope. This aspiration for a ritual prelate gradually turned out to be a passion, as Parapuram substantiates⁴⁷, which often blinded clear thinking. However this aspiration was a longstanding one and from the close of the eighteenth century there were intermittent struggles to realize it (cf. Mundadan 2003: 55ff.). The idea of a bishop from their own ranks did not at this time occur to them easily.

Blessed Chavara was from the very beginning very clear in his mind about the rightful prelate placed over the Syrian Church of Kerala by the Pope: it was the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly. All others entered the flock through the back door. He does not seem to have been very happy at the continuation of the Padroado regime, especially after the so-called schism of the Padroado prelates, priests and people. At the same time he least relished the idea of re-linking the Kerala Church to the Chaldeans, as he had very poor opinion of their clergy and of the state in which their Church was found at this time. It seems that he also shared the view that it was not time yet to install an indigenous, national bishop. His preference, therefore, was for a proficient Carmelite missionary who knew Malayalam and Syriac language s well and who could celebrate in the Rite to which the people belonged⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ Cf. Parapuram: 627-36.

⁴⁸ Cf. ch. 12.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In the Service of the Church and Society

Blessed Kuriakose was a man who was completely dedicated to the Church, its pastoral concerns. The many instances we have seen in the previous pages are clear illustrations of this fact. The anxious care he showed and the heroic efforts he made to keep the Church united, were because unity was essential for the salvation of souls, for which the Church existed. The activities the Blessed undertook for the renewal, reform and all round development of the Church were many and varied: his close association and his exemplary cooperation with the vicars apostolic and the missionaries, his services as vicar general, his pioneering actions in the fields of education, social service and liturgical reform. In this chapter we will gather together whatever is available in the sources on all these aspects of the ministry and activity of the Blessed. In connection with his service as vicar general we will also examine the proposal to consecrate him bishop.

Vicar General

In chapter five we discussed the circumstances that led Vicar Apostolic Bernadine Baccinelli to appoint Prior Chavara vicar general for the St Thomas Christians on 8 June 1861. It was the critical situation that ensued the intrusion of Bishop Thomas Roccas which prompted the prelate to take this step. Ever since the introduction in the seventeenth century of the Diamper discipline of the Latin pattern, the office of the 'Archdeacon of India' and the practice of *yogam* (assembly) became gradually weak. The Latin type of vicars general replaced the archdeacon and often the persons chosen for the office were foreign missionaries (cf. Thekkedath 2001: 75-90). Under the Propaganda Carmelite regime all the vicar generals were foreigners. The only exception, perhaps,

was Chavara. Archbishop Baccinelli had appointed already in 1853 as his vicar general Fr Philip¹, an Italian Carmelite. Chavara was made vicar general in 1861 in the special circumstances mentioned above and exclusively for the St Thomas Christians.

Now the question is whether this appointment was just for the particular occasion or was it intended to continue after the disturbances that took place with the coming of Bishop Roccas were brought to an end. There are different views about the matter. As it has been observed earlier Chavara himself never made any mention of this office and dignity conferred on him. Archbishop Baccinelli, in his letter dated 15 June 1861², informed Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda that he had to give an order under obedience to make Chavara accept the position of vicar general (cf. *Positio*: 260). It was ten days after his appointment as vicar general, Chavara together with his fellow religious wrote to Pope Pius IX a letter dated 19 June 1861. In this letter the Blessed signed simply as Cyriac Elias, Prior. But on the cover of a letter he wrote to Fr Illimoottil on 18 May 1862, there was the following note in a different hand: "Very Rev. Fr Kuriakose Elias, TOCD, Prior wrote this letter as vicar general." But in the letter itself the initial salutation is from "Fr Prior of the monasteries at Mannanam and other". He signs simply "Br Kuriakose Elias, Prior" (cf. *Positio*: 260 f., 251, fn. 8).

In the view of some of the Carmelite missionaries the appointment was just to tide over the Roccas crisis. Fr Leopold Beccaro in a written report³ he gave to the vicar apostolic on 18 September 1865 says:

On the occasion of the schism caused by the intrusion of Bishop Thomas Roccas, a vicar general was elected for the

¹ Missionary Philip of St Joseph OCD born at Genoa, Italy, made his profession in Carmel in 1845. After ordination he arrived in Kerala in 1854. He worked in the Varapuzha Mission in various capacities including that of vicar general. Died in 1893 (cf. *Positio*: 566, fn. 72).

² The original of this in Italian is in the Archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (ACEO).

Scritture originali 1865-'66, f. 596f.). It is reproduced in PO, doc. 139 and in *Positio*: 258-60.

³ About the occasion of this report and that of Fr Marceline Berardi we shall see later. Regarding the 2 following statements, see also ch. 10.

Syrians in the person of the Prior of the Tertiaries (*Positio*: 266f.)

The same Fr Leopold wrote in the Chronicle of St Philomena's Monastery (1864-74, p. 136):

Because he [Fr Chavara] has administered the office of the vicar general at the time of the Roccisian schism, his body was dressed in the priestly vestments and not religious vestments (*Positio*: 252).

This means that for Fr Leopold the appointment of Chavara was just for that occasion and it ceased with the termination of the Roccas affair. The same was the opinion of Fr Marceline Berardi OCD. In his report of 13 September 1865 to the vicar apostolic we read:

Your Excellency has given this name of vicar general, as it pleased you, to one, and this served only for one occasion, namely of the past schism (*Positio*: 263f.).

According to Berardi and Beccaro (see below) the appointment of Chavara as vicar general was of a temporary nature. It seems that Archbishop Baccinelli also agreed with this view⁴. But many St Thomas Christian writers thought differently.

Fr Mathai Mariam Palakunnel, for example, writes in his chronicle speaking of the three eminent persons of Malabar, namely, Madhava Rao, Diwan (equivalent to today's prime minister) of Thiruvithamcore (1852-72), His Excellency Archbishop Baccinelli, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly (Malabar) (1853-68)⁵, and Kuriakose Elias Chavara the vicar general of Malabar (1861-71), who all reigned at the time, which he considers the glorious period of Kerala.⁶ The same author, speaking of the death of Fr Chavara, writes in the diary:

⁴ Cf. his letter to Cardinal Prefect dated 24 September 1865 (*Positio*: 269f.).

⁵ About these two eminent persons cf. the references given in *Positio*: 512, fn. 45.

⁶ Cf. P. J. Sebastian (ed.), *Palakunnel Valiachante Nālgamam* ('The Chronicle of Senior Father Palakunnel') Changanachery 1972, pp. 102-103; *Positio*: 511-14.

Most Rev. Prior of Mannanam and of the other monasteries and the vicar general of the Syrians ...died on 3 January 1871, and is buried at St Philomena's church, Koonammavu (cf. Palakunnel 1972: 102f., 112).

Fr Scaria Ephrem Kalathil, the vicar (superior) of the monastery of Mannanam at the time of the death of Fr Chavara, in his letter informing the churches of his death, writes:

The Very Rev. Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara, vicar general, malpan of Malabar and Prior of the monasteries, died at 7 o'clock in the morning on the 3rd of January.⁷

Aloysius Pazheparampil says in his history of an important period of Syro-Malabar Church:

Rev. Fr Kuriakose Elias, Prior of all monasteries and vicar general, wrote about this in 1871 [sic] to Rev. Fr General of the Discalced Carmelites (Pareparambil 1920: 4).⁸

Parapuram (p. 1418) speaking about the vestments in which Chavara was to be buried, says that some of the missionaries were of the opinion that he should be buried in solemn sacerdotal vestments as he was the vicar general. A petition sent to the Pope in 1876 by a group of St Thomas Christians with Parayi Tharakan as the leader refers to Chavara, "the vicar general of Bernardine Baccinelli".

The official letter by which Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli appointed Chavara vicar general, as we have seen in chapter six, only vaguely alluded to the context (the present circumstances).⁹

⁷ Original Malayalam of this letter sent to Athirampuzha church is preserved in the archives of this church. Latin translation is given in *Positio*: 457.

⁸ Pazheparambil seems to refer to a letter which Blessed Chavara sent to Rome through Fr Leopold in 1869 (CWC IV 1982: 28f.). Hence the year (1871) given by the author is an error. Chavara died on 3 January 1871.

⁹ In his letter to the Propaganda dated 15 June 1861 the vicar apostolic explains in detail the "critical circumstances", which moved him to appoint Chavara vicar general (cf. *Positio*: 258ff.; cf. below).

The main reasons he gives for the appointment are general: his own advanced age, consequent bodily weakness, absence of the desired spiritual fruits. The appointment is made on the basis of the provisions of the Council of Trent.¹⁰ Here there are no restrictions regarding time or faculties. The only restriction is that Chavara is to be the vicar general exclusively for the St Thomas Christians (cf. *Positio*: 217). Thus there seems to be no restriction of period in the mind of Baccinelli at this time.

Rome seems to have understood the office of the vicar general bestowed on Chavara as permanent, not conditioned by the particular circumstances. On 14 April 1865, Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Congregation of the Propaganda, wrote to Archbishop Baccinelli¹¹ referring to the appointment of Cyriac Elias Chavara, already made, in accordance with the provision given in can. 9 of Lateran Council IV:

On this occasion, it would be good if you give the exact information on the quality and merits of the priest Cyriac Elias, Prior of the Tertiaries, so that in case it is judged opportune to consecrate the vicar general of Your Excellency bishop for the Syrians, the necessary information may not be lacking.

It may be noted in this context that much before 1865 the critical condition caused by the intrusion of Bishop Thomas Roccas in the Malabar Church, was resolved and peace was established in the Church.

The same Congregation wrote on 4 August 1874 to Archbishop Leonard Mellano, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly:¹²

Monsignor Bernardine had constituted a vicar general in the person of Cyriac Elias in conformity with the sacred canons, which was greatly praised by the Sacred Congregation. I

¹⁰ The letter of the Propaganda Congregation dated 14 April 1865 has recourse to the provisions of the IV Lateran Council (cf. *Positio*: 262).

¹¹ This letter is found in ACEO, Lettere e Decreti, Vol. II (1864-65), p. 419ff. Part of it is given in *Positio*: 262f.

¹² It is found in ACEO, op. cit., Vol. VIII (1873-74), p. 24ff.; *Positio*: 270f.

would like to know whether you have followed up the same procedure (*Positio*: 271).

From all these references we may legitimately infer that the office of vicar general conferred on Chavara was for life.

Chavara to Be Bishop

Blessed Chavara served the Church with no aspiration for any ecclesiastical office or dignity. When a message came from the Roccisian party offering him bishopric his answer was: his desire was not to be made a bishop, but to save his soul (cf. chapter 6, p. 14). As seen earlier he never mentioned in any of his writings about his office of vicar general, which in all humility he accepted under precept of obedience and always signed his letters not as vicar general but as Prior of monasteries.

In the letter dated 15 June 1861, i.e. immediately after Chavara's appointment as vicar general, Archbishop Baccinelli informed the Propaganda Congregation about the appointment of Chavara as vicar general. In the same letter the vicar apostolic made the proposal that Chavara be consecrated co-adjutor bishop:

In these difficult and critical times, with the consent of my councillors, I have constituted as my vicar general the seniormost among our Tertiaries, the prior of the principal monastery, and the head of the entire congregation, a man truly Christian, virtuous, very prudent, well-versed in the Sacred Scripture, expert in Syriac language, who in the present circumstances has proved by facts most attached to the Catholic religion, and to the Holy See. Though the rebel group and the intruder bishop attempted by several ways to win over Fr Chavara to their side, even by offering him episcopacy, he did not succumb to any such seductions. Had he accepted their offer, no doubt, the whole Church would have followed him, because he enjoyed among all the people great esteem, respect and authority (*Positio*: 259). Now I have an idea and I request Your Eminence to give serious consideration to it. In case that the dignity of vicar general alone will not be enough to keep away the people from the intruder and from the Chaldean patriarch, will it not be better to consecrate the said Prior coadjutor bishop for the Syrians.

The prelate reminds the Congregation that Chavara having made a simple vow of humility would not accept the position and dignity of a bishop unless commanded under obedience. The vicar apostolic is of the view that, though the proposed person [Chavara] lacks the necessary perception of the proposed office—he is not in a position to have such a perception being from a country which cannot be expected to possess such requirements a bishop needs—but supported as the vine by the tree, i.e. by the vicar apostolic and the missionaries, he shall produce much more fruits than the Chaldaean patriarch or his intruder, because he is a good, prudent, and obedient person, besides is a captivating preacher.

The Propaganda Congregation seems not to have taken this proposal immediately for consideration. Perhaps only in the meeting of 6 March 1865 (that means almost four years after the Congregation received the 1861 letter of Baccinelli) the Congregation attended to the matter. In that meeting, among other things, the following three questions were placed before the Cardinals: whether it was expedient: 1) to extend the government of the Chaldaean patriarch over the Syrians of Kerala; 2) to give the St Thomas Christians a bishop of their Rite and nation; 3) to give Chavara the episcopal dignity. The answer of the Cardinals was negative to the first two proposals. As for the third opinion they were agreed that a vicar of their own Rite and nation be appointed for the Syrians, but dependent upon the vicar apostolic and according to the provisions of Canon IX of the Fourth Lateran Council: "A local ordinary may, after mature consideration, appoint as his vicar some one to preside over the Catholics of a particular nation, but in all things obedient and subject to himself".¹⁴ The letter says that Archbishop Baccinelli had already done this and deserves praise for it. Now the Congregation wanted to know from the vicar apostolic whether it was expedient to consecrate the vicar general he had appointed (Chavara) a bishop, but without any personal jurisdiction and fully dependent on the vicar apostolic; if the answer was positive he was to inform the Congregation about the calibre and qualifications of the said priest Cyriac Elias Chavara for being ordained bishop.

¹⁴ All this is clear from the letter Propaganda wrote to Baccinelli on 14 April 1865, Italian original of which is in ACEO, op. cit., Vol. II (1864-65), p. 419f.; *Positio*: 252f.

Having received this letter of the Propaganda, Baccinelli commissioned Fathers Marceline Berardi and Leopold Beccaro to study the matter and submit reports to him. Fr Marceline who submitted his report on 13 September 1865,¹⁵ was, in principle, opposed to the idea of appointing a St Thomas Christian priest permanently as vicar general (cf. *Positio*: 265). All the more he was against appointing him bishop, because in his opinion there was no candidate among the St Thomas Christians worthy of the position. After enumerating the many "deficiencies" of the St Thomas Christians he asks:

Where do you find one who has the qualities necessary for being a bishop? There are in the monasteries many good, upright priests. But where is the prudence, where the courage, where the knowledge and other qualities required of a bishop? (ibid.: 264).

These are general statements and nothing specifically about Chavara.

Fr Leopold gave his report on 18 September 1865.¹⁶ His opinion is quite similar to that of Fr Marceline: in principle he is opposed to have a St Thomas Christian as vicar general continuously¹⁷; there is none among them worthy to be a bishop. Regarding the person of Chavara he puts forward the following objections: lack of sufficient knowledge of moral theology although he possesses a good natural common sense, little

¹⁵ This report in Italian original is found in ACEO, *Scritture riferite, India orientali*, Vol. XIX (1865-67), ff. 738f., PO, doc. 143; *Positio*: 263-65.

¹⁶ The original Italian is ACEO, op. cit., f. 742f.; PO, doc. 144; *Positio*: 265-69.

¹⁷ Probably the 1865 inquiry of the Propaganda was the occasion when missionaries like Leopold, Marceline and others began to entertain second thoughts about the nature of Chavara's position as vicar general. If he was appointed vicar general for life as representing the Syrian community that position could be continued in other native priests, which the missionaries wanted to avoid by all means. Still there remained some confusion in their minds. This confusion is visible when the question arose regarding the vestment in which the body of the deceased prior was to be buried (see ch. 10).

experience in matters of administration, advanced age, 63 years old, which is 80 years in Europe, his bodily indispositions and health problems. We will later on examine the objectivity of the objections raised by these two missionaries. Now we shall see the nature of the reply of Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli to the Propaganda Congregation. He sent his reply on 24 September 1865. It is clear from this reply¹⁸ that he fully agreed with the views expressed by the two consulters. He says that in a matter of such importance as giving to the St Thomas Christians a permanent vicar general and that too endowed with episcopal dignity, he took time to consult a few of his more enlightened and experienced missionaries nearby. All of them fully agreed with what he and his vicar general (Fr Philip) thought right. So they unanimously came to the conclusion that it was safer, more prudent and practical to continue as at present without any innovation, which could turn out to be fatal and irremediable. However, the prelate shows his readiness to follow any directive from the Congregation. In this letter also we do not find a reference to Chavara as such. Just like Fr Marceline's report it also indicates that the vicar apostolic, his common vicar general, and the missionaries were in principle opposed to the proposal to establish a permanent post of vicar general for the St Thomas Christians, whether or not endowed with episcopal dignity.

The prelate had written to the Congregation in 1861 proposing that Chavara be ordained co-adjutor bishop. In it he unreservedly extolled the brilliant qualities of the latter:

He is the prior of the first and principal monastery, and the head of the whole congregation... (see above).

The only reservation the prelate expresses is Chavara's insufficient learning (of course compared to a European missionary) necessary for the episcopal dignity (cf. *Positio*: 261). It seems that the vicar apostolic later changed his view, and probably made his own the views expressed by Frs Leopold and Marceline. Baccinelli in his letter urged as reasons against the consecration of Chavara the fact, that, even though he was a good man and the only person who had the least obstacles to being made

¹⁸ The original in Italian is ACEO, op. cit., f. 38ff.; PO, doc. 145; *Positio*: 269f.

a bishop, he had very little knowledge of moral theology, was too simple and inexperienced in governing, besides being sixty three years of age, which was equivalent to eighty years in Europe (cf. Vithayathil 1980: 51, fn. 10).¹⁹ The Congregation did not press the point immediately.

We may now examine how objective were the reports of the missionaries and whether there were any vested interests at play in the matter. The most important objection of the missionaries, especially Fr Leopold, was that Chavara did not know moral theology. It may be true that he had not learned this discipline as systematically as the missionaries had. But even they testify to his natural sense of morality. This is clear from all his dealings and teachings. Whatever Malpan Palackal had taught, he diligently internalised. Now Malpan Thomas was well known for his deep knowledge of divine things and holiness. Chavara himself speaks about his vast reading, even books in Tamil. His love for books was well-known. Probably due to his association with the missionaries and with the Vicars Apostolic of Verapoly he had imbibed sufficiently the moral theology of the west. Chavara says:

As Fr Palackal began to teach he came to feel the absence of books of philosophy and theology in Syriac. He realized that this put a limit to the knowledge priests could acquire in the seminary. His enquiries revealed that there were some books in Tamil translated by the Jesuits and a few in Malayalam itself translated by missionaries. He succeeded in getting some of them for our use. ... [Unlike other malpans] Palackal spent a lot of time in reading; he even studied Tamil to read the religious books in that language ('81: 72f.; '90: 63f.).

Further to equip his students for learning sacred theology he even made arrangements for them to study Latin. Chavara was the foremost student he chose for this. Although he could not learn it sufficiently well, he must have picked up an elementary knowledge of the same. He even started teaching it to the sisters of Koonammavu (cf. CKC 2002: 152; cf. also CWC IV 1982: 113).

¹⁹ This part of the letter is not reproduced in *Positio*. Vithayathil refers to ACEO, *Ponenza*, Dec. 1886 (n. 26), p. 3 (cf. *ibid.*). Probably this part of the *Ponenza* contains the reports Fr Leopold gave to Baccinelli (cf. *Positio*: 272).

He also tried to learn Italian and had many Italian books read to him. Add to this the intimate association with missionary Leopold and others. All this must have helped Chavara to have enough grasp of the moral teachings of the Church.

About Chavara's academic career we have first the testimony of Fr Leopold himself:

Those who are called by God and possess priestly virtues and knowledge are raised 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 Alcantra, 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 be even 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 (Beccaro 2003: 5f.).

Chavara was intimately associated with his malpan in collecting books and arranging them systematically. So too he assisted the malpan in the academic and administrative affairs of the seminary. Koyipallil says:

[In 1828 Chavara was ordained deacon.] After that whenever the malpan had to go anywhere for some reason or other, it was Deacon Kuriakose who was in charge of the seminary and also taught the other students (*Positio*: 552).

After priestly ordination Malpan Palackal asked him to assist at the seminary. Although after two or three years he allowed Chavara to go and stay at Mannanam, he frequently visited Pallipuram and gave all help to his malpan. When a seminary was started at Mannanam he was in charge of it under Fr Porukara. All this shows that Palackal had the best of opinion about the knowledge and administrative talents of his disciple.

The prelates also showed high appreciation of Chavara's capabilities to teach and train seminarians. Vicar Apostolic Francis Xavier Pescetto officially raised him to the status of malpan (professor) and also appointed him examiner of priests aspiring for

faculties to hear confession and preaching in churches (cf. the letter of appointment in *Positio*: 92f). Pescetto's successor Mgr Ludovic Martini appointed Chavara rector of the seminary at Mannanam in 1846 (cf. *Positio*: 255). All this shows that not only his malpan but also the prelates and missionaries including Fr Leopold considered Chavara sufficiently knowledgeable as far as ecclesiastical sciences were concerned (cf. also p.).

Another objection of Mgr Baccinelli and Fr Leopold is lack of administrative experience. This statement might surprise anyone who knows the various administrative positions Chavara had held and carried out very successfully. Yet the missionaries found it difficult to acknowledge it. Naturally one is led to suspect their good faith and their ulterior motives. Did they mean that he had not lived in an 'episcopal palace' and had not appropriated the customs and practices of an episcopal curia? If so they had some reasons for justifying their statement. But considering the following facts they are quite wrong in their assessment and objection. Blessed Chavara was the superior of the monastery of Mannanam officially from 1846 but even before that he was practically in charge as Fr Porukara often went out for preaching and collecting alms. He became the superior general of the congregation in 1855, 'Prior' according to the constitutions given that year.²⁰ During his life time he had established seven monasteries (including Plasnal) in different parts of Kerala and had started negotiations for the foundation of the eighth. Add to this the part he played in founding and nurturing the religious house for women (see below chapter 8). Besides think also how he managed for many years the seminaries at Pallipuram and Mannanam. He was the disciple of Malpan Palackal whom he knew well as secretary to the vicars apostolic and consulter of the Verapoly prelates. It is strange that this objection is put forth by Fr Leopold who wrote in his short biography of Chavara:

Thus, our young Fr Kuriakose, who was among the pioneers [Fr Palackal d. in 1841 and Porukara d. in 1846] in all the new enterprises, was left alone. He, however, made up for his lack of age with prudence and exemplary conduct (Beccaro 2003: 8f.).

²⁰ In a circular prepared by Chavara, which in the original is dated 5 March 1850, he signs as 'Prior'. But the year 1850 may be wrongly inscribed instead of 1865 (cf. below). If 1850 is correct Chavara had the title of 'Prior' even before 1855.

It is also to be noted that the vicars apostolic Pescetto, Martini, Baccinelli and Mellano, especially Martini and Baccinelli, designated him for carrying out various missions, which he discharged most competently and to the satisfaction of all concerned. All admired the courage, dexterity, maturity and steadfastness, with which he brought to a successful conclusion the vexed problems arising from the intrusion of Bishop Roccas.

The third objection is advanced age. In 1865 in which year the reports were submitted, Chavara was only sixty years old and not sixty-three as Fr Leopold assumed, and during this year and till late 1860s he was active in spite of some physical debilities. It is these debilities, Fr Leopold considers an objection. It is true Blessed Chavara suffered a few bodily complaints from his youth onwards as we shall see in chapter ten. But these maladies did not prevent him from fulfilling his duties. He travelled much in order to collect alms and give sermons and retreats. As vicar general he not only worked and travelled strenuously but also carried out other activities.

From what we have seen so far we are led to think that the real reason for bringing forward such weak arguments is that the missionaries had their vested interests in the matter. If permanent vicars general with episcopal dignity were appointed from among the St Thomas Christians who were three fourth of the Catholics under Verapoly, the missionaries had reason to fear that they would have no more place in the vicariate. Both Fr Marceline and Fr Leopold hint at such an eventuality in their reports (cf. *Positio*: 165, 167; cf. also Mundadan 2003: 92f.). This was also the view of Mgr Agliardi, as we will explain now.

In December 1886 there was a plenary meeting of the Propaganda Congregation, in which Relator (*Ponens*) Cardinal Rafael Monaco Valletta placed before the Cardinals all the documents we have referred to above and discussed the objectivity of the arguments of Mgr Baccinelli and his consulters (Frs Marceline and Leopold).²¹ He briefly refers to the consecration of Chandy Parampil (Alexander de Campo) in 1663, and the attempts of the Holy See to satisfy the desire of the St Thomas Christians for a bishop of their own Rite. Then he comes to the affairs of 1865 and refers to the response of Mgr Baccinelli dated 24 September

²¹ This relator's report is ACEO, *Ponenza*, Dec. 1886, p. 1ff.; part in *Positio*: 272-74. Cf. also Vithayathil 1980: 55.

1865. After this he speaks of the opinion of Mgr Agliardi, the first delegate apostolic of India (1884-87).

Against the arguments of Fr Marceline Mgr Agliardi believed that an Indian, as also a Syrian [Syro-Malabarian] could be a very good candidate to be a bishop, because they fulfil the following conditions, i.e. integrity of customs, sufficient instruction, a general esteem of the people and consequently a certain influence over them, a sure attachment to the Holy See. Mgr Agliardi had found these qualities among many Syrians. If one takes into account all the defects of the Orientals, especially of the Indians, for example, a certain fickleness, a little pride and ambition, a tendency to create small groups [cliques], indolence, etc. you can never think of finding one fit to be bishop, because these defects, which are natural and national among them, as among other peoples there are other national defects, for example, drunkenness; while among the Indians there are some virtues, which are wanting among other peoples, for example, meekness of character, patience, respect for the authorities, especially if they are European s.

A second observation Mgr Agliardi makes is that the opposition of the vicars apostolic to give a bishop of proper Rite to the Syrians could be perhaps the continuous insistence of those missionaries who are closer to the vicars apostolic and who aspire to succeed in the episcopacy. In fact, in Verapoly it is verified that excepting a few older ones, and those who are very young, there are three or four who aspire for episcopacy, who fear that they lose their chances to that dignity, if the Syrians are given a bishop of their Rite; these continuously speak ill of the Syrians and present them in a very bad light before the vicars apostolic. They even publicly say to the Syrians not to think of a bishop proper to their Rite, because the mission is of the Carmelites. In Quilon where there was recently the question of the appointment of a vicar apostolic who did not pertain to the mission, the most Rev. Monsignor found himself in the midst of an opposition of Fr Elia, and of Fr Victor with their respective groups, because both of them aspired to the episcopacy.

The relater continues:

From what is exposed above Your Eminences have understood that from 1865 onwards the Congregation [of the Propaganda] has shown itself not opposed, but very much inclined in favour of the demand of the Malabar Syrians for a bishop of their own Rite. But it has to be said that until recent times the Congregation had no information except that coming from the Carmelite fathers and their vicars apostolic. It was only Monsignor Meurin and then Monsignor Persico who have given a report independent of the Carmelites (*Positio*: 273f.; cf. also Mundadan 2003:).

The Propaganda Congregation had not known that Chavara had passed away in the beginning of 1871. In a letter dated 4 August 1874 addressed to Vicar Apostolic Mellano²² the Congregation refers to the appointment of Chavara vicar general in 1861 and enquires the new vicar apostolic whether he had followed the procedure and whether Fr Kuriakose Elias was still alive. If he is still alive Mgr Mellano is asked to furnish the necessary information about him so that in case he is to be recommended to the Pope (for episcopal consecration) the Congregation may have the necessary data. Archbishop Mellano replied to this letter on 12 September 1874.²³ In it the prelate informed the Congregation, among other things, the following points pertinent to our story:

Fr Chavara passed away four years ago. It is true that the deceased was appointed vicar general by my predecessor at the instance of some missionaries among whom I was one. It was hoped that he would do something useful to the clergy and people of Kerala. But people did not go to him as he was an indigenous person...but preferred to approach the vicar apostolic directly.

We fail to understand why Archbishop Mellano responded to the Congregation in this fashion. Is he speaking about the time Chavara fought for preserving the unity of the Church during the Roccasian disturbances or of later years? It is enough to glance

²² ACEO, Lettere e decreti, Vol. VIII (1873-74), p. 241-44; PO, doc. 150; *Positio*: 270f. This letter was sent in the context of the aftermath of Melusian intrusion in Kerala.

²³ ACEO, Scritture riferite malabares, 1862-77, f. 264f.; PO, doc. 146; *Positio*: 271f.

through what we have written in chapter six about how the priests (from Antony Kudakkachira to Antony Thondanatt) and people had recourse to the Blessed. Even Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli had to rely on him to get Bishop Roccas ousted from Kerala and to reconcile Bishop Abdisho to Catholic unity. Even after that many priests and laypersons approached Chavara to get things done. Just two examples would be enough: the care of the convent of Koonammavu was entrusted to him together with Fr Leopold (see chapter 8); it was Chavara whom Fr Mathai Mariam Palakunnel approached for advocating the union of Jacobites with the Catholic Church. Here we may recall what Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli wrote to the Propaganda Congregation in 1861: "he enjoys great esteem, respect of, and authority over, all people". Therefore it seems that Archbishop Mellano wrote in this manner because he was opposed to the idea of appointing a vicar general of their own Rite and nation for the St Thomas Christians. What we are going to speak in the next section will further strengthen the view we have expressed above.

Chavara's Efforts at Reforming and Vitalizing the Kerala Church

It may be true that it was primarily to prevent the influence of Bishop Roccas and his followers on the Christians of Kerala that Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli appointed Chavara vicar general. But the letter of appointment, as we have seen above, only vaguely refers to this. Greater importance is given to bringing about a reform in the Church, as the vicar apostolic feels that he did not succeed in doing it: besides his old age and consequent physical weakness and illness, he found that his administration had failed to produce "any spiritual advancement either among the priests or among the people". From this it would appear that an all round reform is the main mission given to Chavara as vicar general. As seen above, Archbishop Mellano says that it was to do some good to the priests and people he was made vicar general. Now we will examine how far the Blessed succeeded in promoting an integral renewal—spiritual, social, cultural, missionary, liturgical and so on.

Realizing the need of the presence of Chavara near the residence of the vicar apostolic the prelate asked him to move from Mannanam to Koonammavu in 1864. From there he directed, under the guidance of the ordinary and with the cooperation of the

missionaries, especially Fr Leopold, the various relevant activities: preaching retreats to priests as well as the laity; establishment and running of seminaries in order to give a boost to good priestly training; administration of the vicariate through deputies assigned to different zones into which the vicariate was divided; securing the financial position of the vicariate; promotion of educational and cultural activities; reform of liturgy, etc.

Even before he was made vicar general, Chavara was called upon on various occasions to deal with certain administrative matters.²⁴ Both Mgr Ludovic Martini and especially Mgr Bernardine Baccinelli had deputed Chavara to investigate cases related persons or churches and to report to the prelate. For example, in 1848 Martini deputed him to examine the registration deeds of the properties of Kumarakam church and again in 1851, to investigate certain allegations against the priests of Ramapuram. Baccinelli did the same in 1853 related to the complaints of the people of Painkulam parish, the parishioners of Athirampuzha, and accounts of the church of Arakuzha in 1855, and the parish assembly of Muttuchira in 1856. The confidence the vicars apostolic placed in him is clear from the fact that they gave him special faculties to reconcile the excommunicated persons, and to absolve censures against priests (cf. *Positio*: 363).

Another important point one should note is Chavara's skill in discerning persons who had the competence to help him in the administration and courting their assistance and cooperation. This comes out clearly in his fight against the Roccisian disturbances. Unnicheria Kappil writes in his diary notes²⁵ about his visit to Chavara at Thathampally at the latter's invitation. In fact by the influence of Unnicheria and other friends Chavara managed to secure an order from the government authorities and thus check the progress of dissension. Similarly it is through the help of some influential persons that he managed to set up the printing press at Mannanam as we shall see soon. There are many other instances of this kind.

²⁴ Here it is good to remember that Fr Thomas Palackal, malpan of Chavara, was a permanent consulter to the vicariate curia. Chavara knew this well.

²⁵ See above ch. 5, p.196r.

Spiritual Reform through Preaching

The preaching of the word of God was not common or effective in Kerala before this time. Chavara himself, an eloquent and effective preacher, just as his predecessors Frs Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara, saw to it that the members of his congregation took up this apostolate in a big way. The testimony of Fr Kuriakose Porukara is worth mentioning here. He first refers to two scriptural passages: 1. Prophet Zachariah says: "The streets of Jerusalem shall be filled with persons of various ages, the old carrying staff and the young and children playing and jubilant".²⁶ 2. The miraculous catch of fish (Lk. 5: 4ff.): the apostles unable to lift their net on account of the overabundance of the fish they caught by casting the net at the bidding of the Lord, called their friends to help out. Porukara continues:

Even so these brothers, at the order of superiors, preached in different parishes having thousand or two thousand or even five thousand and more faithful, spiritual retreats and missions, taught catechism and heard confessions. Thus they rooted out the reign of the devil and brought salvation to the people. The glory of God and the salvation of souls effected in this way gave joy to the ecclesiastical superiors, priests and laity, for which they thanked God. In order to spread this good work all over Kerala, he [Chavara] visited many places and founded monasteries (Porukara 1905: 34).

After this the biographer describes the opposition Chavara put up against Bishop Roccas and party:

During those stormy days he was endowed with the dignity of vicar general for Syrian churches. All who have any recollection of those events know well how many people he saved from falling into the abyss of schism, how many churches he salvaged from the clutches of the Roccasian partisans, all through his good influence among people, his eloquent sermons and his life of virtue. Just as, if there were not the arc of Noah during the flood no single human being would have been spared, even so if there was not Fr Prior and this religious community, it is quite reasonable to think

²⁶ This reference, a paraphrasing of Zachariah 8: 4f., is not in 1905 printed text (cf. *Positio*: 483 & fn. 57 *ibid.*).

that all Syrian churches would have been lost in schism (ibid.).

Fr Leopold also speaks in a similar way about these events (cf. Beccaro 2003: 10f.).

In recognition of the success of this apostolate of preaching and to further enhance the efficacy of it, Vicar Apostolic Ludovic Martini (1844-52) officially appointed in 1849 the religious of Mannanam headed by Chavara as official preachers of spiritual exercises for the whole vicariate. The prelate addressed his letter of appointment dated 8 January 1849²⁷ to all the faithful of the vicariate, both Syrians and Latins. After indicating the great importance St Ignatius, St Philip Neri and many others had given to retreats for compunction of heart and salutary disposition, the prelate says:

Therefore I select and send to you Rev. Fr Kuriakose Malpan Chavara and the other priests at Mannanam. When any of them comes to you, the vicar of the church takes care that an eight-day retreat is conducted in a convenient church either for each parish community separately or cumulatively for a few of them. The necessary expenses for the same may be provided from the common income of the church. Be diligent to participate in these exercises with good will and reap abundant fruit from them. This we command on precept of charity (*Positio*: 93f.).

The preaching of the word of God and conducting of retreats were followed with greater intensity after the Roccas disturbances. It got a new style and thrust. Four or five priests as a group went to each parish to preach spiritual exercises. It is said that about thirty such retreats or missions were conducted every year in different parishes. At the end of each retreat the vicar apostolic made his visitation of the parish (cf., e.g. Parapuram: 1111ff.; cf. also Valerian, 1939: 204). Chavara and his fellow religious tried to establish the practice of preaching sermons on Sundays and feast days.

²⁷ A copy of this (palm leaf) is preserved in the archives of the Arakuzha parish; PO, doc. 178; *Positio*: 93f.

Here mention may be made of two letters Chavara wrote to his own parishioners at Kainakari, one in 1868 and the other in 1869. The first he calls his testament to them and contains instructions on building up a true Christian family; the other exhorts them to found at Kainakari the Confraternity of Happy Death. We will be speaking on them later in connection with the family apostolate and social action, both of which the Blessed promoted with zeal.

Besides organizing retreats and missions for the common people as described above, Chavara was zealous in arranging annual retreats for priests at Mannanam, usually towards the end of the month of May. We have already referred to one in connection with the Roccas events. Chavara's notes on divine vocation, grace, sin, etc.²⁸ deserve attention in this connection. Actually the Blessed wrote these under five headings: meditation on 1. vocation, 2. divine grace, 3. mortal sin, 4. the worth of two priests, 5. death of an impious priest. We may reasonably infer from the contents and the style that these were notes he prepared for the retreats given to priests. More about this book we will see in the section on the writings of Chavara (chapter 9)

Priestly Formation

Already we have spoken a few things about the education and training of priestly candidates. It was a heritage which Chavara and fellow religious took over from Malpan Thomas Palackal, who was completely dedicated to this cause and at whose initiative the first CMI seminary started at Mannanam in 1833. It was in the seminaries at Pallipuram and Mannanam a more systematic and regular training of clergy first emerged. It was Palackal and his disciple Chavara who opened the way for a higher standard of learning for the clerical candidates. The seminaries at Pallipuram and Mannanam differed from the other domestic seminaries or malpanates, about twenty or so, that existed then among the Syrian Christians.²⁹

²⁸ There is a manuscript in the hand of Chavara at Mannanam (AMSJ). The original in Malayalam has no title, but it is published in CWC III (1981), pp. 48-65 under the title *Dhyana Kuripukal* ('Notes for Meditation /Retreat'). A Latin translation is in PO, doc. 75 and *Positio*: 425ff.

²⁹ Cf. Ambrosius 1939: 340; *Positio*: 80; cf. also Mundadan 2007: 44ff.

We have already seen in chapter three what Chavara says about the beginning of the seminary at Mannanam. Brother Jacob Kaniyanthara gives us a few more details. After referring to the life of the fathers at Mannanam in early thirties he says:

When they were living like this, since there were no students, there was no one to assist at Mass, etc. Therefore seminarians Ittiyavira Valiaparampil of the parish of Athirampuzha and Joseph Alamcheril came to the monastery and began residing there. At the same time the vicar of Kaipuzha brought there from his parish two boys, Jacob Malayil and Joseph Puthathil. He wanted them to stay in the monastery and to carry on their studies there. At this time Fr Pallipuram [Palackal] and Fr Porukara were there. When they discussed the matter Fr Porukara said: "Since this is a monastery, if we begin to impart lessons to clerics, it would adversely affect monastic life. Therefore no seminary should be started here". But Fr Palackal was of opinion that a seminary and study should be started there. For, he said, if there were a seminary and studies the relatives and friends of the seminarians would often come to the monastery and thus the monastery would be able to establish very good relations, and it was possible to gain for the monastery various benefits. Fr Porukara finally agreed with the view of the senior priest and also consented to teach in the proposed seminary. After this, one after another many came to Mannanam and thus the seminary was formed. From each of the parishes there came one or two boys and in that way their community grew in number to ten or fifteen. Fr Chavara was teaching and at the same time was also looking after the construction. Fr Porukara was going about the parishes preaching sermons and collecting funds (Kaniyanthara: 11, *Positio*: 105).

Fr Palackal, though he stayed permanently at Pallipuram as malpan of the seminary there, functioned also as malpan or rector of the seminary at Mannanam, but managed the affairs there through Frs Porukara and Chavara. Koyipallil (p. 29, *Positio*: 555) says:

In a short time candidates came [to Mannanam] from all places and the seminary grew into a grand institute. Fr Kuriakose Chavara was himself rector. However Fr Kurian

Kochuparampil was appointed to live with the seminarians as assistant and to teach them.

Besides directing the seminary at Mannanam, Chavara also continued to help Palackal at Pallipuram and after the latter's demise he was left alone to manage both. This led to Mannanam assuming a prominent position and Pallipuram allegedly being reduced almost to a branch of the former (cf. Valerian 1939: 85). There is some evidence that some other malpans also had charge of Pallipuram seminary (cf. chapter 6, p. 20, fn. 30). Mannanam remained for a long time the only seminary for the whole of the Syrian community (cf. Valerian 1939: 87-88; Bernard 1908: 42). It is further to be noted that attached to three of the monasteries founded after Mannanam and Koonammavu, seminaries were also opened, namely Vazhakulam, Elthuruth and Pulincunnu, in 1866, 1868 and 1872 respectively (cf. chapter 4). Later they were correlated with the newly started common major seminary at Puthenpally for all Kerala under the direct supervision of the vicar apostolic and administered by the missionaries. Mannanam was affiliated to it only in 1894 (cf. Valerian *ibid.*; Bernard: *ibid.*).

Administrative Organisation of the Vicariate

The Carmelite Congregation... (1932: 58) says:

The great uplift Malabar witnessed in the 19th century is mainly to be attributed to the zeal of Mgr Bernardine and his vicar general, Fr Cyriac Elias (Chavara). It is worthy of mention that at this time the whole Syrian Church was divided, by the vicar general, into four districts, each being entrusted to one of the fathers of the congregation. These fathers were known, so to say, as the "plenipotentiaries" or "deputies" of the vicar apostolic, each in his district. They had special charge over the clergy and laity; they supervised school work, conducted catechetical institutions, settled knotty disputes and quarrels and transacted other works of importance. Thus the members of the congregation, directed by Fr Cyriac Elias (Chavara), visited, from the beginning, all the churches of Malabar, preached retreats and missions, corrected abuses, and even discharged parochial work, when the peculiar circumstances of a parish required it.

Of course the division was made by Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli, quite possibly at the suggestion and with the consent of Chavara as the members and institutions of the congregation were involved in the working of the new arrangement. The vicar apostolic in a report sent to Rome in 1860s³⁰, informed the Propaganda Congregation the following: he had organised all the parishes of the vicariate into four units entrusting them to four priests of the Carmelite Tertiaries. Each one of them had the charge of the parishes in the neighbourhood of his residence. They see that on all days of obligation one or two fathers go continuously to each parish, and hear confessions, preach sermons, visit schools and instruct students. They thus spend five to six months outside the monasteries going round the churches.

Financial Security of the Vicariate

The vicariate had difficulty to find the necessary funds for its various activities and developmental programmes. In volume III of the Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery there are casual references in two places regarding the advice Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli sought from Chavara regarding the means to raise the needed funds. The vicar apostolic grieved at the scanty resources he had for the common expenses, especially for the construction and maintenance of the seminary, in 1865 with great mental anguish spoke to Prior Chavara about the situation. Chavara, on a visit to Mannanam told the community there during the recreation time that the archbishop had diligently worked, even exhausted himself, for the development of the region; that owing to financial difficulties he was very dejected.³¹ Then the members of the community suggested that the problem could be solved by collecting one tenth of the income of each church. The Prior accordingly drew up a proposal for this and took it to Varapuzha on 6 April 1865 and showed it to Fr Philip, who expressed great satisfaction at the proposal (cf. *Positio*: 499). But the vicar apostolic, perhaps moved by his consulters, suggested to make it five percent. Accordingly the Prior prepared a decree, which

³⁰ ACEO, Scritture riferite malabares, 1862-77, f. 154 ff. (cf. *Positio*: 276f.)

³¹ Cf. also the circular dated 20 May 1865 signed by the vicar apostolic, *Positio*: 289f.

directed each parish to deliver, together with the annual statement of accounts, five percent of the total income of the church to the episcopal curia. The archbishop signed this decree and sent it to the vicar of Mannanam Monastery to get it printed and sent to all the churches. This was done by the vicar apostolic in the beginning of April 1865 (cf. Mannanam Chronicle III: 44f., *Positio*: 499, 498, 288 fn. 36).

We have two circular letters related to the matter of collecting certain percentage of the income of the parishes for the construction and maintenance of seminaries, one in the hand of Chavara and with his signature, the other in the same hand but signed by the vicar apostolic. At the foot of the original of the first, 5 March 1850³² is given as date. *Positio* (p. 287f.) thinks that the year (1850) is an error as then Chavara had not been known as Prior, which designation is found in the signature. Both *Positio* (cf. p. 289, fn. 39) and the editor of CWC IV (1982: 129) think that this appeal was made by Chavara for the expansion of the Mannanam seminary. If the actual writing is in 1865 this view is difficult to accept. *Positio* itself says (p. 288): both letters sent to the parishes agree as far as the content is concerned, the difference being regarding the percentage. If in the first it is ten, in the second it is five. Both the circulars indicate that the amount collected would be utilized for the seminary. We think that the purpose of both the circulars (if they were written in 1865) was the same: expenses for seminaries whether they were at Mannanam, Puthenpally or anywhere else. It may be noted that the seminary at Puthenpally was under construction at this time.

The circular signed by Chavara starts with some spiritual thoughts of St Ephrem: the second source of enlightenment is learning/knowledge³³. Then he goes on stating that those who have no learning are spiritually blind. And "if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Mt. 15: 14). Though the Nazranies

³² The original in Malayalam is kept at Mannanam (AMSJ 218); Latin version PO, doc. 7, *Positio*: 286f.; the Malayalam is printed in CWC IV 1982: 129f.

³³ Perhaps the reference is to what Ephrem considers the inner eye or the 'luminous eye', with which we can penetrate through the symbols and types both in the scriptures and in the nature, cf. Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, Rome: CHS, 1985.

(St Thomas Christians) claim ancient origin, since they do not have the necessary knowledge they lack the seed and sprouting of wisdom of the sages. The need for learned priests is of paramount importance. But to produce learned priests sufficient funds must be made available. The letter continues:

To make up for this deficiency it is decided to erect a seminary in a convenient place as agreed to by all and especially by our bishop. In such a seminary, in the first stage, languages like Malayalam, Tamil, Syriac and Latin will be taught by special teachers appointed for the purpose. If any of the boys who study in this seminary when they come to maturity, desire to dedicate themselves to priesthood and if the superiors find that they have a real vocation, they will be selected and taught theology and other subjects related to priestly life. Thus, when they will have completed the studies, they will be found competent to do their ministry in the proper way, and without any draw-back.

Now, in order that we may erect a proper seminary and appoint competent teachers to teach, no small amount of money will be sufficient. On the other hand, it is only becoming that God's money is spent for divine works. Hence for the common benefit of all and in order that no one may be overburdened, it is decided that every year, on a fixed date, after the accounts of the church have been audited, one tenth of the income be contributed for the seminary. This amount along with a modest monthly allowance should be given regularly to a special deputy appointed for the purpose. Thus we hope the project would be easily realized (CWC IV 1982: 129f.; 1990: 96f.).

The parish priests are requested to acknowledge receipt of this circular.

Probably Chavara drafted the above mentioned document to comply with the ordinary's directive to prepare a circular. But it seems this circular was not dispatched to the parishes. Some of the advisers of the prelate probably considered ten percent too high and wanted it to be reduced to five. The vicar apostolic agreed with this change. Therefore Chavara himself prepared another circular, in which the contribution of the parishes was reduced to five

percent. This circular³⁴ was signed by the vicar apostolic and printed at Mannanam and sent to the parishes. It must be to this circular that the above mentioned passage in the Mannanam Chronicle refers (Vol. III: 46, *Positio*: 499). In the circular the vicar apostolic expresses his deep concern for the Christians under him and the financial crunch he was experiencing at that time, especially for the construction of a seminary and the maintenance of seminarians and their teachers. It was because of this constraint he was appealing to the churches for the special contribution.

Parapuram (p. 1181f.) speaks about this event at length. The financial needs of the vicariate were being managed with the annual subsidy received from France. But that was found insufficient for the various projects undertaken and Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli was worried about it. He had recourse to the counsel of Prior Chavara. The latter after mature consideration and consultation proposed the scheme of five percent tax on the excess income (total income minus expenses) of every parish. The first proposal was for ten percent but later it was reduced to five. The vicar apostolic was pleased with the proposal but he wanted it to be proceeded with caution lest the people resent it. So the task of implementing the scheme was entrusted to the Prior himself. The latter knew that since most of the vicars of the southern regions had their priestly training in the seminaries of Pallipuram and Mannanam they would easily oblige. So too the faithful who had great esteem and fondness for him, would not object to the scheme. He contacted all the parishes in the south and motivated them. They willingly executed the order of the vicar apostolic presented to them by the Blessed. By 1867 all the Syrian churches in the south carried out the proposal. Soon those of the north followed suit. The Latin parishes did not do anything immediately. With the proceeds that came in through this method the vicar apostolic was able to meet the expenses for the running of the seminaries, convents of nuns and monasteries.

Another device which was employed for augmenting the income of the vicariate was what was called the *pidiyari* system. Parapuram (pp. 1182-870) describes the introduction of this practice first by Fr Geevarghese Thoppil for the construction of the

³⁴ The original of this dated 20 May 1865 is preserved at Mannanam (AMSJ 7/211); Latin version in PO, doc. 67 and *Positio*: 289f.

Pulincunnu Monastery, and then its expansion all over the vicariate. A meeting of lay leaders was held at Koonammavu, in which Frs Philip (vicar general), Marceline, Leopold, Chavara, and Alexander Joseph participated. Their unanimous opinion was to introduce the practice in all the families in the vicariate. Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli was pleased to take the necessary steps for the implementation of the scheme. The collection became very substantial that the vicar apostolic, on 25 March 1868, appointed Fr Kizhakethayyil to supervise the scheme. The letter of appointment is written in the hand of Chavara but signed by Vicar General Philip (cf. PO, doc. 68, *Positio*: 277).

Fr Bernard (1989: 157) says that Blessed Chavara, at the advice of Fr Geevarghese Thoppil, introduced in around 1850 the practice called *kettutengu*, i.e. reservation of one of the coconut trees of a family for church purposes. It seems that this was introduced by Chavara for the needs of the monastery at Mannanam. We have a reference to this practice in connection with the story of Fr Antony Thondanatt (cf. '81: 120, see chapter 6:27). Though in the beginning this practice was intended for a particular purpose, in course of time it became more common and spread all over Kerala, as Fr Bernard says.

Catechumenates

The system of *pidiyari* was also made use of for the expenses of catechumens and catechumenates. It seems that no school for the training of catechumens existed in the vicariate except the one attached to the headquarters at Varapuzha. Thus for receiving instruction in faith and morals the neophytes had to make long journeys. Individual initiatives started in certain places to open schools for catechumens in early 1860s. Anglicans, with their centre at Mundakayam, had established missions among the low castes like *ezhavas*, *pulayas*, etc. in the eastern regions of central Kerala. This was a challenge to Catholics to organize catechetical centres for them. It was Fr Mathai Mariam Palakunnel who was to take it up for the first time. He says that he received an urgent message from some important person that unless something is done urgently the *ezhavas* and their place, Kora tty east of Kanjirappally, would fall into the hands of the Anglican missionaries.

So I at once started for Manimala and together with the vicar of that church and Mr Chacko of Chirakadavil mentioned

above, visited Kora tty. I was very pleased with the place (Palakunnel 1971: 3).

Though many were sceptical about the endeavour, there was at least one gentleman, Devassy Ottaplackal, who encouraged the fathers in their attempt. Immediately Fr Palakunnel took down the names of a few *ezhavas* who were willing to become Christians. He then proceeded to Varapuzha. After initial apathy Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli became interested in the project. He wrote a letter to Prior Chavara of Mannanam³⁵ asking him immediately to make arrangements in secret to get Kora tty acquired for the vicariate from the government. It was to be registered in Chavara's name. Fr Palakunnel on various considerations did not hand over this order of the vicar apostolic immediately to Fr Prior. This caused some misunderstandings at Mannanam, which the former regretted. It seems that the land was not acquired. However Palakunnel went to Koratty and started work among the *ezhavas*. In February 1858 when the vicar apostolic came for visitation of churches he baptized some eighteen *pulayas* at some centres. The work of Palakunnel was extended to Kuttanad. There was stiff opposition to his work not only from some high caste Hindus but also from the Christians who had their prejudices and vested interests. In spite of such opposition he was able to baptize about two thousand *pulayas*. About it he says:

Had I out of fear of the opposition from the Hindus and even our own priests, recoiled from this effort, we would not have had the fortune of seeing the two thousand *pulaya* Christians in their chapels (ibid: 114).

In this work of Fr Palakunnel we do not see any active involvement from the part of Chavara or his community. Another catechetical school was opened at Athirampuzha by the administrator of Cranganore with the help of his secretary Fr Mani Nidhiry (cf. the *Carmelite Congregation...* 1932: 56).

However in 1864 Mannanam Monastery, as directed by Prior Chavara, started a catechumenate attached to the monastery.

³⁵ This letter dated 24 April 1857, is given in Palakunnel 1971: 6f.

This was officially inaugurated on 9 October of that year. Chavara and a few missionaries were present there on the occasion.³⁶

Mannanam Chronicle (Vol. III, p. 30) has this entry dated November 1864, in the beginning of which month Prior Kuriakose visited Mannanam:

On Sundays and feast days many boys came to study catechism and remained here till five o'clock in the evening. Some of them came from distant places. Some of them were poor. In order to promote more efficiently this so wholesome and fruitful work, they thought that it was necessary to feed the boys at noon with *Kaññi* [rice gruel]. They were also given clothes and pious articles like rosaries, scapulars, etc. To meet the expenses involved for this as well as for the conversion of *pulayas* and for conducting the catechetical school, the means decided was collection of *pidiyari* ['handful of rice'] every Sunday.

The Carmelite Congregation... (1932: 56) says that Fr Chavara opened a catechumenate at Mannanam in 1866 and another in the parish of Edathva. It continues (p. 57):

Almost all the monasteries of the congregation imitated the mother-house in opening catechumenates attached to them. In these, many adults and infants are cared for, instructed and baptized every year. During the period between 1866 and 1931 more than 20,000 souls were gained to Christ by the missionary zeal of the fathers of the congregation.

In the Field of Education

As we have mentioned a few times, the educational system in Kerala was *Kalari* oriented. It was at the turn of the nineteenth century that English education had its beginning all over India. In Kerala it was the Anglican (CMS and LMS) and the German Basel Evangelical missionaries who introduced English schools. Between 1817 and 1866 the three groups established English schools in the whole of Kerala, the LMS in South Thiruvithamcore area

³⁶ CE *Positio* 277. The references given for this are 1. Mannanam Chronicle, Vol. III, p. 30—here there is no mention of date, as we shall see; 2. *The Carmelite Congregation...* 1932: 56f—in this reference also the date is not mentioned but only the year (1864).

(Thiruvananthapuram and south), the CMS in Central Thiruvithamcore and Kochi areas, and the Basel Mission in the Malabar or North Kerala areas. In 1866 one of the first colleges of Kerala, the nucleus of the present University College, Thiruvananthapuram, also saw its beginning (cf. S. Menon 1979: 97-99). Probably in the same year the CMS institution at Kottayam also attained the status of a college (cf. Chathanparampil³⁷ 2004: 111). It seems that this was different from the Orthodox Seminary, which from its inception apparently functioned as a college (cf. Gibbs 1972: 326; Kulakkatt 2002: 395). But, for Catholics entry into these schools was forbidden. The missionaries seem to have prohibited the Catholics even to study English language as they feared that study of that language (language of the Protestants!) would be occasion for Protestant ideas to infiltrate among Catholics (cf. *Positio*: 82; Valerian 1939: 16). Both the States of Thiruvithamcore and Kochi soon introduced English schools. But the Catholics were allowed to attend them only, it seems, in 1880s³⁸.

In the estimation of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala writers, the Carmelite missionaries were slow to catch up with modern educational progress. Fr Bernard observes:

Till Missionary Marceline became [auxiliary] bishop [in 1877], in the Vicariate of Verapoly nothing was done to promote English education, nor was there freedom for it. This being so Fr Prior [Kuriakose] Porukara, with the permission of Archbishop Leonard [Mellano], selected a few members of the congregation and made arrangements to teach them English. They were: Frs Louis Pazheparampil (later Vicar Apostolic of Ernakulam) and Hillarion Tharavattil, and Scholastics Stephen Thayyil, Joseph Kochupalathinkal, Joseph Peedieckal (Kochheppachan), Abraham Poovathaniyil and Joseph Moolakariyil. Fr Prior commissioned Mr Thomas Manchil, a Jacobite who had become Catholic, to teach them English in private. The

³⁷ He quotes *CMS-Church Mission Society* without date or place of publication.

³⁸ Archbishop Augustine Kandathil is said to have had studied in the government English school at Vaikom in late 1880s.

writer of this [Fr Bernard] was also a scholastic who studied English with them. Afterwards also at Mannanam special teachers were appointed to teach English to the seminarians, even though not in a systematic manner. Complaint reached Visitor Apostolic Meurin [1876] that Varapuzha was negligent in the matter of education in general and in particular in that of teaching English. In order to redress this complaint, Bishop Marceline, immediately after his consecration and appointment, established in Kochi the Santa Cruz School. Some Irish Carmelite brothers and a few Jacobites³⁹ were appointed teachers there. This was the first English school under Varapuzha. Soon teaching of rudiments of English was introduced in seminaries. The French missionary Augustine who was called Bothollo Sami, was appointed supervisor and examiner for this. Bishop Marceline enlarged the seminary at Puthenpally and brought there a few students from other seminaries. Soon it was decreed that students from seminaries other than at Puthenpally, should go to Koonammavu for undergoing examination in English and Syriac, and that only the successful candidates would be ordained priests. In 1885 a regular English school started functioning at Mannanam. This was the first English school of the Catholic St Thomas Christians (Bernard 1921: 342f.).

It is interesting to note that a petition in Syriac dated 1 September 1875 and signed by about fifty-eight diocesan and thirty-five religious priests sent to the Pope, requests to separate the Syrians from the Padroado and Varapuzha jurisdictions and appoint for them a separate bishop. This bishop might be chosen from the English or Irish Carmelites. Fr Bernard is right when he comments that it was in view of better secular prospects and of English education that they preferred an English or Irish man (Bernard 1921: 314-21).

In the report of Visitor Ignatius Persico (1876/77) we find the following statement:

³⁹ The Jacobite (Syrian Orthodox) Seminary set up in 1813 came under the influence of the CMS and introduced teaching not only English but also several branches of secular subjects (cf. S. Menon 1979: 298; see also below).

The Carmelites who rule over the Syrians have done practically nothing in the field of education...

The missionaries in general have not achieved fame in India for knowledge of languages or in giving good education to native clergy and laity (quoted in Payngott 1997: 41, 70; cf. also *idem* 1996: 285, 379).

In a letter, which a number of Catholics wrote to the Prefect of Propaganda Congregation on 5 October 1884, it is stated:

There is not a single one among the Catholic Syrians who holds a degree in collegiate studies. There are more than hundred persons among our Jacobite brethren who have such degrees. While there are advocates, doctors and judges in other communities, in our community there is none (quoted in Payngott 1997: 103).

We have been so far explaining the situation in Kerala till about the close of the nineteenth century. Chavara's endeavour to promote education among the Catholics should be assessed against this background. When we say Blessed Chavara established schools attached to parishes or monasteries they could not have been English schools of the type mentioned above. They might have been a sort of private schools. About the educational standard that prevailed both among the clergy and laity in the nineteenth century Parapuram has this comment:

Till the fifteenth century many learned persons came from the East and preached the faith. Then came the Jesuits and made very laudable efforts. Still it cannot be said that bringing up of children in Kerala did achieve the standards that existed in Europe. In the years when the Jesuit presence was strong they made great efforts to improve the situation. But their departure badly affected the process (cf. Parapuram: 541-43).

Perhaps a new beginning was made with the arrival of the Carmelite missionaries. Yet the natives lacked the necessary knowledge and application in practice. The European Carmelite missionaries were better equipped, but did not have the expertise as the Jesuits had (cf. *ibid.*: 543-45). Parapuram observes in another context (cf. p. 1490) that in the government schools both English

and Malayalam flourished. But as far as the Catholics were concerned they had very little studies of that sort. Fr Leopold took keen interest to improve the study of Malayalam in the novitiate at Koonammavu.

While speaking of the printing press at Mannanam and publishing Malayalam translation of Tamil books, Parapuram mentions the establishment of a Sanskrit school by Chavara at Mannanam:

At the same time [late forties]⁴⁰ a Sanskrit school was established at Mannanam, attached to the monastery. In it the priests and others in the monastery, as also students from the neighbouring places, were studying. For the proper running of the school they had brought from Thrissur a teacher belonging to the Warriar caste. He was an expert in Sanskrit and Malayalam. His services were very useful for preparing the books published from Mannanam in proper Malayalam idiom. Because of his expertise in Sanskrit Prior Chavara also started to learn Sanskrit from him (Parapuram: 1473f.)⁴¹.

We have already seen about the catechetical school started at Mannanam (see the previous section). Fr Valerian citing Parapuram says:

⁴⁰ Parapuram does not give any precise date regarding the establishment of the Sanskrit school. *Positio* (p. 83) referring to the same passage in Parapuram says that the Prior established the school in 1846. How the author arrives at such a conclusion is not clear. Valerian referring to the same source also states that the school started in 1846. For *Positio* Valerian may be the source. It was Mgr Ludovic Martini, vicar apostolic from 1845-55, who suggested to Fr Prior to get Tamil books translated into Malayalam and published from the press at Mannanam. This was being done. It is in this connection that Parapuram speaks of the Sanskrit school. Since Mgr Martini left for Rome in 1852 never to return, the school must have been functioning before that (cf. Ambrosius 1939: 335; see also ch. 9).

⁴¹ We do not know how long this school continued to function. A building, supposed to be the Sanskrit school, can be seen at Mannanam. Perhaps the present building is the result of several modifications in later years.

[Chavara] started a school on the Mannanam hill. He fixed the hill of Thuruthumaly family at Arpukara as the place for a chapel with a school attached for the converts from *pulayas*. He collected funds from parishes and important persons and bought a plot of wet paddy field nearby and ordered that the monastery must run it.⁴²

Then there is the question of the schools attached to parish churches. In the Chronicle of Mannanam, Vol. III (1864-71), p. 90 there is this entry:⁴³

When Fr Prior was here [at Mannanam] we received a decree of the archbishop, which demanded that in every parish a school be established for the education of boys. It warned that those who neglected to comply with this order would incur censure. Mannanam Monastery immediately started the construction of a school. We also decided to establish a chapel with a school attached for the *pulaya* converts.⁴⁴

There is a tradition that this circular was issued by Vicar General Chavara. The manuscript of the circular kept in the archives of Mannanam is in the recognised hand of Chavara. Many biographers of the Blessed and historians of the period attribute it to Chavara⁴⁵. It is most likely that, though officially the decree was issued by the vicar apostolic, the whole idea was conceived by Chavara and the decree prepared by him was circulated on his recommendation. The only question is: what sort of schools were they? May be they were private schools where both religion and secular subjects were taught. A regular English school was started at Mannanam in 1885. It was raised to a middle school in 1890 and to a high school in 1902 (cf. Bernard 1989: 230, 235).

⁴² Reference is to Parapuram. But the page number is not indicated. We have not been able to verify the reference.

⁴³ This entry seems to correspond to the year 1865.

⁴⁴ May be it is this school at Mannanam and the chapel with school attached for *pulaya* converts (probably on the Arpukara hill), to which Fr Valerian refers, as mentioned above.

⁴⁵ E. g. Valerian 1939: 137; K. C. Chacko 1959: 95; P. T. Thomas 1956: 146; P. J. Thomas 1961: 210, etc. School in Malayalam is called *pallikudam*, hall attached to church.

Did Chavara think of establishing a college? Fr Valerian (1939: 138), referring to an article by the late well known educationist, Fr Romeo Thomas Mannanal in *Education Review*⁴⁶, says:

When he was vicar general Chavara started thinking of beginning a central college. Because of the prevailing circumstances the plan was not realized.

Considering the fact that the Orthodox Seminary at Kottayam functioned as a college turning out hundreds of graduates, and that already by 1866 there were two colleges, one at Thiruvananthapuram and the other at Kottayam, it is not impossible that Chavara conceived such an idea. May be he had in his mind a central institute like the Orthodox Seminary at Kottayam catering to the higher education of both clergy and laity. Was not the Sanskrit school a beginning in that line?

Social Pastoral Dimensions of Chavara 's Services

In the preceding pages of this chapter much has been said about the pastoral dimension of Chavara 's services. The founding of the CMI Congregation (chapter 3), and that of the women religious, which we will see in the chapter eight, are pastorally very important contributions. The foundation of the several monasteries at key localities is equally significant from this point of view. In the last testament to his religious community the Blessed chalks out his plans for future foundation of monasteries and convents at other nodal centres. The relentless war he fought against Mar Roccas and party to preserve the Christians under the communion of the Catholic Church and the plans he envisages in his 'Reflection ' (*Ālochana*) for the future of the Church of St Thomas Christians are great steps to make the Church pastorally effective and spiritually vibrant, without losing its identity and selfhood. These are all treated at length in other chapters so that we need not repeat them here.

We have also touched here and there on the social concerns of Chavara. Here we may briefly refer to them and elaborate one aspect, namely the associations and institutions he established for helping the poor and disabled. We have already seen Chavara's

⁴⁶ We have not been able to trace this article.

love and concern for the poor. The establishment of catechumenates and schools and the arrangements made under his leadership for the noon-feeding of the poor students and providing them cloth and books referred to earlier are relevant in this context. He may not be called a social worker in its technical sense as is understood today. But his concern and regard for the poor and suffering are very impressive in his words and actions. What he initiated was carried forward by his followers (see *CMI 175 Years* 2007: 24). In the 'testament' to his parishioners at Kainakari he exhorts the families to be just in their dealings with others instead of going greedily after riches. Then he adds:

Days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned with the days of your life. Be more zealous about other people loving you than fearing you. Do not let beggars leave your home empty handed. Do not refrain from giving alms whenever you can (CWC IV 1982: 142; 1990: 108).

Speaking about justice, he states:

Do not deny or delay payment of just wages to labourers. For that is a sin which cries up to the throne of God for retribution. Do not belittle or humiliate the poor. For God will demand of you an account of their tears (ibid.: 143f.; 109).

Chavara's love and concern for others, especially for the poor and suffering got institutionalized so to say, in the *Upaviśāla* or *Dharmaśāla* ('House of Charity') at Kainakari. It in a way perpetuated his universal love and all-round compassion. Chavara in his second letter dated 15 October 1869 to his people at Kainakari addresses them:

To my loving brothers and sisters, people of the Kainakari chapel of the parish of Chennankari (CWC 1982: 153; 1990:118).

Then the Blessed points out how important it is to prepare ourselves and others for a salutary death and how important it is to love the sick and the dying. He illustrates this fact with many stories and anecdotes and the example of Fr Chacko Valliara. Then he says:

Now my intense desire and my earnest request to you is to begin such a confraternity which has taken origin from such a motivation. Though I may not have the good fortune to witness the beginning of such an institute, if you so desire you can get it realized. Keep a charity box with the label "Happy Death Charity Box", and without being ashamed of it, beg of others and raise funds yourselves and build a modest charity home near the small chapel of yours and let at least one or two sick people, who have no one to take care of, stay in it and thus try to cultivate at least a shadow of this virtue. This will help the apostolate grow in Malabar (ibid.: 161;126).

He draws their attention to such charity homes existing in Europe, the result of the generosity of rich people. In Kerala also that can be done by rich people, and the poor and the sick who happen to live there will be eternally grateful to their benefactors and will pray for them. But the rich who are capable, may not think of it. "But you can think of it" (cf. ibid.). After this the sensitive heart of Chavara comes out expressing his experience of universal love:

I know I do not love God as I ought to. But I left my home and parents for the sake of God. Now I am writing this from Aranattukara⁴⁷. I have my brethren here who love me more than my own brothers and sisters. Tomorrow if I go to Koonammavu, I will have the same experience there as well; so also if I go to Mannanam or to Vazhakkulam. Hence you take good care of this charity box of happy death (ibid.: 161f.; 126).

Then he gives the concrete proposal for the '*Upaviśāla*' and detailed suggestion on how to raise funds:

This should be run exclusively with the amount obtained from your contribution and from the coconut tree set apart for your chapel. You should not seek help from other people, because they too will need such a home of charity in their respective places. If people come to know of this

⁴⁷ It is clear from this that this letter was written during one of his visits to the Elthuruth monastery.

confraternity, I am sure many will contribute to it. Let therefore four among you be nominated as administrators, and you write a petition somewhat as follows: "We have established the confraternity for happy death attached to our chapel. According to the regulation of our confraternity, besides praying for all of you for a happy death, we propose to start here a home of charity where we propose to give hospice to the poor and the destitute sick and dying and to take care of all their needs. Hoping that we could realize this with the small alms we receive from you we place this charity box here." Put such a petition in your chapel and in the surrounding churches. Besides, place such a box with the above petition in the markets of Changanachery and Alapuzha; and at the time of harvest carry this box around to the fields. The greater part of what you need will be realized in this manner. God will supply the rest (CWC IV 1982: 162; 1990: 127).

In response to the above letter of the Blessed the parishioners wrote down a statement and got it signed by the vicar of Chennankari parish. It reads:

We shall not only pray for all those who were instrumental in establishing this confraternity in our chapel so that all may be blessed with a happy death, but we also pray for the poor folk who have none to take care of them so that they also may be given a happy death, and we propose to open here a home to give hospice to the poor and the destitute and to take care of all their needs. Hoping to get from our Christian brethren small gifts by way of charity to aid us in this venture we have placed here a charity box (ibid.:163;128f.).

The Vision and Mission of a Christian Family

We are not interested in the question whether Chavara was an apostle of the family or not. What is important for us is his concern that his relatives and friends should lead an ideal Christian family life. Naturally it will become model for all people. It is an exhilarating experience to see mothers bringing their children to the room at Mannanam in which Chavara lived for many years and making the little ones not only to read the 'testament of a good father' but even to take down the instruction in it. Among the

sweet memories the Blessed cherished with great relish a few stand out: One is the devotion his parents handed over to him towards the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The Holy Family was the most ideal family which should inspire all families (see chapters 10 and 12). Another is his experience of the good family, and the way his parents, more particularly his loving mother, brought him up. He sings this experience very feelingfully and gratefully in his poem *Ātmānutāpam* (see chapter 1). To this may be added Chavara's experience of the community life with his fellow religious at Mannanam, Koonammavu and in the whole congregation, an experience of heaven on earth. All this made him appreciate the value of family life and conceive the various factors that make a home happy and blessed, develop the ideas of a deep spirituality of family life. It is with this background that Chavara speaks to the family members of Kainakari and through them to all the families, in his letter dated 15 October 1869, just about four months before his holy death on 3 January 1871.

We have several times referred to the first of the two letters Chavara wrote to his relatives of Kainakari, his native place: He qualifies this letter as his testament to his dear people of Kainakari. K.C. Chacko in his biography of Chavara states:

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 ninety years now [1959], only a decade short of 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 (K. C. Chacko 1959: iv).

This reminds of the customs many of the Christian families of Kerala keep even today, e.g. the whole family meeting for the evening prayers, after the prayers the children greeting the elders with the words 'Praised be Jesus Christ' and kissing the hands of the elders, etc.

Chavara begins this long letter with a sort of definition of family:

A good Christian family is the image of heaven. Those bound by ties of blood and affection, living together, duly respecting and obeying the parents and thus ensuring their

salvation, each according to his/her vocation, constitute the rightful family. The only sweet consolation for a person experiencing trials and difficulties in this valley of tears is the membership and life in a family where love, order and peace rein lives peacefully (CWC IV 1982:137f.; 1990:102).

After this introduction Chavara gives two sets of rules: twenty-four to be observed in an ideal family (cf. CWC 1982:137); sixteen as guidance to parents for bringing up the children. Chavara concludes the letter by requesting the people of Kainakari, who are his children tied to him both by the family and the spiritual bonds:

This is my testament to you who are my children in two ways, as members belonging to my family and as my spiritual children. Let this remain a proof of the fact that you are my own kith and kin (CWC 1982:152; 1990:117).

Born in their family as a child of their ancestors Chavara feels that he has a special obligation to do some 'good to them in justice and charity'. He continues:

Considering this obligation, I have done for you nothing more than what I have done for everybody in common. So I give you this in my own handwriting. Even after my death, this paper will not perish. So I entrust this to you, my sons [and daughters] of the parish my, children of the Kainakari chapel, to be preserved and observed as a treasure from me (ibid.:152;116).

In the twenty four instructions he elaborates a number of principles and practical aspects which should guide a good Christian family. The precept of Jesus to love one another (Jn 10:18) is the first rule for every family. He illustrates the loftiness of forgiveness by an episode from the life of Emperor Constantine: A man from the street came up and dealt a blow on the king's cheek. The whole army sought his permission to kill the offender. But the Emperor replied, "Even my lowest officer can do that. That is not a big thing. But I forgive him. That is the sign of my strength". He exhorts the families to avoid litigations as nobody has been happy or better for having gone for litigation. In order to observe Sundays and feast days in the proper spirit it is advisable not to hold festivals and other celebrations on these days. Another

practical proposal is to avoid borrowing money as far as possible because the family without debt is the richest family. It is also not good to lend money except on grounds of charity.

Humility should be the hallmark of a Christian family. Those who show off their wealth or power are reminded of how God punished David for ordering a census of his people which was an act of pride. In this connection he reminds his people not to spend more than they can afford on festivals and celebrations. He gives as example a scholar who once said to a man who was lamenting over his bad days, which followed his extravagance: "Brother, if you did not burn away your lamp at day time, you could have lighted it at night." People should not unnecessarily get involved in the affairs of others. They are to welcome to their homes only those who talk decently, keep Christian decorum and abstain from criticism of their neighbours. Industriousness and hard work of members are assets of a family. Trade and business, since often they promote dishonesty and greed, should be avoided as far as possible.

The greatest wealth of a family is piety and fear of God. A family of God-fearing people enjoys God's blessing in this life and in the next. Such a family scrupulously avoids abusive and foul language. The ideal is to attend Mass daily. Attending Mass on Monday (for the holy souls in purgatory), Friday (in devotion to the passion of Our Lord) and Saturday (in honour of Our Lady) is specially recommended. Practice of the virtue of modesty and chastity is the mark of a good family. All illness and sufferings are to be accepted joyfully from the hands of God. Special care and discernment are necessary regarding books and other reading materials. Sundays are to be observed integrally, not only hearing Mass but spending time reading good books and visiting and serving the sick. There is need for keeping a regular timetable. It is recommended that these rules are read every Sunday and conscientiously observed.

After this there follow rules for upbringing children in the proper way which is a grave duty of the parents. As the child grows he/she must be taught to recite holy names of Jesus, Mary, Joseph. When they are about eight years old they must go to the sacrament of penance. Special care must be taken not only properly educating the children but also preserving their innocence and purity.

When one goes through these instructions he/she will feel the depth of not only Chavara's experience of family life but also the deep knowledge he had acquired through reading and reflecting on what he had read. The Bible stories, anecdotes, comparisons etc., with which the Blessed illustrates his points are quite appealing. They reveal the depth of his wisdom and the width of his knowledge. A Japanese story with which he concludes his instructions to the children is very interesting:

In a heathen country, Japan, there lived a mother with three children. They were extremely poor so much so that the children could not support their mother as she deserved. In this land thieves were invariably executed and if anybody captured a thief and handed him over to the government authorities, a large amount of money was promised. In order to get some money to support their mother, one of them pretended to be a thief and the other two handed him over to the authorities and received their prize. When the authorities in the jail saw that the two brothers were frequently visiting their brother and encouraging him to be brave in facing death for the sake of his mother, the authorities began to doubt why the two men were so anxious about the thief, and made enquiries and discovered that the man was facing death in order to make funds to support his mother. The authorities felt great admiration for him on learning this truth and informed the king of this fact. Besides setting the youth free, the king decreed that a pension should be given to the mother.

He asks the children: (CWC 1982: 150f) "My dear children, please always remember this event."

Liturgical Reform

Even before the Synod of Diamper (1599), Latin elements started to creep into the community of St Thomas Christians. The Portuguese missionaries were bent upon bringing them "to their obedience and to their sacraments", which meant to reduce them to the Padroado regime and to introduce among them the Latin customs and practices that the Portuguese considered perfectly Christian (cf. Mundadan 2001: 482 ff.; Tisserant 1957: Appendix I & II). The Synod of Diamper effected a radical change as regards these aspects of their life. In several of the decrees ground was

cleared for the substitution of East-Syrian and Indian usages and disciplinary laws which were prevalent in India, with those of the Western Church, especially of the Council of Trent. This produced an unhappy admixture of Latin, Eastern and Indian practices. The Eucharistic celebrations also were to be made in them. The Synod compiled a Mass text with a number of corrections. It was published in 1606⁴⁸ by Gouvea together with his *Jornada* and Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper. Archbishop Ros (1600-1624) made some improvements on the text of the Mass⁴⁹. For a long time only manuscript missals were available in Kerala. Only in 1774 a missal was printed in Rome (cf. Tisserant, *ibid.*: Appendix II). Perhaps even after that manuscript texts were used by the priests, giving rise to variations from place to place. The case of the Divine Office was much worse. In spite of the endeavours of the Portuguese, especially Archbishop Meneses, to achieve complete uniformity with the Latin West even in language, says Cardinal Tisserant, the *cathanars* succeeded in saving the greater part of their traditional prayers (cf. *ibid.*: 177; cf. also Podipara 1944: 48ff.).

The intention of Blessed Chavara in attempting to reform the liturgy, was that the public worship should be performed with decorum and solemnity. Whatever traditional matter was available in any form he made use of. For the rest he had to borrow from the Latin sources. His natural inclination towards piety and devotion and his close association with the missionaries and western practices prompted him to adopt many of those devotions and practices, which, he believed, would foster the spiritual life of the priests and lay persons. But this did not mean that he was negligent or indifferent towards the age-long liturgical traditions of the St Thomas Christians. He was anxious to preserve them as much as possible. His mind comes out clearly in this regard in a personal reflection he noted down. As we have observed elsewhere he had no good opinion of the intellectual and moral qualities of the Chaldean clergy, as he had for the missionaries from Europe. He would prefer an enlightened missionary, rather than a Chaldean prelate, to guide the Church of the St Thomas Christians (cf.

⁴⁸ Cf. Tisserant, *ibid.*; also Bernard 1989: 139f.; Podipara 1944: 59ff.; Thaliath 1958: 220ff.

⁴⁹ Cf. Podipara *ibid.*: 88ff.

Alocana—'Reflections', CWC IV 1982: 83-85; 1990: 57-59; cf. also chapter 12). From what he says in these reflections it is very clear that the Blessed wanted by all means to preserve the identity and traditions of his community. But at the same time he was not averse to take over from the Latin Church whatever would be complementary and foster the spiritual tempo of the people⁵⁰. Orderly and devout celebration of public worship and good participation of the faithful in them was the aim of the renewal endeavours of Chavara.

Already when Chavara was a student at Pallipuram Seminary, he helped his malpan, Thomas Palackal to collect whatever manuscripts related to Church worship were available in Kerala and put them in some order (cf. Porukara 1905: 30). In the 1860s when he became vicar general, he initiated, with the necessary permission of the ordinary, liturgical reform and renewal. Fr Placid summarises these endeavours of Chavara:

His work consisted in the organisation of liturgical books, the rubrics for the Eucharistic celebration, the books of the Divine Office, the Office for the Dead and the liturgical calendar (Podipara 1944: 132f.).

According to Kuriakose Porukara, Chavara compiled the book of the Divine Office (breviary), the Order of the Mass, the order for the solemn Mass, solemn vespers, prayers for the dead, etc. The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery (III: 88; Positio: 499) gives the following items: order of solemn sung Mass celebrated with three priests, solemn vespers, the divine office, calendar (cf. also Bernard 1989: 137).

To summarise, Chavara composed about ten books for the liturgical use in the Church of the St Thomas Christians. They may be listed under four categories:

1. Original compositions or books which he himself prepared and which were published under his care: *Thukasa* (Order of the Mass) and liturgical calendar.

⁵⁰ This was more or less the policy followed from the 16th century, beginning with Mar Jacob (cf. Mundadan 2001: 485; Podipara 1944: 48ff.).

2. Compilations from existing manuscripts: Divine Office (breviary), Office for the Dead, funeral services.
3. Books which Chavara adapted from the Roman tradition: the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the lectionary for Mass.
4. Books which he translated into Syriac from the Roman liturgical texts: Holy Saturday services, benedictions or blessings.

Eucharistic Liturgy

Since the missal had been printed in Rome 1774 and 1844, the body of the text did not need any reform. But the rubrics and the calendar indicated in the missal were too brief and defective. Hence the priests were celebrating Mass following customs which varied from place to place. Naturally this was a cause of confusion and embarrassment to the people. Hence Chavara undertook the composition of an Order of the Mass. About this Mannanam Chronicle has an entry (III: 88, *Positio*: 499). When Prior Chavara visited Mannanam sometime in 1866 he had brought with him the *Ordo* of the Mass, which he had prepared at the bidding of the vicar apostolic.

For the Syrians of Malabar had till now no written ritual which described all the rubrics of the Mass. Therefore the archbishop had asked Rev. Fr Prior to write one in conformity with the printed missal and the teachings of St Liguori ...

Chavara prepared it and got it printed in 1868 with the Syriac title *Thukasa* which means Order of the Mass (*Ordo Missae*) (cf. preface to the book, *Positio*: 308). After describing the rubrics the author mentions certain problems that may arise during celebrations and gives solutions. In the preface to the book the vicar apostolic orders the priests to follow strictly the rubrics in the book.

In a circular dated 15 February 1869³¹ the Blessed sent to all the priests we find the following information:

³¹ Original in Malayalam in AMSJ, published in CWC IV 1982: 134-6. Latin version in *Positio*: 309-11.

Our missal prepared according to the Chaldean Rite and approved by Rome and printed there had been given to us³²... We have prepared an order of the Mass, which describes all those rubrics not given in the above mentioned missal. By the grace of God we have printed this order. This together with the calendar will help the celebration of the Mass uniformly everywhere, even in minute details (CWC IV1982: 135).

The book was reprinted in 1926. It was in use in the Church till 1962 when a new missal with an *Ordo* promulgated by Rome, came into use. Fr Bernard observes:

Chavara wrote a book called *Thukasa* containing the rubrics of the Syrian Mass and got it printed for the use of the priests. The *Thukasa* was composed in order to bring about uniformity in the rubrics of the Mass. The contents were almost the same as those followed traditionally by the priests. It was to bring about uniformity that Chavara at the order of the ordinary composed it and got it printed (Bernard 1989: 136f.).

Liturgical Calendar

In the same letter referred to above Chavara speaks also of the calendar that he had prepared. The context for working out the calendar was the following: The East-Syrian tradition of calculating the various seasons or periods was based on the major liturgical events of the year, e. g. Nativity, Lent, Resurrection and Pentecost, etc. Indications of these periods were given in the manuscript missals. From the sixteenth century the process of Latinization started to mar the clarity of this system (cf. Bernard 1989: 139). In the 1774 and 1844 missals the dates of feasts, fasts, etc were marked out in the missal itself, more or less in the Roman pattern. The only calendar that had been printed and used for many years was common to both the Latin and Syrian churches. This made the old practice of liturgical seasons very confused. It is this confused situation, which prompted Chavara to launch the project of a new calendar for the St Thomas Christians.

³² Reference is to the 1774, 1844 editions.

The Mannanam Chronicle (III: 91, *Positio*: 500) has an express reference to this calendar:

Fr Prior [who was at Mannanam] received orders to go to Koonammavu at once...and reach there at least on the eve of the Nativity of the Lord.⁵³

Therefore Father Prior completed with great difficulty the printing of the calendar for the year [18]66 and proceeded with it to Koonammavu at six o'clock in the morning on the 23rd.

From this entry it is clear that the calendar was completed and printed at Mannanam before the end of 1865. There is no indication that this is the first time such a calendar was published. Probably Chavara continued to prepare the calendar every year till his death in 1871. We have his letter written to Fr Alexander Kattakkayam in September 1870,⁵⁴ in which he writes:

Please send the calendar for 1871. I thought that the printing of the calendar could be done here. But we find that it is not possible to do so. So you should take the trouble to do it there this year too (CWC IV 1982: 77).

We possess only the 1926 edition of the 1871 calendar. This was commissioned by Archbishop Baccinelli in 1868.

Fr Bernard has the following comment on the calendar:

According to the Syriac tradition the calendar was a perpetual one. But since it was not possible for all to learn it, and since the Ordinary had decreed that the vestments used in the celebration of the liturgy should be of different colours as was the custom in the Latin Church, [Chavara] introduced the tradition of printing in Malayalam the calendar for every year (Bernard 1989:137).

This calendar is of great importance for the simple reason that it gives us a glimpse of the ancient mode of demarcating the seasons of the liturgical year, known and practised in the Church of

⁵³ This was in order to send to Rome some missives through Missionary Leonard, vicar of Kollam, who was leaving for Rome shortly.

⁵⁴ Published in CWC IV 1982: 77f.

St Thomas Christians. The seasons are: Sundays after the Nativity (no name is given to this period); Period of *Denha* (Epiphany), seven weeks; Period of *Saumma Ramba* (Lent), seven weeks; Period of *Qyamtha* (Resurrection), seven weeks; Period of *Sliha* (Apostles), seven weeks; Period of *Qaitha* (Summer), seven to nine weeks; Period of *Sliva* (Cross), seven weeks; Period of *Qudasedtha* (Dedication of the Church), four weeks; Period of *Subara* (Annunciation), four weeks⁵⁵. This calendar evidences Chavara's knowledge of ancient tradition and of his concern to preserve the uniqueness of the St Thomas Christian identity.

The calendar is composed in Malayalam; the dates are noted according to both the Malayalam Era (K. E.) and Gregorian Calendar (A. D.). The months are named according K. E. but adapted to A. D. (e. g. January is *Makaram*), as it was followed in most of the Roman tradition as is presented in missals of 1774 and 1844, and in the lectionary of 1775. But, as seen above, the periods are named in Syriac according to the ancient tradition, e. g. *Denha*, etc.

Liturgical Books Chavara Compiled from Ancient Manuscripts

The Divine Office, the Office for the Dead, and funeral services were the three books, which Chavara compiled from ancient manuscripts. That does not mean that the *Thukasa* and the calendar were exclusively original compositions; in creating them Chavara must have depended, at least partially, on ancient manuscripts as on oral tradition and Roman discipline.

The Divine Office used by the St Thomas Christian priests consisted of several parts like *Hudra*, *Kaskol*, *Gaza* and *Kala*. *Hudra* is the collection of prayers for Sundays and movable feasts of the Lord, and for each day of the Lent; *Kaskol*: prayers for ferial days; *Gaza*: prayers for the fixed feasts of the Lord and feasts of saints; *Kala*: hymns fit for various seasons. Besides there was a book of the Psalms, which contained also some hymns and praises from Isaiah and the Pentateuch. During the nineteenth century they existed in a few manuscripts, which were insufficient for the use of all the priests (cf. Valerian 1939: 222ff.).

⁵⁵ Fr Bernard (1989: 18) gives an interesting description of the periods.

The Divine Office was said everyday in three parts: *Ramsa* (evening), *Leliya* (night), and *Sapra* (morning). In Lent there were four more parts. Naturally the Divine Office as contained in these sources was too long. On ferial days the priests had to recite three *hulale*⁵⁶ (twenty to twenty five Psalms), on Sundays seven *hulale*, and on feast days ten *hulale* and on Christmas night, twenty one, i. e. all the hundred and fifty one psalms. Besides there were the other sections of the Office mentioned above. Recital of prayers of such length was very much time consuming and tedious so much so that the priests tended to neglect it. Besides, the Psalms and other prayers were in manuscripts, which were too few and in a very poor state of preservation. Hence there was need for a compact and manageable collection of the Psalms and prayers of the Divine Office. Chavara took up the challenge and prepared such a handy text of the Divine Office.

As mentioned above, already when he was a seminarian, Chavara with the help of his malpan, Thomas Palackal, made attempts to prepare such a text. Kuriakose Porukara says:

At that time the books of Divine Office, both for festival and ferial days, were in a decaying state. Hence in order to restore the practice Chavara together with his malpan collected the books from different places and worked tediously to write one and practised it with all rubrics (Porukara 1905: 30).

This experience and the training under Malpan Palackal stood in good stead for Chavara to enter upon the project of producing a new set of canonical prayers. In a circular dated 15 February 1869 addressed to the clergy⁵⁷ first he speaks of the order of the Mass already printed. Then he refers to the Divine Office:

Now there remains the other part of the liturgy, which is the Divine Office. The prayers of the Divine Office are very lengthy. For example, we have to recite during these days of Lent 7 *hulale*; on Sundays 10 *hulale*, and for the Nativity of our Lord 21 *hulale*. As for the Divine Office for feasts of the

⁵⁶ The psalms were originally divided into *marmithe/se* (collection of 5 or more Psalms), and into *hulale* (collections of four to five *marmithe*). Cf. also Bernard 1989: 17-19, 137f., 139f.

⁵⁷ The original Malayalam is in AMSJ. It is published in CWC IV 1982: 134-36 and Latin version in *Positio*: 309-11.

saints, because of the difficulty of transcribing the book and because many of the feasts in the missal are missing in the book of the Divine Office and for other reasons, each one in his own convenient way recites the Divine Office. While they say the Mass according to the feasts of the saints, they say the Divine Office according to the ferial days (CWC IV 1982: 135).

In order to avoid such disorders, we have abbreviated the book of the Divine Office according to the order of the vicar apostolic and made it suit the missal. Though we tried through our archbishop to have them printed in Rome, it has been found impossible for the time being. So we have decided to print these books here itself under my own supervision. We have to print the book of the Divine Office, which is in current use and also that for Sundays, feasts and fasts (*ibid.*).

It seems that Chavara had prepared the manuscript already before 1862. In his letter to Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation dated 31 May 1869⁵⁸ he wrote:

We humbly request you to obtain permission to recite the Divine Office for the whole year according to the order, which we had sent to the Sacred Congregation seven years ago for approval (*Positio*: 312).⁵⁹

There is another letter of a much earlier date (probably 1864)⁶⁰. In it we read:

⁵⁸ The Syriac, and its Latin translation are in ACEO, Serit. rif. Mal. 1862-77, f. 219f, printed in CWC IV 1982: 23-25. Both Syriac and its Malayalam translation which is defective are in PQ, doc. 8; Latin in *Positio*: 311f.

⁵⁹ This is from the Latin in *Positio*. In the Syriac original the year 1862 is specifically mentioned in the place of 'seven years ago'. This passage is missing in CWC IV printed text. The Syriac version of this letter is signed by Chavara and about sixty other priests. In the Latin version no signatures appear (cf. *Positio*: 312, fn. 72).

⁶⁰ Cf. CWC IV 1982: 22f. It is preserved in ACEO, serit. rif. Mal. 1862-77, f. 120f. The original in Syriac is in Chavara's hand. It was sent to Rome by Archbishop Baccinelli together with his own introduction. Hence the letter has neither signature nor date. 1864 is suggested because it is stated that the Divine Office was sent to Rome "about two years ago". From the 1869 letter mentioned above we conclude that the breviary was sent to Rome in 1862 (cf. fn. 57).

We are very happy about the extreme care, with which you are scrutinizing our book of the Divine Office which we had sent to the Holy See through Monsignor Wunard, about two years ago. We are gratified to note that the scrutiny of the book is nearing completion. We hope that the scrutiny will be finished soon and the book approved for our use as early as possible. The elderly members of the congregation, in particular, are anxiously waiting to see the approved book of the Divine Office (CWC IV 1982: 22).

Fr Kuriakose Porukara in his biography of Chavara speaks about this:

Being divinely illumined he [Chavara] had the presentiment of his approaching death. He wanted to do everything possible for the good of others. It was his long cherished wish to put in right order the canonical prayers...in accordance with the tradition of the Church. He was for shortening them, if permitted, and bringing uniformity. For this, by the order of the vicar apostolic, he collected from different places old manuscripts. After having a discussion with several malpans assembled at Koonammavu he made the necessary changes with extreme care. He took great trouble to write down in his own hand the whole of the breviary neatly and orderly. He sent it to Rome through Archbishop Bernardine so that, after scrutiny by the authorities, it might be printed there and sent back to Kerala

...

Since in Rome and in the whole of Europe it was a time of great turmoil, it was not possible to print the Divine Office in Rome. Hence it was decided to print it at Koonammavu. With the money received from the priests and seminarians as advance, letters were cut and the book of the Psalms was printed at Koonammavu⁶¹. It was expected to get the rest printed when the vicar apostolic and the missionary Fr Leopold returned from Rome with the necessary permissions (Porukara 1905: 34f., *Positio*: 484f.)⁶². Fr Bernard, after describing the situation prevailing at the

⁶¹ Cf. Bernard 1989: 138 where it is said how a certain Sivaraman was brought to Koonammavu, who cut the necessary Syriac letters.

⁶² The passage cited here is mainly from the Latin version in *Positio* as the 1905 printed Malayalam text is sometimes confusing with additions, omissions, transposition of passages (cf. *Positio*: 47, critical remarks about the 1905 published text).

time of Chavara, speaks of what the latter did in respect of the Divine Office (1989: 139f.). He concludes:

In the prevailing context Fr Prior tried hard to bring the recital of the Divine Office in conformity with the *taksa* [missal] and had one part printed⁶³ accordingly. But due to the demise of the Prior the work did not produce the deserved result (ibid.: 140).

The author goes on to say that Brother Ignatius the son of Aranattukara Tharakan, who was a novice in the congregation, died in 1874 after receiving the subdiaconate. He had worked diligently to get the breviary printed (cf. ibid.). Fr Bernard describes how finally one book (*Shimmapady*, i.e. the text for ordinary days)⁶⁴ was printed and published:

Prior Chavara Kuriakose Elias died in January 1871. Our fathers continued the work he had started in respect of the breviary and were engaged in getting it printed in the order Fr Prior had arranged it. But because of some difficulties the work was discontinued. But Fr Scaria Thattacheril, then [1873] vicar of Koonammavu Monastery, started to print only the prayers for weekdays called *Shimmapady* and completed the printing in 1876 (ibid.: 139).

This was published by Archbishop Mellano in 1876⁶⁵.

Office for the Dead

Chavara prepared also the Office for the Dead and the funeral services. They were printed and published in 1882⁶⁶ after

⁶³ Reference may be to the Psalms which alone was printed before the death of Chavara.

⁶⁴ *Shimma+pady*=ordinary/weekday/ferial+order—breviary for week days.

⁶⁵ (cf. Podipara 1944: 134f.). A copy of this edition with Syriac title *Ksava dThesmesta dHladhsabha dAumase Shimme* ('the Book of the Prayers for the Sunday and Weekdays'), Koonammavu: 1876 can be found in the archives of Dharmaram College, Bangalore. This was in use in the Church till late 1960s when the breviary arranged according to the liturgical seasons and translated into Malayalam was introduced.

⁶⁶ *Ksava dThesmestha dahlap Annide* (Book of the Services for the Dead), Mannanam: 1882 (cf. Podipara 1944: 139).

his death, by his successor Fr Kuriakose Porukara. In the preface of the book Fr Porukara says:

This book consists of a longer and a shorter office for the dead, as it was divided by our respected Fr Kuriakose Elias, whose memory resonates in the whole of Kerala.

Various editions of this work appeared in later years. In 1976 the office and funeral services were published in Malayalam. The funeral section of the book was the abridged version of the prayers then available in manuscripts. There are separate services for priests, religious and laity. The services for the funeral of children were adapted from the Roman ritual.

Rituals Adapted from Latin Tradition

Besides, the funeral services for children, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the lectionary were adapted from the Latin tradition. The first of this was arranged according to the structure of the Divine Office. Besides, some special prayer to St Joseph was added in each part of the office.⁶⁷ This book was never printed (cf. *Positio*: 282). In the case of the lectionary Chavara added some readings taken from the Roman missal to the lectionary already existing, the one which was printed in 1775 in Rome. He is said to have sent the manuscript to Rome around 1865⁶⁸.

Rituals Translated from Latin

Chavara translated into Syriac Holy Saturday services, Forty Hours Adoration ceremonies, and various benedictions from the Latin liturgical books. The Kerala Church, just as the East-Syrian Church, had no services for Holy Saturday. At the same time in the Latin Rite churches there were services. For Chavara this was somewhat embarrassing. Hence he took the initiative to write to Rome in the name of all the vicars of the churches and all the priests and seminarians of the church of St Thomas Christians.

⁶⁷ A copy seems to be in the Mannanam archives. It is produced in PO, doc. 79.

⁶⁸ The manuscript is said to be preserved in ACEO.

There are references to this question in two letters, one probably written in 1864 and the other in 1869⁶⁹. In the first letter we read:

We are sending along with this letter the liturgy for Holy Saturday, translated from the Latin ritual, for your approval. In the Syrian Rite there are no special liturgical services for Holy Saturday. Our churches remain closed on that day like the Jewish synagogues. So I request you to approve it for us and send it back as early as possible (CWC IV 1982: 22f.).

In the second letter the same idea is repeated. It adds:

We humbly request you to approve this for our use, as all the ceremonies from Ash Wednesday to Maundy Thursday are already in use in our churches according to the Latin rite (ibid.: 24).

It is intriguing to note that the Syriac translation is sent to Rome both in 1864 and 1869. Probably the request was made first in 1864 and it was repeated in 1869. It may be noted that already before 1869 permission had been obtained to follow the Latin rite prayers from Ash Wednesday to Maundy Thursday. Permission for the proposed Holy Saturday services was received in 1870. The ceremonies remained in manuscript till 1928, in which year it was printed. *Positio* referring to a document (ACEO, scr. rif. Mal., 1862-77, ff. 52-59) says the vicar apostolic sent the text to Rome for approval in 1865 and it began to be celebrated in certain churches from 1866 onwards. According to Fr Placid (1944: 128) the text was printed at Mannanam only in 1922 (cf. *Positio*: 281).

Parapuram says that one of the permissions Archbishop Mellano obtained during his stay in Rome during the First Vatican Council was related to Holy Saturday service. After stating this Parapuram describes the situation that was prevalent at this time in the Syrian and Latin churches. To make things easy for the Syrian churches, the ceremonies that were then conducted in the Latin churches were translated into Syriac and got the necessary

⁶⁹ The second is dated 31 May 1869. Original in Syriac and Latin version are in ACEO, scr. rif. Mal., 1862-77, f. 219f. The Latin text is published in *Positio*: 311f. Malayalam version is in CWC IV 1982: 23f.; English in CWC IV 1990: 11f. Reference is also found in a letter written probably in 1864 (cf. fn. 56 above).

permission to conduct them during daytime as said earlier. It was conducted at Koonammavu Monastery church probably in 1871⁷⁰ with Fr Scaria Thattassery as the main celebrant. Later it was celebrated at Mannanam; soon also at Elthuruth and Vazhakulam. A new translation was compiled and published in 1984.

Forty Hour Adoration

Chavara, the great practitioner and apostle of Eucharistic devotion, translated the ceremonies of forty hour adoration from Latin into Malayalam and introduced it in the churches with due permission. It was first conducted at Koonammavu in 1866 and in the following years at Mannanam, Vazhakulam and Elthuruth. Thereafter it spread to many churches in Kerala. This devotion was of great inspiration for the faithful for the reform of Christian life (cf. *Positio*: 282f.).

Concluding this section on the reform of public worship one might admire the firm determination and sustained endeavour of Blessed Chavara, the extraordinary patience he displayed even attending to the minute details, to reorganize and harmonize the liturgical celebration of the Church. Although only two items, namely the order of the Mass and the calendar, were printed and published during his lifetime, all the ceremonies he had composed or compiled were in use in the Church. Despite some corrections and additions in later years they continued to be used. Perhaps in the case of the breviary all but one part went out of use since 1876 when the book for the ordinary days was printed. It is only from 1962 they began to be replaced in the wake of the liturgical renewal and restoration process launched at the initiative of Rome. Another remark worth mentioning is that, although Chavara reduced the bulk of the traditional prayers and supplemented them with ceremonies borrowed from the Latin tradition, he was careful to keep the structure, as far as possible, according to the age old practice of the Syrian Church in Kerala. The old liturgical seasons were restored and uniformity of celebration was ensured. By reorganizing and shortening the Divine Office in tune with the ancient tradition of the Church, he facilitated the practice of saying

⁷⁰ Parapuram says that the decision was taken to conduct it in the same year. He is describing events that happened in 1871, after the demise of Chavara. His description about the beginning of Holy Saturday services is given on pp. 1475-77.

it regularly by the clergy. The same should be said about the services for the dead. His love for his Church and its worship-centred life shines with a special glow in these painstaking endeavours, for which the Church should be eternally grateful.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Foundation of the CMC, CTC Congregations

Fr Palackal and his intimate friend Fr Thomas Porukara craved to start a monastery (darśanaveedu, 'house of vision') at least for priests because they were well aware of the fact that many a good thing was not done owing to the want of a religious house ('81: 1; '90: 1).

The words of Chavara, "a *darśanaveedu* (monastery) at least for priests" seem to indicate that the founding fathers of the CMI Congregation desired to open a path to religious living in general (both for men—priests or not—and women). But given their limitations they wanted to begin at least with one for priests. In this connection a reference may be made to the letter Bishop Stabilini gave to Frs Palackal and Porukara exhorting the faithful and churches to give generous donations for the starting and building up of the proposed monastery. It is significant that the prelate mentions the need for opening a door to religious life in general, both for men and women. He says:

In other countries, which were evangelized much later than Malabar [Kerala], and even in those which are not so extensive as Malabar, there are many monasteries for both men and women. You who are ancient Christians, requested the Holy Church to establish for you also similar religious houses. Yet, so far, no steps have been taken for the establishment of a monastery. There are no men and women here who have benefited by the example and labour of the religious. The teaching about the choice of the religious life is not known among laymen and women; and even among the priests (*Carmelite Congregation* 1932: 17).

The bishop goes on to say that the attempt of the two priests (Palackal and Porukara) is "to open a door for religious life" (*Carmelite Congregation* 1931: 17f.). It is quite likely that the letter of Bishop Stabilini was, if not dictated by the two priests, based on ideas suggested by them (cf. chapter 3). From this we might infer that the two had included in their vision religious life for both men and women. The beginning they were attempting—the foundation of a monastery for priests—would eventually lead to religious life for all categories of persons.

No wonder that Chavara who shared and made his own the inspiration, ideas and projects of the two pioneers, entertained a longing for opening religious life to women from very early years of his priestly life. This was a dream he dearly cherished and continuously prayed for realization. While the *Panambu Mat ham* ('bamboo-mat convent') (see below) was getting ready in 1866 in a plot of land, then known as 'Kashandian Parambu' at Koonammavu, Chavara wrote:

It appears that God has been pleased to fulfil something which seemed difficult and for which I have long been praying, namely, a convent for women ('81: 126; '90: 104).

Next year on the day of the blessing of a proper house for the convent, he wrote in the form of a prayer:

Almighty God! It is to make me more indebted to you that you gave me a longer life so that I can see this event, too; let your name be glorified forever and ever. Amen (ibid. 139; 117).

These two quotations, both from the Chronicle of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, amply testify to the intensity of Chavara's desire to have a religious congregation for women, and his joy and sense of fulfilment when it was finally realized.

Religious life for women in Kerala was not something new. Before the seventeenth century the St Thomas Christians had among them not only monks but also nuns (cf. chapter. 3: 1). We do not know when the monastic tradition in India vanished. As seen above, in the seventeenth century there was an attempt to revive monasticism by Archdeacon George of the Cross. But then no attempt seems to have been made to establish any religious house for women. Only in the second half of the nineteenth century

such an attempt started and successfully culminated in the establishment of the Koonammavu convent. Already before that religious houses of foreign orders or congregations of women had started functioning in Goa and some other places. Admission for natives to these houses was very restricted. For example in the Santa Monica Convent in Goa a few indigenous nuns who had been admitted had to suffer discriminative treatment (cf. Mundadan 2003: 154). By the middle of the nineteenth century a few religious foundations for Indian women were started outside Kerala:

1. 'Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary' founded in Pondicherry in 1844
2. 'Servants of Mary, the Mother of Sorrows' at Thiruchirappally in 1854
3. 'Congregation of St Anne' at Thiruchirappally in 1858
4. 'The Regular Tertiary Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Bon Secours' at Pondicherry in 1858 (cf. *The Catholic Directory of India* 1998: 1365, 1854, 1332, 1363). These were minor communities limited in extension and membership.

In this connection a reference may be made to something Chavara notes in his chronicle. The new building for the convent at Koonammavu was completed and inaugurated on 27 April 1867. After the ceremonies the fathers returned to the monastery:

Back at the monastery Fr Delegate [Leopold] took up Mother Teresa's book and opened it to read. What struck his eye was something which he had never read before. Mother Teresa received a letter from some of our ancestors inviting her to come and establish a convent in India. On reading of our miserable plight she wept, and resolved to come to India. Then during prayer, as was her practice, she consulted Christ. He told her, "You need not pray for that now. It will be accomplished, not by you, but by your sons who will, in good time go there and establish monasteries and convents". We felt sure that this discovery of ours was done by her guidance from Heaven and that she would see that the work goes on. I prayed: "Almighty God, I believe that you allowed me...for ever. Amen (see above p. 2).

We have not been able to trace in any of St Teresa's works any such description. Even some experts on St Teresa's writings confessed that they also have not seen anything like that. Mgr Bernardine in a letter expressly says that St Teresa "wished to dedicate a convent for women [in India] to her beloved spouse" (see below). In any case the event only confirmed Chavara's belief that God was guiding him in the foundation of the convent as in all of his undertakings.

In this chapter, after an overview of the religious community started at Koonammavu in 1866, we will concentrate on the following points: 1. how the idea of a religious house for women in Kerala arose and how the first attempts failed to realize; 2. how the effort was resumed and brought to a successful conclusion; 3. what was Chavara's role in these enterprises.

An Overview of the Religious Community of Koonammavu

The whole affair was a dream comes true in God's own time after various vicissitudes, alterations and fluctuations. Locations changed from Alangad Kunnel to Puthenpally and then to Koonammavu. Perhaps names too changed. The humble *Panambu Mat ham* was soon converted into a pukka, well-built convent. Within three decades it branched off into several units and eventually emerged into two well-defined religious congregations: the Congregation of Mother Carmel (CMC) of the Oriental Rite and the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC) of the Latin Rite. This religious community at Koonammavu in the village of Valluvally, a place situated between Varapuzha and North Parur, was started as an inter-ritual congregation. As seen earlier, in 1887 the Syrian Rite Catholics were separated from the jurisdiction of the Vicariate of Verapoly and were distributed in two new vicariates, Thrissur and Kottayam (cf. *Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent*¹ [hereafter abbreviated as CKC] 2002: 297ff.; 188 II: 133f.). Consequently this congregation for women also was divided into three groups in the tenor of the order of the Holy See

¹ This chronicle was preserved in the archives of the CMC convent at Koonammavu; recently it was deposited in the CMC provincial archives, Ernakulam. Its first Malayalam edition was published in 1988 in 2 parts, referred to as CKC 1988 I & II; the English translation by Sr Seraphia was published in 2002, referred to as CKC 2002.

dated 7 April 1889: one in the Vicariate of Thrissur, another in that of Kottayam and the third (all of the Latin Rite) in the Vicariate of Verapoly.

Even after the separation of Oriental Rite and Latin Rite Catholics in 1887, the Koonammavu community continued to be inter-ritual and inter-diocesan. But due to the disturbances caused by some local Christians this arrangement did not last. As we shall see in chapter ten, the Oriental Rite members of the Koonammavu Monastery left for Ampazhakad on 9 March 1889. But, with the support of Bishop Medlycott, Vicar Apostolic of Thrissur, a few of them returned to Koonammavu to attend to the spiritual needs of the sisters and to look after the properties the fathers had at Koonammavu. The local Christians continuously disturbed them. The Convent Chronicle describes vividly the happenings of these troubled days (cf. CKC 2002: 295-300; 1988 II: 131-136).

At this time in this convent, there were sisters belonging to all the three dioceses of Malayalam —Varapuzha, Thrissivaperoor [Thrissur] and Kottayam. Therefore all the three bishops had authority over the convent. Thus, from 1888 there were heated discussions going on, as to the jurisdiction under which this convent was to be. In order to come to a final decision all the three bishops had been writing to the Holy See. Finally, on April 1890, an order came from the Holy See with instructions, to give the convent and all the adjoining buildings to the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of Thrissivaperoor, Most Reverend Bishop Medlycott (CKC 2002: 297; 1988 II: 133).

This assignment was, the chronicle says, based on the strong testimony of Fr Leopold that the funds used for the construction of the convent was collected from the Syrian Christians and their churches. This assignment provoked the local Latin people to have recourse to great agitations and disturbances all of which are painfully recorded in the Convent Chronicle. It was the timely intervention of Vicar Apostolic Mellano that put an end to the disturbances.

When the turbulence had thus been calmed, the archbishop of Varapuzha requested that the Latin sisters of the convent be given to him. So the Bishop of Trichur immediately sent an order to relieve the sisters. Accordingly Rev. Fr Louis,

the brother of Mother Eliswa Vaipissery and another diocesan priest came together here and took seven sisters with them. They were Mother Vaipissery Eliswa, Mother Vaipissery Thresia, Sister Anastasia Pooppanna, Novice Angela Pattiala, Sister Beatrice Pazhampilly, lay Sister Eliswa and boarder Mariam Vaipissery (ibid. 2002: 298f.; 1988 II: 135).

Even after this the sisters at Koonammavu had to suffer a lot from the local Christians. The basis for allotting the convent to the Syrians was the fact that the funds raised for the new convent building came from the contributions of Syrian churches and individuals. Also the plot on which the convent stood originally, belonged to the Syrians. The report Mgr Baccinelli sent to the Propaganda Congregation in 1867 says that the building of the convent was nearing completion, that the funds for this were collected as donation from the faithful as well as from certain churches, and also some priests (cf. *Positio*: 131). Jossy (2005: 36, fn. 84)² quotes differently from the same report: "the construction of the convent building was completed with the money collected from the priests, and the **Syrian** churches". But the word Syrian is not found in the report of Baccinelli, nor in *Positio* (p.318), or even in *Allocana*, to which reference is made. But from the context we can surmise that the funds were collected from the Syrian parishes, priests and faithful.

The letter of the Syrian sisters of Koonammavu written to Mgr Medlycott is clear evidence:

Just as you have known, this convent was built with the money collected only from the Syrian churches and the Syrian people, with much effort and the great interest by our Fr Cyriac Elias TOCD of happy memory, and our other fathers, and they themselves stood by the construction works and supervised them. Ever since it is these fathers who have been attending to most of our spiritual and material needs.

The compound in which this convent stands and the area within the fence belonged to our fathers of the Koonammavu

² The booklet, which we quote as Jossy is: Sr Jossy, CMC and Fr Thomas Kochumuttom, CMI, *Dream Fulfilled* (Blessed Chavara and the Foundation of CMC), Gaziabad: Pushparam Province, 2005.

Monastery. Only after the construction of the convent was completed the above-mentioned plot was bought by us from the fathers with the patrimony amount of the Syrian sisters (quoted in Jossy 2005: 36f., fn. 87).³

The Convent Chronicle does not allude to this letter. But it clearly says that the funds were collected from the Syrian community:

In the first volume of our chronicle we find a clear and detailed description of how the funds were raised for building the convent. Leopold missionary had given a strong and powerful statement of witness that this convent had been built with the sum of Rupees eight thousand (Rs 8,000), collected by Father Chavara Kuriakose Elias, from the Syrian people and the Syrian churches. It is on account of this statement, which was proved with clear evidences that this convent came to be given to the Syrians. This is one great thing that the members of this convent should ever gratefully remember (CKC 2002: 297; 1988 II: 133).

When the construction of the new convent had reached up to the roof Fr Leopold wrote a letter to the churches of Muttuchira and Kaduthuruthy in which he says:

Now the building of a convent for religious sisters, who diffuse perfume like sweet smelling lilies, ... has reached up to the roof thanks to the alms of churches, priests and faithful of the Syrian Rite (quoted in Maniakunnel 2005: 250).

Thalachelloor quotes from the letter Mgr Medlycott wrote to Delegate Apostolic Ajuti dated 27 January 1889:

The new convent was built by the Syrian Prior of Koonammavu monastery with the money collected from the Syrians and from their churches on a piece of land which belonged to the Syrian sisters. It is clear that they would not have done that for the sake of Latins (quoted in Jossy 2005: 36).

³ Jossy says (*ibid.*) a copy of the original letter is kept in the archives of St Teresa's Convent, Koonammavu.

First Attempts and Failures

It has already been stated that the two pioneers of the CMI Congregation, Frs Palackal and Porukara, probably had included in their vision the starting of religious life also for women. It was a dream that Chavara dearly cherished and continuously prayed for. But it remained at the idea and dream level for a long time. He begins the Chronicle of the Convent with these words:

In the land of Malayalam [Kerala] even though the true Christian religion was in practice from very early times, there existed no monasteries or convents. The people had heard of men and women who practised religious virtues but they did not have living examples of religious virginity, except that the men who had the privilege of priesthood lived a life of chastity. As for women, even those who desired to live a virginal life had no way of embracing such a life style. They had no option. They had to accept marriage and live as worldly women. The people were living in this sad plight for a very long time (CKC 2002: 21; 1988 I: 1; '81: 231).

But nothing happened concretely till late 1850s. It was in 1859 that the first attempt was made. About this the chronicle of Varkey Parapuram (p. 656f.) says:

His Grace Archbishop Bernardine announced in a circular to the churches about the charitable funds collected from the churches he had visited in the current year [1861] and in the previous year. He also mentioned in the same circular about the need of establishing a convent for women and about the help required for the same. The people as well as the priests were in general happy about the idea. For this several places were discussed. A place near Alangad Kunnel church was also considered. It is at this time that Mgr Canus, Vicar Apostolic of Thiruchirappally happened to visit Varapuzha. When the matter of the proposed convent was discussed with him, he suggested that it should be located not far away but at a nearby place [near the vicariate headquarters].

Subsequently Puthenpally was found to be an ideal place for the convent. Manampadi Puthenpally is a place between Koonammavu and the bishop's house at Varapuzha. This was also

a stronghold of the Syrian Christians, and was finally decided to be the site for the convent. The plot chosen for the convent, on the eastern side of the cross of Puthenpally church, belonged to the Syrian parish of Puthenpally. This plot was leased to Bishop Bernardine Baccinelli for building and conducting a convent (see below). Soon the construction works began. In the words of Chavara himself:

Then by the grace of God the above-mentioned vicar apostolic [Mgr Bernardine Baccinelli] decided that a convent, too, should be opened for women. In 1860 in the church property to the east of the cross of Puthenpally, the foundation was laid, and incurring a great expense a compound wall of thirteen feet height was being constructed all around (CKC 2002: 21; 1988 I: 1; '81: 231f.; cf. also Parapuram: 617).

Mgr Bernardine Baccinelli wrote letters to the Carmelite communities of Europe, seeking financial help for the construction works of the convent. Among them is a long circular written on 29 June 1860 to the Carmelite Orders of both men and women in Italy, in which it is said that the building under construction could accommodate thirty-three members. On the same date he wrote to a Carmelite convent in Rome:

...she [St Teresa of Avila] wished to dedicate a convent for women to her beloved Spouse. As a matter of fact the foundation stone has already been laid for a convent of the Third Order of Carmelite nuns, engaged in the training of Indian girls (quoted in Jossy 2005: 9f.).

In a brief history of the Puthenpally Seminary Fr Sebastian Kuzhumpil⁴ stated:

Dr Bernardine, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly ... laid the first foundations of... the edifice at Puthenpally in 1859. The idea, which engrossed his thought at the time, was the erection of a convent for promoting female education. He marked Puthenpally as the best place for it... by 1860 a two-storey building was raised (quoted in Jossy 2005: 11f.).

⁴ Sebastian Kuzhumpil, *A Short Outline of St Joseph's Apostolic Seminary of Puthenpally, Travancore*, Ernakulam: 1922.

Now the question is whether the proposed convent was meant for candidates from Kerala or Carmelite Tertiaries from Europe. Kuzhumpil appears to support the latter view when he says (*ibid*):

But before the nuns could arrive from Europe and take possession of the building, the unity of Catholicism in the Malabar coast was once again threatened...

May be Kuzhumpil confuses the idea of having a convent at Puthenpally and Baccinelli's plan to get foreign sisters to work for the young women in Cochin (Kochi). On 19 January 1864 he wrote to the definitor general of the Discalced Carmelites:

I beg you to send me a few nuns of St Joseph for the good of the young women in Cochin, so that the money we spend goes for the Christian and civil education of that town. I have already taken a house on rent and am paying the rent every month (quoted in Jossy 2005: 12).

This project had nothing to do with the building at Puthenpally. While the former was for the nuns of St Joseph to care for the young women of Cochin and not for "Third Order of Carmelite nuns" as is clear in the letter of Bernardine to the Carmelite convents in Rome. According to parish records of Puthenpally, through an agreement between the vicar apostolic and the parish, a plot of land on the eastern side of the church was leased to Bishop Baccinelli for the clearly stated purpose "of building and conducting a convent in the name of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel": Four men, who were members of the parish council and prominent ancient families, signed the deed, transacted on 4 February 1859 (*cf. ibid.*: 8).⁵

⁵ Jossy told this writer that she had seen this document among the parish records. Recently she did not succeed to trace it but it is recorded in the parish chronicle also. It is almost certain that the proposed convent was for Indian women. Perhaps the idea of bringing some European nuns to assist the Indian sisters is not ruled out. Blessed Chavara makes a casual reference that Fr Leopold had a plan to bring some nuns from Europe and make their services to the community at Koonammavu:

We may with a fair sense of reasonableness hold that while Blessed Chavara along with his confreres and the people were planning the new congregation for women, for which a house was being built at Puthenpally, as a sister institution of the CMI Congregation, bearing identical name, Mgr Bernardine certainly interested in the establishment of a convent for nuns and positively using his official capacity for it, had in mind just a house of the Third Order of the Carmelites. It may be added that even later on when the first community of the congregation for women was finally being opened in 1866, it was the constitutions of the Third Order of the Carmelites, first those of the laity and then of the religious, that Mgr Bernardine handed over to them. His idea always was to establish a convent of the Third Order of the Carmelites, if not merely a lay fraternity of it. What Mgr Baccinelli wrote to the Carmelite convents in Rome on 29 June 1860 confirms this (see above).⁶

Blessed Chavara's concluding words referring to the decision to convert the building at Puthenpally to a seminary, do betray his keen interest and involvement in the events under discussion:

A decision was taken to change the convent into a seminary. Accordingly it was made a study house [seminary]. With this we lost all the hope we had [about opening a convent] and again got plunged into the same former sad state of helplessness (CKC 2002: 22; 1988 I: 2).

He was indeed grieved by the decision, and humanly speaking felt hopeless and helpless! In the Chronicle of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, also he expresses similar sentiments:

You can at least say the little office [in Latin]... when moopachan [Fr Leopold] brings the sisters (CKC 2002: 161; cf. also p. 141; 1988 I: 165; cf. also p. 145).

The sisters expected the latter to bring them (cf. *ibid.*: 152f., 166f.).

⁶ Jossy quotes from a copy of this letter kept in the archives of CMC Generalate, Aluva. It is interesting to note that Mgr Bernardine had also the information that St Teresa wished to dedicate a convent for women in India to her beloved Spouse, something, which Fr Leopold allegedly discovered in a writing of the saint, as seen earlier (see above).

A huge wall was being built for the convent for nuns. It was then that the above-mentioned events [Roccas affair] broke out. So the construction works were stopped. Then the authorities, feeling that priests were more needed than nuns, converted the convent building into a seminary, and it seemed that there was no more chance of realizing the plan for a convent! ('81: 126; '90: 103).

But being a man of faith, on the one hand, he was fully resigned to God's plans and gracefully accepted the decision, while, on the other hand, he continued to long and pray that sooner or later the dream for a congregation for women would come true. What his biographer Fr Leopold says about him, is worth quoting:

Never did he himself back out of 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 (Beccaro 2003: 12).

The Dream Comes True

During the years following the arrival of Bishop Roccas on 9 May 1861, Blessed Chavara who was appointed vicar general on 8 June 1861, was fully absorbed in the struggle against Roccas's schemes and in the works to restore unity and harmony in the Church. Naturally, therefore, he was unable to pursue the plan for a convent, although it was certainly kept alive in his thoughts and prayers (cf. 81:126)⁷. But till 1865 the project remained still in the state of wishes and prayers.

In the mean time several things happened, which, in some manner, providentially paved the way for a fresh attempt. As mentioned in chapter four above, the Koonammavu Monastery was given over by Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli to the Mannanam community. They took up residence there in 1857. It became the novitiate house of the congregation in 1859. Fr Leopold Beccaro was appointed novice master in 1861 and provincial delegate in 1863. In 1864 Blessed Chavara himself, at the order of the vicar apostolic, moved his residence to Koonammavu. This made his

⁷ See quotation on p. 2 above, which he wrote in the chronicle in 1865, just after bringing the Roccas affair and matters arising from it to a happy conclusion (cf. *ibid.*: 124-26).

association with Fr Leopold closer and more intimate. Chavara believed that God had sent Fr Leopold to Kerala for the realization of the convent project. In the Convent Chronicle he says:

With this [conversion of Puthenpally building into a seminary] we lost all hope. We had again got plunged into the same former sad state of helplessness. It was when we were thus pulling on our life, that our moopachan, the present delegate provincial, Very Reverend Leopold Maria de San Juse, by his powerful assistance and hard work brought this convent into existence. When we look at what has happened, we are led to think that God had sent him here, solely for the purpose of establishing these monasteries and convents. Why? All the missionaries who had set foot here had left Europe only after the ordination, but he landed up here, in this Malayalam, in December 1859 as a sub-deacon. Having arrived, without tarrying at all at Varapuzha, he came and stayed in the monastery at Koonammavu. Moreover, within a short time of about four or five months he learned the Malayalam language. As the delegate provincial for monasteries and as the master of novices he earnestly carried out all the duties that the archbishop required of him. He also found time to teach many of the novices the Latin language. Meanwhile he received the diaconate and major orders. After his ordination he took keen interest in attending to the spiritual needs of the people belonging to the Koonammavu parish. Through good confessions, he turned many from their former evil ways of life to a new and virtuous living (CKC 2002: 22; 1988 I: 2).

Quite possibly Chavara, during his intimate conversation with Fr Leopold, had brought up his longing for a convent for women in Kerala. Fr Philip Koyipallil in his biography of Chavara expressly says that this happened:

Having performed all these Fr Prior was longing for establishing on Malabar soil a religious house, which would be a citadel of virtues for Malabar girls, where they could learn religion, where they could advance in virtuous living and thus turn out to be good Christians. Fr Prior communicated this desire of his to Missionary Leopold and both of them together approached Archbishop Bernardine and obtained from him the permission to start the proposed

convent. Trusting in God they bought a plot of land at Koonammavu and put up a temporary dwelling made of bamboo mat. They selected girls who longed to lead religious life and accommodated them in the above-mentioned house in 1868 [actually in 1866] (Koyipallil: 57; *Positio*: 558).

Fr Leopold in his short biography of Chavara states:

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 (Beccaro 2003: 12).

It is quite reasonable to think that the two, in their frequent exchanges, talked about this matter. Both were hoping that a way would soon open for its realization. It is in such a context that Fr Leopold happened to know the widow Eliswa Vakayil (Vadakel) aged 34 and her daughter Anna aged 14, who had vowed to spend their life in consecrated chastity. This was perhaps quite an unexpected discovery, but which opened the way to the realization of the wishes of Frs Chavara and Leopold.

The Koonammavu Convent Chronicle has a long description of how Fr Leopold came to know the above mentioned two ladies, how he planned to fulfil their wish and how everything converged into the foundation of the convent (cf. CKC 2002: 22-30; 1988 I: 2-10). These pages were written by Chavara himself and hence are printed in the Complete Works of Chavara ('81: 231ff.; '90: 192ff.). In the Mannanam Chronicle the Blessed wrote:

For years we have been praying for the establishment of a convent, but so long it has not been possible. It seems that now God has willed to bring about the establishment of a convent, for which we have been praying but which till now has not been achieved...

One evening in 1865 our delegate V. Rev. Fr Leopold Maria took me for a walk with him. We went out of the gate of our monastery at Koonammavu and were walking northwards. As we approached the small crumbling mound, he told me: "Here is a widow with a 14 year old daughter whose father had left her half of his properties. The girl does not want to be married. So why not get these two out of their joint family house, settle them down in a house constructed in one of their own properties and engage them in the work nuns do, i.e. teaching other girls the practice of virtue and training them in some handicrafts." "It seems to be a good idea", I answered. "But those who are to inherit their properties after them would not like it and would create obstructions", he observed ('81: 126f.; '90: 104).

Mother Eliswa Vakayil and Daughter Anna

Among Fr Lepold's spiritual daughters were a widow of Vakayil family called Eliswa, aged 34, and her only daughter Anna, aged 14, both of them living in Koonammavu. As the chronicle continues, they shared with him the desire to lead a life of consecrated chastity till death, and entrusted themselves completely to him. As their confessor and spiritual director he considered the desire sympathetically, thoroughly tested its genuineness, and guided them with instructions and corrections. He also made enquiries about their character, and even consulted the other missionaries. And above all he prayed to God to show him the way. Eventually God Himself put an idea into his mind.

Gradually he started thinking out more details of a plan to nurture and protect the two ladies' vocation to religious life. They had some compound and paddy fields as their own, which Anna's father had left to her. This property was being looked after by her uncle, her father's younger brother called Thomman of Varika family. A sickly person, he was also the steward of the monastery. A loan had been drawn on the security of the same property, and its interest was mounting and reaching a point when they would not only lose the land but also run into debt. So it was decided, or rather Fr Leopold hoped, to take this property from him and make a small house in it. Then both of them [Eliswa and Anna] could live there. Besides living a simple and peaceful spiritual life, they could at the same time be engaged in the work of teaching young

girls prayers and other virtuous practices, and also handicrafts like needle work.

As mentioned above Fr Leopold shared his plans to Fr Chavara during their evening walk. The Convent Chronicle says:

Coming to a decision, on a certain day in September 1865, moopachan told all about it to Very Reverend Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who was the prior general of all monasteries. He was very much pleased with it and promised to do all he could for it. So moopachan became very happy and confident at heart.

They approached the vicar apostolic for permission and got it. The latter was keen that the proposed religious community should assume the name 'Third Order Carmelites'. The first set of rules he got translated for them into Malayalam was found to be of the lay fraternity of that order. Though the sisters started with those rules, soon they were given the rules of the 'Third Order Carmelites, Regular' ('81: 127; '90: 124; CKC 2002: 24; 1988 I: 23).⁸

The Panambu Matham, a True Abode of Poverty

Frs Chavara and Leopold soon proceeded to the construction of a modest house for the religious women to be. Fr Leopold personally contacted Anna's uncles Thomman, Pailee and Pappu, of whom the last two were the eldest brothers of her family. The missionary in his negotiation with them promised to pay all the debts incurred on the property, which Anna's father had bequeathed to her. He went around the property and fixed in it location for the proposed convent. A new straight pathway from there to the church was also planned, for which he got the permission of a Hindu landlord.

Although Fr Leopold sought the support of all the three uncles and a few others to construct the house, only the sickly Thomman and his wife who were devout persons extended help.

⁸ Chavara observes that the first rules proved a boon to the other pious women who wanted to live a kind of consecrated life at home, who otherwise would have been unhappy and resentful for being left out. They were given the big scapular and the rules of the lay fraternity (cf. '81: 127).

But the work lagged because of lack of funds. But by the beginning of 1866 some donations were received and with that the work started. Chavara says:

It was built of coconut tree and bamboo mats. It was divided into a prayer hall, a dining room and three other rooms.

More money came from other sources. Chavara continues:

With this money we completed the construction of a house, which was a true abode of poverty. Early in the morning on Tuesday, 13 February, with the approval of Fr Delegate, we sent to the house the "rousing bell" from the quarters of our novices, rosary-beads, nippers, thin wire, scissors, needle, thread, a penknife, inkpot, quill, paper, nails, hammer, lantern, framed pictures, wooden crosses, holy water, porcelain cups and tumblers, ladle, fork, knife, pitcher and goblet. Wooden signboard for placing at the privy and bathroom doors were also provided. A cot, mat, blanket and a small table were put in each of the three rooms. When all was ready the mother superior, the two sisters and the helper⁹ were sent for, as already arranged. They came from the church where they had received Holy Communion earlier, along the newly made road accompanied by the women, who, being their blood relations, were grieved by the thought that they would not be freely seen again. After they had all entered the fenced compound the four women were led forward into the small prayer hall. All the four knelt down there and prayed for sometime. Then Fr Delegate wearing surplice and stole came in and calling them one by one asked them whether they were willing to live in this convent until death keeping the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. He proceeded according to the prescribed form and ended by giving them each the small scapular. Then we sang *Te Deum*, he, in Latin, and I, in Syriac. Everyone sat down and he spoke a few words of good advice. Then the other women were sent off. The inmates were shown how to string the beads, etc. Sr Anna, the

⁹ Who are these sisters and the helper? Already before the *Panambu Mat ham* got ready Eliswa's sister Teresa aged 18 had joined the group. Another unmarried woman Eliswa, a relative of Anna's father, aged 26 was appointed helper to the sisters (cf. CKC 2000: 25, 26).

daughter of the woman who was now the mother superior, being more intelligent, prudent and confident than the others, was learning everything very quickly. By 11 o'clock we finished everything and left. ('81:127-29; '90: 106; cf. also CKC 2002: 24ff.; 1988 I: 4ff.).

The Convent Chronicle (2002: 25ff.; 1988 I: 5ff.) has many more details:

On Tuesday the 13th in the morning at 5 o'clock itself moopachan and priorachan came to the bamboo-mat house and woke up the men who were sleeping there, guarding the things we had kept there. Then they went about seeing to all the things needed in the house. What the many things were, that moopachan cared to furnish the house with, and what minute things he had kept in mind and had accomplished, cannot all be written here.

There follows a long list of the articles (cf. *ibid.*: 27-29; 7ff.).

They had not only brought all these kinds of things but also arranged them with their own hands before we arrived...After having finished all these arrangements by 9 o'clock, they sent for us....

We, with those that were permitted, went in. First we entered the prayer room and knelt before our Lord and prayed in silence for some time. By that time moopachan wearing the surplice and stole came along with priorachan, to the prayer room. Soon we prayed "Father give us your blessing" and kissed his scapular. Father said the prayers that were to be said and he himself clothed all three of us, beginning with the superior, with a small brown scapular and blessed us sprinkling holy water on us (*ibid.*: 29f.; 9f.).

The chronicle adds that surrounding the house, a fence was put up to demarcate the enclosure. Beyond that there was also an external fence all around the compound. A little house owned by a certain Avira in the compound was bought and converted into a kitchen.

Already before the inauguration of the convent another candidate, now from a St Thomas Christian family, Ms Eliswa,

aged 37¹⁰, daughter of Kochuvarkey Vaidian (physician) of Puthenangady family belonging to the parish of Vaikom was waiting for admission. She had been widowed after ten years of her marriage and from then onwards she was living in her parents' house with her brother. It was at the instance of Chavara that she came to Koonammavu. The Convent Chronicle says:

As priorachan knew that she was leading a life of prayer and meditation according to her knowledge and understanding, he informed her through the parish priest of Vaikom, asking her to come if she desired to embrace this new state of life. When she had made her decision to come, her own people and her relations coming to know of it raised many objections and caused many hindrances. Since she did not heed them and dared to come, her uncle (her father's younger brother) Puthenangady Ittoop¹¹ and the parish priest helped her out (ibid.: 27; 7).

Fr Leopold took sometime to discern her spirit and to take a decision. This delay "caused much sorrow and disturbance" (ibid.). Finally she was admitted with the name, Sister Clara (cf. '81: 129). The Convent Chronicle adds a number of details about this event (31f.): how Fr Leopold tested the new candidate, how he together with the Prior (Chavara) came to the convent on the 14th and inquired the sisters about their experience in the convent, how Fr Leopold announced the arrival of Sr Clara and how he inquired their willingness of accepting her, how Sr Clara was introduced to the community. Since the names of the superior and the helper were Eliswa, the new entrant Eliswa Puthenangady was given the name Clara. She was thus received into "the third order of the sisters of Mother St Teresa".¹² Since there were only three rooms

¹⁰ This is according to the Convent Chronicle (2002: 26): married when 16 years old, lived with her husband for 10 years, thereafter for 13 years she lived as a widow at home. But in the Chronicle of Mannanam ('81: 129) she was a 27-year-old widow, which may be a mistake. Probably she was between 37 and 39 years old.

¹¹ Probably it is this Ittoop who accompanied Chavara and others on their way to Thaikkattussery to meet Bishop Roccas (cf. '81: 205).

¹² Was this the name of the community in the beginning? In the introduction of the 1875 constitution we find: "our congregation, which is the third order congregation of St Teresa" (*Positio*: 319).

in the convent Sr Anna was accommodated in the room of Mother Eliswa and her room was allotted to Sr Clara¹³. What follows in the Convent Chronicle can be considered as description of the life of the new community:

The things that Sr Clara brought were to be kept in common and used as if they were all of one family. In order to show their charity and commonness even in words, they were commanded not to say 'mine' 'yours' 'hers', etc., instead they were to say, 'the room I use', 'the cloth Sr Anna uses', 'the bed sheet I use', etc. and that it should really be so in word and deed. After this he showed us how to make rosary and he made us do it by ourselves to ascertain that we had actually learned it. Although by our rules we were permitted only one confession and two communions a week, he gave us permission to receive communion thrice a week (ibid.: 32f.; 13).

Thus the convent started functioning with four sisters and a helper. The two young sisters—Anna and Teresa—took to writing, playing on instruments and needlework. Sister Anna, the daughter of the mother superior, being very intelligent, prudent and confident was learning everything very quickly. It was she who wrote the Convent Chronicle in early days at the direction of Chavara (cf. CWC IV 1982: 108). The two founders, Leopold and Chavara, did all possible to make the life of the sisters comfortable and ardently spiritual. They even searched for some expert person to teach the sisters embroidery and sewing ('81: 129).

The Convent Chronicle repeatedly refers to the various services, spiritual as well as material, which the two rendered to them and the discipline—rather very strict as conceived by Fr Leopold—they were to follow. The phrases like: "our father moopachan and priorachan came together to our convent", "we told our father moopachan and priorachan about it", "they brought

Perhaps 'St Teresa' was added as an implication of the special Carmelite tradition they received.

¹³ Recently a booklet in Malayalam was published on this Sr Clara: Sr Sergius, C.M.C., *Mother Clara, Kerala Suriyāni Sabhayile Pradūma Samyāsini* ('The First Woman Religious in the Syrian Church'), Aluva: CMC Publications, 2005.

us medicine", "they taught us the rules", "they told us to ask for anything that we needed", "they gave us special instruction on the practice of humility and obedience", etc., we find almost on every page.

Thus the two holy priests, in the form of a humble bamboo-mat convent— "a true abode of poverty"— planted the seed of the new congregation for women in Kerala, with four simple but zealous candidates, who, true to the Carmelite spirit of contemplation were "burning with the zeal for the Lord, the God of hosts" (1 Kings 19: 10, 14). The beauty of it was that it was the magnificent result of the concerted efforts and sacrifices of all sections of the people in the society: men and women, the bishop, priests, religious and laity, young and old, rich and poor, those of Latin and Syrian Rites, natives and foreigners, and indeed even persons of other faiths. It was the human sweat blessed by God! A perfect symbol of love and harmony, selfless service, commitment to God and his people with the purest of intentions!

But it was just the beginning of the project, with much more of it remaining undone. How to go about it? It was completely in the hands of God. Chavara writes:

We trusted that God will now complete what we started. We happened to say that He will see to it that a new building is constructed even before the bamboo mats and the coconut leaves had to be changed ('81:129f.; '90: 107).

This was equal to a prophecy, which the sisters recalled:

As written earlier, when we were given the brown scapular of Mary, our Mother, and were put up in the room made of bamboo mats, our superiors Very Rev. Father Delegate and priorachan said as words of good wishes, "God will make you a strongly built convent before it is time to re-thatch and renew the leaves of the roof and the bamboo mats." We too heard these words. But we thought, unworthy worms as we were, we could never expect it. God does not do good to man counting on man's merits but only out of his boundless love and generosity. God has made us understand this, in a light that is even brighter than the broad day light, by doing to us, exactly in the same way as said, in this matter. Even though on the day of entrance into the house it was said so, after that they took interest and busied themselves with our

spirituality and the many things that were to be taught to us. But along with it our priests by their efforts and their letters, made God influence some persons, to give us some donations (CKC 2002: 58; 1988 I: 43f.).

A New Building for The Convent

Persons of good will came forward to help Frs Chavara and Leopold in their effort to replace the temporary structure, the *Panambu-Mat ham*, with a more durable structure. It is in this context the idea of *pidiyari* ('a handful of rice')¹⁴ came up. Chavara tells us:

But for this work that has already been started, i.e. the building of a proper convent in order to accommodate all those who aspired to enter it, we found no resources. As we were about it, a meeting of a few important persons from the north and south was summoned. During the discussion on interest, etc., Itti Kuruvila Thoppil of Pulincunnu and others brought forward the idea of collecting for this holy purpose from each family "the handful rice" they put away every time they take rice to prepare a meal.

The idea was approved and a request was forwarded to the vicar apostolic to send out a circular for this purpose, which he did with great pleasure. Accordingly the 'Charitable Association of Infant Jesus' was formed with the stipulation that every house should keep a box with the label 'Deposit for Infant Jesus'. Every time the housewife cooked rice, she had to put away in it a handful of rice, reciting the short prayer 'Infant Jesus bless us'. Each parish would have this rice collected periodically and sent to the head quarters of the vicariate. Chavara says that the association started functioning in all parishes of the vicariate ('81: 131f.; '90: 108f.).

But the *pidiyari* process would take a long time to materialize a substantial amount. Moreover, there were also other projects of the vicariate, for which money was needed. Hence Chavara and Leopold had to have recourse to other methods to collect funds. Chavara says:

¹⁴ In chapter 4 a reference was made to the introduction of this movement by Fr Geevarghese Thoppil sometime after 1864 for the building of the Pulincunnu Monastery (cf. Parapuram: 1184f.).

The life of the sisters in the present structure was very pitiable. Because it was made of fresh bamboos, bamboo-mats that were not yet dry, and unprocessed tender coconut logs, they fall easy victims to moths and termites. Hence there was need to construct a stronger and permanent building ('81: 132; '90: 109).

So the two priests undertook a weeklong journey to the parishes of Kuttanad collecting funds. The response was good, even though some of the parishes were in acute financial strains. They were able to collect one to two thousand rupees. Now they felt that with this money they could start the construction of the convent (cf. *ibid.*: 133f.; 110f.). The Convent Chronicle notes:

When they came back they brought with them some donations to make a new convent building and started measures for buying another plot of land for it (CWC 2002: 36; 1988 I: 17).

Fr Leopold managed to get at a concessional price two plots of land adjacent to another plot belonging to the monastery. It was decided that these three plots together would be a good spot for the convent.¹⁵

On Saturday 23 *Mithunam* [June] 1866 Fr Delegate accompanied by Fr Prior went to the site and laid the foundation for the convent building ('81: 134; '90: 112).

This is according to the chronicle of Mannanam but the Convent Chronicle in one place (cf. CKC 1988 I: 21; 2002: 40) says that the

¹⁵ In the Chronicle of St Joseph's Monastery, Koonammavu (not paginated) Fr Leopold in his own hand wrote about 3 pieces of land purchased for the convent and the amount paid for them was 22948 *Puthens* (a coin used then in the State of Kochi). Another portion of land was added to the convent, which cost 200 *Puthens*. Some money was taken from the monastery, which was later repaid from donations and the patrimony of the sisters. This is signed by Leopold, 1 January 1868. Mannanam Chronicle [?] pp. 84f. also speaks of 4 plots. CTC *Nālāgamam* p. 19 says: for the purchase of the new land and the convent the patrimonies of all four sisters were also used. A strong foundation was put for a 2-storeyed building, which included the convent, a boarding house and school (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 251).

foundation was laid on 28 *Mithunam* 1866. This is, however, a casual reference. When it describes formally the establishment of the new convent building (cf. *ibid.*: 44; 58) there is an entry:

With this amount, on Saturday 13 *Mithunam* [1866] the foundation stone was laid for the convent¹⁶.

Parapuram (p. 1107) confirms this date when he says:

In the mean time at Talichuva a new convent near the Koonammavu Monastery was under construction. It was on 13 June 1866 that the foundation stone was laid.

In the light of these two references we might accept 13 June 1866 as the more probable date. The Malayalam month (*Mithunam*) given by the chronicle is the same as June. Parapuram gives the English month June. The English translator of the Convent Chronicle gives it as June, while that of the Mannanam Monastery gives it as July¹⁷. In common use of the time *Mithunam* stood for June.

Whatever be the date, the foundation stone was laid, initially, for a small single storied building. On second thoughts, however, they wanted to have a bigger building, for which more money was required. So "after some days the foundation work was discontinued." But soon sensing that the people would be generous in contributing to this noble cause, and that God's providence would not fail them, they decided to go for a two-storey building:

Seeing that God was directing and plentifully blessing them through all the ways and means that the priests adopted and through all whom they approached, they decided to make a two-storey building and also to build a closed building for a boarding house and school with walls built in single stones. After the feast of the Nativity of Mary on 8 September, the foundation was dug up along both the eastern and western walls that ran north and south. Since our Fr Delegate was not quite satisfied and felt that the foundation laid for the school and boarding house was not strong enough, he made them to

¹⁶ Jossy p. 23, fn. 75 seems to confuse the sources.

¹⁷ The dates given here are according to the printed texts. The original manuscripts, except Parapuram, have not been consulted.

erect some pillars on the outside of the foundation wall, and the work of all the three buildings were started together as if they were a single unit. Thus the masonry work started in September (CKC 2002: 59; 1988 I: 44).

Then onwards it was a clear instance of God directing the events in a surprising manner through people of good will. There was hardly ever any cash in store. Once or twice loans were taken from the monastery and from some others to continue the work. But Fr Leopold was not happy about this way of meeting the expenses. So they decided to keep the work either going or suspended depending on the money being made available or not by God's providence. But to their great joy and amazement, just enough money would always come so that they never had to stop the work. The Convent Chronicle has recorded the fathers' own testimony:

Often when we feel that money is over and think that we can stop the work next day, an amount comes to us from somewhere. Likewise, we were thinking about the great amount that would be required to purchase wood for such a big construction. Then a man came and offered to give a good *akil* wood at the rate of three and a half rupees, while the rate till the previous year was eight or nine rupees¹⁸.

The chronicle goes on describing the ways money came in and says: the new house was complete and ready for entrance by Ash Wednesday —the day, on which they had received the small scapular and entered the bamboo-mat house (CKC 2002: 59f.; 1988 I: 44ff.).

Chavara gives a good description of the inauguration of the new convent:

In the year '67 the Almighty God showered a blessing on us; the nuns, who, in '66 April started staying between bamboo-mat walls, were transferred on 27 April '67 to the newly finished building with all rooms fully furnished. The prayer

¹⁸ Fr Leopold wrote in his account book that the convent was constructed from the donations collected from the Latins and the Syrians. The construction cost of the convent was 4500 rupees (ACO, *Ponenza 1890, sommario*, p. 10, cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 252f.).

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¹⁸ Fr Leopold wrote in his account book that the convent was constructed from the donations collected from the Latins and the Syrians. The construction cost of the convent was 4500 rupees (ACO, *Ponenza 1890, sommario*, p. 10, cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 252f.).

room had Stations of the Cross; the chapel had an altar, flower-vases, etc. The dormitories were provided with picture-frames, cots, mats, blankets and chamber pots. In the dining room were towels and white plates. Inside the parlour were a confessional, a grating and a register. The chapel had an arrangement for the nuns to receive communion without entering the chapel. All this was made possible for us who had taken the vow of poverty thanks to God who brought to us Rs. 8000/- in donations ('81: 138; '90: 115f.).

The day the sisters entered the new convent was also the day of their vestition. The two priests took meticulous care to furnish the house with all the necessary gadgets. The Convent Chronicle gives a detailed description of the preparations (CKC 2002: 62-65; 1988 I: 48-51). Fr Kuriakose Porukara gives a touching account of the effort of the two priests to build the new convent:

The desire was to construct a convent of the European style, but it was a time of financial crisis. With the donations the monasteries were just pulling on, and all were tired and feeling helpless. Still they hoped against hope, and more than Rs 8000.00 was collected from the archbishop, by the programmes like "the handful of rice," and in a miraculous way, so to say, from the parishes and priests, and, in a manner unheard of, from the priests who were contacted through letters. And within a short period of time a convent of unusual model was constructed, and was furnished with all the necessary things already during the next Lent. It was a matter of amazement to watch that, although so many workers were employed at the expense of a huge amount, the work had never to be stopped for want of money. It reminds us of the Scriptural words, "We are taken for people having nothing, though we have everything" (2 Cor 6:10) (*Alocana* Book of Mannanam: 139f.; Valerian 1939: 216).

Finally comes the day, when the community moved from the bamboo-mat convent to the new building:

At 6 a.m. on 27 March the four sisters and the new helper Teresa ... and an old pious woman from Edakochi ... came through the new gate along the new path and entered the new convent. Fr Delegate received them and put on them the cassocks, scapulars, veils, etc. with the assistance of the

helping woman... They were shown the big bell, the small bell and the rattle. An old man was appointed as procurator ('81: 138; '90: 116).

The Convent Chronicle gives details of the vestition ceremony. In the presence of Blessed Chavara, Fr Leopold, following the prescribed rituals gave them, first Eliswa, secondly Anna, thirdly Teresa and fourthly Clara, the religious habit of the Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced, consisting of the cassock with a cord as belt, scapular and veil. Thereafter the convent was blessed beginning with the prayer room and ending in the common room (cf. CKC 2002: 66f.; 1988 I: 52f.).¹⁹ Blessed Chavara concludes this entry by narrating what Fr Leopold read in one of the writings of St Teresa about a convent in India, to which allusion has already been made. At the end he prays:

Almighty God, I believe that you allowed me to live so long that I may be able to see this and feel all the more obliged to you. Greater praise be to you now and forever. Amen ('81: 139; '90: 116f.).

In 1869 a chapel attached to the convent was constructed with funds received from Lady Elizabeth Clarke and a few other benefactors. It was blessed by Vicar Apostolic Mellano on 12 June 1869. Blessed Sacrament began to be preserved in the chapel only from 1870 (cf. *CTC Nālāgamam*: 156f., Maniakunnel 2005: 255).

Nature and Characteristics of the Congregation

As said in the beginning of this chapter the founding fathers of the religious community at Mannanam had probably included in their vision of religious life in Kerala both men and women. It was first realized in the foundation of the congregation for men in 1831 at Mannanam. What they envisioned for this community was deep (contemplative) prayer coupled with solitude, austerity and penance, and service of the community at large, patterned more or

¹⁹ *CTC Nālāgamam*: 41f. says that the real novitiate of the sisters started on 27 March 1867. On 16 July 1868, the feast of Our Lady of Mt Carmel, after a retreat of 10 days, the four sisters made their profession before Fr Leopold in the presence of Chavara (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 253, 254); cf. also CKC 2002: 188-90; 1988 I: 202-4.

less on the Dominican lifestyle. Their vision of religious life for women could not be of a different type. It was such a form of life for women, a convent, which Blessed Chavara had been longing and praying for (cf. '81: 126).

By the time the Koonammavu convent was established the congregation for men had received the Carmelite rules and style of life, which only added to the original vision of prayer and ministry. Hence the congregation for women was in a position to imbibe not only the original charism of the men congregation but also the Carmelite form of it. It was Fr Leopold Beccaro who was instrumental for the men religious to follow closely the Carmelite life style. It was he who, as novice master, formed the young religious. It was he who revised the constitutions of 1855 and made it to conform to the OCD constitutions as nearly as possible, probably with a view to eventually making the CMI Congregation an OCD province for which he tried. The 1855 rules were given them by Archbishop Baccinelli, but Fr Leopold polished them with a vision of this future. The first rules of the congregation for women were given by Baccinelli, but Fr Leopold kept on improving them to make them more and more conformable to the constitutions of St Teresa of Avila, i.e. of the Discalced nuns.

When Alangad Kunnu was first selected for the convent, there was no mention of any definite scope for it (cf. Parapuram 657). When Puthenpally was chosen for the convent and the property was acquired for it from the parish there, it was for "building and conducting a convent in the name of the Immaculate Holy Mother of Carmel". This name suggests a replica of the CMI Congregation or the Carmelite Tertiaries of Mary Immaculate. Another point to be noted is that the building was surrounded by a thirteen feet high wall, which meant a strong cloister. Mgr Baccinelli gives certain characteristics of the proposed convent in his letter written in 1860 to different religious communities in Rome (cf. Jossy 2005: 8f.). The two-storey building was for thirty-three members, "the virgins who are anxiously waiting to enclose themselves in the solitude of the convent", "the so many young girls longing to stay in the convent to dedicate themselves to the Spouse, Jesus, who has called them to Himself." The proposed convent was to be named 'Third Order of Carmelite Nuns', who would be engaged in the Christian education of Indian girls. Already the twofold purpose of the proposed house for women is defined: it is to dedicate themselves to prayer and meditation in a

well-protected cloister, and at the same time they would engage in the work of education of girls.

When Blessed Chavara and Fr Leopold discussed the concrete steps to be taken for the establishment of the convent at Koonammavu the idea proposed and endorsed was to settle the selected women in a house "and engage them in the work nuns do, i.e. teaching other girls the practice of virtue and training them in some handicrafts" ('81: 126f., '90:104); "so that they could, besides living smoothly their spiritual life, be engaged in the work of teaching girls prayers and other virtuous practices, and also handicrafts like needle work, etc" (CKC 2002: 23; 1988 I: 4). Baccinelli in his report of 1867 (cf. *Positio*: 132) says that the sisters rigorously follow the discipline of community life and cloister. These references clearly show the kind of life, which the sisters were called to follow and which they conscientiously lived: regular community life of prayer and penance in the cloister and Christian education of young girls. In the same report Baccinelli says that the institute at Koonammavu was of the same nature as that of the 'Pious Ladies' (*Maestre Pie*). At that time there were two different institutes of 'Pious Ladies'.²⁰ Their primary goal was the character formation and education of girls. Education of women was a definite goal of the Koonammavu institute. The permanent building completed in 1867 had a section where girl students stayed under the care of the sisters. This was called *Educantat* (Boarding House) (cf. CKC 2002: 63f.; 1988 I: 50). The name and the rules given to the institute are indicative of its juridical identity. We have seen two names already: Community of the 'Immaculate Holy Mother of Carmel' (Puthenpally document), 'Third Order of Carmelite Nuns' (Baccinelli), both reminiscent of the name which the Mannanam community received after 1855. In the revised constitutions introduced in 1875 (cf. p. 1) there is a slightly modified form of the name, 'Third Order of the Congregation of St Teresa', a name not probably used as such but indicating the relation to the Discalced Carmelite nuns. Mgr Baccinelli says that the congregation in Kerala was of the nature as that of the Pious Ladies of Europe. If this is the case its juridical status would have been that of a secular institute. But the final form of the given constitutions was that of the Third Order of

²⁰ 'Maestre Pie Venerine' and 'Maestre Pie Filippini', both founded in the 17th century (cf. *Positio*: 318).

Carmelites (cf. '81:127). This must have happened either in 1865/66 itself or a little later, definitely before the death of Blessed Chavara. He says:

On being told about it [the rules given were of the Lay Fraternity of the Carmelite Order] already translated into Malayalam, the Archbishop suggested that we could start that also. Then he gave the rules for the religious sisters and they were translated into Malayalam ('81:127.)

Thus there is mention of two sets of rules translated into Malayalam. Of these the first set was that of the lay fraternity. Was the second a modified form of the same or the real rules of the Third Order Regular? The author of *Positio* (p. 318) says: "As far as we know, in 1866, there did not exist a proper constitution of third order regular". Then what was the constitution Archbishop Baccinelli gave to the Koonammavu community of nuns? In his 1867 report Baccinelli says that the rules are those, which are already approved for a secular institute. Further he says that he made some changes in order to suit them to the given context just as he had done in the case of the men religious and that the scope of the institute was to train and educate girls (cf. *Positio*: 131). From all these we might draw the conclusion that the rules given by Baccinelli was an adapted form of the rules of the lay fraternity, but with simple religious and dispensable vows (as those of the men religious), community life and strict enclosure (cf. *Positio*: 133, 132). The rules were so adapted as to make this institute a third order regular.

Fr Leopold thoroughly revised these rules and gave them to the community on 16 July 1875. The Convent Chronicle says:

After this we received our new Regula constitution and following it, all of us who had made our vows earlier, renewed our vows according to the new constitution. This constitution was a translated form of the Regula (constitution) of our Mother St Teresa, and made to suit the people of this country and their situations. The constitution observed till now was the abridged constitution for the third order, which was used abroad (CKC 2002: 266; 1988 II: 97).

From this we might conclude that the new set of rules was an adapted form of the rules of the OCD nuns. It is not clear

whether the new rules were approved by the ordinary or not. Fr Leopold made all the sisters renew their vows according to the new rules given in 1875. The rules and directory ('rituals' as Maniakunnel calls the latter) are clear evidence that the sisters at Koonammavu strictly observed all the austere practices such as penance, abstinence, silence, etc., as they existed among the Discalced Carmelite nuns.

From early 1860s Fr Leopold was revising the rules of the CMI in order to adapt them more and more to the rules of the OCD. When he did this perhaps he had in mind, as we have already observed, the eventual possibility of making the men congregation an OCD province. May be the same spirit moved him in the revision of the rules of the sisters' congregation in 1875. These are the oldest extant rules of the congregation. In them details of all aspects of religious life are described: prayer life, solitude and cloister regulations, vows, community life, administration, formation of novices, precepts on food and clothing, etc. Already in 1867 we have in the Convent Chronicle a description of the habit with which the first nuns were clothed on the day of their profession: the habit (cassock), a cord as belt, the scapular, the big veil (cf. CKC 2002: 66; 1988 I: 52). The colour of the habit was white. 1875 constitution (p. 64) says:

As a symbol of internal purity our sisters of the third order shall wear clothes of white colour (*Positio*: 320).²¹

In the same year (1875) the sisters were given detailed statutes or directory: celebration of important feasts, chapter of faults, various prayers and customs and practices in the dining hall, practice of meditation, examination of conscience, renewal of vows, ringing of small and big bells, election of the superior, assistant superior and procurator, vestition of candidates, administration of the last sacraments, ceremonies for the dead (AST, "Directory of the Sisters of Discalced Carmelite Order 1875"). These directives were the same as practised in the monasteries and convents of the Discalced Carmelites. They were written in Malayalam (probably translated from the text used by the Discalced). Prayers to be recited by the sisters are given only in

²¹ It was from 1897 the sisters began to wear the brown habit (cf. Jossy 1991: 141).

Malayalam, and those to be said by the officiating priests are given in Latin. You find very often some Syriac words used in the text (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 260). The hand of Blessed Chavara may be seen here as it is probably he who helped to insert the Syriac words in the statutes. Moreover the Convent Chronicle tells us that the regulations or directions related to vestition ceremony were written out fully by Chavara (CKC 2002:74f.; 1988 I: 62).

There seems to be some confusion regarding the administrative authority of the convent. The 1867 report of Baccinelli says that the religious institute at Koonammavu depended, just as the third order men were, on the OCD superior general and also on himself. He also says that the sisters were entrusted to the care of the missionary (Leopold) and the Prior of the men religious (cf. *Positio*: 131). In the 1875 constitution (p. 4) Fr Leopold gives the following order of authority: 1. vicar apostolic, 2. OCD general, 3. delegate of the provincial, 4. mother superior. Maniakunnel (2005: 261) says that there is no evidence that the OCD general had any authority over the sisters. May be both Baccinelli and Leopold derive their views from the fact that, just as the third order men religious, the sisters also belonged to Discalced Carmelite family and hence depended upon the superior general of the order.

Blessed Chavara and the Congregation for Women

We have been so far trying to explore 1. the origin of the idea of a women religious community; 2. the different attempts made for its realization, 3. the foundation at Koonammavu; 4. the nature and characteristics of the congregation. Our main concern is about the role played by Blessed Chavara in all these. Before attempting to define it, we might examine the various views expressed about the question of the founder/ founders of the congregation.

There have been various opinions or various shades of views on this question. Maniakunnel (2005: 266-279) discusses these opinions and comes to his own conclusion. There is a small minority of writers (e. g. Marottikaparambil, Prescilla Mary, Pereparambil), who consider the two of the first members Eliswa and Teresia, as founders. Some others (e. g. Pulcheria) consider Eliswa and her daughter Anna as the founders. V. A. Pascal speaks only of the effort of Fr Leopold and Fr Thomas Guimar Panambil,

secretary to Mgr Baccinelli in founding the convent. In no other writing we find the name of Panambil²². These writers have scarcely recourse to original sources but mostly depend upon secondary material.

A few who, using more original sources, consider Fr Leopold as founder (e.g. Vazhappilly, Chummar).²³ Most of the writers consider both Fr Leopold and Blessed Chavara as founders. Only one of them, Chandy Kattakayathil, includes Archbishop Baccinelli among the founders.²⁴ Of others some (Urumpackal, Thalachelloor, C. J. Mary) give greater importance to Fr Leopold.²⁵ Some writers of this group name Leopold as founder and Chavara as cofounder. Others give equal importance to both and for them both are founders (Bernard, I. C. Chacko, Pazheparampil).²⁶ There are quite a few who give greater importance to Chavara (Jossey, Valerian, Kanjirathinkal).²⁷ There are very rare cases of writers who consider Chavara as the only founder (cf. Laçko).²⁸

Maniakunnel analysing the original documents tries to arrive at an objective conclusion on the founder question. He says that Blessed Chavara had the desire and plans to establish a convent and made attempts for the same. But that alone does not make him a founder. After this the author picks up some relevant passages from the writings of Chavara, especially the Convent Chronicle and the Mannanam Chronicle to prove that he clearly stated that Leopold Beccaro was founder of the convent. He quotes two passages from the Convent Chronicle as found in the complete works of Chavara ('81: 232; '90: 194; CKC 2002: 22; 1988 I: 2).

²² Marottikaparambil 1998: 176f.; Prescilla, M.: 38-43, 303; Pereparampil 1997: 319f.; Pulcheria 1991: 6-10; Pascal: 134. Most of the bibliographical notes in this and the following footnotes are collected from Maniakunnel 2005: 266ff.

²³ Vazhappilly 1939: i-iv, Chummar 1966: 5-7.

²⁴ "Diary of Kattakayathil Chandy", ASJM, p. 45.

²⁵ Urumpackal 1986: 197, 285. Thalachelloor 1990: 71; Mary 1985: 73.

²⁶ Bernard 1989: 241. I. C. Chacko: 506, Pazheparampil 1917: i.

²⁷ Jossey 1997: 21f. Valerian 1991: 34f.; 1939: 208ff. Kanjirathinkal 1986: 57dd.

²⁸ Laçko, *Oriente Cattolico*, Vatican City: 1974.

The context of the first passage is the feeling of loss and helplessness Chavara experienced when the Puthenpally building was converted into a seminary. It was then by the effort and help of Fr Leopold that "this [the project of the convent] happened to be realized" (CKC 2002: 22; 1988 I: 2). The second passage in the Convent Chronicle is about Fr Leopold's sharing his concrete plan with Chavara. Chavara's answer was simply "I feel that the idea is excellent" ('81: 127; '90 104), or "He was very much pleased with it and promised to do all he could. So moopachan [Leopold] became very happy and confident at heart" (CKC 2002: 23; 1988 I: 4).

Here a few observations need to be made. Blessed Chavara never says that Fr Leopold was the founder as claimed by Maniakunnel. What he says is that Fr Leopold was sent by God to establish not only convents but also monasteries. What he says is that the project of the convent which was in his mind for a long time and for which he had been praying (and quite probably cooperating with Baccinelli to start), became a reality "with the assistance and efforts of Leopold". Again it may be noted that Fr Leopold (who must have heard so often from the Prior about the project) wanted the consent of Chavara to launch it concretely. He became very happy and confident at heart when the latter approved the suggestion and promised all help. Here what we get is the impression that it was a work undertaken by the two together, in perfect harmony. Just as Chavara attributed to Leopold the foundation efforts, Leopold does it to Chavara.

The controversy that was unleashed in connection with the plan of dividing the community is, Maniakunnel rightly observes, based on the land, on which the convent was built and the money that was spent for the building. (This started only after the separation of the St Thomas Christians from the Archdiocese of Verapoly in 1887). Mgr Mellano wanted that the convent be declared Latin and given over to his vicariate. For this he argued that the convent was built by the first Latin members in their own house and on their own land. He further argued that Missionary Leopold founded the convent as ordered by Archbishop Baccinelli. Bishops Medlycott and Lavigne (Vicars Apostolic of Trichur and Kottayam respectively) claimed that Fr Kuriakose Chavara constructed the convent with the money collected from the

Syrians.²⁹ Delegate Apostolic Ajuti gave a more neutral opinion in his letter dated 30 August 1889:

In fact the convent was built under the auspices of Fr Leopold, delegate superior of the convents of the Tertiaries, helped by Fr Kuriakose Elias, superior of the Tertiaries, and by many members of his congregation, some clerics of which collected money mainly from the Syrian churches and people; and for this they had letters from Fr Leopold and Fr Kuriakose Elias (Maniakunnel 2005: 276).

After alluding to this controversy Maniakunnel refers to the charism and spirituality of the sisters and states that they came from Fr Leopold. The reasons given for this statement are: 1) It was Fr Leopold who determined the goal, namely contemplation, and action, i.e. the apostolate of educating girls. 2) Most of the instructions and the major share of formation given to the sisters were Leopold's contribution. The implication is that Leopold played a more decisive role in founding the convent. To corroborate the same implication the author brings in a few statements of Fr Leopold himself as found in the CTC chronicle.³⁰ On some occasions he stated that he was not the founder of the convent and immediately attributed it to St Teresa. On one occasion he says that neither he nor Fr Chavara is the founder but God made them to do it (*CTC Nalagamam*: 20, 66, 47f., cf. also CKC 2002: 56, 73, 132.). For Maniakunnel these are indirect ways of accepting the responsibility as founder/founders. He then refers to the charism and spirituality of the sisters, and says that they came from Fr Leopold as it was he who determined the goal namely contemplation and teaching girls. Most of the instructions and the greater part of the formation were his contribution. When

²⁹ ACO, Ponenza, Marzo 1890, summario, p. 36f. (letter of Mellano dated 28 Nov. 1888), p.45f. (another letter of Mellano), pp. 38- 44 (letters of Medlycott, 27 January and 12 April, 1889), p. 52f. (letter of Lavigne), cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 275f. fns 111, 112, 113, 114, cf. also *ibid.*: 263f.

³⁰ Sr Pulcheria, ed., *CTC Nālāgamam, 1866-1890*, Edapally: 1990, pp. 20, 66, 47f.; (cf. also CKC 2002: 73; 1988 I: 61): "It is only God's miracle that... we were able to put up this building"; p. 73: "This convent was not made by me or by priorachan. It was God who made us to do it for you".

Fr Leopold came to learn that the community of sisters was divided on the basis of their respective Rites (1890) he expressed his sadness in the words, "What became of my instructions and works? Let the will of God be done in everything"³¹. This outpouring, Maniakunnel considers characteristic of a founder. He concludes that the original sources point to Fr Leopold as founder and Chavara as co-founder (cf. p. 278). This is repeated as his considered opinion (cf. p. 279).

A few comments might be in place here. The claim that Fr Leopold determined the goal of the community is debatable. As pointed out earlier the founding fathers of the CMI Congregation probably had in view the starting of a convent for women. If so naturally the goal they envisioned would not have been different from that of their own religious community: contemplation and pastoral action. Chavara's idea also could not be different. From the time a convent building was planned and executed it was to be a Third Order of Immaculate Mother of Carmel, which could not but be similar to the third order for men. Already in 1860 Baccinelli wrote to a Carmelite convent in Rome, "The foundation stone has already been laid for a convent of the Third Order of Carmelite nuns engaged in the training of Indian girls." Hence Kuzhumpil had no problem in stating that the proposed convent was "for promoting female education." It is such a convent, Chavara felt lost and longed to establish or re-establish. It was such a convent about which he must have talked to Fr Leopold at least from 1864 onwards. No wonder, then, he whole-heartedly accepted and approved Fr Leopold's concrete proposal for such a convent. The goal of the future convent had already been determined.

Fr Leopold did not newly draft the rules given to the community. The original rules adapted to the situation were given by Archbishop Baccinelli. The 1875 rules were, as indicated above, adapted from the rules of St Teresa, i.e. of the Order of the Discalced nuns. Fr Leopold did a similar service to the TOCD for men from early 1860s onwards, correcting and improving the original rules with a view to making them as conformable as possible to the rules of the Discalced Carmelites.

³¹ Letter of Leopold in the Archives of St Joseph Vidya Bhavan (ASJVB), Edapally, as quoted by Maniakunnel.

It is true that Fr Leopold played a greater role than Blessed Chavara in imparting instructions to the women community of religious and in moulding the novices. This is because he, as delegate, was primarily in charge of the convent administration and discipline. Though Archbishop Baccinelli had entrusted the convent to the care of Fr Leopold and Blessed Chavara, it was the former who assumed greater responsibility. This he did probably in his capacity as delegate of the vicar provincial³². Chavara's role also is not defined by any document but seems to have been presumed and recognized by the ordinary and the community of the nuns who always calls him priorachan and also 'our father'.

Taking all this into consideration it is best to say that both Fr Leopold and Blessed Chavara are the founders of the religious community of women founded at Koonammavu in 1866. Otherwise there will be no end of problems. There is not much to be gained in distinguishing between founder and co-founder. The sisters of Mother Carmel (CMC) have wisely accepted both of these great men as their founders. Maniakunnel (p. 310) somehow or other acknowledges this when he concludes his account of the foundation of the convent: "The little seed that was sown by Fr Leopold Beccaro and Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara at Koonammavu in 1866 began to grow up rapidly." Here it may also be pointed out that the decree of the Holy See approving the miracle of Chavara before beatification clearly stated that Chavara founded the CMC Congregation assisted by Fr Leopold. We will now speak at length about Chavara's role in the founding and early growth of this religious community.

Personal Profiles of Fr Leopold, Blessed Chavara

We have been so far discussing the question of founder/founders of the first religious community for women in Kerala.

³² We possess no document, by which Fr Leopold was appointed delegate. This position seems to have been assumed since he was the officially appointed delegate for the third order for men. The sisters felt that he had been appointed their superior.

This bishop [Baccinelli, vicar provincial per order of the superior general of the OCD] has appointed a delegate giving him the power to see to the smooth running of the monasteries and also to establish and run convents and to admit sisters to the same order. This delegate is the missionary apostolic of Malayalam - Very Reverend Fray Leopold Maria de San Juse of the Order of Carmelites Discalced (CKC 2002: 267; 1988 II: 98).

The conclusion arrived at is that the wisest solution to the problems involved is to acknowledge Fr Leopold and Blessed Chavara as founders. We are now in a position to figure out the specific role that Chavara played in establishing, in running and in the all-round development of this community of women. In order to grasp this role better, it may be useful to draw a sort of personal profiles, not only of Blessed Chavara but also of Fr Leopold. Both were involved, each in his own way, in the process of building up the community, spiritually and materially.

Father Leopold, from the beginning of his missionary career in Kerala, tried his best to identify himself with the community here. Unlike many other missionaries he learned their language, Malayalam, and used it effectively in all his dealings. He made it a point to keep good relation with persons of influence in the society, which turned out to be a great asset in his activities. His popularity among people of different standings was such that so many of them came to visit him when he was about to depart for Europe in 1869. The rush was so great that he hardly got time to eat or rest. They loaded him with presents, which he could distribute in Europe as Indian specialties. The Convent Chronicle gives a long list of the articles and expresses its inability to name all (cf. CKC 2002: 144f.; 1988 I: 144). He was intelligent, sagacious, quick to come to decisions, and greatly efficient in carrying out his plans. His comparatively young age (was only 29 years old in 1866, he was born on 30 August 1837, cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 68) and active temperament stood him in good stead in his career. He was challenging, self-confident and articulate, almost verging towards authoritarianism. Fr Leopold's energy and resoluteness have been praised by many. He was an ardent missionary devoted to the cause of the Church which he served well in Kerala. He entertained great esteem and liking for the St Thomas Christians, had even been accused of being partial towards them.³³ His zeal for the wellbeing and all-round development of the religious congregation for men was immense. He took great trouble to convert the then TOCD into OCD or at least give them some independence by obtaining a vicar provincial distinct from of the vicar apostolic, though he did not succeed (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 210ff.). Blessed Chavara was his best friend

³³ Mgr Baccinelli reported to Rome (5 Oct. 1865) about the revolt of the Latin Christians against Frs Leopold and Philip OCD (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 100).

whom he loved, esteemed greatly and on whom he always relied. Because of his concern for the welfare of the St Thomas Christians, he strove to get for them a separate ecclesiastical set-up proper to their Rite and traditions. Both his special interest in the growth of this religious congregation and also in the well-being of the St Thomas Christians as a whole, became issues with other missionaries and Archbishop Mellano. Because of this he had to suffer much and finally leave Kerala.

What we have seen so far are the very positive traits of Fr Leopold's personality. But certain other traits are of a rather equivocal character. It seems that he was not above what has been noted as a characteristic of Europeans: an innate, maybe unconscious, superiority complex. He had a domineering personality which expressed itself in various ways. His was somewhat of a scheming disposition, one easily able to influence people in high positions and get things done according to his plan, to some degree aggressive in carrying out his plans and decisions. Here are a few instances which may unravel these rather ambiguous traits of his personality.

Fr Leopold seems to have been somewhat of an impetuous temperament. On his first journey from Europe to Kerala in 1859, he with his companions disembarked at Kollam. From there the journey was in a country boat. His enthusiasm to reach Varapuzha at the earliest made him impatient of the slow movement of the boat and wanted the rowers to speed up. He did not know the Malayalam word to use. Someone told him the word was *vegum* ('quick'), which in his haste he heard 'bugam'. So he used the latter word to goad the rowers. This story he himself later told his Malayalam teacher at Koonammavu (cf. Parapuram: 617).

As mentioned earlier Fr Leopold was revising the rules of the men religious given in 1855. Once he completed the revision and made copies of the revised version, he did not feel any qualm to have all the copies of the old rules committed to fire. Of course the intention was to avoid giving rise to confusion. But the action was rather rude and authoritarian. The next generation badly missed them when they wanted to know what exactly their contents were and had to have recourse to surmises based on what the elder

members told them.³⁴ The missionary, with or without the consent of his prelate, acted rather in a high-handed manner in getting his own brother, that too very young and inexperienced (it was only five or six months since he arrived in Kerala and was less than 28 years old), to hold the position of the delegate (cf. chapter 4: 28), a great responsibility of course.

It seems that Fr Leopold had antagonized many of his fellow missionaries. A certain missionary, Fr Thomas staying at Elthuruth to learn Malayalam, got irritated, may be unreasonably, by the actions of Fr Leopold (cf. Parapuram: 1137). There may be elements of prejudice and even jealousy in what Missionary Candid de Vido reported sometime in the 1870s: Fr Leopold got whatever he wanted from Mgr Baccinelli; he was intent on building convents and monasteries here and there; he used to travel in his own boat accompanied by four or five tertiaries; it was because of his spirit of independence that he did things as he liked (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 129). As said above there might be some prejudice and even malice in all these allegations. The personality traits of independence and freedom, with which Fr Leopold acted, were resented by his fellow workers. It was these traits in his behaviour that provoked opposition and offence in other missionaries and the prelates, even Mgr Baccinelli. Fr Marceline Berardi in 1876 reported to his religious superiors in Rome that Fr Leopold had been ruling at Koonammavu like a small independent king (cf. *ibid.*: 116).

Fr Leopold's relation with Missionary Leonard Mellano, later archbishop, was often strained. One occasion for the strained relation was the opposing views they took regarding a book by a Spanish nun, Maria A 'Greda (1602-1665).³⁵ Fr Leopold used it

³⁴ See chapter 3: 35. In the *Nota in Prologum* (p. 9) they, with a feeling of regret and anger, say: "We do not have at present the rules given at first, because it was taken away from us and burned by the missionaries. In order to add new texts, they removed from our eyes the first set, even threatening with punishment for those who would keep the original rule." It is interesting to note that though the accusation is levelled against the missionaries, the person, they knew, responsible was Fr Leopold.

³⁵ The title of the book is *The Mystical City of God and Divine History of the Virgin Mother of God* (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 133).

not only for his own spiritual reading but also had it read and explained to the students. Fr Leonard opposed this because he, as many others, thought that the book contained some errors. Mgr Baccinelli referred the matter to Rome. Rome's answer was that it had no good opinion of the book. After this there was a mitigation of the controversy but it did not completely vanish (cf. Parapuram: 1143f.).

Another case in point was the unauthorized removal by Fr Leopold of some wooden planks from Varapuzha bishop's residence to Koonammavu. He may have done it with a good intention. Yet the way he did it is questionable. The planks were under the custody of Fr Leonard. Fr Leopold played a trick and without giving even a hint to the former, at a time when the vicar apostolic was out of station, took them to Koonammavu. Fr Leopold went to Varapuzha with this intention and spent the night there. Early next morning he feigned illness when invited by Fr Leonard to say Mass. When he was saying Mass Fr Leopold cleverly managed to have as many planks as he wanted removed from the store above the high altar and had them loaded in a boat and rushed them to Koonammavu (cf. Parapuram: 1145-47).

The tension between the two got further intensified and became acute after Fr Leonard Mellano became the vicar apostolic in 1868. As he was opposed to the idea of dividing the vicariate on the basis of Rite, his feelings against Fr Leopold became very bitter for the wholehearted support he gave to the movement. The former even entertained displeasure against Blessed Chavara for writing to Rome for this cause (cf. Parapuram: 1437). It was this question, which finally ruined the career of Fr Leopold in Kerala, and so too his plans for converting the religious congregation of men in Kerala into a province of the Discalced Carmelite Order, or at least to get appointed for them a vicar provincial distinct from the vicar apostolic.²⁶

It seems that Fr Leopold was almost always in good terms with Vicar Apostolic Baccinelli. He apparently obliged Fr Leopold in many ways (cf. above what Fr Candid says). However Fr Leopold had no great opinion of the prelate. He was one of the

²⁶ There was a long controversy on this question. Fr Leopold continuously arguing for this and Archbishop Mellano refuting his arguments and complaints (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 211f.).

signatories who complained to Rome about the shortcomings of Baccinelli and his inefficiency. He personally wrote to the OCD superior general, complaining about the misadministration of the vicar apostolic (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 97-99). Parapuram records (p. 1197f.) one event in which Baccinelli was seriously offended by the behaviour of Fr Leopold. The prelate used to spend a day every week, usually Thursday, at Koonammavu Monastery for rest, for free conversation in Italian (he did not know enough Malayalam for easy conversation), so also to inquire about the welfare of the monastery and to discuss various other matters. One Thursday towards the close of 1867 the prelate made his usual visit to Koonammavu and wanted to talk to Fr Leopold. So he knocked at the door of his room. Imagining that the conversation would be on matters silly or trivial and mere waste of time, Fr Leopold answered bluntly, "Monsignor, I have no time", with an Italian nuance that he had no time to play or for exchange of pleasantries. The prelate, deeply hurt, told Fr Leopold, "You will yearn in vain to see a bishop" and immediately left the place. After this he did not relish going to Koonammavu where Fr Leopold lived. Blessed Chavara must have been aware of the personal rivalries and petty quarrels among the missionaries. But he never refers to them anywhere in his writings. Parapuram makes mention of some of them but without any personal comment.

Fr Leopold loved Blessed Chavara 'as his own soul' and had great regard for him. Yet there were occasions when Chavara could feel rather uneasy with the way he did things. One example is when Eliswa Puthenangady of Vaikom, later called Sr Clara, together with her relatives was made to wait before she was admitted to the convent. Blessed Chavara expresses, perhaps indirectly, his embarrassment at the event when he says, "This caused some sorrow and disturbance" ('81: 237; CKC: 27; 1988 I: 7). She was a person the Blessed knew well and judged fit for religious life. He probably had directed her to arrive just in time to enter the convent together with the other three on 13 February; she had arrived two days before this (cf. CKC 2002: 26; 1988 I: 7). Yet Fr Leopold insisted on personally testing her spirit. May be this and other experiences made the Blessed rather cautious in dealing with Fr Leopold. In spite of his affection and regard for the latter, he appears sometimes afraid of his judgment. In a letter he wrote to the sisters during his last illness before the return of Fr Leopold from Europe he says:

When father delegate comes and looks through his glasses, to see how I have formed you in my ignorance, I don't know what all accusations he would hail at me. I have real fear for the reprimands of the Great Delegate (CKC 2002: 200; 1988 II: 7).

We have already alluded to an instance in which Fr Leopold and the Blessed took opposite views openly, namely, with regard to permission for Fr Scaria Kalathil to visit his dying uncle priest (cf. chapter 5: 5). Parapuram who records this episode concludes that Fr Leopold's displeasure reflected on his face (cf. Parapuram: 1432). This incident is a telling example of the respective attitudes and mentalities of Blessed Chavara and Fr Leopold. Here we see the latter as a rather strict Western type disciplinarian, a commanding and domineering personality. He overrules the suggestion of the local superiors that the matter be settled between the two and insists on voting. On the other hand it is almost in a sportive spirit Blessed Chavara opposes the former, but at the same time with a humane feeling towards the wish of a dying person. Here we can perhaps discover the image of a stern father in Fr Leopold and in Chavara that of a concerned mother. The contrast of the personalities is significant in consideration of their roles in bringing up the sisters of Koonammavu. We will make later a few other remarks when we analyse the personal profile of Blessed Chavara.

To return to Fr Leopold, it must be said that perhaps he was not free from personal ambition. As long as Chavara was alive he was happy to collaborate with him, as the Blessed almost always kept an unassuming and low profile and projected the missionary as the doer. Once he died, things changed. His successor, Fr Kuriakose Porukara was not so unassuming or easily obliging but more of an assertive character. Parapuram (p. 1429) explicitly says that Fr Leopold was not happy at the appointment of Porukara.

As noted earlier Fr Leopold took keen interest in the development of the religious congregation for men. He tried his best to convert it into a province of the Discalced Carmelite Order. In all this apparently there was no consultation with or reference to Blessed Chavara and other members of the congregation. Here a question arises: did he not foresee the influence he would be exerting over the community? Did he not envisage the possibility of himself being elected provincial in case the congregation

became a province? It is interesting to note that when in the 1880s there was a suggestion from the CMI that a foreigner be appointed deputy of Mgr Ajuti (then prior general), their preference was for Fr Leopold. Later in the 1890s when there were some internal tensions on a regional basis, they asked for a foreign Carmelite to be appointed as their prior general. And Fr Leopold was their first choice (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 211ff.).

Again another question arises: why was he so keen to have the Vicariate of Verapoly divided? Of course it was necessary for the good of the community, as Blessed Chavara himself was convinced; it was a cause the St Thomas Christian community was agitating for. At the same time had not Fr Leopold in mind the possibility of himself being appointed the ordinary of the Syrians? Blessed Chavara in his scheme of things for the Church in Kerala had in mind for such a post a foreigner, who knew Malayalam well and who was able to celebrate in the Syriac language (cf. CWC IV 1882: 84f.; cf. also *ibid.*: 28f.). Who else, if not Fr Leopold, could do this? Again it may be asked why Fr Leopold who used to say and write so many good things about Blessed Chavara, especially the efficient manner in which he, as vicar general, dealt with the Roccas episode, when consulted gave a negative note about the latter's competency of being appointed bishop (cf. *Positio*: 254, 265-69). Mgr Antonio Agliardi, the first delegate apostolic of India, reported to Propaganda that the opposition of Bishop Baccinelli to the proposal could perhaps be due to the pressure brought on him by those missionaries who were close to him and who were aspiring to succeed the reigning prelate. In fact, he says, there were three or four middle-aged missionaries in the vicariate aspiring for the post. They feared that they might lose their chance and hence used to speak disparagingly about the natives (see chapter 7). Was not Fr Leopold one of these three or four?

In **Blessed Chavara** we get altogether a different personality profile. We will deal with his personality at length in another chapter (chapter 12). Here some specific traits may be pointed out in contrast to the personality of Fr Leopold. We have already described Chavara's spirit of obedience which he showed not only to the Holy See, not only to the vicar apostolic but also to the Carmelite missionaries, especially to Fr Leopold who was, as delegate of the vicar provincial, his superior. He held in great regard Fr Leopold and other missionaries. He exhorted his fellow religious to obey them (cf. chapter 5). We know of only one

instance in which he opposed the view of Fr Leopold, to which already reference was made above. It is almost certain, as we have pointed out above, that he was aware of the differences of opinion between Archbishop Leonard and Fr Leopold, and so too of the rivalries and petty quarrels that existed among the missionaries. But nowhere in his writings he makes mention of them.

Another trait of his personality is that he always kept a low profile of himself while recording events, giving credit to others who co-operated with him. We have already seen how in Chavara's description of the foundation of the CMI Congregation, he gives the impression that the two pioneers Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara are the founders, and attributes to himself only a secondary role (see chapter 3). On a certain occasion he speaks of Bishop Baccinelli as the person mainly responsible for the founding of the congregation because it was he who gave the rules in 1855 (cf. '81: 143; cf. also Liturgical Calendar prepared by Chavara), sometimes Fr Leopold as having played the important role of the founding and developing of the congregation for women.

The chronicles written by Blessed Chavara himself or under his supervision are almost autobiographical works as far as the contents are concerned, because they are records of things that he either did himself or was deeply involved in. But in the entire bulk of volumes amazingly there are very few occasions when he is explicitly mentioned. It is as if an impressive story is written seldom mentioning the main character. The sentences in the chronicles as a rule either are impersonal or in passive voice, or have the subject in the singular or plural third person form. There is hardly any sentence with the subject in the singular first person form. But this silence is eloquent, indeed. This is a clear evidence of his spiritual maturity and is his personality trait. This is the silence that speaks more powerfully and convincingly about his noble character. In the Indian terminology this is *nishkamakarma*, selfless service, the defining mark of a *karma-yogi*, a contemplative in action. This is the Christian spirit implied in the words of Jesus Christ, "When you have done all you have been told to do, say, 'we are just unworthy servants, who have done no more than our duty'" (Lk. 17:10). Blessed Chavara made his own the motto of St John the Baptist, "He must increase and I must decrease" (Jn 3: 30). As it has already been stated Blessed Chavara and Fr Leopold give to one another the credit of founding the

convent and highlight/underscore the role of each other. *Reference* has also been made earlier to the proverbial and universally acknowledged spirit of obedience of Chavara.

Chavara One of the Two Founders: His Role in Formation

The overall picture we get in the chronicles is that Fr Leopold was the one always commanding, while Blessed Chavara was the one being commanded! While for the former it was perhaps a matter of a share of the unconscious superiority complex of the foreign missionaries, for the latter it was a matter of noble humility and graceful obedience. For Blessed Chavara it was also a matter of practical wisdom, for he wanted to have the greater goals such as the convent, achieved even at the cost of his own name and fame. The self-emptying obedience of Jesus Christ was indeed the supreme model for him. The sister chroniclers, even when they were writing under the supervision of Blessed Chavara, had their prejudice for the foreign missionaries, which, too, might be at least partially responsible for the low profile Chavara got in their recordings. Fr Leopold himself has observed the sisters' unreasonable and naïve approval and admiration of the foreign missionaries. In an instruction on obedience, he said to the sisters:

If you were given a European sister as your superior, how promptly you would have obeyed her words. Why? Because she is a European. She is educated; she is spiritual, etc. (CKC 2002: 252; 1988 II: 77f.).

Blessed Chavara himself might have, with the best of intentions, encouraged the sisters' uncritical appreciation of the foreigners.

If Fr Leopold manifests a father figure, Chavara's is its counterpart, the image of a mother. In the instance of permitting Fr Scaria Kalathil to go and see his dying uncle, to which reference has been made, the two different personality traits of these two priests come out clearly. Fr Leopold is the Western type strict disciplinarian, and Chavara the human and compassionate Indian type personality. The share each of these two founders had in the establishment and growth of the congregation for women was more or less characterised by their respective personalities.

We have explained rather at length Blessed Chavara's role in the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu. Here we are concerned with understanding the share he had in the religious

formation of the sisters. Fr Leopold in his capacity as delegate was immediately in charge of their formation, though Mgr Baccinelli had given their charge equally to Fr Leopold and Chavara. But the latter did his service—both temporal and spiritual—always subject to Fr Leopold. However Fr Leopold himself says:

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 (Beccaro 2003: 12).

But going through the pages of the chronicles one may get the impression that in the years following the inauguration of the new convent in March 1867 Blessed Chavara did not relate himself to it except as a companion of and assistant to Fr Leopold. The Chronicle of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, is practically silent about Chavara's involvement in the convent affairs these years. The Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent, however, continues to mention his frequent visits to the convent, but almost invariably accompanying Fr Leopold. All the same it is noteworthy that in almost all the frequent visits of Fr Leopold—at least once a week on an average—Blessed Chavara was there with him. In fact neither of them would go to the convent except in the company of the other. Of course, exceptions were there. For example, in order to hear confession or to give corrections Fr Leopold would go there by himself. Similarly in the rare cases of his unavailability or absence, Blessed Chavara also would go to the convent and act on his own. Moreover, he personally looked after the sisters and helped them in their needs when the latter was away in Europe from 11 September 1869 to 8 November 1870. During this period, far from being a mere silent observer, he was an active guide and administrator, even in spite of old age and weakness. The chronicler's descriptions of his involvement in the convent matters of the same period clearly reveal his continued care and concern, and the more and more self-effacing efforts for the sake of the new community:

Our Fr Prior gave us four books printed both in Latin and in Malayalam ... Fr Prior often came and taught us how to read and write Latin and we began to pick up slowly (CKC 2002: 152; 1988 I: 153f.).

On 12 February [1870] Fr Prior came to the parlour...He had brought with him a small Latin book of the office of the

Blessed Virgin Mary ... He then gave us the small book which he had brought. He read out to us a part of it and told us to read and start saying these prayers. He then added, "This was my aim in teaching you Latin..." (ibid: 161; 165).

The barn outside the enclosure fence was renovated with pillars and basement of stones. The gate-house on the east also was renovated with stone pillars... [The paddy store's] wall on the west was cut open and a door with lock was installed. All around the coconut trees the ground was dug and manure put, the clay being brought from the nearby paddy fields. Thus in all things, small or big, spiritual or temporal, our Fr Prior by the grace of God did whatever was necessary in spite of his old age and ill health (ibid: 170f.; 178).

[When Sr Maria fell sick,] Fr Prior wrote to Tharakan and the next morning came with the medicine prescribed by the latter. By the grace of God when Tharakan's medicines were given, she became a bit relieved. Then Fr Prior gave some advice. He teased her saying, "You don't want to die; you want to enjoy life," and then left (ibid: 176; 185)

During the same period we read about how he on Easter Sunday 1870, though sickly and weak, went to the convent early in the morning at 3.45 and said Holy Mass, and again in the evening at 6.00 went for the Easter blessing of the convent (cf. ibid: 168f.; 174). In April the same year he got for the sisters an open well dug, himself supervising the works and looking into all the matters concerned, although he was not keeping well (cf. ibid: 170; 177). Moreover, late in the same year he was quite busy arranging for and supervising many repair and maintenance works related to the convent, before the completion of which he fell ill, probably never to recover again fully (cf. ibid: 179; 188). Thus, he was there with his "dear little children" (that is how he addressed them in the letters) always till the end in all their physical, mental and spiritual needs. Indeed a beloved father and an accompanying *guru*! Apart from such exceptional instances as mentioned above, in almost every page of the said chronicle the two priests appear together, and almost all the entries begin as follows: "Our Moopachan [Fr Leopold] and Priorachan [Blessed Chavara] came together and he/ they said/ instructed/ did so and so".

In such statements, "he" obviously refers to Fr Leopold. It is very rarely indeed—may be just once or twice—that the chronicle explicitly states that during their many joint visits Blessed Chavara gave formal instructions. If thus the chronicle does not assign a more prominent place to him, it may at least partly be in accordance with his own directions to the writer. He certainly preferred to be overshadowed by Fr Leopold not only as a matter of humility, but also in consideration of propriety and practicalities.

Chavara gracefully gave Fr Leopold a free hand in exercising his rights and duties in relation to the convent. In his 'Last Will' he advised the confreres that they should take particular care not to interfere in the affairs of the convent or boarding house unless they were officially assigned to the work. This is certainly a wise advice which he himself practised before preaching. Still more, as the prior of the men's congregation, and vicar general for the Syrian Catholics of Malabar, he who always got his priorities right, could not possibly afford more time for the sisters' community. Added to all these were his old age and failing health. The sisters were all appreciation and gratitude for all that he did in spite of his old age and ill health, and, in their assessment, during the years following the convent's inauguration, too, he continued to work for them even ignoring his own health and comforts:

Our Very Rev. Fr Prior has suffered a lot in his old age on our account. So all of us have an obligation to remember him and pray for him at all times. Moreover, he has also given us a monstration as a memento (CKC 2002: 92; 1988 I: 83).

Ah! How much pain and how much interest this father of ours [Chavara] takes to teach us and to make us do certain things! My dear sisters, what love and gratitude can we return for this? Nothing! We cannot do anything. So then let us remember that it is our obligation to pray always for this father of ours in our poor prayers (*ibid.*: 152; 154).

In that same place [Pala] there was some problem concerning a church and it was to be settled. Fr Prior was to go for it. But he could not on account of his old age and weakness. But since it became absolutely necessary that he himself should go, he decided to go...Fr Gerard asked us to pray for Fr Prior. They went on 1 November and carried out

all the works they had to do, and came back on 15. Because they came sitting all the time in a rowboat, Fr Prior was not well (*ibid.*).

But since God has given Fr Prior a little health and strength that day [Easter Sunday] he informed us that he would be coming for Holy Mass at quarter to four a.m., and at quarter to four Fr Prior came and offered Holy Mass for us. When the father came at 6 o'clock, he brought us some ripe plantains and mangoes. Then he blessed all the eatables that were arranged and kept there. Then he said, "This is the day on which angels were united with men. I am also going to do something similar." He then made us call the children from *Edukantat* [boarding house] into the room. He then himself distributed *appam* [bread], plantains, etc., to all including the children. After spending some time talking with us he left. We were unable to give him anything in return for the trouble he took on our account. Yet we gave him a small present by sending him the first fruit that our breadfruit tree yielded (*ibid.*: 168f.; 174f.).

...And there was no other good water to drink. Again, during this April 1870 our Fr Prior decided to make a well [for us]...So he made arrangements for the materials required, like stone, lime, etc., and engaged many workers so as to finish it within a short time. It was dug at the same spot they had fixed upon the previous year, and the work was soon completed. Though the father was not keeping well those days, he often came and supervised the work and looked into all the matters concerning it (*ibid.*: 170.; 177).

...Our Fr Prior was old and sick... The house on the north inside the enclosure-fencing near the pond used for washing clothes was lying in a very bad condition. Fr Prior got it repaired. He transformed it into a place where sisters could be accommodated, if they were to be quarantined. A door was also fixed so that dresses could be kept there safely. It was cleaned and whitewashed. Under the roof wooden bars were spread so that coconuts could be stored on the top. A door made of bars was fixed making it secure. All these were got done by our Fr Prior, but he was unable to see its

completion because by that time it became impossible for him to walk (*ibid.*:179; 188f.)³⁷.

These passages are clear evidence of Chavara's continued commitment to the cause of the new congregation, although he ever remained admirably subordinate to Fr Leopold, never superseding or interfering with him. The community of sisters unambiguously acknowledged the services of the Prior:

He [Chavara] it was who helped our missionary Fr Leopold, especially to establish the convent for women, and toiled tirelessly for this heroic work. He was the faithful companion chosen by the missionary Fr Leopold to stand steadfast by him in facing the difficulties and making journeys. He remained a changeless and ever true friend to him. He was a man of untold prudence and great efficiency (CKC 2002: 207; 1988 II: 17).

Chavara's Contribution to the Formation of the Sisters

The Convent Chronicle allots a lot of space for the instructions given to them by Fr Leopold (*cf.*, e. g. CKC 2002: 195-264; 1988 II: 3-94). But there are only scant references to the instructions given by Blessed Chavara. In some of the references it says that Fr Leopold and Blessed Chavara went to the convent and gave instructions. But from the wording of these instructions it is clear that it is mainly Fr Leopold who speaks, Chavara is just present (*cf.*, e. g. *ibid.*: 100, 102-105; 1988 I: 92, 94-97). There are only two or three instances when Chavara gave them some instruction. One explicit example is "some advice he gave them on Ash Wednesday, 2 March 1870" (*cf.* CKC 2002: 164; 1988 I: 169), which the chronicle summarised in one paragraph and wrote: "I have not written the whole of the advice here as it will become very lengthy." The following observation in the chronicle is very significant:

He [Chavara] was one of our fathers who used to instruct and teach us all that we wanted and all that we needed to know for our spiritual and temporal life (CKC 2002: 199; 1988 II: 6).

³⁷ This is an entry of late 1870.

Though the number of instructions Blessed Chavara gave to the sisters were few, the letters he wrote to them are quite considerable. The contents of these letters reveal the deep spirituality of the person writing and the spiritual calibre he expected from those to whom he wrote them. In the complete works of Chavara (CWC IV 1982: 107-118), there are seven of them. One or more of these may be found recorded in the Convent Chronicle, (e.g. letter two is found in CKC 2002: 162f.; 1988 I: 167-9). It speaks a few times that he wrote many letters to the sisters. Most of these were written when he was sick and unable to visit the convent as frequently as he wanted. At that time Fr Leopold had gone to Europe. The chronicle reproduces five letters written in August 1868, of which three are definitely from Fr Prior (Blessed Chavara). The other two have no designation of the writer. These two are very short information about the last illness of Archbishop Baccinelli (cf. CKC 2002: 100-102; 1988 I: 93f.). Three letters reproduced in the chronicle (ibid.: 199-201; 1988 II: 7-9) concern the illness of the Blessed. The first, a little longer than the other two, is more significant.³⁸

If we compare the instructions and letters of Fr Leopold with these, though relatively short, we can note the difference of style and approach between the two. It would be interesting to make a detailed study of the two. We do not intend to do it here, but only give some main lines of difference. The affection and concern both of them had for their "dear children" is quite manifest. However Fr Leopold, the man of action, the one who wanted things done efficiently, mostly deal with practical aspects of the life of the sisters. He elaborates his advices with many stories and illustrations. He often uses the words 'must', 'command', etc. Sometimes he is blunt in finding fault with the sisters and correcting them. Blessed Chavara, the contemplative in action, on the other hand, appears to be self-negating, suave and sweetly persuasive in his approach and tries to elevate the sisters in his own simple way, but in a genuine manner, to the heights of contemplative experience, an experience he himself had made his

³⁸ The originals of the letters are kept in the archives of St Teresa's Convent, Koonammavu. Copies of many of them are in the archives of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam. These are published in CWC IV.

own through prayer and meditation³⁹. With these observations we will now see the type of formation Blessed Chavara provided to the sisters.

The fact is that even if we admit that for various reasons Blessed Chavara's direct involvement in the convent affairs during the last years was limited to necessities and unavoidable circumstances, his love and concern for them was on the increase. The biographer and contemporary Fr Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara, who succeeded the Blessed as prior general, observes:

Just as Patriarch Jacob had a greater love for his youngest son Benjamin so he [Chavara] loved them [the sisters] most deeply, and brought them up most carefully, providing them with all the needs even as a hen took care of the chicks (Porukara 1905: 35).

This succinct statement cannot be dismissed as a casual remark. Instead it is a carefully thought out statement on Blessed Chavara's love for them, both paternal and maternal, the former symbolised by Patriarch Jacob and the latter by a hen. The instructions he gave them especially through the letters during the last years of his life, assume much importance as expressing his deep sentiments stemming from equally mature and solid thoughts and attitudes. That was the period when Fr Leopold was away in Europe, and, therefore, the sisters were in need of the Prior's closer attention and guidance. At the same time the ill health would not permit him to visit them as frequently as he wished although the convent was not very far from his monastery. So he took recourse to writing letters, short and informal as they generally are. On the one hand, they are the articulation of his deep love and concern for them, and, on the other, present his vision of their life in the community. Touching on all aspects of their life—physical,

³⁹ Here a note may be made about some of the circulars the Blessed sent to the members of his own congregation. Three of them (CWC IV 1982: 89-98) may be taken as examples. The first of these was written jointly with Fr Leopold, the second jointly with Fr Gerard and the third is by him alone. The tone of the first two is rather severe and smacks of Western, commanding missionary style. In the third the first part is of the same style but it is written according to the order of the vicar apostolic. If we compare these to his last will, the difference is very conspicuous.

mental, and spiritual—the letters are a vivid portrayal of the present Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) of his original vision.

The letters are very personal, parental and thoughtful, too. They instruct the sisters in clear details regarding the temporalities such as farming, construction works, bookkeeping and accountancy (cf., e. g. CWC IV 1982: 112f., 115). There is also mention of certain things that he sent them, things that were apparently trivial but all tokens of his love, such as "some tobacco-powder in a bottle," "two small chillies, perhaps the last yield," and "the mangoes, the best found in India !" (cf. *ibid*: 115f.) He also insists that they should note down every detail in the chronicle for the sake of themselves and the future generations. He also expresses concern for the children in the boarding house. He gives directions about the spiritual practices such as *Angelus*, May devotion, Divine Office, Ash Wednesday and Holy Communion.

A central theme of the letters is the sisters' privileged interior life. He feels a holy envy at their immense good fortune as queens and spouses of the Lord and King Jesus Christ. The state of life they have embraced is indeed great and praiseworthy. The terrestrial empresses will feel jealous of them (cf. *ibid*: 108f.).

Another great concern expressed in the letters is the sisters' reading habits which is "the straight way to the summit of perfection and the means not to tumble down from the heights." Sending them the best available books, some of which he himself translated from Tamil into Malayalam for their sake, he urges them to read them. He wishes he could teach the sisters more Latin. But he cannot. It is not necessary either. Let them learn Tamil well so that they can read the many spiritual books in that language. They are advised to spend the spare time not "in useless conversation," but "in spiritual reading." They may read not merely "for knowledge and enjoyment," but "for knowledge and devotion," which is the sure way to acquire virtues and persevere in the same. Love of reading will lead to love of solitude.

When a soul delights in solitude, Jesus Christ will come to converse with her in solitude, and begin communing with her. At first you will not understand the language. Then it is that the Lord will lead you to the wine cellar and pour out some wine for you, a little at first. In course of time, you will begin to understand the language. When your Spouse sees

that you understand His speech, He will speak more and more distinctly and show you the magnitude of His love. Then the bride will love more, and the Bridegroom will rejoice over her and adorn her with ornaments. Thus commences the divine union. Then on there will be nothing to fear (*ibid.*: 116f.).

Dwelling further on the same theme the Blessed insists that they should resist every temptation to give up the solitude of the convent. On occasions like the Forty Hour Adoration they may not be permitted to go to the church to join the people. But it is enough and most pleasing to their divine Spouse Jesus Christ that they adore Him from the corner of their convent. They are His brides, and as such they must not expose themselves to the unworthy eyes of the worldly people. Let the sisters learn from the queens of this world who are carried in palanquins covered on all sides with thick curtains to hide themselves from the human gaze. The divine Spouse is still more demanding. Therefore, it is enough that they offer the adoration from the solitude of the convent, for which they shall be amply rewarded. Let them, therefore, remain with Him in their cell, which is His royal chamber, with joy and peace of mind. Again, on days like Maundy Thursday according to the practice of those days the sisters had no chance of receiving Holy Communion. But that should not disappoint them. Instead, they must invite Jesus Christ to their heart in spirit, and then let them remain with the Mother of God and the three Marys, awaiting the joy of the resurrection ! (*cf. ibid.*: 108, 112).

Thus in keeping with the Carmelite spirituality, incessant and ever deepening prayerfulness, is the trait of the members of the new congregation as it is depicted in the letters of Blessed Chavara. He irresistibly exhorts that the sisters should above all learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Let them stay constantly in his presence, walk along with Him, and converse with Him continuously (*cf. ibid.*: 114). Their love for Him should be undivided and single-minded so that there shall not be anything or anybody that they shall not ignore for His sake. "God alone suffices," as the Carmelite mystic Teresa of Avila used to say. Let the sisters consider how sweet is the voice of their loving Spouse; He is vigilantly watching them from the inside and the outside of their hearts lest they love anyone else more than Him, and looks into all their needs. Can there be anyone in the world more fortunate than

they? There may be people who are richer in temporal goods, but they always live in tears and afflictions (cf. *ibid.*: 115). Let the sisters keep their hearts locked up in the tabernacle of Jesus, where their treasure is. That is what Blessed Chavara himself had done (cf. *ibid.*: 117). Let them be there with Him till the day of resurrection (cf. *ibid.*: 112). They must diligently strive to ascend the steps of perfection and to be united with Him. Through deeper and deeper contemplation they must enter into the more and more interior mansions of the castle that each one's soul is, as St Teresa of Avila says. It is in the innermost mansion of the same castle that they are to be united with Him, their divine Spouse. What a sublime call ! (cf. *ibid.*: 115).

Again the letters remind the sisters of the care and delight with which the Lord looks after them. As soon as He sees that they have decided in their hearts to love Him, He does everything for them with joy. Take, for example, their convent itself. Just as they begin to think about how to manage certain things, He accomplishes them without the least worry on their part (cf. *ibid.*: 118). At one point Blessed Chavara bursts out:

O joy of joys! O Lord, we are mere worms incapable of understanding anything. Like unto the mother who nourishes her children with milk even while they are asleep, or are unable to express in words their hunger and thirst, You are looking after our needs every day (*ibid.*: 117).

All the same the sisters must responsibly do their duties. Each one must remain committed to the work assigned to her. Commitment to one's duty—*svadharma*—is a principle that cannot be compromised. Let the superior do the supervision, while the procurator does the administration. The rest of the community should obey with humility and be charitable. All should be industrious. Let each one take care not to waste even a moment. Time is precious. But ever remain free of worries regarding where the money will come from and so on. Once you do your part, God will do the rest of the work. After all it is entirely His project. Your competency here is only to work without regard for what you would get or not in return (cf. *ibid.*: 113). Here it may be noted that Blessed Chavara through the letters is recommending the ideal of *nishkama-karma* (selfless service) described in *Bhagavad-Gita* as the rule of a *karma-yogi*, a contemplative in action, who remaining in the state of being united to God (*yoga*), is engaged in the service

of the society, totally regardless of any reward. So Blessed Chavara's advice to the sisters is that they should be contemplatives in action, harmoniously integrating prayer and work into each other.

In view of the reparation for sins, the cultivation of virtues, and the practice of incessant prayer, one of the letters gives a simple but effective advice. First of all the sisters should bear the pains of illness, etc. in a spirit of repentance and penance. Then they should take care not to rejoice in the failures of others, but to share in the joy of their success in good works. Still more, let the sisters, in the spirit of the communion of saints, continually offer to God all the good works and acts of repentance done by all the holy people and martyrs, and rejoice in them as if they are their own doings. In union with the works of their Lord Jesus Christ, which are of infinite merit, let them also offer to God every pulse beat of their veins, every winking of their eyes, every breath of theirs, every little chirping of the birds—indeed everything as their prayer! Whatever they do, should be done in association with an act of mental prayer. For example, as they move the left leg, let them think of the sacred wound in the Lord's left leg, and pray that the blood from it may purify them of sins. Let them, above all, practise the spirituality of desire—having more and more intense desire, which can be doubled and even multiplied again and again to do all that the saints have done, and to do all the prayers being done in all the oratories all over the world (cf. *ibid.*: 110f.). Is it not the short cut to holiness that St Therese of Lisieux is acclaimed to have invented and successfully employed?

A last but not the least point that Chavara makes in the letters is the touching reference to himself. He regrets his inability to visit and instruct the sisters and the children in the boarding house more frequently because of the ill health. For example:

I wanted to go over to the convent and meet you. But on reaching here, I felt very tired and had a splitting headache. I fell asleep without myself sensing it. Hence I write to you this note (*ibid.*: 112).

I regret I was not able to come to give instruction to the children of the boarding house. The condition of my health impedes me (*ibid.*: 116).

More inspiring are his apologies, request for prayer, and the anticipation of a happy death:

Pray for me in a special way that I may be forgiven the scandal which I have caused you by my way of life, my unwholesome manners, disorderly words and careless behaviour; that I may be spared the punishment I deserve for my carelessness in looking after the innocent little ones entrusted to my care, and you His dear spouses; that I may be forgiven the scandalous and careless way of life, and also the defects I have committed in administration. Pray that I may be forgiven all these shortcomings and that I may spend the rest of my life accomplishing always His will in all things and finally die a happy death (*ibid.*: 109).

Are they not the spontaneous outpourings of the heart's desires and sentiments of a loving father to his beloved little children towards the end of his life? The letters under reference can rightly be considered and respected as Blessed Chavara's testament to the sisters' community. He was also concerned about their future developments, well-being and apostolate, as is clear from his testament addressed to the members of the men's congregation:

Although God has willed to found this congregation for the salvation of the Christian brethren, due to shortage of members we are not able to render the help they need. In order to remedy this situation... It is necessary that more monasteries and convents be opened in the south...some convents with boarding houses... It is necessary and useful to have convents of the sisters, one at Mutholy and another at Mannanam, with boarding houses attached (*ibid.*: 100f.).

In the Fond Memories of His Children

Perhaps it is in the context of Blessed's final sickness that lasted for about three months and his death that caused his total disappearance from their physical eyes that made the sisters fully aware of his greatness and what he really meant to them. This is what transpires from the few pages of the Convent Chronicle regarding his last sickness and death. It was the period between the beginning of October 1870 and the beginning of January 1871, when

[This beloved father's] health and strength to work and face difficulties for the glory of God, began to wane and he began to get illnesses one after another, which meant that his days were coming to an end (CKC 2002: 199; 1988 II: 6).

In 1870, from the beginning of the month of October, our Reverend Father began to have illnesses like giddiness, vomiting, headache, eye pain and many such others. With the headache and eye pain again he became unable to see light or to read anything (ibid.: 201; 8).

The following are his own words: "Dear children, now because of the severity of the headache, I am constantly meditating on the crowning of the sacred head with thorns. When I open my eyes and look, I feel as if I see angels flying about always. When I look at people's faces, they seem to look like stars" (ibid.: 201; 9).

This old man [Chavara], who from the very beginning has undertaken so much work and has undergone very many difficulties for the sake of attending to our spiritual and temporal needs and aiding our growth...He was one of our fathers who used to instruct and teach us all that we wanted and all that we needed to know for our spiritual and temporal life (ibid.: 199; 6).

It was the time when Fr Leopold was away in Rome, and Blessed Chavara because of the illness was unable to make the regular visits to the sisters. But he never stopped thinking of them and being concerned about their well being:

But in the beginning of the illness he wrote many letters to us. Even though he did not have the health to write, still he wrote because he was pleased to do so. Till he became unable to write, he sent letters and short notes to inform us of something or another, as and when needed (ibid.: 199; 6f.).

From among the above-mentioned letters, three, which are not included in the *Complete Works of Chavara*, have been reproduced in the Convent Chronicle "from which you will see how gloriously his humility shines forth" (ibid.). In the first of them he humbly expresses the feeling that he had not been of much use to the sisters, and the sorrow that now being ill he would be

causing them more difficulties and inconveniences. The other two letters are more a frank sharing of the pains of illness with his dear children.

Yesterday I had severe giddiness and vomiting and was very sick right from four o'clock in the morning. When God wills, I shall let you know the rest (ibid.: 200; 8).

Yesterday, after the procession from four o'clock to eight o'clock, I was having giddiness and gas trouble. After some time I got some *kasturi* [a kind of ayurvedic medicine]. Taking it, I got some relief after midnight. Yesterday I bade Jesus my last farewell. In a way I bade farewell to you also. I felt that this much of living was enough. But now this morning I got up. I did not attend Holy Mass today (ibid.: 200f.; 8).

The last of the letters under consideration concluded: "May the dear Lord bless you. Dear children, pray for patience" (ibid.: 205; 13).

The chronicle then mentions the last three visits of Blessed Chavara to the sisters. The first was on 15 October 1870, the feast of St Teresa of Avila. That day "out of his charity he came to the convent twice, and made the sisters very happy" (ibid.: 201; 9). But seeing him so weak, unable to walk by himself, staggering and almost stumbling down, his body emaciated by illness, and the face disfigured, the sisters felt very sorry. As he managed to reach up to the courtyard, they made him sit in a chair there itself. The short walk had made him extremely exhausted and weak, and feel sick and uneasy. However, gradually recovering a little he said that he was unable to see their faces except as "stars emitting rays of light" (ibid.: 202; 10). He taught them the hymn *Slamlekh* ('Hail Holy Queen'), and some principles of handicrafts. It was 6.00 p.m. when he blessed them and left, saying, "My children, I came to say my last farewell to you, in case I may not be able to do so again. Today, because I felt somewhat better, I managed to offer Holy Mass" (ibid.).

The second visit was at four o'clock in the evening on 28 October 1870. This time, seeing his sickly figure the sisters could not control their feelings and tears! "He was being helped by a priest. He came here suffering so much to see us. In spite of the treatments, his ailments were steadily increasing. He had lost his

eyesight (*ibid.*: 202; 11). The children of the boarding house came and kissed his scapular. But he could not see and recognize them. So he asked each one of them her name. He then disclosed the plan to go to Mannanam for better treatment and climate, and said, "I thought of saying my last goodbye to you before I leave. This is why I came now" (*ibid.*: 203; 12). The sisters, saddened at the thought of missing him, requested him not to go. But his characteristic answer was that he was resigned to go or not to go as would be decided by the superiors concerned. The proposed journey was eventually cancelled, to the great joy of the sisters.

The third visit was in November 1870. When Fr Leopold returned from Europe on 8 November, Blessed Chavara was still ill with severe pain, and had no eyesight. However, he gradually became better and got the eyesight back. Then one day after five in the evening helped by Fr Nicholas, and accompanied by Fr Leopold, he came to the convent. The sisters, who had never expected to see him again, were all happy and praised God. They and the children of the boarding house gathered around him seated in the courtyard, and kissed his scapular. He expressed happiness that unlike the experience during the previous visit, this time he was able to see and recognize them.

At the end, when he was about to go from here, he said the last goodbye. He turned towards us with a smile, full of humility and devotion. He bowed his head unusually in respect towards us as a speciality. He then gave us the blessing and took leave of us (*ibid.*: 206f.; 16).

Finally the chronicle refers to the last three days of his life on earth. On 30 December 1870 all his illnesses aggravated and he partially lost his senses, too. Next day through Fr Gerard he sent the sisters the New Year message that they should revitalize all their virtues and make their lives new, and that they had his blessings (*ibid.*: 208; 18). On 1 January 1871 at his request he was given the anointing of the sick and other sacraments. Before receiving them he spoke on the passion of Christ and the glories of Mary, astonishing the hearers. After receiving the sacraments, he lost his consciousness, never to regain it fully. Next day being informed of his critical condition the sisters were overwhelmed with sorrow, about which they state:

When we heard this [the news of his serious condition], we surrendered everything totally to the will of God. Yet all of us prayed with tears, quite a lot, that God, if He so willed, might give this beloved father of ours the grace of consolation and cure of illness (ibid.)

But their "prayer was not heard, as it was not the will of God" (ibid.). On 3 January 1871 at 7. 30 a.m. he breathed his last lying in the hands of his spiritual sons in the monastery at Koonammavu, as God willed that he should be called to heaven to receive his eternal reward for all his works and sufferings (cf. ibid.: 210; 21). It was the time when the sisters were attending the Holy Mass in their chapel. Hearing the bell announcing his death, they were "overcome by uncontrollable grief even while the Holy Mass was going on, and the church was filled with the sound of weeping and sighing.... Today we miss him and all the good he did and all that he was continuing to do for us. Hence it is that our hearts are so sorrow-stricken" (ibid.: 210f.; 21). But eventually they consoled themselves:

Whatever may be the sorrows and troubles that befall us, they all come according to the will of God who is ever concerned about our good. Besides that, this good father of ours, in order to receive his reward for all the good works he had done and for all the difficulties he had endured, has left this valley of tears and is now enjoying the bliss of heaven. So we came to the thought that there is no reason to be sorry on his death. On the other hand, there is reason to be happy about it. Moreover, now that our father dwells in heaven, he will be a very alert and powerful mediator of our cause and he will be able to help and do so much more good for us than he was capable of doing when he was alive (ibid.: 211; 21f.).

There are a few virtues of Blessed Chavara, such as obedience and the accompanying spirit of resignation to God's will, patience, calm and quiet, peace and joy that impressed the sisters more especially during his last illness. During his visit to them on 28 October 1870, when he mentioned that he was going to be taken to Mannanam, the sisters requested him that if he willed, he could continue to stay in Koonammavu without going to Mannanam. His characteristic reply was that he had no will of his

own (cf. chapter). Following it he gave them a lengthy exhortation on giving up their own will and the greatness of obedience (cf. also chapter 10, p. 18 for similar other remarks recorded in the Convent Chronicle).

Nearer the end of his life, saying to Fr Gerard that he then had much peace and joy, a little scrupulously he added, "Father, I did not hear Holy Mass last Sunday." Fr Gerard consoled him saying that it was not by his own will but in obedience to the superior's command that he had not heard the Holy Mass, and that as such it should not worry him. That instantly settled his doubt, and he responded, "Yes, it is true. It is under obedience that I did not go for Mass. That is enough for me." Ever since, he was calm and quiet. The chronicler then shares her reflections:

Ah my dear sisters, we have heard just now that since our father was perfectly obedient during his lifetime, this memory brought him great peace and joy at the time of his death. If we desire to get this favour and this joy at the time of our death, let us now try to be persons of blind obedience (ibid.: 210; 20)

Blessed Chavara's patience, too, was amazing as well as inspiring. The severe pain would not at all depress him. It was as if he had made his own the words of St Paul, "What, then can separate us from the love of Christ..." (cf. Rom 8: 35-39). Even as the outer man of his was falling into decay, the inner man was renewed day by day (Rom 4: 16). Indeed the sufferings seemed to increase his joy, making his face more and more radiant (cf. chapter 12). The sisters do fondly recall and treasure Fr Gerard's testimony regarding his experience while he was administering the Holy Communion to him (cf. ibid., p. 12).

Finally the sisters acknowledge with admiration and a sense of legitimate pride the greatness and mission of Blessed Chavara not only in relation to themselves but also in the wider context of the Church and society at large:

This father of ours was a model and guiding light to all the Christians in Kerala. Moreover, he was a pillar that supported the Catholic Church because of the zeal he evinced in its expansion and in the protection of faith. He was also especially interested in the numerical increase of the members of the convent and in their growth and

perfection in virtues. Therefore, he did much to establish the convent of ours and make us grow in the path of virtue (CKC: 210f.; 21).

Concluding this chapter we may make a few observations. The booklet which Fr Thomas Kochumuttom CMI and Sr Jossy CMC have published on the role of Blessed Chavara in the founding and early growth of the first religious community for women in Kerala is rightly titled 'Dream Fulfilled'. Religious life for women in Kerala was a dream entertained and cherished by noble minds from very early times. It is legitimately claimed that there were in Kerala in the ancient times not only monks but also nuns who lived "in great observance, honesty, chastity, and poverty." But this phenomenon both for men and women among the St Thomas Christian disappeared sometime in the sixteenth century. Ever since there were attempts to revive it. After the short lived experiment at Edappally in early seventeenth century almost two centuries passed before a fresh attempt was made in the nineteenth century by the saintly trio Frs Thomas Palackal, Thomas Porukara and Kuriakose Chavara. This attempt succeeded in establishing a religious community for priests. That was a beginning, an opening of the door for religious life in general. The dream of religious life for women started to develop intensively from that time onwards. After several failures—Alangad Kunnu, Puthenpally—it was finally fulfilled in the 'Panambu Matham' of Koonammavu, a true abode of poverty for the first four nuns. Within a year they were shifted to a better and more durable building, attached to which was also a boarding house for girls. It was "a convent for religious sisters who diffuse perfume like sweet smelling lilies", "a religious house, which would be a citadel of virtues for Malabar girls". Chavara felt that God had been pleased to fulfil something, which seemed difficult, which he was longing to establish, for which he cherished great desire, for which he had been praying. He heaved a sigh of relief and humbly acknowledged: "Almighty God. It is to make me indebted to you that you gave me a longer life so that I can see this event, too; let your name be glorified forever and ever. Amen".

It is nineteen years after the demise of Blessed Chavara that the community of the Koonammavu Convent was bifurcated, the seven Latin Rite sisters being taken to Varapuzha at the order of Archbishop Leonard Mellano. That is the beginning of the separate

existence of the Latin TOCD nuns eventually to become the Congregation of the Teresian Carmelites (CTC). As far as the founders, Blessed Chavara and Fr Leopold, were concerned the sisters of both the Rites were their 'dear children', whom they brought up in the genuine tradition of St Teresa of Avila. So they were in reality the founders of both the congregations, the CMC and the CTC. Hence the title of this chapter 'Chavara and the Foundation of the CMC, CTC Congregations'. It is these combined dear children who cherished the fond memories of their common beloved father described in the Chronicle of the Koonammavu Convent which they concluded with the words: "Moreover, now that our father dwells in heaven, he will be very alert and powerful mediator of our cause and he will be able to help and do so much more good for us than he was cable of doing when he was alive" (CKC 2002: 211).

The dream came true in a marvellous way. Chavara saw it and was satisfied. His concern was not merely the material building up of the community of nuns but much more the building up of the inner shrine of their hearts. They were to lock themselves up in this interior castle and attain a high degree of prayer experience, for which process Chavara, always keeping his low profile approach, masterfully guided them.

CHAPTER NINE

Apostle of Christian Literature and Print Media

Blessed Kuriakose Chavara was a person, who desired to retire from the secular world and devote himself to prayer and penance in the *tapasubhavanam* or *darshanaveedu*. But the most remarkable feature of his personality was that he withdrew from the 'world', so as to permeate it with the values of the kingdom of God. He retired from the world not because he was afraid of it, or tired of it, or disliked it, or belittled it, but because he wanted to leaven the dough, to educate and to reform the sons and daughters of God, so that they became really His children. With a singleness of purpose he tried all through his life to equip himself with knowledge, wisdom and virtue and disseminate them to his fellow religious, priests, nuns and the laity at large. The best means for this, he knew, was proficiency in languages. Besides Syriac¹, which was his special field of study, and his mother tongue Malayalam in its various dialects, he also learned Tamil and Sanskrit, and gained some skill in Latin, Portuguese, and towards the end of his life also in Italian. Thus he may be said to be a versatile linguist. His ambition was not to be a versatile linguist but to acquire knowledge and wisdom and communicate them to others in simple Malayalam, occasionally also in Syriac and Latin. Sanskrit perhaps helped him to compose lofty ideas and his mystical experience in high Malayalam verses. What Dr Johnson

¹ The Church of the St Thomas Christians had started, perhaps from the 4th or 5th century, using Syriac or Syro-Chaldaic in liturgy. It was in this language many of their priests used to write their signature as today many Malayalees do it in English. Not only liturgy but the teaching of ecclesiastical subjects was in Syriac. The books, not only the Bible, but also the teachings of the Fathers and theologians, were all in Syriac (cf. Mundadan 2001: 170, 188, 189, 194, 197, 198, etc.)

said about Oliver Goldsmith, "He touched nothing that he did not adorn", may be said of Chavara too. It is a wonder that in the midst of his hectic administrative, pastoral and other activities, he found time and leisure not only to reflect, meditate and pray but also to write so much, to write with such variety, poetic flavour, mystic depths and apostolic urgency. Only in the last five years he was comparatively less busy and got greater leisure. It is during these years he wrote some of his original compositions, like *Ātmānuthāpam*. His writings reveal his personality, his vision of life, his concerns and his spiritual quests. Through them there emerge clearly the vision and lifestyle of the founding fathers of the CMI Congregation. Without a deep study of these writings neither the personality of the Blessed nor the identity and nature of the congregation can be understood. Before we come directly to his writings we would like briefly to highlight his love of books and literature, printing and publication.

Chavara's Love for Books and Study

We have already seen how during his seminary years, under the inspiration and guidance of his malpan, Thomas Palackal, Chavara applied himself to study and learning, how he helped his malpan to collect books in Malayalam, Syriac and other languages, especially in Tamil, how he was encouraged by his malpan to read them and acquire a broad range of knowledge and wisdom. The malpan wanted him to learn Latin and Portuguese, which would open his mind to the wide world of philosophical, theological and other literary treasures of the West. Though the attempt was not fully successful, it opened a path for him for further acquisition of knowledge and wisdom. The collection and arrangement of manuscripts related to divine worship, which he did under the guidance of his malpan, as we have seen above, stood in good stead for him in the reform of the liturgy of the Church of the St Thomas Christians. All these exercises engendered in Chavara a love, perhaps even a passion, for reading books, something he admired in his malpan.

The Printing Press

A reference has already been made in chapter three to the endeavour of Chavara to set up a printing press at Mannanam. He thought that was the best means to communicate knowledge and Christian doctrine and values to people. He was convinced that the

print media was a powerful means to the learning process. He knew this from what the Protestant missionaries and before that what the Jesuits and other Catholic missionaries had done.

It was in Goa at the Jesuit-run St Paul's Seminary that the first ever printing press in India was established in 1556. In 1577 a press started functioning at the Vaipicotta (Chennamangalam) Seminary, also run by the Jesuits². It appears that another press was set up in Kochi between 1577 and 1579 and the Tamil version of St Francis Xavier's catechism is said to have been published from this press. Presses were also established at Kollam in 1578, 'Our Divine Saviours Press', Kodungalloor and Ampazhakad (or Sampalur). It was only towards the close of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth that printing presses were established in Bengal (1778) and Mumbai (1807). In Kerala the CMS Press, Kottayam and the Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram, were established at this time (cf. Sreethara Menon 1979: 291)³.

The CMS press being near Mannanam, Chavara thought that he could get enough information from the people who were running it. But he did not succeed in that attempt. Already on 21

² Bro. John Gonsalves, probably a Spaniard (though some say that he was an Indian trained in Spain), cut 'Malabar types' (actually Tamil types) at this seminary. Hence he is called 'Gutenberg of India'. Gutenberg (c. 1395-c. 1468) of Mainz in Germany was the inventor of a method of PRINTING from moveable types—earlier there existed either stamping letters on various surfaces or woodblock printing (cf. T. Devaprasad, "The Church and Indian Print Media", in *Indian Christian Directory*, Kottayam 2000: 1327; *Britanica Ready Reference Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, New Delhi: 2005, p. 235. The great scholar Fr Schurhammer has made an interesting study under the title, "The First Printing in Indic Character", originally published in *Harvard Library Bulletin* (13 [1952] 147-160) is reproduced in his *Orientalia*, Lisboa: CEHU, 1963 (pp. 317-31). It speaks of the first printing press brought to Goa, the first cutting of 'Malabar' (Tamil) types and the first printing at Kollam of *Doctrina Christiana* translated into Tamil by Fr Henriques.

³ Malayalam types were used for the first time at Amsterdam in *Hortus Malabaricus* (1686). P. J. Thomas (1961: 84, 85) is of the view that Bible was the first book printed in Malayalam types (cf. Devaprasad, art. cit.).

September 1843 Chavara accompanied by Mr Ittikuruvila Thoppil, who was working as a printer and showed great interest in Chavara's idea, proceeded to Kottayam and made some arrangements with a certain skilled worker (cf. '81: 43)⁴. This seems to be the first step taken towards the establishment of a press. That may be the reason why Fr Bernard (1989: 26) says that even before 1844 some steps began to be taken for establishing a press. Whatever it be it was in 1844 that concrete steps started for the purpose. Bernard continues (*ibid*):

Till a printing press started functioning at Mannanam only a very few individuals had in their possession some prayer books printed in Tamil and manuscripts in Malayalam. It was to facilitate imparting of religious knowledge among people and provide them with devotional literature that our fathers at Mannanam thought of starting a press.

Here we may pick up the account given by Chavara himself. The Mannanam Monastery received from a certain Mariathumma Kappamavummutil the equivalent of 12,000 Chakrams as mass stipend in November 1843. After alluding to this, Chavara directly proceeds to describe the attempts made to start the printing press. Maybe the substantial amount deposited in the monastery was thought to be a source for the attempt. Chavara continues ('81: 44; '90: 38):

From September '44 onwards we were interested in setting up a press for printing books. With eagerness I went to Kottayam [the CMS Press] to see and learn about setting up a press. But I was denied the opportunity. So I went about asking people who were in this field and with that information started the work of constructing a press.

⁴ The English translation ('90: 38)—"On the 21st Fr Thoppil and I went to Kottayam and brought a craftsman skilled in book-binding"—is misleading. Fr Bernard (1989: 27) says that in July 1843 they began planning to set up a printing press at Mannanam and for this Fr Chavara and Itti Kuruvila Thoppil went to Kottayam and brought a skilled worker. Kuruvila was a native of Pulincunnu.

Immediately after the demise of Chavara, in 1871, itself, Fr Leopold got the former's book, *Ātmānutāpam*⁵, printed and published. He prefaced it with a short biography of the Blessed, which he himself had written. Speaking of this biography Parapuram informs us that the fathers at Mannanam regretted that the biography did not mention anything about the printing press Chavara had established, attached to the Mannanam Monastery. He continues (p. 1469f.):

The setting up of a printing press may not appear to some people a praiseworthy achievement. But in reality it was. Before, at the time when the press was set up, or for many years after that, there existed not a single Catholic press.

In the absence of printing facilities the situation was such that people, desirous of knowing about matters related to Catholic faith and doctrine, had to have recourse to the few manuscripts. Since such manuscripts were rare the Christians had little knowledge of such matters. It was some eight or ten years before 1855 (the year in which the Carmelite rules were given to the Mannanam community) that Fr Prior set up the press. Spiritually the faithful profited very much from the books printed there.

Now we will follow up the story of the press as Chavara and others present it:

I went to Thankassery to meet the delegate⁶, and there the vicar, Rev. Fr Manuel Rosario, from Edakochi supported and recommended our case to the delegate. We wrote to Puthusserry and Madras to get the press and ink. Reply came that ink was not available there and they would get down a press and send it to us if we promised to pay the price of Rs 500, and transportation charges. But since we did not have that much money, we looked in other directions ('81: 44; cf. also Bernard 1989: 28).

⁵ *Ātmānutāpam*, by Very Rev. Kuriakose Elia, Prior of the Third Order Carmelite Missionaries, printed at the Immaculate Mother Press, 1871 (Malayalam): first 14 pp. biography, next 42 pp. *Ātmānutāpam*.

⁶ A Carmelite missionary deputed by the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly for looking after the faithful in this area.

We are not sure whether this happened before setting up a temporary press at Mannanam or after that. Fr Bernard's version (1989: 27) is the following:

Since the Kottayam people refused to show their press and explain its working Fr Chavara and Cathanar Paulose Parampil of Muttuchira⁷ travelled to Thiruvananthapuram. There, with the help of some Catholic workers in the Government Press, they were able to see and learn the working of the press as much as they wanted.

Fr Paulose Parampil possessed a good taste for and expertise in handicrafts and skilled work. When they returned to Mannanam from Thiruvananthapuram, a model of a press in plantain stem was made. A skilful carpenter constructed in wood a press according to this model. A base crafted in granite was fixed to it. The printing press was ready⁸.

The next thing was to get letters cut for printing. At this stage Pazhukkachan of Kottayam came to their help. He managed to influence a goldsmith, Sivaraman by name, an employee of the CMS Press, and brought him to Mannanam. On learning that the Kottayam people were trying to take him by force back to their press, he was sent to Pulincunnu and hid in the house of Mr Kurian Kuruvila Thoppil. There he cut square-shaped letters. Later he got relieved from his employment at Kottayam. Staying at Mannanam he cut other varieties of letters.

In 1846 Vicar Apostolic Ludovic Martini obtained the royal permission through the British Resident, Mr Kallan. For printing they got the services of a certain Kurian, an employee of the Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram and for binding books, an

⁷ Parapuram (p. 1411) says that Fr Parampil was a disciple of Malpan Palackal and a co-disciple with Chavara. The latter was brought to Mannanam where both he and Chavara after long discussions found out, with the grace of God, all the means to establish a press.

⁸ This original press is preserved in the Chavara Museum at Mannanam.

expert black Jew of Kochi⁹. It is at this stage, according to Fr Bernard (cf. 1989: 27f.), the mission to Thankassery took place.

As the reply from Puthusserry and Madras was not encouraging, Chavara and party went to Alapuzha where Cheriankunju Elanjikal and Kochupaulose from Vaikom came to their help. Through them an arrangement was made with a merchant by name Kameesa to get paper, ink and led worth hundred Rupees. On information that the articles had arrived in September¹⁰ Chavara together with Fr Kanjirappally¹¹ reached Alapuzha. As the quantity of paper and ink was over four times more than ordered and the money brought by them was insufficient to buy the whole lot, there was need to negotiate. This was done by a certain Thoman Chennat and the merchant agreed to sell half the quantity. Even for this they had not enough money. The said Thoman collected three thousand Chakrams in the form of a *chitty* (a subscription lottery) instituted in the name of St Joseph. This money was given to the merchant immediately and for the rest (three thousand Chakrams) Thoman gave him a promissory-note. Frs Chavara and Kanjirappally returned home with the purchased goods (cf. Bernard 1989: 28).

Chavara soon paid up this debt to the merchant. After that there was not a single Paisa left over for paying wages to the workmen and for other expenses. Chavara describes the situation ('81: 45; '90: 39):

We all began praying to the Guardian Angel and St Joseph. One day while I was thus praying with groaning in the church, almost like a miraculous help from God, a gentleman from the parish of Cherpunkal, by name Itty Nellipuzha arrived and told me that he had brought [for us] five hundred Chakrams and that if some one went with him he would send another five hundred. I heaved a sigh of

⁹ Printer Kurian and binder Jew trained a few local people of Mannanam in their respective trades. The Jew had his training in Bombay (Mumbai) (cf. *ibid.*: 27).

¹⁰ The year is not mentioned. Probably it was 1846.

¹¹ This must be Cathanar Kuññako Puthenpurayil of Kanjirappillil, who had joined the Manna nm community in 1841 (cf. '81: 42) and died before 1855 (see ch. 3).

relief. This gentleman had earlier given us thousand Chakrams¹² with the intention of giving alms to the poor, with the interest. After making it clear that either the alms given here would be made on his behalf or a fund would be set apart for this purpose, I received the money and spent it for the urgent needs.

In this context Chavara mentions many other donations received (cf. '81: 45f.; '90: 39f.).

Printing of Books and Papers

According to Parapuram (pp. 1472-5) at that time not only in Kerala but also in Tamilnadu there was no Catholic printing press¹³. But the Protestants at Tharangampadi (Tranquebar) (from the beginning of the 18th century, cf. Hambye 1997) were on a large scale printing and publishing books harmful to Catholics, much more than what those at Kottayam were doing. This made the Catholic priests to take great interest to start a press. A priest working in Puthusserry mission, Swami Depoi (Dupui?) daringly undertook many hardships and spent much money and established a press a few years before the one started at Mannanam. The books printed there were in Tamil but since there was much similarity between Tamil and Malayalam, those books got wide circulation in Kerala and many Kerala Christians profited by reading them. The then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly His Excellency Archbishop Ludovic told Fr Prior: "I give you permission to get translated the Tamil books printed at Puthusserry Mission into Malayalam and to print them at the Mannanam Press". There was at that time a certain Ikko Thoppil, who had the expertise to translate the books. He had a considerable knowledge of Sanskrit, Tamil and Malayalam. With his effort the above mentioned Tamil books were translated into Malayalam and printed at Mannanam. This was done very efficiently and to the satisfaction of all. Parapuram goes on describing the starting of the Sanskrit School at Mannanam. The services of the Sanskrit teacher, a Warriar from Thrissur, were also

¹² It is to be noted that 1000 Chakrams may be equivalent to Rs. 20,000 or more today.

¹³ Maybe the earlier presses established in the 16th century (cf. above p. 3) had already ceased functioning or Fr Parapuram was not aware of them.

used to keep good standard of Malayalam in the books printed at the press (cf. Parapuram: 1472-75). Fr Bernard (1989: 28) says that *Jñāna Piyūṣham* ('Spiritual Ambrosia') was the first book that was published from the Mannanam Press, in 1846¹⁴.

Fr Kuriakose Porukara has also an entry about the press in his biography of Chavara. After saying that the Prior had great desire to print books in Malayalam for the spiritual good of the less learned persons in Catholic doctrine, enumerates briefly the difficulties he encountered in the attempt. Notwithstanding, Chavara, being an intelligent and dignified person, succeeded in setting up a press and publishing a number of books. "This was a great service to the Kerala Church" (Porukara 1309: 32f.).

The Deepika

Great is the influence the Mannanam St Joseph's Press exerted in the history of Kerala and Malayalam language. The printing of *Nazrāni Deepika* ('Deepika' published at Kottayam from 1939 onwards) is a milestone in the media history of India itself. Generally considered the first Malayalam daily¹⁵ *Deepika* saw light in printer's ink in 1887. But already half a century before Chavara must have dreamed of a newspaper, which would serve as the eye, ear and tongue of cultural Kerala. It was to give wings to this dream he may have started the press. From that perspective it

¹⁴ Sebastian Paul says that it was an exhortation that Chavara circulated among his co-operators and friends, that was first printed in this press. It is not clear, to which circular this reference is. We know one circular that he got printed in this press in early 1860s against Roccas (cf. ch. 6, p. 26f.).

¹⁵ *Bengal Gazette*, started by J. A. Hicky in 1780, is the first Indian newspaper. Other newspapers were begun only in the first decade of the 19th century. The Baptist missionaries in Bengal started newspapers simultaneously in English and Bengali. *The Herald* (Calcutta, 1839 on), *The Examiner* (Mumbai, 1850 on) and *The New Leader* (Chennai, 1887 on) were the first Catholic papers. But they were all in English. *Deepika* is the first Catholic paper in an Indian language. It is true that H. Gundert published the first Malayalam newspaper, *Rājyasamūchāram* in 1847 from Thalassery and Benjamin Bailey, the second, *Jñāna Nikshēpam* in 1848 from Kottayam. The latter seems to be still published but is of no great influence nor widely known.

would not be an exaggeration to call Chavara the godfather of Malayalam print media.

The *Deepika*, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the Mannanam Press (1896) wrote:

In the prevailing atmosphere in mid-nineteenth century, the idea of starting a press appeared something exceptional and amazing. Even some intelligent people deemed that the effort and the yearning was for something impossible to achieve. But Chavara simply discarded such views and that way of thinking. Hence the ordinary people began saying that his attempt was the beginning of a mental derangement. Despite all this there was no change in this steady, courageous worker. He actually went ahead taking various steps to get done the task before him (*Nazrni Deepika*, 10 January 1896).

Kottayam and Mannanam developed into pioneering centres of print media by the middle of the nineteenth century. After Chavara changed his residence from Mannanam to Koonammavu, a branch of the press was started also at the latter place, 'Immaculate Mother Press'. Many prayer books and booklets came out from there. Parapuram (pp. 1492-97) describes how Syriac types were cut there and how some Syro-Malabar liturgical books in Syriac were published from there.

The greatest fortune was that the Mannanam press became the womb of the first of the still existing Malayalam newspaper and proved true to the lofty ideal defined in its very first issue:

To represent the atrocities, injustices and cruelties meted out to the poor folk before the court of the rulers and ministers and to voice the grievances of the mass like a faithful messenger...¹⁶

Writings of Blessed Chavara

We do not know whether the Blessed planned his own writings to be printed in the presses he established. The only one of

¹⁶ For much of the general information provided above about print media, cf. articles by Sebastian Paul in *Chavarayachan*, Kottayam 2004: 115-17; by Aykara and Devaprasad in *Indian Christian Directory*, Kottayam 2000: 90-93, 1327-28 respectively.

his original writings that was published in the nineteenth century is his *Ātmānutāpam*, that too only after his death, by Fr Leopold Beccaro at the Immaculate Mother Press, Koonammavu. However we know that one or two of his circulars were printed at Mannanam (cf. chapter 6: 26f.). We have seen in chapter seven some nine books Chavara prepared for divine services. A few of them were original compositions, others compilations, with some originality, from existing manuscripts, others adaptations or translations from the Roman worship tradition. Of these *Thukasa* ('Order of the Mass') and the liturgical calendar, both original compositions, were printed during his life time. Of the Divine Office, the Psalms were also probably printed before his death (cf. chapter 7: 37ff.). These liturgical texts, though Chavara showed some originality in their composition, especially the first two items mentioned above, were not completely independent of some manuscripts available at that time. Hence usually they are not counted as his literary contributions.

Chavara's originality and personal traits come out in his prose and poetic writings mainly in Malayalam. It is estimated that about one hundred and one writings (including all categories) of Chavara have come to us. There may be a few more, which have not yet been traced. Of the one hundred and one writings seventy five are in Malayalam, about twenty-four in Syriac (mostly related to divine worship), one or two in Latin, and one in Tamil but in Malayalam characters. Some of the Syriac letters sent to Rome were accompanied by translations in Italian or Latin (cf. *Positio*: 376). The writings of Chavara may be divided into the following categories: 1) Chronicles or historical works; 2. Spiritual writings¹⁷; 3. Letters; 4. Writings related administration. To this may be added a fifth category related to divine worship, about which we have already spoken.

The authenticity of Chavara's writings published in the *Complete Works* (CWC) has been scientifically established. Of the 101 writings mentioned above 89 are original in the hand of

¹⁷ Some divide this category into literary works and spiritual works. The publishers of the *Complete Works of Chavara* follow this pattern: Vol. II: Literary Works and Vol. III: Spiritual Works. Since both these categories are spiritual in character and literary in style we treat them under the title Spiritual Works. *Positio*: 377 gives a slightly different order of classification.

Chavara, 54 of them bearing his signature¹⁸. Three of his writings have been, as seen above (chapter 7, p. 38ff.), printed during his life time. The originals of seven of his letters have not come to us. The Latin or Italian versions of four of them are found in the archives of the Roman Congregation for the Oriental Churches¹⁹, and four are found copied in some of the contemporary chronicles²⁰. *Positio* states that the hundred and one writings have been scientifically researched into and their authenticity has been established by the historical commission for the cause of Chavara's canonization. This investigation made with the help of Mr T. K. Thomas, an expert in graphology, established the following points: 1. Chavara had his own special and constant mode of writing Malayalam characters; 2. the curving and shading of letters have a special constant feature in his writings; 3. while there was a variety of writing letters of the alphabet among Malayalees, Chavara kept a singularity and peculiarity of his own; 4. in his writings we can notice the selection of certain words of his predilection and choice²¹. The manuscripts were subjected to scientific scrutiny in 1960 with the help of experts in the Manuscript Library and Crime Branch Department in Thiruvananthapuram (cf. CWC I 1981, Introduction: iii). As a result of these studies some pages and lines in the traditionally handed over manuscripts have been dropped as spurious or later interpolations. In those studies styles of letter-formation, water marks on papers, quality of ink, signature etc. have been studied. So the officially published writings of Blessed Chavara can be taken as authentic. Other observations may be made when each document or sections of documents are studied.

¹⁸ Cf. *Positio*: 377 for a list of 14 modes of his signature.

¹⁹ Letters dated 19 June 1861 and 25 April 1870 to Pope Pius IX; letters to Card. Prefect of Propaganda, dated 1861 and 1869 (cf. *Positio*: pp. 218, 396 and 223f., 311 respectively). These are published in CWC IV 1982: pp. 6-11, 15-29

²⁰ Pastoral letter addressed to the parishes, dated 5 March 1850 (probably 1865), in the Chronicle of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, Book III (cf. *Positio*: 287f.); letter to his parishioners (cf. *ibid.* 291); circular dated 1 July 1869 to the members of the congregations (cf. *ibid.*: 351f.) are published in CWC IV 1982: 129f., 137ff., 89ff.

²¹ About these aspects cf. "Report of the Historical Commission", xxvii, p. 14 ff.; *Positio*: 388.

Chronicles and Historical Writings

Under the title of 'Mannanam Nalagamangal' ('Mannanam Chronicles')²², we possess two manuscripts kept in the library of Mannanam Monastery.²³ The binding of the books is not original. It was under the care of Fr Jerome of St Mary²⁴ that these two as well as other manuscripts in the library were bound in the way they are found at present. The custodian indicates in each of the bound volumes the name of the person whom he considered its author. The two manuscripts called 'Mannanam Chronicle' Vol. I and Vol. II contain most of the historical writings of Chavara.²⁵

Book I consists of the matter originally written in six separate note books, later bound together as already mentioned.²⁶

²² The name is not in the original but was given later by the custodian of the library (cf. fn. 23 below).

²³ They were earlier classified as AMSJ 32/B/2096 and 32/B/4/2095 (cf. *Positio*: 398; PO doc.1&8). Recently a new classification has been carried out.

²⁴ Fr Jerome (d. 31 July 1920) was the custodian of the library from 1902 to 1917. He was 19 years old and was at Mannanam at the time when Blessed Chavara died (cf. '81: 'b' ii).

²⁵ The writings identified as Chavara's in these two volumes (we may call them Book I and Book II) together with small portions from 3 other manuscripts were published in 1981 in Vol. I of CWC by the CMI Editorial Committee (which we refer to as '81). In this edition on the first series of pages i-viii (we call them 'a' series), we have a preface by the then Prior General, Fr Thomas Anicetus Aykara CMI; on the 2nd i- xxii pages (for us 'b' series) is the introduction by the editors; then there are two pages, iii & iv (for us 'c' series) of contents, then a blank page, on the reverse of which is the photo reproduction of the first page of the original of Book I. Then the text follows as pp. 1, 2, etc. Since the pagination in the edition is a little confused, for convenience sake we name 1st i- viii as series 'a', 2nd i- xxii as series 'b'; 3rd iii-iv as series 'c'.

²⁶ The continuous numbering of pages in this also was the work of the custodian when the fascicles were bound together. We may call the six books as six parts:

1. pp. 1-14 (written by Kaniyanthara not printed in CWC I).

Chavara does not give any title common to all the four parts (2-5). The title in the beginning of fascicle two²⁷ is *Darśanaveēdupanivaka Varthamanam* (The Story of the Building of the *Darśanaveēdu* 'Religious House'). Above this title is a decorated sign of the cross ('81: vi). This part has two subtitles: *Onnām Tudakkam*²⁸ (First Beginning), *Raṇṭām Tudakkam*²⁹ ('Second Beginning'). Under the first subtitle are narrated how Frs Palackal and Porukara obtained permission for the monastery from Mgr Stabilini; the donations received for the establishment; the problems Mgr Stabilini met in Kerala. Under the second subtitle the following events are described: the long search for a suitable site and selection of Mannanam; the laying of the foundation stone on 11 May 1831; the first Mass in the chapel on the day of Pentecost that year. *Mūnnām Nirut, Nērikida* ('Third Section, Time of Stress') is the third subtitle, with which the third part begins³⁰. The main events described in this section are: beginning of monastic life at Mannanam, the retirement of Mgr Stabilini, the installation of Mgr Pescetto as vicar

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2. pp. 15-62 ('81: 1-24) – Foundation history of Mannanam Monastery.
 3. pp. 63-80 ('81: 24-41) – Foundation history of Mannanam Monastery. This and the previous part were written at Mannanam in 1855 or later. This we infer from the first sentence where the name of the Blessed is given as Kuriakose Elias. We presume this name he took at his profession in 1855.
 4. pp. 81-126 ('81: 58-75) – Life of Palackal. This was written between 1864 and 1869 at Koonammavu.
 5. pp. 127-167 ('81: 41-58) – Chronicle, 1841-64. This must have been written between 1855 and 1864 at Mannanam except the last two or three pages.
 6. pp. 171-242 (not being Chavara's not printed in this volume). *Positio*: 398 says that this book consisted of 11 fascicles.

²⁷ See original p. 15 & '81: 1.

²⁸ See original p.1 & '81: 1.

²⁹ See original p. 28 & '81: 8.

³⁰ See original p. 65 & '81: 26.

apostolic, and the difficult time the founding fathers had, the starting of Mannanam Seminary, visit of Chavara to Vazhakulam and nearby places, the building of the church at Mannanam. The section ends with the mention of the religious profession of Br Jacob Kaniyanthara on 2 February 1865.

Part four contains a detailed account of the life and activities of Malpan Palackal Thomas, about whom brief reference had been made in the beginning of part two³¹. There is no special title given by Chavara to this part. It begins with the prayer, 'Jesus, Mary, Joseph be my help'. In the introduction ('81: 58f.) Chavara tells us that it was at the instance of Fr Leopold Beccaro that he wrote this account, which he thought his duty to do. There are three subtitles: two in the beginning of the narrative (Palackal's childhood, Palackal beginning to teach as malpan) and the third at the end (information about Palackal's preaching and starting of confraternities in churches). The narrative ends with a brief reference to the death and obsequies of the malpan³². The main content of this part is about Pallipuram Seminary and the studies and training given there. In between are given some information about the way a new prelate was received, the close association of Palackal with the administration of the Vicariate of Verapoly, visitation of churches by the vicar apostolic, certain reforms in the Church initiated by Palackal, etc. We get in this writing not only the mode of training Chavara and companions received in the seminary, but also an idea about the system of training given in seminaries at that time in general, the practice of praying the

³¹ This life of Palackal with a few additions and modifications was first published in 1905 by Alexander Kattakkayam (Jr), TOCD (CMI) in *The Founding Fathers of the Congregation of the Third Order Discalced Carmelites*, pp.1-17. About some of the additions and modifications see *Positio*: 65, 70, 72, etc. The full text is in CWC I, '81: 58-76. In the original (pp. 81-116) this part comes immediately after parts two and three, but in '81 edition it comes after part 5. According to *Positio*: 58 this part consists of the original fascicles 6, 7, 8.

³² This reference does not seem to have belonged in the original to the biography section but to the beginning of the next section (part 4). That may be the reason why it appears twice in the printed text, on p. 41 and p. 76.

Divine Office in the Church of St Thomas Christians, the clerical dress, etc. This part, besides being a genuine biography of the first of the founding fathers of the CMI Congregation, a luminary in the Church of the time, a holy, venerable *guru* and *ācārya*, is an important record of the history of the Church in the nineteenth century³³.

Part five, consisting of the seven and eight fascicles, gives the day to day happenings by date from 1841 to 1850³⁴. Three following pages³⁵ contain brief reference to events which took place in 1861 and 1865. These three pages must have been written about the year 1865. The main events narrated are: the demise of Fr Palackal, Cathanar Kunjakko Puthenpurayil joining the community at Mannanam, reception given to the junior prince of Thiruvithamcore, the establishment of the printing press at Mannanam, the elevation of Porukara and Chavara as malpans, the death of Vicar Apostolic Pescetto, the obsequies for him, the continuation of the constructions at Mannanam, the starting of giving food to the poor on St Joseph's feast, Chavara suffering a bout of small pox, the last illness and death of Porukara, visit of Bishop Ludovic Martini and others to Mannanam, submission of petition to get the congregation confirmed with ecclesiastically approved rules.

Book II³⁶ narrates the events that happened from 1855 to 1864 at Mannanam and from 1864 to 1870 at Koonammavu.³⁷ The

³³ Besides the two editions in Malayalam mentioned above and the corresponding part in the English translation of the Chronicle, a Latin translation is in PO, doc. 4 and is reproduced in *Positio*: 59-72.

³⁴ Original pp. 127- 164 (161?) & '81: 41-56.

³⁵ Original pp. 165- 67 & '81: 56-58: events which happened in 1861 (Rocco's and Thondanatt affairs briefly) and 1865 ('miracle' by Pius IX and profession of Br Kaniyanthara). *Positio*: 408 fn. 75 concludes that the second part (for us Book II) of the chronicle ('81: 77- 208) was written before this ('81: 56-58).

³⁶ Original pp. 1-147 ('81: 77-172). Partially in Latin also in *Positio*: 408-19. The section up to 1864 must have been written at Mannanam and the rest at Koonammavu.

³⁷ Although *Positio* (p. 398) says that this book has 160 pages, in the 1981 printed text only 147 pages are given (cf. '81: 172).

events described are more of the Kerala Church of the time than merely of the CMI Congregation. The earlier part of the book (pp. 1-58/'81: 77-177) was apparently written before 1864, probably in 1863, while Chavara was residing at Mannanam and the latter part (pp. 59-147/'81: 117-172) in about the year 1867 when he was living at Koonammavu (cf. *Positio*: 400; also '81: 'b' xiii). Pages 1-147 are definitely in the hand of Chavara; the rest is not so clear. Because of the uniformity of the ink and pen used for writing these pages and also because of the fair nature of calligraphy, it is suggested that these pages were recopied by Chavara himself from his original notes sometime before March 1870. The last event described in this volume is the mission Chavara undertook in the company of Fr Gerard OCD in 1870 to Bharananganam and the fixing of the site for the Monastery of Mutholy (cf. chapter. 4: 15f.). After this a few original letters are copied ('81: 166-72), the first of which is dated 5 February 1870.

The contents of this volume are: detailed account of the religious profession of the first eleven fathers at Mannanam in 1855; the taking over of the monastery at Koonammavu, and that of Plasnal; the beginning of the monasteries of Elthuruth, Vazhakulam, Ampazhakad and Mutholy; the affiliation of the congregation to the OCD in 1860; various achievements of Archbishop Baccinelli; beginning and the end of the Roccas affair; the reconciliation of Bishop Abdisho (Antony Thondanatt); the establishment of the religious house for women at Koonammavu in 1866; the illness and death of Archbishop Baccinelli in 1868; his successor Leonard Mellano; the arrival of Fr Gerard Beccaro OCD in 1869; the departure of Archbishop Mellano and Fr Leopold Beccaro for Europe; some information about Vatican Council I; the consequences of the new concordat between the Holy See and Portugal, beginning of Forty Hours Adoration in monastery chapels, etc.

It is interesting to note that a number of original documents are reproduced in this book, some of them in Syriac. In these pages Chavara's role within the Congregation and outside, in the Church as a whole, comes out in clear relief. The whole chronicle, both book one and two, is of supreme importance for the history, not only of the CMI Congregation but also of the Kerala Church as a whole, during the nineteenth century. It is a very important source, all the more so because the Blessed tells the story from his own personal experience, and also because original sources are

frequently quoted. It is also to be observed that the personality of Chavara can be discerned in this writing of his: e.g. his sense of obedience manifested in a marvellous way, by which he discerns the will of God revealed through the superiors; his zeal for the orthodox faith and unity of the Church; his loyalty to the Apostolic See and attachment to the supreme pontiff; his sense of humility, which prompts him to openly acknowledge what he considered his mistakes and aberrations; his readiness to recognize even any shade of goodness and any achievement found in his collaborators; his great prudence in judging persons and situations and in taking practical decisions and fulfilling them; his keen sense of regard and respect for others, etc.

Spiritual and Literary Writings

It has been already pointed out (above p. 11, fn. 17) that the *Complete Works of Chavara* (CWC) divides these writings into two categories: literary (poetic) writings (Vol. II) and spiritual writings (Vol. III). In the first of these are published: 'Compunction of Heart' (*Ātmānutāpam*), 'Dirge' (*Parvam / Pāna*) and Martyrdom of Anastasia; in the second, Meditation Colloquies (*Dhyānasallāpangal*), a number of other short meditations and prayers. Though the first three have a special literary flavour, they are also very spiritual in content. Hence we treat them, as already mentioned, together with other spiritual writings. Some of the letters he wrote, especially to the sisters of the Koonammavu Convent also are highly spiritual. They will be treated in proper places.

Ātmānutāpam ('Compunction of Heart' or 'Lamentations of a Contrite Soul')

This major composition, written in epic (*Mahākāvya*) style is the most important of the literary and spiritual writings of Blessed Chavara. The original Malayalam manuscript is preserved in the archives of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam.³⁸ Though the name of the author is not given in the manuscript there is sufficient evidence, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that the work is by Chavara

³⁸ ASJM; Latin version PO, doc., 70, and excerpts with an introduction and notes in *Positio*: 29-48.

³⁹. It is not very clear whether the manuscript is in the hand of Chavara himself. There are two possibilities: 1) either Chavara himself wrote carefully the whole text or recopied from a draft he had prepared; 2) or he got the assistance of a scribe to copy down the final text from a draft. The corrections, additions and footnotes are definitely in his hand which means that the text is recognized by him.

The title of the book, *Ātmānutāpam* is by the author himself. In the English version of the complete works of Chavara (Vol. II) it is translated as 'Compunction of the Soul'. A better translation may be 'Lamentations of a Contrite Soul'. The original manuscript has 143 pages containing 3000 metric verses, running into 4023 lines. It is divided into 12 cantons and follows various Malayalam poetic meters. The book treats: 1) life of Jesus from birth to ascension into heaven; 2) life of Mary from ascension of Jesus to assumption of Mary into heaven. The narrative is interwoven with continuous self-reflection and lamentations on his sins, especially in the first part of the book.

The first five parts of the book was published by Fr Leopold Beccaro in 1871 immediately after the demise of the Blessed. He prefaced it with a short biography of Chavara with the caption, 'A Short Account of the Blessed Person Who Wrote This Devotional Colloquies'⁴⁰. The subtitle given to the book is "A Devout Soul's Colloquies of Gratitude and Love towards God". The full text was published in 1939, from Elhuruth. In 1957 a third edition was published from Mannanam under the supervision of postulation of the cause of Chavara. The whole text is published in CWC, Vol. II both Malayalam (1981) and English (1989).

The writing or the final redaction of the book took place probably in 1869. Fr Leopold Beccaro says:

³⁹ Cf. Mannanam Chronicle III (1864-71), Chronicle of Palakunnel, Diary of Parapuram, writings of Leopold Beccaro and Ambrosius OCD, cf. *Positio*: 29, and also 385.

⁴⁰ *Ātmānutāpam*... by Very Rev. Fr Kuriakose Elia, Prior of the TOCD Monasteries founded in Kerala, printed at the Press of Mother Immaculate, Koonammavu: 1871. There is a short glossary at the end. The biography was published separately by Lucas Vithuvattical CMI, Mannanam: 2003.

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, titled *Ātmānutāpam* ('Lamentations of a Contrite Soul') included in this volume, 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 (Beccaro 003: 14).

Chavara fell a victim to his last illness in 1870. He finished the work a little before that, i.e. in 1869 or early 1870.

It has been established that Chavara depended on the well-known 18th century book, 'The Mystical City of God' by Sister Maria D'Agreda or Sister Mary of Jesus⁴¹. It seems Mgr Baccinelli and Fr Leopold had copies of the Italian edition of the book and made much of it, using it for spiritual reading. Leopold used it for instructing the novices. Chavara came to know of the book either through attending Fr Leopold's classes, or through conversation with the latter or even reading the book, with the little Italian he had learned. However his dependence on the book for writing *Ātmānutāpam* is limited to the section on the Virgin Mary. The main source for his reflection and meditation was the Gospels. The long years he had spent reading and meditating on them stood him in good stead to spiritually relive his whole life, from the infancy onwards, as is clear from the contents of the book.

Experts and critics of Malayalam literature have made various comments on *Ātmānutāpam*. P. J. Thomas (1961: 241) has commented that Chavara composed the poems to evoke devotion and compunction of heart in the souls of readers rather than impart knowledge. C. Anthapai, who as a boy had read the five chapters published by Fr Leopold, was very much impressed by the book. Later in his adult years, he longed to read it again and managed to procure a copy. He read it and published his comments in *Nazrni*

⁴¹ Suor Maria de Gesù, *Mistica Città di Dio*, Venice: 1740. This book was a controversial one and on this point there was disagreement between Fr Leopold and Fr (later Archbishop) Leonard Mellano. This controversy was reported to Rome by Mgr Baccinelli and Rome seems to have expressed its reservations about the book (cf. Parapuram: 143f.; see above ch. 8, p. 45). About Mary and her book see Maniakunnel 2005: 112f.

Deepika.⁴² After indicating certain points which he considered defects, Anthapai expressed his great esteem for the author, "who wrote down only what he had personally internalized and made his own. No line in the book shows any slackness of mind," he continues, "but the whole book is apt for inducing devotion in the minds of the readers." He discerns the special gift Chavara had to compose poems. We will have occasion later on to discuss the deep spiritual contents of the book.

Dirge (*Parvam* / *Pāna* - Song of Mourning)⁴³

Christians in Kerala have the custom of the household and relatives and friends keeping vigil around the dead body of a family member. This poem was written to be sung loudly on occasions like this.⁴⁴ This poem has 1162 verses. Underlying the poem is the Catholic faith in communion of saints that is the communion among Church triumphant in heaven, Church suffering in purgatory and Church militant on earth. The emphasis is on our attitude towards the dead, those suffering in purgatory. The poem contains ten parables or episodes intended to inspire the listeners to be kind towards the dead.

The Malayalam original is kept in the archives of Mannanam Monastery. The authorship has been established beyond doubt (cf. *Positio*: 431). It was first published in 1939 and again in 1969. The title in the original is *Maranaveettil Pādunnatinulla Parvam* (Canto to Be Sung in the Home of a Dead Person). The 1969 edition retains it while that of 1939 substitutes *Pāna* (song) for *Parvam*. In CWC Vol. II (1981) *Pāna* appears in the title.

⁴² *Nazrāni Deepika*, XVI (Kottayam: 1902), nn. 4&5, cf. *Positio*: 577-80.

⁴³ AMSJ 21/a/5/ 1389. Latin translation in PO, doc. 71 and excerpts in *Positio*: 432-34. Published in CWC II 1981: 129- 172 (Mal.), 1989: 127- 161 (English).

⁴⁴ It may be good to remember here that more than a century earlier Arnos Pathiri (Fr Ernst Hanxleden SJ) had written what is known in Kerala as *Puttanpāna* ('New Hymn'). This used to be sung in Christian families, in Lent, especially in the Holy Week, and when some one died in the family (cf. Mundadan 1997: 236ff, at 258).

Although no name of the author appears in the manuscript it has been proved that the work is by Chavara. At the end of the published work (both editions) we find the following note:

Since Very Rev. Fr Kuriakose Elia, TOCD, wrote this beautiful spiritual dirge, we should pray, "Lord, let his soul rest in peace, rest in the home of the just".

Positio suggests that probably it is about this work that Chavara wrote to the sisters of Koonammavu Convent on 2 April 1870 (CWC IV, 1982: 109ff): "Give this *caritra-pana* ['history in poem'] to the children." This inference may not be quite correct. The writing in question could also be 'Martyrdom of Anastasia', about which *Positio* does not say anything.

The poem begins with a quote from *Ecclesiastes* (71: 2-3): "The day of death is better than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting". The poet then introduces, with striking thoughts, images and episodes, the aim and end of life and our duty to help the souls in purgatory with prayers and acts of penance. With playful strains and humorous episodes the poet leads readers to the deeper realms of Christian eschatology that deals with the end of man. It throws light on the words of Christ and insights into the meaning of our life. Through the theme of sufferings of the dead in purgatory, the poem is intended to inculcate the consciousness of the end of life, from which every man should have to make life itself meaningful.

Martyrdom of Anastasia

This beautiful poem is a minor epic (*Khaṇḍakāvya*), perhaps the first of its kind, which was to become later very popular with Malayalam poets. This is the poetic rendering of the story of St Anastasia who suffered martyrdom in the third century in Rome under Emperor Valerian. Towards the end there is also a reference to a certain Cyril who, for giving her water to drink, also fell a victim to the sword of the persecutors. The poem in 182 verses is written in the style of a boat song (*vañcipāṭṭu*) calculated to move the listeners to action and sacrifice. If the *Pāna* describes the sufferings of the Church in purgatory, this poem describes the sufferings of the Church militant on earth. A Christian's greatest duty is to persist in faith during this life in spite of sufferings, persecutions or even death. It is believed that the poem was written

at a time when the unity of the Church in Kerala was challenged by the disturbances caused by the intruding bishop, Roccas⁴⁵. Blessed Chavara might have felt that people needed to be reminded of this so that they could remain loyal to the one Catholic Church. In the circular of Chavara published probably in May 1861 there is a call to the faithful to be prepared even for martyrdom (cf. CWC IV 1982: 133).

The young woman Anastasia is summoned out of the convent by Emperor Valerian. In the parting advice of her mistress Sophia, Blessed Chavara is exhorting his fellow faithful. [The soldiers were calling out to the convent to release Anastasia and send her with them to the royal court:]

Holy Sophy heard this news,
 Held her daughter close and said
 Daughter dear, your blessed groom,
 Calls you with a longing love
 Go, be quick.
 Recall your former days of joy
 Days your king stretched out His arms
 To clasp you close to Him with love.
 The Lord who climbed the cliffs and hills
 The Lord who crowned his head with nails
 The Lord who offered life and love
 It is the Lord, your holy groom
 Show his glory, show his might
 The Lord you love so dear and well
 Oh! He your constant friend for'ever
 Men of earth shall never possess
 Your heart and body pure and fine.
 She kissed her with love and
 Filled her with valour

(CWC II 1989: 167, lines 48-67).

The poem then describes how Anastasia boldly and gladly suffered all the tortures and gave up her life for Christ. The martyrdom of Anastasia expresses the cost Chavara was willing to

⁴⁵ The Roccas affair became very intense by the end of 1861 and beginning of 1862. Hence it may be surmised the poem was composed at this time.

pay for the cause of faith and Catholic unity. *Martyrdom of Anastasia* is a well-knit story: it is written in a simple and beautiful style; and the mode of narration is apt to strengthen the faith of the readers. The poem can very well revive the spirit of faith in any person tormented by doubts and questionings. The poem demonstrates not only how deep Chavara's understanding of martyrdom was but also how lofty an ideal he cherished regarding consecrated life. It may be noted that at this time he was seriously thinking of establishing a religious house for women, with a boarding house (*educantat*) (CWC II, 1981: 175, line 7 mentions *educantat* of Abbess Sophy).

***Dhyānasallāpangal* ('Meditation Colloquies') and Other Spiritual Writings**

Under this category a number of writings are included. They are published in the *Complete Works of Chavara* (CWC III) with the title 'Spiritual Works of Chavara'⁴⁶. The way the different items are presented is a little confusing. The English edition is still more confusing,⁴⁷ giving all items under the general heading given above. Only the first three of them are numbered I, II, III. The others have no numbers. *Positio* deals only with two items, the first two of the four given below. We arrange them under four headings: 1. *Dhyānasallāpangal*, 2. *Dhyānakuripukal*; 3. Prayers Blessed Chavara used to Recite; 4. Forty Hour Adoration.

1. *Dhyānasallāpangal* ('Meditation Colloquies')

Of all the writings of Chavara, this seems to be the most expressive of the author's God-experience and contemplative dimension. It is a sort of spiritual diary he wrote between 1866 and 1868. The original Malayalam manuscript⁴⁸ does not contain any

⁴⁶ Mannanam: CMI Editorial Committee, 1981 (Malayalam), 1990 (English). The title given in the English version is 'Colloquies with the Heavenly Father', which is derived from the first item, and hence not comprehensive.

⁴⁷ It gives all items but without numbering them properly.

⁴⁸ AMSJ 32/ A/ 28/ 2075. Its Latin translation can be found in PO, doc. 24, partly also reproduced in *Positio*: 427-31. The original Malayalam was first published from Mannanam in 1939 under the title, *Dhyāna-sallāpangal*, a title not found in the original but given by the editor. A second edition with the same title was published

title of the whole book but only some subtitles, which do not keep any logical order: Glory to God,—Hail Holy Mother of God, Meditation 1, Part 1, Act of Contrition, and Act of Humility. The English text adds one more, 'Prayer to St Joseph' (p. 12). The text begins on page 1, followed by an interruption: a short sermon on Forty Hour Adoration. The colloquy is then resumed with a doxology: Glory to God. Praise to the Mother of God.

This book, mostly diary notes of the Blessed's spiritual experiences, is transcribed in the form of personal monologues addressed to Jesus Christ, the Blessed Mother and St Teresa of Avila. *Dhyānasallāpangal* discloses that Blessed Chavara was a master of spirituality and attained the highest levels of mystic experience. He had a personal approach to prayer, into which were incorporated prayer concepts of St Ignatius of Loyola and St Teresa of Avila: the latter he considered his mistress in prayer life. In fact Chavara has developed a Carmelite mysticism of his own brand. Here we may recall how the Blessed spent the common meditation time as reported by eye-witnesses. It lasted one full hour. He became so completely absorbed in the meditation that it appeared he lost the sense of time and place. The whole time he shed tears profusely. After the meditation he returned to his room shedding tears. One may surmise that reaching his room he wrote down the experiences he had during the meditation, thus giving shape to his *Dhyānasallāpangal*.

Through these colloquies Chavara expresses the deepest feelings in spiritual life: gratitude to a loving God for all the abundant blessings showered on him and sorrow for the smallest lapses in personal life. His most intimate feelings reveal his child-like innocence. He continuously addresses God and Jesus Christ *Appa* ('father'), *Ente Appa* ('my father'), which has the endearing and intimate meaning of 'father' reserved exclusively to the children. It is almost like addressing God 'Dad' or 'Abba'. The Malayalam word 'Pitāṁ' (also meaning father) is more an honorific term used to address God the Father, ecclesiastical dignitaries (the Pope, the bishop) and some saints like St Joseph, etc. The word *appa* is used thirty-one times and brings out his *abba-consciousness* and reveals how the picture of the loving father

receiving the prodigal son in the Gospel parable was deeply impressed in his soul. God had to pay a great price in receiving back the prodigal son—the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The mainsprings of Chavara spirituality are the burning love of God and the horror of sin. Though the soul may be sunk in remorse the father-son relation lifts it to sublime heights. So his spirituality ever remains lofty, being absolutely free from any feeling of inferiority. The point of departure for this intimate meditation-conversation with God is the story of the prodigal son with whom Chavara identifies himself, and the thought of his very loving father. Reading through these meditations one will be impressed by Chavara's close familiarity with the sacred scripture, both Old and New Testament s.

2. *Dhyāna Kuripukal* ('Points for Meditation / Retreat')

This book consisting of 32 pages is conserved in the archives of Mannanam.⁴⁹ The historical commission for the cause of Chavara called the book *Deiva Viliyinmel Dhyānam* ('Meditation on Divine Vocation'), which is the first of the five meditations contained in this book. The other four are: meditation on the mercies of God, on mortal sin, on serving two masters⁵⁰, on the death of an impious priest. All the meditations are intended for priests. They are probably points prepared for preaching during spiritual recollection of priests. The manuscript seems to be fragmentary. Though nowhere the name of the author appears, both from extrinsic and intrinsic evidence it is established as Chavara's. It is surmised that these notes were written down when Chavara began preaching retreats for priests, i.e. between 1840 and 1850 (cf. *Positio*: 425).

⁴⁹ AMSJ. Latin translation is PO, doc. 75 and partially in *Positio*: 426. The original was published in 1981 as part of CWC Vol. III (Malayalam 1981: 48-65; English 1990: 24-34).

⁵⁰ Malayalam title is *Rantu Acammāruḍe Vela Ennatinmel*, which is translated into English as 'On the Worth of Two Priests'. The content is about a priest who is devoted half to God and half to worldly affairs, hence the proper title should be 'On Serving Two Masters' (cf. *Positio*: 425).

3. Prayers Chavara used to Recite⁵¹

This is a small size manuscript of 218 pages written in the hand of Chavara and preserved in the Mannanam archives. The first 137 pages have not yet been traced. The manuscript, which we have, starts with page 138. There is a note on the cover of the manuscript written by Fr David on 25 May 1918:

This book had been used by Father Big Prior [Chavara]. It was found in a shelf at Chethipuzha. When the shelf was cleaned this was one of the books thrown out as useless. But I with the permission of Very Rev. Prior Nicholas, took it for my personal use (cf. CWC III: 1981: 66).

The prayers are the following: 1. Preparatory Prayer, 2. Prayer to the Holy Mother of God, 3. Morning Prayer, 4. Evening Prayer, 5. Prayer for the Custody of Eyes. In between 4 and 5 there is a prayer for a happy death composed by a girl converted from Protestantism at 15 years of age and died as a saint when she was 18 years old. At the end there is a prayer to be said by priests everyday so that they might serve God earnestly⁵².

4. Forty Hour Adoration

Already a reference has been made to the starting of Forty Hour Adoration in Kerala by Blessed Chavara. He translated the ritual from Latin. But the original of this composition has not yet been traced. What we have today is a copy preserved in the archives of Mannanam⁵³.

⁵¹ AMSJ. It was first published in Vol. III of CWC, (Malayalam 1981: 67-76; English 1990: 34-40).

⁵² There are 2 prayers at the end of the first section: a. Preparatory Prayer, b. Prayer to the Holy Mother of God. These two prayers (81: 67-68) are more or less the same as those given after *Dhyāna Kuripukal* (CWC IV 1981: 45-47), though in the latter case there is an additional information (ibid.: 47): a great tragedy that threatened Chavara and Leopold was avoided by the prayers of the sisters: "What seemed to assume a mountainous proportion, was made as light as the a flower by the Blessed Mother".

⁵³ AMSJ 24/ A, XI/ 12. It was printed in *Namaskārakramam* ('Order of Prayers'), published from Mannanam. There is a note in the book: "Fr Prior Chavara himself copied these rituals from the order

The spiritual works of Chavara mentioned above reveal the concrete steps followed by a great soul in growing in prayer life. Priestly sanctity is the central theme. The possibility of becoming faithless to one's call has always been a threat to priests. These meditations reveal the author's single-minded commitment to priestly holiness. The training the author received from his seminary rector Father Thomas Palackal may be the core element behind this scheme of priestly spirituality. They are also indications of the themes he used in preaching retreats for priests.

Letters

It is known that Chavara wrote letters at different occasions to various persons or groups. Of these about 67 in originals or copies have come to us. These are published in volume IV of the *Complete Works of Chavara*⁵⁴. Three letters written to the nuns at Koonammavu are found in the chronicle of their convent, and the chronicle says that he wrote to them many letters and notes, of which only three are recorded⁵⁵. Of the 67 letters published in the *Complete Works*, some are short, but several are quite long. Most of the letters are in Malayalam, some seven in Syriac with or without translations into Latin or Italian; one is in Tamil, and a few in Latin. Four or five of the letters have come to us only in copies and the rest are original. Among them are the two letters sent in 1861 and 1870 to the Pope; 7 letters written between 1861 and 1869 to the Propaganda Congregation in Rome; 10 letters to various bishops; 2 letters sent to the superior general of the OCD in Rome; 17 letters and 4 circulars sent to his confreres; 11 letters to the Carmelite sisters of Koonammavu Convent; 4 letters to diocesan priests; 7 general circulars and 3 business letters.

The letters like the chronicles are of great historical value. Most of them were written by his own hand with place and date and hence they are most authentic. At a time when correspondence was not easy, the abundance of letters proves that Chavara was very particular about consulting the authorities concerned or

prepared by Pope Clement". It is now published in Vol. III of CWC, 1981: 77-83, but not in the English translation.

⁵⁴ CWC IV, Mannanam: 1982 (Malayalam); Ernakulam: 1990 (English).

⁵⁵ Cf. CKC 2002: 199-2001.

reporting to them at proper times. They reveal that he was a man of action. They were the effective means to transmit to others his plan of action for materializing the schemes he had visualized. They were used to seek solutions for the prevailing dissensions in the local Church, to instil greater Christian culture and morality into his fellow-Catholics, to answer queries from priests and to put fervour into his fellow religious and the sisters at Koonammavu. Some of the letters contain the best spiritual insights of the Blessed. They also contain guidance for growth in spiritual and prayer life. The common circulars that he wrote to his confreres are of lasting value to the CMI Congregation. This is especially true of his testament, which is indeed a cherished possession. We have already made an analysis of this document in a previous chapter. We have also referred to the high quality of the spiritual direction Chavara imparted to the nuns and boarders of Koonammavu Convent. About the two letters he addressed to his blood-relatives we have seen in chapter seven.

Writings related to Administration

About 16 writings have been identified in this category (cf. *Positio*: 382- 85). A few of these are written on palm leaves, others on paper. There are two short notes, which do not carry any title⁵⁶: the first was written in 1864 and dealt, among other things, with the question of admitting candidates to the congregation; the second written between 1865 and 1868 is concerned with the way of bringing lasting peace to the Church of St Thomas Christians. We have spoken elsewhere about the contents of both these notes (cf. chapter 5, 12). There is another short note written by Chavara in the diary of Fr Kuriakose Porukara⁵⁷. It is published in the chronicle ('81: 208f.; '90: 175f.) and speaks of the community way of life the inmates of Mannanam Monastery started in 1840. This has also been referred to in an earlier chapter (chapter 3: 28).

⁵⁶ These are published among letters of Chavara in CWC IV, pp. 81-85 (Malayalam 1982) and pp. 55-59 (English 1990); Latin translation in PO, doc. 40 & 81, *Positio*, 419-24.

⁵⁷ This is part of the account book of Mannanam written by Chavara from 1840. On one side of each page is the account and on the other is the chronicle by K. Porukara (cf. *Positio*: 383); AMSJ, 32, B, 5/ 2100. Latin translation in PO, doc. 83.

There are two more account books in the hand of Chavara: 1. account book II of Mannanam Monastery corresponding to the years 1840-55⁵⁸; 2. the account of Koonammavu Convent corresponding to January 1867 to January 1868⁵⁹. Then onwards the sisters themselves wrote the accounts. This account is important for the funds received for the convent (p. 31ff.), and the patrimony received for each of the sisters (p. 58ff.).

There are two official documents related to the parish church of Arakuzha, prepared by Chavara in his capacity as delegate of the vicar apostolic⁶⁰. The first is an inventory of the church together with a summary of the receipts and payments for the years 1835-45. Actually the document on palm leaves is not in the hand of Chavara nor does it contain his signature. But from the introduction it is clear that Chavara was principally responsible for preparing this inventory. The second (incomplete) is in Chavara's hand and there is his signature at the end. It is the report of the cases Chavara was delegated to inquire into (cf. *Positio*: 383).

There is a note written by Chavara in relation to the testament of Fr Kora Kallungathara⁶¹. This diocesan priest, in his old age was living in a house he had built in the monastery compound of Mannanam. Before death he, by a testament, relinquished all his possessions to the monastery together with the obligation to pay any debt he had incurred. After his death Chavara made an inventory of all the possessions and debts of the deceased priest and prefaced it with a brief account of the life of the same priest (cf. *Positio*: 384).

There are two public documents, by which Chavara delegated in 1864 Mr Chandy Uthuppu Muriakary, and in 1869 Mr Eapen Chacko Kalapurckal to enact business in the civil court as his representatives⁶². Besides there are two promissory notes

⁵⁸ AMSJ 15, D, 5; Latin in PO, doc. 82, and partly *Positio*: 424.

⁵⁹ ACST; Latin translation in PO, doc. 84.

⁶⁰ Archives of Arakuzha parish; Latin in PO, doc. 89 and 90. Only one of the leaves of the second document has been traced, the rest are missing.

⁶¹ AMSJ, 32, B, 15/ 2110; Latin in PO, doc. 93.

⁶² AMSJ, 18/ 295 (1864); Latin PO, doc. 93 bis; AMSJ, 10 (1869); Latin PO, doc. 189. The second document is not original but a copy.

written and signed by Chavara, one given to Mr Kandan Nayar Madassery (1865) and another to the *Devasom* (temple property custodians) of Kumaranelloor (1867)⁶³ (cf. *ibid.*). Two other documents are receipts acknowledging receipt of Mass stipends Mr Okanda Pothan Thayyil (1856) and Mr Okanda Kurian Tharakan (1857)⁶⁴ (cf. *ibid.*). There are also two documents regarding the paddy fields of Kari⁶⁵. The first of these is an agreement with Mr Kurian Thayyil (1850) regarding the mode of cultivating the fields, which were in the combined possession of Kurian and the monastery. The second is another agreement with Mr Jacob Thuruthumalil and Okanda Pothan Thayyil (1857), regarding the cultivation of fields, which were in the combined possession of these two persons and the monastery (cf. *ibid.*: 385). These documents are a witness to the care Chavara took in administering temporalities and his sense of duty to the causes both temporal and spiritual he served.

In this chapter we have seen first a brief survey of Blessed Chavara's love of knowledge and his earnest desire and assiduous efforts to defuse it, especially through the print media. Then we listed his writings under different categories with brief summaries and short commentaries. This is rather an overview of the amazingly large number and variety of the writings of Chavara. These writings constitute a rich mine of information on Church and society, and much more they are a mine of immense spiritual wealth. We have not been able to explore all this adequately. Many other writers have done creditable analysis to some extent. Of course we have made a partial exploration of the writings in some other sections of this book, trying to draw out the multifaceted, especially the spiritual personality of Chavara and his valuable contributions. Yet we feel that there is need for a deeper and a more thorough study. It is hoped that gifted minds will come up to respond with dedication to this challenging task.

Both are concerned with the litigation against Mr Mathan Kalapura, about which reference has been made elsewhere (cf. *Positio*: 365f.).

⁶³ AMSJ, PO, doc. 87 (1865); AMSJ, PO, doc.86 (1867). Both are on palm leaves.

⁶⁴ AMSJ, PO, doc. 91 (1856), PO, doc. 91 bis (1857). Both are on palm leaves. Both have the signature of Chavara.

⁶⁵ Private archives of Kurian Thayyil, PO, doc. 92 (1850); Private archives of Okanda Pothan Thayyil, PO, doc. 205 (1857).

CHAPTER TEN

Journey to the Father's Home

The inscription on the zinc sheet affixed to the coffin, in which the body of Chavara was buried on 4 January 1871, concludes:

On 3 January 1871, in the morning at 7.30, amidst the tears of his spiritual children, comforted by the sacraments of the Church, and manifesting extraordinary signs of the love of God, offered his beautiful soul in the hands of the Lord God, whom he had been loving all through life (Chronicle of Mannanam III, p. 267; *Positio*: 506).

“Offered his beautiful soul in the hands of the Lord God”. The whole life of Blessed Chavara was a continuous preparation for this process of offering his soul into the hands of God the Father. His whole life was a journey to heaven. Physically he was subject to various disabilities from his seminary days to the end of his life on earth; spiritually the thought of death was always in his mind.

Chavara's notion of death was coloured by the theology and spirituality current at that time, expressed in the religious literature of the West. An element of fearfulness and trepidation, frightening phrases may find their way into Chavara's reflection on death, but positively he prescribes various means to safely sail through this troubled ocean and reach the other shore, the Promised Land (cf. *Dhyānasallāpangal* - ‘Meditation Colloquies’, CWC IV 1981:34ff.)¹

¹ You find in these pages the fear and trembling one feels when one thinks of death and judgement. At the same time salutary thoughts are plenty.

Salutary Thoughts on Death

It was such thoughts on death which moved the Blessed to establish, wherever possible, 'The Confraternity of Happy Death' of St Joseph, patron of happy death. In 1843 he sent out a circular letter to priests and faithful requesting them to join such a fraternity, already started in the Monastery of Mannanam, "which is the place of St Joseph". He introduces the circular:

Man, the crown of creation, is created by God of infinite goodness. The moment he is born, death too is born. To cross over this sea of death, the voyage is really difficult and perilous. Therefore in order to cross over this sea, we need a sailor who is really an expert, familiar with the route and who, at the same time, is capable of withstanding every obstacle on the route. We need also a heavy anchor, which would resist every tempest in the sea and protect the ship from being caught amidst the billows. We need also a strong vessel, strong enough to resist the tempests of the sea, which gives guarantee of safety and protection to the passengers.

Such a strong vessel, which would resist every tempest of the dangerous sea is Mary our Mother, the refuge of sinners; the powerful and heavy anchor which protects the ship lest it be caught amidst the billows of the sea is Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father; the sailor who is familiar with the route and who would safely bring the passengers to safe landing, is St Joseph, the patron of happy death.

Therefore the invocation of the holy names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, is a sure pledge of eternal salvation.

After this the obligations of the members are listed (CWC IV 1982: 127f.).

In the letter he wrote to his parishioners at Kainakari in October 1869, Chavara starts with some Old Testament events, in which God protected a number of people for their good deeds, and punished others for their evil deeds. Then he says:

If only one soul is saved through the counselling and service of another and goes to heaven, he, the helper, would be saved invariably, because the soul thus saved would be near him with a heart filled with gratitude and would pray

unceasingly for the salvation of the soul that saved him. Many saints reached the height of sanctity by nursing the sick. The nursing of the sick may be the most difficult, unpleasant, detestable and degrading service before the fellow men; but it is the most meritorious service before God. This becomes very obvious when we read the lives of saints (ibid.: 158f.).

He goes on describing, through similes and stories, the need to be always vigilant expecting death at any moment and always preparing for it. He speaks also very vividly about the ordeals and temptations one might be subjected to. The conclusion is that of all the helps we can render to a human being, the greatest is what we render to him/her at the time of his departure from this world. Hence the need for the 'Confraternity of Happy Death'. In order to cross this sea of death with peace of mind he reminds the Kainakarians, how effective and consoling is the devotion to St Joseph (ibid.: 152f.). He concludes the first letter (13 Feb. 1868) to his parishioners with these words:

Each month, on this particular day read this and say the following ejaculatory prayer: "Lord accept the soul of this your servant in the home of the just". This is my only request to you (ibid: 152).

In a letter he wrote to his nephew, Fr Joseph Chavara, in 1868, the Blessed speaks at length of his approaching death and asks his nephew to pray for him (cf. ibid: 80). In his book *Dhyānasallāpangal* ('Meditation Colloquies') his prayer to St Joseph would touch the heart of any one:

Therefore, my benign father, in order that my fears at the time of death may be dispelled, only one thought comforts me, namely, the memory of you, who are my father and patron (CWC III 1981: 36).

In the same writing the author puts the following prayer on the tongue of the Blessed Mother:

Oh my most beloved Son, my creator, I, your servant and mother, believe you have given to me also this poor Kuriakose as my son... See he has come to me with true contrition over all his sins. Having absolved him of all his

sins and debts due to them grant him the baptismal grace and perseverance in the same until death (ibid: 44)

In the last chapter of his *Ātmānutāpam* (Concluding Prayer lines 53-56) Chavara makes this prayer to the Blessed Virgin:

Your beloved Son and your Spouse,
My Father, virtuous in the same measure
And when the time draws near to step out
Come to me and lovingly bless and help me

(CWC II 1981:126)

Physical Disabilities and Presentiments about Death

We do not know whether Chavara suffered any serious health hazard before he entered the seminary when he was thirteen years old. In the seminary at Pallipuram he contracted filariasis or elephantiasis, a disease common to the coastal area of south Kerala. Rheumatism with occasional fever soon became a life-long companion. In 1845 or so he suffered a bout of smallpox (cf. 81:53f.). Once he was making a trip to Malayattoor and other churches in the eastern parts sometime in October/November 1866, in order to collect alms for the completion of the construction of the convent. At Cheranallur he started to have rheumatic fever, and having lost his senses, was confined to bed for about two days. He was taken back to Koonammavu, where he developed swelling in legs. Slowly he got better and soon engaged himself for the same purpose (Chronicle of Mannanam III, p.130f., *Positio*: 501.)

It seems that from the same year on Chavara began to entertain strong presentiments about the approaching death. As seen above he wrote to his nephew in 1868 in that tone. These sentiments intensified in 1870. It was in August that year that he wrote his testament to the members of his congregation. In the previous year he sent a similar testament to his parishioners at Kainakari. Vicar Apostolic Leonard Mellano left for Europe in August 1869 to take part in the First Vatican Council. Delegate Leopold Beccaro accompanied him. Before their departure they came to Koonammavu to bid farewell. After the formal farewell meeting was over, Chavara took a piece of paper from his pocket and read it out. It was a poem he had composed. It reads:

At a time when I find myself unable to perform even my daily duties, if I am being entrusted with such great responsibilities, I feel really perplexed. All the more regretful is that, my spiritual director [Fr Leopold], who I thought would be my consolation at the time of my death, is being taken with you.

When the Prior recited the poem his face changed and his voice quivered and the eyes were filled with tears. For about five minutes there was dead silence. Then the prelate once again consoled all saying that God omnipotent would turn everything for the good of all (Moolayil 1f., *Positio*: 544f.).

In several churches where the Blessed preached in 1870 he bade farewell to the parishioners stating that it would be his last sermon to them. To the priests who assembled those days for retreat he told the same thing, and also to those who visited him. This is how the Latin text (*Positio*: 485) of the biography by Kuriakose Porukara presents the situation. This is not found in the printed text of 1905 (p. 36). In its place the following information is given:

As the Prior was aware by a special intuition the approach of his death, he was continuously preparing for a happy death. Though he was so tired that it was with difficulty that he walked to his room after Mass, with great will power and ardent piety he used to offer the Eucharist everyday at 5 a.m. He reflected on the death and the trepidations and the temptations of that terrible moment. The thought of the mercy and kindness of the Mother of God, whom he used to call *amma* (Malayalam for mother) and of the intercession and help of St Joseph, whom he was in the habit of revering with great devotion and love, gave him hope, light and joy (Porukara 1905: 36).

Even though it was difficult for him to walk and he was very tired, he celebrated Mass with great devotion, continuously prayed during the day, and meditated and engaged himself in reading spiritual books. Porukara continues:

As our Lord suffered much before death which caused immense suffering to his relatives and disciples, as they loved Him, so God made our father [Chavara] to suffer

much. He suffered headache, eye pain and later loss of sight... After some time he recovered a little his sight; though he was not able to walk without help (*Positio*: 485)².

Last Illness

By the second half of 1870 Chavara was in the terminal stage of his illness. Fr Kuriakose Porukara introduces it:

Before he arrived at the terminal stage of illness, Chavara, in order to give vent to his feelings of piety, love and gratitude and also for his spiritual consolation and to foster his devotion, wrote a poetic book, called *Ātmānutāpam* (Porukara 1905: 36).

In 1870 the illness intensified. Though many attempts were made to save his very precious life, the will of God was to give the award for his labour without any more delay. For three months he suffered with great patience and joy the pain of illness and complete loss of sight (*ibid.*: 37).

In this connection Porukara mentions about the testament of Chavara to his religious.

Now we follow chronologically the various stages of his illness. For this we have a booklet of Fr Leonard Moolayil³, who had joined the congregation in 1868 as an aspirant at Koonammavu. He was an eyewitness of the events from that year onwards. Not only the author but Fr Cherubin also signed the booklet—Fr Cherubin joined the congregation in 1869. The latter signs the booklet attesting:

When these events took place I was also at Koonammavu. I declare that whatever is written in this is true.

Fr Leonard wrote this in 1923. He explicitly mentions at the end of the manuscript that he wrote this account as ordered by Fr Alexander Kattakkayam (Jr), prior general from 1920 to 1923. So

² This passage is not in the printed text of Porukara 1905. There are other omissions and variations in this part of the printed text (cf. *Positio*: 485, fns. 65-68).

³ The booklet is preserved in AMSJ. Latin version is in PO, doc. 115 and *Positio*: 543-50.

also he attests that Fr General asked him to do this because he was at Koonammavu and he had directly seen and heard about the events he writes, events from September 1869 to January 1871. He may have written it from memory, helped probably by some notes he had prepared earlier and by what is found in other accounts of the illness and demise of Blessed Chavara and also some sort of interview with contemporaries. In some respects this is a unique source, because a few things he narrates are not found in any other writing (cf. *Positio*: 543f.). For example, Fr Leonard describes the last conversation of the Blessed, in which he confesses the preservation of his baptismal innocence:

By the grace of God, I dare say that with their [the Holy Family's] help I had no occasion to lose the grace I received in baptism (*Positio*: 548).

Besides there are long or short references in the chronicles of the monasteries (including that of Parapuram) and that of the Koonammavu Convent.

As pointed out above the Prior had strong premonitions of his approaching death at least from 1866. The Malayattoor event was a sign. However he continued to live an active life till late 1870s. In August 1869 Vicar Apostolic Leonard and Delegate Leopold departed for Europe. Though Fr Philip was appointed pro-vicar apostolic and Fr Gerard Beccaro delegate of the congregation, the vicar apostolic gave special instructions that both act in consultation with the Prior.⁴ That may be the reason why the latter said in his poem referred to above: "It is too much that such a great responsibility is imposed upon me". At the end of 1869 he made a trip in the company of Frs Philip and Gerard to Anakallu, where there was a conflict between two groups (those who were previously under Padroado and those under Varapuzha). Both had agreed to the mediation of Chavara. After accomplishing the task they returned *via* Mutholy to Koonammavu (cf. chapter 4). On reaching Koonammavu the Prior was down with rheumatic fever. But by some normal treatment he regained some strength and worked as before. He sometimes attended the lectures that Fr Gerard was giving to the students in Italian language. Even the Blessed tried to learn Italian in order to read good books in that

⁴ Moolayil says that the vicar apostolic made the Prior the superior of the two (cf. *Positio*: 544).

language. Scholastic Joseph Elias helped him in this attempt (cf. Moolayil, *Positio*: 545f.). He answered the letters of the vicar apostolic from Rome. As the latter desired he wrote a letter to the Pope decrying the claims of the Chaldean Patriarch Joseph Audo over the Church of the St Thomas Christians in India and requesting the Pope to forbid him from sending any person from Mesopotamia to Kerala (cf. CWC IV 1982:10f.)

On 5 June 1870 Vicar Apostolic Mellano was elevated in Rome as archbishop. When Fr Prior came to know of this, and also when the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God was defined⁵, he expressed great happiness and communicated this to all the monasteries. At his order the monasteries, in thanksgiving, celebrated solemn Mass and sang *Te Deum* (cf. Moolayil, *Positio*: 545).

In 1869, on the vigil of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Prior led the solemn vespers and on the feast day he preached a long sermon (cf. *Positio*: 5454). He started again to learn Italian and read books. But it was very straining for his eyes, and together with the complaint of the eyes, he also developed other complications. A number of physicians like Cleric Varkey Muttathupadath, Mr Eapen, the latter's brother, tried their hands to bring about a cure but did not succeed (cf. Moolayil, *Positio*: 546). Parapuram says that Muttathupadath was a seminarian at Varapuzha. The sick Prior called him and told him that it was time for seminary studies and so he should return to Varapuzha and continue his studies. Thus Fr Prior consoled his disciple and sent him back to Varapuzha, where he went with joy and peace (cf. Parapuram: 1411).

It was at this time the fathers at Mannanam suggested to take Fr Prior to Mannanam, which was a cooler place and where physician Eapen had better access. As Frs Philip and Gerard consented to this the Prior prepared for going to Mannanam and, God willing, to die there at the feet of his dearest patron St Joseph

⁵ This dogma had been defined on 8 December 1854 by Pope Pius IX. It was the dogma of Papal infallibility that was defined in the Council, which had direct relevance to the definition of 8 December 1854. Already we have seen that the vicars apostolic were called with the title 'Archbishop'. Hence it is difficult to understand the meaning of Mellano being elevated in Rome as archbishop.

(cf. *Positio*: 345)⁶. Though quite ill and blind, the Prior visited the convent to bid the sisters farewell. But the missionaries had a second thought that it might not be wise to shift him to Mannanam at this stage. Chavara gladly accepted their decision and cancelled the trip.

As Chavara became completely blind the fathers brought Dr Guenther from Ernakulam. He diagnosed that the loss of sight was not due to any defect in the eyes but was caused by the heat produced in the head by the accumulation of aggravated phlegm (*Apoplexia Phlegmatica*). The Chronicle of St Philomena's Monastery, Koonammavu clearly says that Guenther diagnosed the disease as *Apoplexia Phlegmatica*, a disease found generally in old people. It further says why Fr Gerard refused permission to transfer him to Mannanam. The doctor had warned them of the possibility of the Prior's death at any unexpected moment. Besides, the atmosphere at Mannanam was not so healthy as that at Koonammavu. Further at Mannanam it was not easy to have access to European doctors or good native physicians (cf. *Positio*: 459). The doctor prescribed a process of burning of the head. For this a solution had to be applied over the forehead up to ears that would burn the area. Then the swollen area was opened by scissors, and much pus oozed out. The process caused intense pain but the Prior regained the lost sight and soon the burned parts got cured. The exact sequence of events is not clear from any of the documents. Probably it was after this treatment by Guenther that Vicar Apostolic Mellano and Fr Leopold returned to Kerala towards the close of October according to Parapuram (p. 1382) and in the morning of 8 November according to the Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent (2002: 180f.)⁷

Return of Archbishop Mellano and Fr Leopold

According to Parapuram (cf. p. 1382) Vicar Apostolic Mellano and Fr Leopold arrived in Bombay by mid-October 1870,

⁶ This wish of his is expressed in a letter Chavara wrote to Fr Kuriakose Porukara. It is printed in PO, doc. 25 but not in CWC IV.

⁷ When Fr Leopold arrived at Koonammavu, Fr Prior was living in an outhouse to the east of the monastery. This was at the instance of the pro-vicar apostolic, Philip. Though he obeyed without any complaint it was with great mental pain that he spent the days in that house. With tears in his eyes he told Fr Leopold about this (see below).

and after a few days reached Kochi and from there went to Varapuzha. He does not give precise dates. Perhaps the dates given in the Convent Chronicle are more reliable (cf. 2002: 180f.). It says that Fr Prior (Chavara) communicated to the sisters the information received from the letters, which Fr Leopold wrote to Fr Gerard. According to this communication the archbishop, Fr Leopold and three new missionaries would board on ship on 15 September and in two days arrive in Bombay. The last words 'arrive in Bombay in two days' are impossible to believe because the journey was in ship and it would have taken many weeks. Maybe the reference is to a letter Fr Leopold sent from the ship just two days before reaching Bombay. After this the chronicle says that there was no further communication about their journey, which caused them anxiety. However within two or three weeks they received information from missionary Fr Cherubin, that the archbishop and others had already arrived in Bombay in the month of November. Fr Leopold had written to Fr Gerard that they would reach Kochi on 10 November at 10 o'clock. They did arrive on 10 November and the same night Fr Leopold reached Koonammavu and visited the convent. On 11 November Archbishop Mellano came to Koonammavu (CKC 2001: 180ff.). Mannanam Chronicle III also agrees with this version (cf. *Positio*: 505).

The arrival of Fr Leopold gave the Prior great joy and consolation. Moolayil (*Positio*: 547) says:

When Fr Leopold, his spiritual father, came, he had great joy and both, tears flowing from the eyes, embraced each other. Then, after all others left the room, the two talked privately for two hours. He told Fr Leopold about the mental pain he sustained because he had to live in the house outside the cloister of the monastery. Therefore Fr Leopold gave directions for his return to the monastery the following day. By that time Fr Leopold had got arranged in a hall the various gifts and precious articles he had brought from Europe. The missionary showed them to the Prior, who was carried to the monastery from the outhouse, and asked him what he would like to choose from them. To this Fr Prior answered: "It is enough for me that I have seen you". At the end he took just some grapes.

The next day Archbishop Leonard came to Koonammavu together with the three new missionaries. When the Prior saw His Grace he expressed great joy that he could see him again and

praised God for this grace. When the archbishop told him that God had fulfilled what he had said before his departure for Rome, the Blessed prayed in the words of old Simeon: "Now, Lord, dismiss your servant in peace according to your word" (Lk. 2:29). Moolayil remarks:

The return of the archbishop and Fr Leopold was so great a comfort for him, the feeling almost like a heavy burden being removed from his shoulders, and after that with special diligence he prepared for his death (*Positio*: 547).

Illness Intensifies: Preparation for Death

At the instance of Fr Leopold the Prior set out to Ampazhakkad for rest, though the Prior did not like it. It was in December 1870 that he went to Ampazhakad, at a time when the cool north-eastern wind was blowing. It badly affected his health and soon he returned to Koonammavu. There he found much relief, but quite conscious of his approaching death he made the last preparations. At this time the gentleman Mathu Tharakan Chiramel from Aranattukara visited Fr Prior and returned to Kuthiathodu. However from that time onwards Chavara, with greater intensity, prepared for a happy death (cf. Parapuram: 1412ff.). According to the chronicle of the Koonammavu Convent he said Mass on 15 October, on which day he made a visit to the convent (cf. CKC 2002: 201f.). We do not know whether that was the last Mass he celebrated. He received communion very frequently and that too after proper fast. For this his brother religious woke up after midnight and gave him communion two or three hours before dawn (cf. Parapuram: 1414).

On a certain day Fr Gerard was in the room when the Prior received communion. He was so impressed by the extraordinary devotion of the Prior when he received communion, especially by a light that illumined his eyes. Fr Gerard told the novices in high terms of the sick person (cf. Parapuram: 1414f.) He told the sisters of the convent also about it during Mass (CKC 2002: 209):

When I was giving him Holy Communion, I felt like looking at his face and I looked intently into his eyes. Then I saw an extraordinary light glowing and a joyous expression on his face, the kind that I have never seen before.

Fr Moolayil tells us that during these days the invalid Prior recited the Divine Office with the help of others, which Fr Philip prohibited, prescribing the recital of the 'Our Father' a few times. The novices, his children, read for him spiritual books, especially the lives of saints. Besides at his request they recited many prayers from the book *Nanmaranathinte* ('Preparation for Good Death'), and he joined them in reciting them. As said earlier he received communion as frequently as possible. He cheerfully received, and conversed with, those who visited him, and used to give, with a grateful heart, to each one counsels in accordance with his/her status. As he had regained sight he often looked at the picture of the Holy Family, which he always kept near his bed and recited short prayers. He never made any complaint about his illness or the service given to him. He had a special talent to make happy every one of his visitors (cf. *Positio*: 546f.).

During his illness he used to communicate with his beloved children the sisters through letters. Even when he was completely blind he betook himself with the help of others to the convent on 28 October 1870 to say goodbye to them before the proposed travel to Mannanam. The chronicle of the convent, after narrating all the great services he had rendered to them, the number of letters he wrote to them, his visits to them during the last illness, the brilliant qualities of his person, describes how patiently he suffered his illness:

He suffered for three months all the above-mentioned diseases with great patience and resignation. But the one thing that surprised people was this. When people lost their eyesight normally they became irritated and very sorrowful about it. But this was not seen in our priorachan⁸. He was always pleasant with a smile on his face. Looking at his face, no one would understand that he was suffering all this. On the other hand his attitude was such that people who saw him, felt that he was enjoying some great joys. One day when Gerard moopachan⁹ visited priorachan, he said, "Now I feel that God is calling me. So now, I pray you to give me

⁸ This is how the CKC calls him. The Malayalam word means Fr Prior.

⁹ *Moopachan* 'Senior Father' stands for a foreign missionary. This is how the natives usually called them, may be because they grew beard.

all the sacraments I now require". Then Gerard moopachan said, "No, no. God has willed to give you some more time in this life." (CKC 2002: 205).

The Chronicle continues:

During these days itself, our very reverend moopachan [Fr Leopold] came from Europe. Then his [Fr Prior's] illness was continuing as before and showed no sign of change. Besides the pain and suffering of the sickness, he had lost his eyesight too. His head was singed and when the water flowed out from his head he became better. He also got back his sight. While he was in this stage, one day he came here and this was his third visit. This was in December 1870. He was almost cured of all his diseases. He began to go out walking small distances (ibid.).

While describing this third visit, that in the company of Fr Leopold, the chronicle refers to a letter, which Fr Prior wrote to Fr Leopold to Europe. In that he had written, "The end of my life is at hand. I will not be able to see you again, when you come back. Before that I will have left the world". To this Fr Leopold had replied: "You will not die, until I come there...After my coming Magasminus [M. Cusmiano, *Positio*: 466] and Marcelinus will make several travels. Only after that you will die. Believe my prophecy." The chronicle continues:

As said before no one had any hope of his recovery from that terrible illness. Yet, after moopachan had come from Europe, both of them together went on many journeys just as he had written in the letter. At the end, when he was about to go from here, he said his last good bye. He turned towards us with a smile full of humility and devotion. He bowed his head unusually in respect towards us as a speciality. He then gave us the blessing and took leave of us (ibid.: 206f.).

There follows the description of the last three days of Fr Prior's life on earth:

He was a man of untold prudence and great efficiency. He was the first prior and the prior general of all the monasteries in Malayalam [Kerala]. This beloved father's holy life was

brought to a close, by his last illness, which lasted for three days (ibid.: 207).

The Carmelite Congregation of Malabar (p. 64) says that in his last days Fr Chavara had a note affixed on his door with the instruction that visitors might converse with him on no other but spiritual topics. Fr Valerian (1939: 313) repeats this. But neither of the books gives any reference. May be this was a piece of tradition prevalent in the monasteries.

According to the Convent Chronicle his illness increased soon and on 30 December 1870 he lost his consciousness¹⁰. That day he walked about ten or fifteen feet to meet Fr Gerard and asked him permission to go to bed. Seeing him too weak the latter asked him, "Fr Prior, what do you want? You want Jesus, don't you"? To this, he replied, "Yes, I want Jesus and all the sacraments of the Church". The next day Fr Gerard before going to the convent to say Mass, went to the Prior and asked what he had to tell the sisters. Fr Prior answered:

Tell them that the New Year is beginning and they should renew all their virtues. Along with the new birth of our Lord, they should also make new their lives. Also tell them, I have sent my blessings for them (CKC 2002: 208).

Fr Leopold says:

Many tried in several ways to save his precious life. But God had decreed otherwise, for three months he endured cheerfully and with patience the pains of his last illness and the consequences of complete blindness (2003: 14).

Last Illness and Holy Death

The Blessed had requested the fathers to administer to him the last sacraments. Finally, on 2 January 1871 (according to Convent Chronicle, CKC, p. 206, on 1 January) they decided to fulfil his wish. In the morning he made his last confession to Fr Leopold and received Holy Communion. In the afternoon at about 3 o'clock there was a great change on his face and he lost senses

¹⁰ This may have occurred occasionally. We know from other sources that he was conscious till after he received the last sacraments on 2 January (see below)

intermittently. Physician Mathu Tharakan of Kuthiathodu, who had come to attend on him, advised the fathers to administer the sacraments immediately. The fathers gathered in his room and asked him from whom he would like to receive the sacraments. He answered: "Let it be anyone according to the will of the superiors and not mine". Then he uttered these words:

I offer this difficulty in spitting out the phlegm so that the fire in purgatory may affect me less. Even though I was not able to celebrate Mass after my illness increased, I remain one in spirit with the priests, who offer to God the Father the divine lamb every hour continuously during day and night in the four parts of the world, in Asia, and America, etc. (St Philomena's Chronicle: 133; *Positio*: 459).

When all the members of the community were standing around him¹¹ in tears, the Prior sitting on the bed and in full consciousness told them in a clear voice (Moolayil, *Positio*: 548f.):

Why are you weeping? Man, whoever he be, has to die one day. Now it is my time. By the grace of God, I was keeping in mind this moment. Since a few days, I was preparing myself as far as possible. My pious parents in many ways impressed on me great regard for the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. [Pointing out to the picture, which was placed on the table near his bed in such a way as he could see it always, he said:] In this way I was always keeping in my heart and mind, and was honouring, the Holy Family. Thus their help was always available to me. By the grace of God I dare say that with their help never had I an occasion to be deprived of the grace received in baptism¹². I dedicate this

¹¹ Parapuram (p.1416) says that the Prior called all the members of the monastery to his deathbed. According to Moolayil (cf. *Positio*: 548) they were on their knees.

¹² It is to be noted that the Blessed kept this secret hidden in his mind almost for 52 years. Fr Louis of Manjummel mentions it in his testimony recorded in 1936 (cf. Louis, *Positio*: 561): 'I took the name Kuriakose of the Holy Family because I always kept Jesus, Mary, Joseph in my mind. They preserved me from falling into sin'. "We were all present at the time of administering the last sacraments to him. [Among the many instructions he gave to us he mentioned] the devotion towards Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Then he repeated; 'I led

our humble congregation and all its members to this Holy Family. Keep your trust in the Blessed Family. Let them reign in your hearts. Don't allow sorrow to grip you because I am dying; joyfully commit yourselves to the will of God. God is omnipotent and infinitely kind; God will give you soon a new prior, who would be competent to bring about greater good to the congregation and to each one of you. Diligently obey the rules, constitutions and the orders of superiors. Love with all your heart Jesus present in the most Holy Eucharist. As the prophet says draw water of life from His Sacred Heart [cf. Is. 12: 4]. All the members of the congregation, especially the superiors should treat each other with true and sincere charity. If you do all this, glory of God and salvation of souls will prevail and the congregation will progress from day to day.

Immediately after this exhortation he uttered the words: "Extreme Unction". There are slightly different versions in the sources about the reaction of the Prior to the question, "Whom do you like to administer the last sacraments?" One version is given above. Moolayil (*Positio*: 548) says that the Prior after a moment of reflection answered: "Let Fr Vicar himself administer it. If so I can also respond to the prayers". St Philomena's Chronicle (*Positio*: 459f.) describes:

Fr Provincial [Fr Leopold, the delegate of the vicar provincial] was to administer the sacraments. But he was so overcome with sorrow that he could not even stand on his legs. So to their question, from whom he would like to receive the sacraments, the Prior replied: "Whoever do it.

the whole of my life in this trinity. I received the name Kuriakose of the Holy Family in order to remind me always of this trinity. Therefore they preserved me always and everywhere from falling into sin'. Those who heard him judged that he had led an immaculate life and that he had preserved the sanctifying grace unspoiled" (*Positio*: 563, Declaration of Fr Louis).

Fr Leopold noted in his *Manuale memorie* in 1871 (*Positio*: 456): "A little before death he himself was able to attest that he had never lost the baptismal innocence". This, as it comes before Moolayil wrote his account (see above), must be the earliest reference to the baptismal innocence he preserved.

But I would like that it be done in Syriac language so that I can also participate in it."

The Convent Chronicle (2002: 209) tells us:

But even though priorachan's desire was to receive the sacraments from our Leopold moopachan, he said, "As you all will. If it is in my own language, I too can join to give the response. But I shall be quite satisfied with whatever you decide". First Gerard moopachan started giving the sacraments. Afterwards it was completed in his own language [i.e. in Syriac].

There was sometime a suggestion that Vicar General Philip be requested to administer the last sacrament (cf. Moolayil, *Positio*: 548). But finally the proposal that the vicar of the Monastery of Koonammavu, Fr Joseph John of the Cross¹³ administer it, prevailed. So he conducted the main function in Syriac though it is possible that Fr Gerard initiated it.

Before that the vicar asked the Prior's blessing. He, raising his hands, gave the blessing using the formula in Syriac [*Burkse*, Syriac for Blessing] for all the members present there and for the whole congregation (cf. Moolayil, *Positio*: 549). The Blessed fully conscious responded to the minister each word (ibid.). Next evening Fr Leopold and Fr Philip visited the sisters and told them all that happened up to that time. Fr Leopold told them that before receiving the last sacrament the Prior gave a talk on the passion of Christ and glories of Mary. After receiving the sacraments he lost his consciousness. Once Fr Leopold went to his room and asked "Acha"¹⁴ [Father], how are you now? Are you happy? Are you peaceful at heart?" He replied "Acha, now I have much peace and joy" (CKC 2002: 209).

The condition of the invalid became worse and he intermittently lost consciousness. But whenever he regained

¹³ This Fr John, later as delegate of Prior General Ajuti (1887-91) and Bernard (1891-1902), administered the congregation (cf. Moolayil, *Positio*: 548; cf. ibid. fn. 46).

¹⁴ This is how in Kerala people address the priests; usually the Hindus of Kerala call their male parent by this word, while Christians use the word 'Appa' or its equivalent

consciousness he used to recite short prayers alone or with others. At night Physician Mathu Tharakan Chiramel of Aranattukara arrived urgently and applied some medicines, by which vomiting ceased but there was no hope of recovery (cf. Moolayil: *ibid*). By that time Fr Philip and others came from Varapuzha. Finding the condition of the Prior very bad he imparted to him the plenary indulgence. Immediately after that the Prior began to struggle for breath. To help the invalid sufficient number of priests kept vigil in the room. Fr Leopold was grief-stricken above all others. Before dawn of 3 January Dr Guenther came from Ernakulam. But he felt that he could not save the life of the Prior. As arranged by Fr Leopold some priests went to say Mass for the sick person. When the Masses were half way Fr Prior breathed his last. This is how Parapuram describes the end (cf. p. 1417). Moolayil (*Positio*: 549) adds more details. Once the physicians and the doctor expressed their inability to do anything, all gathered in the room and said prayers for the dying. Although it appeared that he was unconscious, he sometimes opened his eyes when called. The priests in the room therefore recited the acts of contrition and gave absolution. The agony lasted for about an hour. Later, breathing became normal. By six in the morning he appeared to be better. So some of those who were around went either to receive Communion or to celebrate Mass. By 6.30 there was a sudden change. Priests said absolution. At the same time the Prior opened his eyes and breathed his last. This was on Tuesday 3 January 1871, probably at 7.15 a.m.¹⁵ Fr Leopold wrote in his diary:

Today, on 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 (Beccaro 2003: 17).

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 loved him even as myself, he breathed his last at the age of 65, and was buried in this church of Koonammavu. O holy and gracious soul, pray for me (*ibid*: 18).

¹⁵ This is what Fr Leopold writes in his diary. The Convent Chronicle says that the Prior died at 7.30 a.m. (see below).

In his biography of Chavara Fr Leopold wrote that the Prior died at 7. 30 morning on 3 January 1871 (cf. *ibid*: 15). The Chronicle of the Koonammavu Convent (2002: 210) also gave the time as 7.30. Since the diary was probably written on the same day as the death, it may be more correct. Convent Chronicle says:

The next morning, i.e. Tuesday, 3 January, Father Vicar came for Holy Mass. Then he told us that our moopachan had commanded that all of us should receive Holy Communion and pray for priorachan. Then he started Holy Mass. When it was time for elevation—in the monastery at this time our moopachan was making thanksgiving after Mass offered for priorachan—lying in the hands of his spiritual sons breathed his last in Koonammavu Monastery. It was 7. 30 in the morning on Tuesday, 3 January 1871. God so willed that he be called to heaven to receive his eternal reward for all his work and suffering (CKC 1988 II: 21; 2002: 210).

The Funeral on 4 January 1871

Chavara was on that day 65 years 10 months and 29 days old. Immediately after death Mass and prayers were offered for the deceased. Preparations were also made for the funeral. As the bells announcing the death rang, people began to flow from all parts. So there was need to expose the body in the church as soon as possible (cf. Moolayil, *Positio*: 549). The funeral was fixed for 4 January. There was a difference of opinion among the missionaries as to whether to vest the body in religious habit or in those of an ecclesiastical dignitary. Fr Marceline was perhaps of the second opinion, since he had been the vicar general of the vicariate. But Fr Leopold held to the first opinion. It was the second opinion, which finally prevailed.¹⁶ Accordingly the body was vested. But in the after noon the other opinion became more prevalent. So the chasuble, etc. were removed and the body was vested in religious habit (cf. Parapuram: 1417f.). But according to the chronicle of Koonammavu Monastery (p. 137, *Positio*: 461) when Vicar General Fr Philip and Fr Marceline saw that the body was dressed not in religious but sacerdotal vestments, they were of the opinion that it was in religious dress that the body was to be buried.

¹⁶ But see below a different version about the opinion of Fr Marceline.

Though the body with priestly apparels had been already exposed in the church in the morning and offices of the dead were being recited before it, at night after 8 o'clock the vestments were exchanged with those of the religious. Since mantle¹⁷ was not in use in the congregation at that time, in its place surplice and stole were put over the cassock (cf. also Moolayil, *ibid.*). The vicar general in his circular to the churches (cf. St Philomena's Monastery Chronicle: *Positio*: 461) had advised the people and priests to come without any pomp or show, and unaccompanied by the parade of confraternities. The reason given is that all such show and pomp were against the discipline of the religious.¹⁸

As said above the faithful and priests flowed to Koonammavu in large numbers. Most of the priests were his disciples (cf. Parapuram: 1417f.). The vicar apostolic being on a visitation was not able to be present for the funeral. So too many fathers of the monasteries were unable to attend it as they were preaching retreats in different, far away parishes. As soon as the vicar apostolic got the news of the Prior's demise, he said Mass in the church at South Parur, where he was on visitation. The vicar apostolic came to Koonammavu as soon as he returned from his visit (cf. St Philomena's Monastery Chronicle: 137f., *Positio*: 461).

Fr Parapuram (p. 1418), after saying that many diocesan priests, mostly Chavara's disciples, came for the funeral, regretfully observes that none of the ceremonies like the solemn Mass or funeral oration could be entrusted to any one of these priests. It was Fr John of the Cross, the vicar, who celebrated the funeral Mass. Rev. Fr Mathai Kappil preached the sermon and Fr Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara conducted the funeral services. But not all parts of the ceremonies prescribed in Syriac were conducted. The faithful and the priests regretted this. Fr Moolayil simply says that when the solemn funeral Mass was over, Fr Kuriakose Eliseus

¹⁷ The blue mantle was introduced only in 1903 as a sign of the devotion to the Blessed Virgin. The Carmelite white mantle began to be used in 1914 (cf. *Positio*: 549, fn. 50; cf. also *The Carmelite Congregation*: 104). From 1965 the use of mantle was given up.

¹⁸ Here a question arises: were the Carmelite prelates buried with religious or pontifical dress? May be the missionaries thought Chavara's position as vicar general terminated once the Roccisian episode was over (see ch. 6).

and Fr Joseph Chavara arrived from Mannanam and led the funeral ceremonies (cf. *Positio*: 550). Fr Valerian (1939: 322) says that according to eyewitnesses the rush of people was such that it filled over the precincts of the church. So also he says that the renowned preacher Fr Mathai Kappil of Thathampally preached the panegyric starting with the words "Today the flag of Kerala has fallen". With it the bells were rung and people burst out in loud cries¹⁹. Moolayil says that the funeral sermon was long and very moving. He concludes:

Thus on 4 January 1871 Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family, founder of the Syrian Carmelite Congregation and the first prior general, the best model for religious and priests, a most loving father, respected by all, was interred in the middle of the church of St Philomena at Koonammavu, near the sanctuary²⁰ (Moolayil, *Positio*: 350).

The following inscription engraved on a zinc plate was affixed to the coffin by Fr Kuriakose Porukara:

In this coffin is buried Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family, Chavara of Kainakari, of the parish of Chennankary, founder of the Third Order Discalced Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, and Prior. Born on 8²¹ *Kumbham* [February] 1805. Was teaching as Malpan at Mannanam since 14 *Edavam* [May] 1832. He made his religious profession on 8 *Dhanu* [December] 1855 and was constituted the first prior. He laboured much for the Holy Church and for this Congregation and for the salvation of souls. During the Roccas schism he was appointed vicar general of the Syrian Rite Christians, he worked hard under great adversity for the salvation of souls. On 3 *Makaram* [January] 1871 at 7.30 in the morning amidst the tears of his spiritual children, comforted by the sacraments of the Church, and manifesting extraordinary signs of the love of God, at Koonammavu he offered his beautiful soul in the hands of God, whom he had

¹⁹ No written reference is found for these statements.

²⁰ When later the sanctuary was enlarged the place was enclosed in it (cf. Valerian 1939: 523).

²¹ This is a mistake; actually the date of birth is 10 Feb. (cf. ch. 1).

been loving all through his life (Mannanam Chronicle III, 266f., *Positio*: 506)

Parapuram (p. 1424f.) concludes his account of Chavara:

It was already mentioned above that the deceased Prior was the most distinguished among the disciples of Malpan Fr Thomas Palackal ... that there were seminaries to train priests, etc. After the death of Fr Thomas the seminary at Mannanam became the principal one and that of Pallipuram a branch of the former. Of both the main person responsible was the deceased Prior. Those, who after training in them ordained priests, were many. All of them were very devoted to Fr Chavara and loved him very dearly. Besides, he, because of the fine qualities, which shone in him and because of his other gifts, was very much esteemed in all Malabar, nay was loved and specially honoured by the above mentioned priests and all lay persons.

In his last days many of these priests came to Koonammavu to visit him and returned receiving his blessing. Although they had wished to be present at the time of his death and conduct the funeral very solemnly, yet since they were parish priests in far away churches they were unable to fulfil this their wish. But as soon as they heard about the passing away of the Prior they offered good works and prayers as far as possible. Later they came to Koonammavu and met Fr Leopold and others and conversed with them praising the benefits they had received from the deceased Prior and expressing their condolence. Fr Leopold also shared their feelings and extolled the good things the deceased had done. He specially recollected that it was because of him that the convent was established there. They, hearing all that, returned with joy and well contented.

A souvenir was printed with the picture of St Joseph on one side and on the other side the following sentence:

Most Rev. Kuriakose of the Holy Family died on 3 January 1871, in the monastery at Koonammavu in the odour of sanctity.

Born in the family Chavara, in the parish of Chennankary in the year 1805. Entered the seminary, and was ordained in

1829. By preaching spiritual retreats and exhorting the faithful he laboured for the salvation of souls and earned many souls for Christ. He laboured so that his disciples become perfect priests.

He made the religious profession on 8 December 1855 and was nominated Prior of the new congregation. He set the congregation, both spiritually and materially, on a firm basis. He was a model of virtues, a spiritual father and protector of all, the right hand of the bishop in fighting against schism. He established a printing press and edited many books related to Christian faith; constructed monasteries and convents May God be glorified in His servants (original is in the Archives of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam).

Transfer of the Mortal Remains

In 1887 the Holy See, by the decree *Quod jampridem* dated 30 May 1887, divided the Vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly between the Oriental Rite Christians and the Latin Rite Christians. By the same decree two new vicariates, Thrissur and Kottayam, were constituted for the Syrians. Following this Delegate Apostolic Andrea Ajuti, on 24 February 1889, ordered the Syrian members of the Koonammavu Monastery to evacuate it and hand it over to Vicar Apostolic Mellano²², who was no more the prelate of the Syrians. The Syrian religious were allowed to take with them the movable properties. To execute the order Ajuti himself constituted a four-member committee consisting of Fr Joseph John of the Cross, vicar of Koonammavu, Fr George John (Varkey Parapuram), vicar of Chethipuzha, Fr Joseph Augustine and

²² The delegate published this in the general chapter of 1889, over which he as prior general presided. The delegate issued this order as he was authorised by Rome. The order caused great grief to the members. But seeing that complaint was of no avail, they obeyed the order (cf. Vazhakulam Chronicle II, p. 198, *Positto*: 509). When in 1887 the Syrians were separated from the Vicariate of Verapoly, the Holy See decided that the delegate apostolic of India to be the prior general of the Syrian Carmelites. Thus A. Ajuti was prior general from 1887. Bernard OCD who became archbishop succeeding Mellano in 1897, was appointed prior general in 1891 and continued in that office till 1902 in which year Alexander Kattakkayam (Sr) was elected prior general (cf. *The Carmelite Congregation*: 80ff.)

Missionary Fr Philip (cf. Vazhakulam Chronicle II: 193, *Positio*: 589).

The Syrian Carmelites left the monastery on 9 March 1889. On leaving they wanted to take with them the mortal remains of Chavara to Mannanam and to inter them in the church there. During the night of 8 March, with doors closed, they began to open the tomb. Hearing the noise, some local Christians made an agitation saying that the church was being destroyed. So the work was abandoned. Missionary Fr Philip promised the fathers that he would see to it that the relics, taken out of the tomb, are handed over to them. So they entrusted to him the keys of the church (cf. *ibid*: 194, *Positio*: 509).

Then the fathers referred the matter to the apostolic delegate at whose order and with the help of Fr Philip the fathers brought the relics to Mannanam (cf. *ibid*: 193, *Positio*: 590). They enclosed the relics in a copper box about one metre long, and sealed it. A steel plate inscribed in Malayalam with the information of this second burial was fixed on it (cf. AMSJ, PO doc. 203, *Positio*: 592). On 24 May²³ 1889 the relics were interred in the church at Mannanam on the left side of the choir (*questroma*) between the sanctuary and the nave. A large number of priests and faithful attended the function, which is narrated at length in the Chronicle of Mannanam (IV, pp. 377-79, *Positio*: 593). The chronicle gives us the following account of the event.

From the time the Syrians were separated from the Latins, the Varapuzha party were working to expel the Syrian religious from Koonammavu Monastery. Finally in February²⁴ 1889 they left it. At this time a general chapter of

²³ In the inscription on the steel plate the date given is 24 *Kumbam* (24 February). But both in the Chronicle of Mannanam (IV, 377, *Positio*: 593 f.) and *Nazrāni Deepika* dated 15 January and 1 June 1889 (*Positio*: 591 f.) it is May (cf. also *Positio*: 592, fn. 15). May be the date inscribed, 24 Feb., was the day on which the plate was got ready. The ceremony of internment may have taken place in May and the date on the plate was the day on which it was prepared.

²⁴ In the chapter held in February the decision was taken to leave the monastery. They actually left Koonammavu only in May (see above).

the congregation had been convened at Mannanam²⁵. Before closing the first session on 24 February the fathers decided to transfer the mortal remains of Chavara from Koonammavu to Mannanam. After the second session concluded on 23 May the same year, the relics were interred on the next day at Mannanam. This was a Friday and the function started at 8 o'clock in the morning. Many religious, priors²⁶ of the monasteries, good many diocesan clergy and a large number of faithful, assembled for the ceremonies such as solemn Eucharistic celebration (*Raza*), and Office of the Dead. After the sermon the relics were solemnly deposited in the church (cf. also Porukara 1905:37f.)²⁷

In 1953, when certain modifications were made in the Mannanam church the relics were exhumed and shifted to a more central place in the choir (cf. *Positio*: 594f.). In 1955, in which year the centenary of the profession of the first eleven fathers was celebrated, the relics were once more exhumed and interred in the centre of the choir and a marble slab with inscription was laid over it (cf. *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* 1955, *Positio*: 595f.).

We may substantiate the event of transferring of the relics of Blessed Chavara also from some other sources. Fr Kuriakose Porukara wrote in his biography of Chavara:

The relics of Fr Chavara were transferred from Koonammavu to Mannanam. On Friday 24 May 1899 at 8

²⁵ The first session of the chapter was held from 13 to 24 February 1889 and the second session in May the same year and was concluded on 23 May (cf. *Positio*: 593, fns 20 and 21).

²⁶ Note the use of the term 'prior' for superior. When did this nomenclature start in the congregation? Fr Bernard (p. 184f.) says that till 1885 the superiors of the monasteries were called vicars. But according to the new constitutions approved in 1885 the superiors of monasteries having a membership of more than six were called priors ('vicars' seems to be a printing mistake).

²⁷ Fr Luke Vithuvattical in a typescript paper says that Fr Philip OCD, in the presence of the committee members, opened the tomb and the mortal remains were taken out. Sermon on the occasion was preached by Fr Joseph John of the Cross. No reference is given for this statement.

o'clock after a solemn *Raza*, Office of the Dead and a sermon fitting to the occasion they were solemnly buried in the Mannanam church below the sanctuary to the south side. On this occasion all the superiors of monasteries, many religious priests, about twenty diocesan priests and many faithful had assembled there (Porukara 1905: 38f.).

Fr Bernard in his history of the CMI Congregation describes first the historical background and then speaks briefly about what happened on the night before the fathers left Konnamavu Monastery on 9 March 1889:

Since it was the day the religious had to vacate Konnamavu Monastery, in order to fulfil the desire of the congregation to transfer the bones of the Common Prior of monasteries, Kuriakose Elias Chavara, from there to Mannanam, the fathers started to open the tomb.

Because of the noise that it caused people of Koonammavu gathered in the yard of the church and started an agitation. They demanded that Fr Hillarion²⁸, vicar of Paravur [North Parur] and Fr Basil (Thaliath) be handed over to them. When Fr Hillarion went out and explained to them what was happening the agitation ceased (Bernard 1989: 199)

After this Fr Bernard speaks of the episode of an *arayan* (fisher man) who was sent by the enemies to malign the fathers, but who actually did the opposite. But Fr Bernard does not speak anything about the actual transferring of the relics.

There are two entries in the Chronicle of Vazhakulam Monastery, written by Fr Joseph Antony Mancherry. In the first entry (p. 201, *Positio*: 510) we read:

²⁸ Fr Hillarion Tharavattathil, born c. 1845, joined the seminary [at Mannanam ?] in 1863 or 1864 and was ordained priest in 1870. Left the CMI Congregation but continued to serve as a diocesan priest. He served as vicar of North Parur for many years. He was a very learned priest and associated himself with Fr Mani Nidhiri in the struggle for selfhood of the Syro-Malabar Church. Very influential with civil authorities, he was greatly serviceable to Bishop Medlycott (cf. 'Suvarna Rekhakal', documents related to Chavara Cause, File XIV, no. 4 in the Archives of St. Joseph Monastery, Mannanam).

The same year [1889] the skull and other bones of the above mentioned Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the first prior general, were brought from Koonammavu to Mannanam. In April of the same year they were enclosed in a copper box about two feet (one *kol*) long, with the necessary inscription and sealed. It was solemnly buried below the main altar near the door of the sanctuary of the church. That day many priests and faithful assembled there. In the morning the box was exposed in the large corridor. Dressed in mantles and dalmatics, priests, scholastics and religious came from the church to the corridor in a solemn procession. After saying the usual office and other prayers the procession moved to the church. With the box [containing the relics] exposed over a table [*esthi*] the most solemn liturgy [*Raza*] was celebrated. Then other rites for the dead were performed. At the end Fr Leopold Puthenpurackal of Pulincunnu Parish preached the sermon. On this day there were present at Mannanam all the superiors and their companions who had come for the chapter²⁹.

What Fr Jose Chirayil calls the 'Chronicle of the Congregation'³⁰ has this entry (p. 43):

Without knowing what was happening [inside the church] they [local Christians of Koonammavu] started agitating outside. Some said that as the lead plate inscribed with a few sentences was buried with the body, it was to get that plate that the tomb was being opened in the belief that the inscribed plate would be proof that the church and monastery belonged to the Syrians Others imagined other reasons. The agitation grew stronger (Chirayil, 2003: 25).

²⁹ An extraordinary chapter was convened by the delegate apostolic (cf. Bernard: 1989). The relics were transferred in April but buried in May (see above p. 27).

³⁰ We find it difficult to identify this source. We quote from a Malayalam booklet he published in 1989 under the title, *Karmalayile Karmayogi* ('The *Karmayogi* of Carmel'), as reproduced in *Karmala Kusumam*, December 2003, pp. 25-29.

Chirayil quotes from the same source (pp. 68-72) the following account, which perhaps is most relevant and most important, as it gives many details on the process of transferring of the relics to Mannanam. These pages are written by Geevarghese Johanna (Varkey Parapuram), who was at that time vicar of Chethipuzha and one of the three-member committee formed by Apostolic Delegate Ajuti to execute the handing over of the Koonammavu Monastery to the archbishop of Verapoly. Fr Parapuram seems to have been given the task of transferring the body of Blessed Chavara to Mannanam.

Missionary Philip, vicar general of Verapoly had promised to see that the relics were safely handed over to the CMI fathers. He informed the fathers that they should bear the expenses that were necessary for the execution. Accordingly he wrote to Fr Parapuram. The latter who was residing at this time at Thondiparamb Bungalow near the sisters' convent, wrote to Fr Philip the following reply dated 1 *Medam* (April) 1889:

Very Rev. Father,

You had promised to open the tomb today and give us the relics ... Day before yesterday I had sent to you Re. 1 as wage for the workers. But the sacristan tells me that the workers did not turn up today because they did not get enough wages. Why were the wages not given in full, I do not understand?

The whole authority over Koonammavu church, etc. is vested in the archbishop and not in the people³¹. You have been entrusted by the delegate and the archbishop to execute all this. So I wish to know whether, as requested earlier and as promised by you, you would get the tomb opened and the bones collected and given to us. Moreover as we had already requested, it is necessary that some of us be present when the tomb is being opened.

Fr Philip gave no reply to this letter. But in the afternoon by 4.15 p.m. he asked the father to write another letter. The following letter was sent to him:

³¹ The people seem to have interfered in the matter and therefore Fr Philip was not able to proceed.

1 Medam
(April) '89 Monday

JMJ

Thondiparampil
Bungalow

Very Rev. Father,

Earlier you had informed us that you would not get workers. Now people have come here asking for utensils. I request that, as it has already been requested, let some of us also be present when the tomb is opened. Unless some of us are present we cannot acknowledge the relics taken from the tomb, nor can we accept them. None of us can come there unless it is daytime. This from vicar of Chethipuzha, Br Greevarghese Jo.

Parapuram explains why this second letter had to be written. At 4 p.m. that day Fr Philip sent for Fr Parapuram. He went and met the vicar general, who told him that he must immediately bring workers and that he was ready. It was difficult to get workers at that time. Even if they got some, by the time they open the tomb it would be already night. That would not be proper. So he came back to the bungalow and wrote the letter. In the morning of 2 April Parapuram sent to Fr Philip another letter, in which he informed the latter:

We have made, both through letters and in person, repeated requests that the tomb of Fr Prior be opened and his relics be given to us. But all that was in vain, nothing so far has been done about it. Not only that, but our attempts have become a ridicule in the eyes of others.

Therefore do not annoy us anymore. If you have thought of any plan to execute the matter please communicate that to us in your reply. We do not want to come there in vain and be further ridiculed. We are trying for this in accordance with the order of high authority in the Church and not according to our own will. It is to you that the task has been entrusted. So give me a reply in writing.

Br Geevarghese Jo., vicar of Chethipuzha.

As soon as Fr Philip received this letter, he sent for Fr Parapuram. He purposely did not go. Instead Fr Chandapilla went and told the missionary that nothing would be done unless Fr

Parapuram got a firm reply in writing for his letter. At once Fr Philip sent a letter to the bungalow.

Koonammavu,

2 Medam (April) '89.

You must come immediately to open the tomb of the deceased Prior Kuriakose Elias. Nobody will object. I give you the guarantee.

Vicar General of Var.,
Missionary Philip.

Parapuram says that the missionary answered so promptly because of fear of the apostolic delegate. It seems that the delegate had written to Fr Philip. Parapuram went to the Koonammavu Monastery and was well received by Fr Philip. Both of them went to the church. The missionary said nothing about workers or their wages. Without any more delay Fr Philip had the tomb opened. Besides these two, Fr Chandapilla, and the assistant vicar of St Philomina's, and a few others were present when the work started. Later Missionary Candid also joined them. When the tomb was opened, they got only a few bones. They put them in a box and Fr Parapuram took it to the bungalow. From there it was soon transferred to Mannanam and buried in the church there.

Why did Vicar General Philip OCD have recourse to these delaying tactics? Maybe the local people who were opposed to the transferring of the relics from their church, continued to bring pressure on him. Finally as it was clear that they could not go against the order of the delegate apostolic, he persuaded the local Christians to yield.

In the printed Chronicle of Fr Mathai Mariam Palakunnel (1972: 296) we read:

On 24 *Edavam* [May] 1889 the skull and two or three bone pieces of the saintly Malpan Kuriakose were brought to Mannanam and were solemnly buried there.

But in the original reproduced in *Positio* (p. 513f.) the text reads differently:

Since the Latins did not want to part with the mortal remains of the saint, after a few days they removed them from the tomb and put in their place the bone of a robber or a wicked

man. Then they asked the Syrians to take these bones as decreed by the delegate. On 24 May 1889 they took the skull and two or three bones to Mannanam, thinking that they were of the Holy Malpan Kuriakose Chavara.

From whom did Fr Palakunnel get this story? Is it possible that he got it from some local Christians who vainly boasted like this, out of despair that, in spite of their opposition, the relics were transferred? In any case the story is quite unbelievable, given the circumstances (cf. Positio: 590). Many witnesses, including the chronicler's nephew Fr Ambrose CMI, witness 26 (Positio: 613) during the diocesan process gave the following clarification of the story alleged by Fr Mathai Palakunnel. Fr Mathai, a well-known public speaker at that time, expected an invitation from the Mannanam religious to preach the sermon on the occasion. But such an invitation did not come. Hence he did not participate in any of the functions. Moreover, in order to express his bitterness towards them and also for getting some relief of his ill feelings, he wrote down the story in his chronicle.

The last section of the present chapter is on the rather odd circumstances in which the holy relics of the Blessed had to be transferred from Koonammavu to Mannanam. It may appear to disturb the otherwise serene, peaceful and holy ambience in which the pure soul of Chavara left the earthly abode and entered the heavenly home. Hence it will be quite fitting to recall here some of the inspring and blissful scenes of his happy death.

Chavara was making "the difficult and perilous voyage" and crossing over the sea of death in the safe vessel that is Mother Mary, protected by the powerful and heavy anchor that is Jesus Christ, with St Joseph the patron of happy death as the safe sailor. Before starting that voyage he consoled his children surrounding his deathbed and gave them his last pieces of exhortation: "Love with all your heart Jesus present in the Eucharist, drawing the water of life from His Sacred Heart." Happy and grateful at the thought that he was able to preserve his baptismal innocence by the special protection of the Holy Family, whose devotion his loving parents had instilled into his heart from early childhood, he dedicated the congregation and all its members to the benign care of this Holy Family. With the extraordinary light, the sign of internal peace and joy, still glowing on his face this humble servant of God, this *karma-yogi* entered the eternal bliss of the heavenly

home and into the imperishable union with God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the God he longed to see face to face. We conclude this with a few verses which express Chavara's life long wish and prayer.

O mine of mercy, whither shall I go?
Your sacred limbs, holy face
Your sparkling eyes, nostrils bright.

Ruby lips, conch-shaped teeth
The honeyed words flowing from your lips
I wish to hear, for a vision I long
Though steadfast to look, unworthy my eyes.

O furnace of love, ardently I thirst
For the treasure of your mercy e'en though
Hindered by sin; when your eyes benign
Oft I've felt, chasing my doubt.

When your bright visage I see
My gloom effaced, love glows
In your look of mercy I behold
A gentle saviour, not a judge

Your out-stretched arms seem as though
Yearning to lock me in your bosom
Your soft lotus feet, I surmise
Are on a race to capture sinners

(CWC II 1981: 34f.; 1989: 54f., lines V, 152-170).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

To the Honours of the Altar

Chavara's biographer, Prof. K. C. Chacko in the preface of his book explains how he was impressed by the personality of Chavara. He says:

The most impressive figure I have come to know of in the congregation [of the CMI] is their founder, Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

The first piece of literature he read of Chavara's compositions was the latter's exhortation to his parishioners on the ideal of a family. It appealed to Chacko as speaking to his household, to the household of every reader. All the same, it never occurred to him then that Father Kuriakose might have been a saint. For him Father Kuriakose was one of Carmelite priors he had known only as a little more energetic, smart, enthusiastic, adventurous, daring, pioneering prior who started and established a team of selfless workers. The prayerful, angelic, simple, devout, obedient, resolute, scholarly, imaginative hero of his study came into his mind only much later. Even then, he was more a hero than a saint to Chacko. The realization that Chavara might be a saint occurred when he read the biography by Fr Valerian and another account by Prof. P. T. Thomas, but much more when he read of the noble heart of Chavara in his own writings—autobiographical, historical, pastoral and personal writings in large volumes (Chacko 1959: iv ff.). This is for Prof. Chacko. But many others discerned a saintly soul in Chavara much earlier, even while he was alive. In this chapter we will first deal with the witnesses to his sanctity before his demise and those which followed it. Then we will speak of the process through which this holy man was raised to the honours of the altar, or the process of his beatification. Here we will have only an overall view of his sanctity. Much more can be seen in chapter

twelve where the personality of Chavara is studied in more detail and greater depth.

Witness to Chavara's Holiness during His Lifetime

We have seen in the life of Blessed Kuriakose Chavara so many of his achievements and services for the Church and people. But over and above everything Kuriakose was a man of God. It is significant that in some of his writings he designates himself as 'Servant of Christ', and 'Servant of God' (cf., e. g. *Positio*: 303, 157). His contemporaries including Hindus saw him as a man of God and expressed this fact in such idioms as 'a divine person', 'a man endowed with divine grace', 'a man of divine vision', 'a man filled with the Holy Spirit'. In all the situations he was longing for communion with God, in thought, word and action. In his *Dhyānasallāpangal* ('Meditation Colloquies'), meditating on the gift of the Blessed Sacrament he prays: "Never separated from you till my death in spirit and sacrament, seeing you in my memory with the eyes of faith, may I be united to you". How ardently he desired to be united with God is evident in his writings, especially in *Ātmāmutāpam* and *Dhyānasallāpangal*. He had God always before his eyes and discerned His presence in everything, in nature and beyond nature. Their service should be to glorify the creator and revealer (cf. *Ātmāmutāpam* CWC II 1981: 14ff, lines II, 292ff.).

It is this union with God which is the source of all his undertakings for the service of the Church and people. Archbishop Kavukatt correctly points out that he was a contemplative in action, that his continuous meditation gave him the strength and courage to accomplish great things (cf. Preface to P. T. Thomas's *Karmayogi* 1955). Chavara was convinced that in order to achieve the intimate union with God absolute purity of heart was essential. He prays to the Blessed Mother and to all his other patrons that, having obliterated all impurities, he may prepare a proper dwelling place for God in his heart (cf. *Dhyānasallāpangal*, CWC III 1981). Chavara's supreme happiness is in the fulfilment of the will of God.¹ He recommended all those who sought his counsel, to seek

¹ Cf. his letter to Fr Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara dated 6 August 1866, *Positio*: 359, "God's will, that is my supreme happiness". This letter does not seem to have been published in CWC IV.

the will of God. He discovers the will of God in the precepts of his superiors, even in those, to which he had conscientious objection, e. g. in accepting fully the rules given to the congregation in 1855. The same spirit is shown when the vicar apostolic asked him to take over the Plussal monastery (cf. chapter 4: 9f.).

We will first speak of those persons who witnessed to Chavara's holiness and integrity of character. Let us begin with two Hindu officials. One is the *thahsildar* (officer-in-charge of the revenue matters of a *taluk*) of Meenachil. As referred to earlier the parishioners of Anakkallu, near Bhutananganam, were divided into two groups, those who adhered to the Padroado regime and those to the Propaganda. Both groups were tenaciously holding to their respective positions. But those under the Padroado stated: "If we are wrong let Fr Prior [Chavara] come and tell us so. We will at once make amends." This shows that these people had great faith in Chavara's ability for discernment. He intervened and the confusion was soon overcome. Already before this a few persons had filed a complaint against him before the *thahsildar*. Before proceeding to the parish Chavara and companions went to see the official. The latter was so impressed by the personality of Chavara that he received him with great respect and honour. Even more, he publicly declared that those who complained against such a great man, a person endowed with divine grace, were very bad people and deserved the anger of God (cf. *Positio*: 438). The episode of the first judge of Alapuzha, we have already spoken in another chapter: how much that judge respected Chavara, although it was the first time they met (cf. *Chronicle of Mannanam III*, p. 168, *Positio*: 503).

A number of persons, both lay and clerical, spoke highly of Chavara during his lifetime. We have already alluded to the parishioners of Anakkallu. Fr Varkey Muttathupadath, a disciple of the Blessed, had such esteem for the holiness of the latter that he treasured as a relic some hair of Chavara cut by the barber (cf. testimony of Fr Joseph Muttathupadath, *Positio*: 573f.). Mathew Mar Athanasius, the first archbishop of the Marthomites, is said to have remarked that in this land who but Chavara would go to heaven, and that holding on to his belt the archbishop also hoped to go there. Fr Mathias Mahempurackal in his biography (1936) narrates this and many other stories that were doing the round, which all reflect the great esteem the people of Kerala had for Chavara even during his life time (cf. *Positio*: 583). There are

many other witnesses to this fact (cf. *Positio*: 601 ff.). The esteem and regard the four vicars apostolic—Pescetto, 1831-44; Martini, 1844-52; especially Baccinelli, 1852-68; Mellano, 1868 on—had for Chavara are well documented. Similarly the testimonies of the missionaries are eloquent, especially of Frs Leopold, Marceline and Gerard. Fr Marceline dedicated to Chavara his short biography of St Teresa of Avila published in 1866. Fr Gerard told the sisters of Koonammavu Convent the special experience he had when giving Holy Communion to the Prior (cf. chapter 10, p. 12f.).² The account the Koonammavu Convent Chronicle gives of the last days of Chavara is very touching and shows the great esteem the sisters had of his sanctity (see chapter 8).

After the Death of Chavara

The reputation of Chavara was so high that, as we have seen, great was the enthusiasm manifested by people at his funeral (cf. chapter 10). Immediately after his death two short biographies were written, one in (probably January) 1871 by his successor Fr Kuriakose Porukara, and the other by his confessor and spiritual director, Fr Leopold Beccaro OCD, a little later in the same year (cf. *Positio*: 487). Fr Leopold's entry dated 3 January 1871 in his diary ends with the prayer, "O holy and graceful soul pray for me" (cf. Beccaro 2003: 17). We had occasions to refer to both these biographies earlier in this book. Besides these biographies there are many relevant memoirs of Chavara in several chronicles and diaries, e.g. the Chronicle of Mannanam III, those of Vazhakulam and Elthuruth monasteries; the Diary of Fr Varkey Parapuram, that of Fr Mathai Mariam Palakunnel, to all of which we have referred to in previous chapters.

Quite a number of various other manuscript records contain material relevant in this context. Some of them are letters, petitions or reports sent to Rome by missionaries or people of Kerala. There are also recorded stories and poems in commentaries and biographies. We may specifically refer to two petitions, which certain Malayalee Christians sent to Pope Pius IX. Both, though written by persons of two different views, give unstinting praise to Chavara: while the first extols his moral authority, prudence etc,

² Cf. *Positio*: 435ff. to illustrate what we have said above.

the other praises his spirit of humility and obedience (cf. *Positio*: 536).

The *Purāthana Pāttukal* ('Old Songs') is a sort of biography written about 1890 in a popular poetic style. The whole poem manifests how lofty was the fame of Chavara's holiness among his people at Kainakari (PO, doc. 114). Brother Rocky TOCD in his diary calls Chavara "a man of divine wisdom". The account of the last illness and death of Chavara composed by Fr Leonard Moolayil in 1923 speaks highly of Chavara and explicitly mentions what he spoke of the preservation of his baptismal grace. Fr Philip Koyipallil in his brief biography of the Prior written in 1929 refers to people's highly cherished estimation of the holiness of Chavara and concludes the work with this exhortation: "Those who desire to die the blessed death of this father let them learn to imitate his virtuous life". Fr Leopold in the note he wrote he wrote about the Blessed immediately after his death, prayed: "O holy and beautiful soul, pray for me" (Beccaro 2003: 18).

Finally we may refer to two saintly witnesses from among indigenous Carmelites, Frs Louis Maria and Marceline Alackappally. The former a devout disciple of the Prior, in a letter to Fr Marceline and in another written statement speaks elaborately about the virtues and especially the high quality of the prayer habits of Chavara. He insists that the process for the Prior's canonization should be started as early as possible (cf. *Positio*: 562-65). Fr Marceline had not seen Chavara but had heard much about him from the contemporaries of the Prior about his many virtues, deep sense of prayer, the esteem and regard in which the missionaries held him (cf. *Positio*: 565-69).³

Almost all the records mentioned above are in manuscripts. There are also a good number of printed records (cf. *ibid.*: 575ff.), beginning with the memorial card or souvenir of Chavara's death (PO, doc. 170). There are very respectful references in many of the books and tracts published from 1871 to 1955. Perhaps the first of these references is that of missionary Marceline Berardi in his book on the history of Malabar Christianity published in 1872:

³ Cf. *Positio*: 535ff, for these and many other records on the fame of sanctity of Chavara.

Even if he [Chavara] were the only flower which bloomed at Mannanam, we can rightly say that the labours of Frs Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara produced the desired fruit (p. 301).

In *Nazrni Deepika* a number of articles appeared, of which those of the Malayalam literary critique C. Anthapai (1902), the well known writers L. C. Chacko (1936) and O. M. Cherian (1938) (first published in *Malayala Manorama* in 1937) deserve special mention.

We have already spoken of some of the biographies published, the first of which was that of Fr Leopold in 1871 (cf. *Positio*: 30) and presently published in English by Fr Lucas Vithuvattical. The second published biography seems to be that of Fr Jose Mathias (Maliempurackal) in 1936. Fr Valerian's, published in 1939, is the most elaborate one. P. T. Thomas's *Karma-yogi* was published in 1955. There are long passages about Chavara in the monumental history of the St Thomas Christians by Fr Bernard (1921/1992). A preface by Bishop Kalahari to the biography of Fr Valerian and another by Bishop Kavukatt to P. T. Thomas's *Karma-yogi* need special mention.

The Process for Canonization

About seventy years passed after the death of the Prior and there were such rich and varied testimonies to his holiness. One might wonder why no formal steps were yet taken for his canonization. Fr Leopold, who knew him so intimately and had the highest opinion about the holiness of his life, seems to have had the intention of initiating the process immediately after Chavara's death. It seems that it was with this intention that he published the very edifying biography of the Prior in 1871 itself and distributed various relics to the monasteries (cf. *Parapuram*: 1423). Soon conflicts arose between him and Vicar Apostolic Mellano and he had to leave Kerala in 1876. The members of the CMI Congregation perhaps had not the courage to launch such a bold project, a project, which they perhaps thought, was an impossible one for them to realize. The various agitations that emerged in 1870s and the changes in the Malabar Church in the following years might have also their impact on not taking a decisive step.

However the members of the congregation as well as many others had the conviction that Chavara's canonization was a

worthy cause to be promoted. Slowly steps began to be taken by the members. Perhaps Fr Valerian played an important role in deepening their consciousness and promoting the cause. Concrete steps followed soon. The collective movement started with the petitions of the members of three monasteries in 1936. The local chapter (synaxis) of Gagultha Monastery, Champakulam, consisting of Prior Simon and five other members sent a petition, dated 3 July 1936, to the general definitory (council) of the congregation requesting that: a) the process for canonization of Prior Chavara be started officially by the congregation; b) the definitory ask the monasteries to say daily in common some prayer for the promotion of the cause (cf. *Positio*: 570). The petition alludes to informal and individual attempts made by some members. Perhaps one of the earliest to express the desire for instituting the process was Fr Louis of Manjummel (see above). A petition similar to that of Champakulam Monastery, dated 6 July 1936, was addressed to the definitory by the prior and twelve other members of St Sebastian's Monastery, Pulincunnu (cf. *ibid.*: 571).⁴ In answer to these petitions the definitory passed a positive resolution dated 23 July 1936. It decided that a good biography of Chavara should be published as a first step, and entrusted the task of preparing such a biography to Fr Simon Pattassery with help from Fr Valerian Plathottam. The December 1936 general chapter (synaxis) of the congregation unanimously decided on 21 December 1936 that a prayer already prepared should be recited by the communities of every monastery for the cause of canonization (cf. *ibid.*: 571-73). The biography was soon ready and was published in 1939 with Fr Valerian as its author. With this publication more and more people came to know of the life and virtues of Chavara and they began to pray for his intercession. Favours received by the devotees appeared in print in dailies and periodicals (cf. *Positio*: 598).⁵

Decisive Action

In 1953 Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, visited Kerala. He is said

⁴ St. Anne's Monastery, Kurianad, also sent such a petition (cf. *ibid.*: 572, 601).

⁵ At Mannanam is kept a book containing the favours and healings received by devotees from 1957-73 (cf. *ibid.*: 599).

to have advised Fr Maurus Valiyaparampil, the then prior general to begin the process for canonization of Chavara. Accordingly the prior general with the consent of his councillors decided on 20 December 1953 to introduce the cause. He first wrote to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches and at the advice of Cardinal Tisserant wrote to the Congregation of Rites⁶. This Congregation by its decree dated 9 December 1955 was kind enough to introduce the cause of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and authorized Bishop (since 1956 Archbishop) Mathew Kavukatt of Changanachery to institute the informative process⁷ on the life and virtues of Chavara, whose body lay buried at Mannanam in the diocese of Changanachery (from 1956 archdiocese).

Subsequently the general definitory appointed Fr Placid Podiapara CMI, who was in Rome as consultant to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, the postulator of the cause. Fr Placid in his turn appointed Fr Maurilius Kakkanatt CMI, resident at Mannanam, vice-postulator. On 31 December 1957 Archbishop Kavukatt, at the request of the vice-postulator instituted the historical commission in the tenor of the decree of the Congregation for Rites (C. T. 63/955, dated 9 December 1955). The members of the commission were Frs Kurian Vanchipura, the then chancellor of the diocese of Pala (president), Anslem Perumalil CMI (secretary) and Antony Kaithara (third member). The commission was formally inaugurated on 3 January 1958. The task of the commission was to collect all the writings of, and documents related to, Chavara and submit them with a scientific report.

⁶ This Congregation was established by Pope Sixtus V on 22 January 1588 as the competent organ to treat the causes of saints. From 1969 it is known as 'Congregation for the Causes of Saints' (cf. Thunduparampil 2003: 5, fn. 8).

⁷ This process had to be conducted under 3 different categories: the process on the life, virtues and odour of sanctity; the process on three specific alleged miracles; and a minor process on the writings of the Servant of God. The process had to be conducted in accordance with the "motu proprio" *Gia da qualche tempo* of Pius XI, dated 6 February 1930 and the norms prescribed by the Congregation of Rites on 4 February 1939. For a detailed description of a process, cf. Nedungatt 2002: 152-59.

As it became clear that the historical commission would take a long time to complete its work and that there was the possibility that some of the prospective witnesses might not survive long, Archbishop Kavukatt constituted the tribunal on 15 August 1962. It consisted of the following members: Frs Romeo Thomas Mannanal CMI (the principal judge delegate), Eapen Aylooparampil and Nicholas Perumalil CMI (assisting judges), Frs Paulinus Jeerakattil CMI (later bishop of Jagdalpur) and A. Mathias Mundadan CMI (promoters of faith), Fr Joseph ('cursor' or courier or errand person). The tribunal was to conduct the informative process on the life and virtues of the Servant of God, as also on the estimation of people about his sanctity and the alleged miracles in general. It immediately set to work examining the witnesses. In 1967 a change had to be made in the composition of the tribunal. Due to disabilities of old age Fr Romeo Thomas, president, had to resign. In his place Archbishop Kavukatt appointed Fr Lucas Vithuvattical CMI president. The tribunal conducted with great diligence and wisdom the informative process on the fame of sanctity of the Servant of God. It held 501 sessions from 15 August 1962 to 2 July 1969 and examined some 109 witnesses, belonging to various categories: priests, both religious and diocesan, other religious men and women, lay persons of various professions and ranks including three Hindus.⁸ A tribunal for the minor process (*processus diligentiarum*) was instituted by the archbishop in 1969 to study the report submitted by the historical commission and the writings and documents concerned. Its members were Frs Louis Neriamparampil and Xavier Koodapuzha (assisting judges) and Fr A. Mathias Mundadan CMI (promoter of faith).

Both the above mentioned tribunals completed their work by 1970. Their acts and documents were then translated into Latin, of which sufficient number of copies were made. After this Archbishop Antony Padiyara, the successor of His Grace Kavukatt who had passed away on 9 October 1969, solemnly concluded the work of the tribunals near the tomb of the Servant of God in St Joseph's Monastery Church, Mannanam.

⁸ *Positio*: (pp. 603-07) presents a systematic and comprehensive list of witnesses. It also provides a select number of sample testimonies (pp. 608-42).

In 1970 all the documents were sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. These documents—the acts and documents mentioned above—were 210 in number, of which 97 were writings of Chavara and the rest about him. The Congregation got ready copies of the acts in 1971 and on 12 October 1973 published the decree on the writings of the Servant of God (cf. *Positio*: XVf.).

Preparation of *Positio*

The next step was the preparation of what is known as *Positio super introductione causae et super virtutibus*, a position document describing the introduction of the cause and virtues of the Servant of God. It has two sections: *Informatio* and *Summarium*. The first section (*Informatio*) included brief accounts of the life of the Servant of God, of the history of the cause, the work carried out by the historical office of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, a survey of the documents, and some doubts proposed to the consultants. This section (cf. *Positio*: v-xcv) is authored by the general narrator (*Relator Generalis*) of the said office, Fr Augustine Amore OFM. The second section, after two general introductions (pp. 1-18), gives in part one (pp. 19-490) the documents related to the life, activities and death of the Servant of God (1805-71), and in part two (pp. 471-642) documents regarding the fame of the holiness of the Servant of God after his death. Besides, there are three appendices, an alphabetical index and a table of contents; in all the *Positio* has over 800 pages. Between the appendices and the alphabetical index there are eight picture plates containing some seventeen photos related to the life of Chavara. There is, besides, the frontispiece with a portrait of the Blessed and a modern map of Kerala after page 588.

Monsignor John Papa, being in charge of the historical department of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints had to see that the *Positio* was written. He sought the help of a CMI priest to write it. Fr Canisius Thekkekara, the then prior general, deputed Fr Lucas Vithuvattical, then professor of theology at Dharmaram College, for the task. There were eight volumes of documents to be scrutinized, of which four were the writings of the Servant of God and the other four about him. Fr Lucas found that there were a few more documents yet to be collected. He, with the collaboration of a junior priest, Fr Joseph Vattathara CMI, made searches in India and in Europe and collected these documents, some of which were of great importance. Altogether, 66 archives in 42 places in India

and Europe were searched, the majority by the historical commission instituted in 1957 and a few personally by Frs Lucas and Joseph.⁹ These two priests then began patiently scrutinizing all the collected documents to confirm their authenticity and accuracy. In the preparation of the text they took special care to make the work of the consultants—mostly unfamiliar with the situation of India and Indian languages—easy by providing general and particular introductions, notes and a glossary. The work of Fr Lucas was very much appreciated by Fr Augustine Amore OFM, the general narrator ('Relator Generalis') of *Informatio*.

The work on *Positio* was completed in 1977 and was printed in the Vatican Press; copies of the same were given to the consultants on historical matters ('consultores historici') of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. They, after scrutiny, had to give their answers to the four questions put to them by the general narrator.

1. Whether the documents cited in the *Positio* are properly collected, and scientifically edited so as provide a true and clear picture of the life and activities of the Servant of God Kuriakose Elias Chavara?
2. Whether the documents merit historical certainty so much so that through them one might know with certainty the personality of the Servant of God?
3. Whether certain knowledge of the genuine fame of sanctity of the Servant of God can be derived from them, and whether it is proved by solid arguments?
4. Whether from the same documents the theological consultants would be able to find solid and sure arguments to determine the practice of virtues by the Servant of God?

The response of the consultants could be positive (*affirmative*), negative (*negative*) or reserved (*suspense*).

⁹ *Positio*: xviii-xx gives a complete list of the archives which were searched. This is followed by a brief survey of the contents of the documents, altogether 22 in number, recorded in section II (*Summarium*) of *Positio*.

Having obtained the positive answers of the consultants the Congregation issued on 15 March 1980 the decree on the introduction of the cause in the Apostolic Curia. Then copies of *Positio* (together with the reports and votes of historian consultants) were given to consultants on theological matters. They unanimously approved and praised the heroic virtues practised by Kuriakose Elias Chavara (cf. *Relatio et Vote*). This was followed by two meetings of the officials and consultants of the Congregation to discuss specially the question of the virtues of the Servant of God. On 23 November 1983 they met and discussed the case in general. On 27 March 1984 the Cardinals met and discussed the question on virtues proposed by Ladislao Cardinal Rubin, the general narrator of the cause: is it evident that the Servant of God practised in a heroic degree the theological as well as the cardinal virtues, and those related to them? The response of both the meetings was positive. The Holy Father, John Paul II, was then formally informed of the findings. His Holiness ordered the relevant decree regarding the heroic virtues of the Servant of God be prepared. The decree concludes:

On 7 April 1984, having called together the Cardinals and His Eminence Cardinal Ladislao Rubin, and myself, the secretary for the Congregation and others who are to be called by custom, and in their presence the Supreme Pontiff solemnly declared that: *It is evident that the Servant of God Cyriac Elias Chavara practised the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity towards God and towards the brethren, and also the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude and those connected with the same, in a heroic degree, in case and for the effect in question.*

The Pope then ordered the decree be promulgated and be referred to in the Acts of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The decree was promulgated on 7 April 1984 by Peter Cardinal Palazini, prefect of the Congregation and Archbishop Trajano Crisan, its secretary.

The decree begins thus:

"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my father will love him, and we will come and dwell in him" (Jn 14:23). Words more apt than these of our Lord cannot be

found to discern the life of the Servant of God Cyriac Elias Chavara, with regard to his interior life. God indwelling in him was in a way manifesting itself outside, so much so that the common people saw in him 'the man of God', or 'man endowed with divine grace' and in this way people acknowledged him in public (published in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XXVII [1984] 810-15).¹⁰

Process on Miracle

What was still needed for the beatification of Venerable¹¹ Kuriakose Elias Chavara was the evidence of a miracle attributed to his intercession. Already in 1980 Fr Placid Podipara had left for India for good. In his place Fr Lucas Vithuvattical had been appointed postulator. Immediately after the above mentioned decree was promulgated the new postulator presented to the Congregation three cases of cures allegedly obtained by the intercession of the Servant of God.¹²

1. The instantaneous cure of Sister Alfonsa FCC (now Blessed Alfonsa, soon to be canonized), which she personally communicated in writing to her confessor, Fr Louis Perumalil (CMI).
2. The cure which Sri Rocky of the Koonammavu Parish experienced in 1949.
3. The cure a boy of six years of age allegedly obtained in 1959 by praying to the Servant of God.

It was the last case the Congregation selected for scrutiny.

The alleged miracle was the healing of a six year old boy Joseph Mathew Pennaprampil, who was born with club feet of the variety, which the doctors call *equino-varus*.¹³ When the boy was three weeks old, the medical doctors examined the deformed feet

¹⁰ This is also more or less how the decree on beatification starts.

¹¹ This is a title the Servant of God automatically obtained once the above mentioned decree was promulgated.

¹² These 'miraculous' cases were those selected in the diocesan process.

¹³ Cf. *Family Medical Encyclopedia*, London, Guild Publishing, 1986, p. 87f.

and affirmed for certain that the deformity could not be cured either by medicine or by massaging, and that the only possibility of cure would be, perhaps, surgical operation. But since the financial position of the parents was such that they could not afford it. So the deformity of the boy happened to be a longstanding one. When Joseph was six years old, while he was on the way to school along with his elder sister Annakutty through a stony road, he felt immense pain on the feet. Then both of them stopped on the way and said together the Our Father..., Hail Mary ... and Glory be..., and then Joseph said a spontaneous prayer: **'My Father Kuriakose Elias, set right my deformed leg and diminish the pain'**. Behold! surprising indeed, the Blessed was there. Suddenly the boy felt a vibration on the right foot and in a moment the deformed right foot became straight. They went directly to the school. All the students in the school, the teachers, the parish priest, and even the medical doctors cried out, Oh a miracle! It was on 14 June 1960. The whole family, the parish priest together with the boy Joseph himself continued their prayers to the Blessed for the healing of the left foot too. For this they had to wait almost ten months. On 4 April 1961 there was an instantaneous cure of the left foot of the boy. Although the deformity was not perfectly cured as the heel of that foot could not touch the ground, the foot functioned normally. The informative process on this miraculous cure was conducted in the archiepiscopal curia of Changanachery in 1964. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints issued a decree on 28 February 1983 confirming the validity of the process. The Congregation then proceeded with discussions on the alleged miracle, first in the medical corps of the Congregation on 8 November 1984. The related documentation and evidence were submitted to the panel of doctors. They gave their expert opinion: the sudden cure of the clubfoot of Joseph at the age of six had no scientific explanation.

The *Positio Super Miraculo* (the position document on the miracle) was got ready by Fr Lucas, the postulator. The Congregation discussed the whole matter first in the meeting of the consultants under the presidentship of the promoter of faith on 28 February 1985, and then on 7 May of the same year in a meeting of the Cardinals. Both the meetings confirmed the cure as supernatural. The Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation duly briefed the Holy Father on all these. His Holiness gave his approval and ordered the decree on miracle be issued. There

followed the meeting of the Cardinals, officials and a few others as usual.¹⁴ In their presence the Holy Father declared that it was evident that a miracle had been wrought by God through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God Kuriakose Elias Chavara:

The cure of the congenital deformity of the feet, which they call 'equino-varus bilateral' of long standing deformity obtained by Joseph Mathew Pennaparampil is instantaneous, perfect and durable.

The Pope ordered the decree be published and recorded in the Acts of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The decree was promulgated on 9 May 1985 by the cardinal prefect and the secretary of the said Congregation (cf. the decree published in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* LXXVII [1985] 1001-03).

Beatification in Kerala

At last the decision was taken by Pope John Paul II:

We decreed that the solemn beatification of the venerable Servant of God Cyriac Elias Chavara together with that of Venerable Alfonsa Muttathupadathu, may be conducted on 8 February 1986, during our journey to India.

There follows the actual declaration:

Thus during the ceremony conducted in the open air, at Kottayam, attended by many ecclesiastical dignitaries, priests, and religious of different congregations, and by a great concourse of faithful, we declared as follows:

WE COMPLYING WITH THE PRAYERS OF OUR BROTHERS JOSEPH POWATHIL, ARCHBISHOP OF CHANGANACHERY AND JOSEPH PALLIKAPARAMPIL, BISHOP OF PALAI AND ALSO OF MANY BROTHERS IN THE EPISCOPACY AND OF MANY FAITHFUL, AND HAVING CONSULTED THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS, BY OUR APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY WE DECREE THAT THE VENERABLE SERVANTS OF GOD CYRIAC

¹⁴ See the procedure for the virtues.

ELIAS CHAVARA AND ALFONSA (*VENERABILES SERVUS DEI CYRIACUS ELIAS CHAVARA ET SERVA DEI ALFONSA*) MUTTATHUPADATHU BE CALLED IN FUTURE BY THE NAME OF 'BLESSED' AND THAT THEIR FEASTS BE CELEBRATED ON THEIR BIRTH IN HEAVEN: OF CYRIAC ELIAS CHAVARA ON THE 3RD OF JANUARY AND THAT OF ALFONSA MUTTATHUPADATHU ON THE 28TH OF JULY IN THE PLACES AND ACCORDING TO THE MANNER DECREED IN THE STATUTES. IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT" (cf. decree published in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* LXXVIII [1986] 1076-78).

Thus the Church officially awarded the honours of the altar to this veteran saint and leading Church man, Chavara. From that day onwards he was to be addressed 'Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara'. From the time the cause was introduced in the diocesan curia in 1955 he was known 'Servant of God' and he became 'Venerable' in 1984 when the decree on the heroic virtues of Chavara was promulgated. Now we are looking forward on bended knees to the day when we will be fortunate to call him 'Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara'.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Personality of Chavara

Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara of the Holy Family died early morning on 3 January 1871 at St Philomena's Monastery, Koonammavu. The news spread like wild fire all over Kerala and people from the north and south, east and west, poured into the monastery church to have a look at, and pay their last respects to, the deceased saintly religious, their loving father. On 4 January was his burial. The church and its vast precincts overflowed with large crowds of people, mourning and praying. The reputed preacher Rev. Fr Mathai Mariam Kappil of the Tathampally Parish of Alapuzha began his funeral oration with these striking and memorable words: "Today the flag of Malayalam has fallen". These words resonated the tense atmosphere, and church bell tolled its sorrowful tones. The crowd overwhelmed with emotion burst out into loud cries. All this was telling evidence of who Chavara was, what he was to all sections of the people of Kerala. Though short in physical stature Fr Kuriakose was a towering, magnetic personality on various counts and considerations—the lofty qualities of his mind and heart, his fine character, his brilliant attributes, his magnificent achievements, valuable contributions, above all his deep God-orientedness, his high profile prayerful and contemplative bent.

Chavara's beloved disciple Cathanar Mathai Mariam Palakunnel wrote in his diary (1971: 102f.): My pen fails me to describe the happiness of those days when Divan Madhava Rao was minister of the State of Thiruvithancore, when Bernardine was archbishop of Varapuzha, when Kuriakose Chavara was malpan and vicar general of Kerala and prior of the monasteries. Historian Fr Varkey Parapuram (p. 1425) has this entry—an obituary note—in his diary: The venerable Father Chavara was director of the seminaries of Mannanam and Pallipuram, and had many disciples among the priests. They cherished great devotedness and fondness

for this malpan of theirs. Because of the excellence of his character and other precious attributes he was esteemed and respected throughout Kerala both by the clergy and the laity. For another eminent student of his, Bishop Louis Pazheparampil, Chavara was a great person to be ever remembered gratefully.

There are ever so many testimonies of important persons about the greatness of Chavara. We will quote only a few more. Prominent lay persons like Mathu Tharakan of Aranattukara, Pascal, I. C. Chacko, P. J. Thomas, and K. C. Chacko have paid brilliant tributes to Chavara. Though a little late many literary and historical writers of Kerala, like Sukumar Azhikod, Perumpadam Sreedharan, M. K. Sanu, Cyriac Thomas, P. Govinda Pilla, Babu Paul, M. Leelavathi, and many others, have started to recognize in Chavara a leader of the Kerala renaissance of the 19th century. The well known Kerala historian Sreethara Menon (cf. 2004: 16-20) regrets that he did not make an elaborate study of Chavara's person and contribution. He writes that the life and achievements of Fr Chavara cannot be restricted to the Catholic Church. They are relevant to all communities and to all times. It can be said that Chavara was a great personality born before the times.

Fr Kuriakose Porukara who succeeded Chavara as the superior general of the CMI Congregation wrote a biography of the Blessed, in which the author touchingly recollected Chavara's vision, life and contribution. He concludes his account: this father of ours was a spiritual sun who illumined the earth with his golden rays to produce precious metals and stones and to bestow on the living beings growth and advancement. Fr Alexander Kattakkayam, a close associate of Chavara and the prior general of the congregation from 1902 to 1908, exclaimed to a junior priest: "O wonder! how much the Prior accomplished in a short time. Could anyone other than he come near to it".

Yes, Fr Chavara did great things, achieved much. Many and varied were the contributions of this eminent scholar and administrator. Just think of the number of languages he learned and the amount of knowledge he acquired; think of the contribution he made to the enhancement of priestly training; the important role he played in the establishment and progress of the CMI and of the CMC Congregations; the contributions he made to the reform and progress, material, intellectual and spiritual, of the Church in Kerala and the people of Kerala; the magnitude of his effort to

keep the unity of the Church; the educational and social uplift of all the people; the pain he took to establish the printing press, etc. K. C. Chacko is right when he says that Chavara's achievements are magnificent and laudable. We have tried to assess the quality and quantity of Chavara's activities in chapters two to eleven. Behind these activities and undertakings there is a personality, a dynamic personality. This personality was in the making from very early childhood till the last moment of the life of the Blessed. The dynamic force which worked throughout his life was, as Pope John Paul II remarked, "the intense charity and prayer, which characterized his daily life, his close communion with Christ". We find the same emphasis in the words of Archbishop Kavukatt:

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 prelate comments further that the life of this monk of extraordinary holiness, this dynamic personality, with broad vision and powerful push and unabating pluck, ever remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration to all those who look at it. Prof. P. T. Thomas, with fine insight, calls Chavara *karma-yogi* (contemplative in action). This attribute is the best to qualify the towering personality of Chavara.

In this final chapter we are trying to explore the various dimensions of this personality. The first of these is Chavara's prophetic vision and mission. Then come the physical and human dimensions, which are followed by the moral-ethical features, and specifically Christian aspects. The last point we present is prayer-contemplative dimension of the personality of Blessed Chavara.

Prophetic Vision and Mission of Chavara

An important dimension of Chavara's personality is his prophetic vision, his prophetic mission. This dimension, from a wider perspective, is vital for an evaluation of Chavara. The other traits of his personality we have already seen and those to be seen in the following pages, emerge, as if, from the prophetic vision he developed and the prophetic mission to which he committed himself. Hence before proceeding to the other aspects it is quite necessary to have some grasp of this dimension. The three

founders of the CMI religious community shared certain visions and concerns which had a prophetic character. Palackal was aware of the harm done to the community of Catholic St Thomas Christians by the struggle for re-linking them to the East Syrian Church of Persia. Although he might have been conscious of the legitimacy of the search for a prelate who identified himself with the Rite and ethos of this community, he was rather disconcerted by the opposition to the European missionaries, which he thought was blind. He considered that the Christian community in Kerala owed much to western missionaries for their steadfast adherence to the Roman Pontiff and the orthodoxy of doctrine. Hence he could not easily tolerate this blind opposition, of the type as found in the *Vartamānpustakam* of Cathanar Paremmakkal, to the missionaries from whom he had received many benefits, especially for developing knowledge, vision and practice of Christian life. He esteemed the Carmelite missionaries much more than the Chaldean prelates and priests. Just as for Fr Bernard of St Thomas later (cf. 1993: 234f.), it was quite evident for Palackal that the dependence of the St Thomas Christians on the bishops from Persia was not conducive to the good of the Church in Kerala (cf. chapter 6: 7). We cannot deduce from any available document the exact attitude of Fr Thomas Porukara towards the Chaldeans. It could not be different from that of Palackal. More than Palackal he owed his priestly training to the Carmelite missionaries and valued much the theological and spiritual views he received from them.

As far as Blessed Chavara is concerned it is very clear that his views were identical with those of his malpan, Palackal. He had deep awareness of the past as he learned history from his malpan and augmented his knowledge and awareness of history through further reading and reflection. Just as for Palackal, for him too the greatest threats to the Kerala Christians was from the Chaldeans. His experience of and involvement in the Roccas affair only confirmed his fears. He deeply felt the critical state of the Church in Kerala. On the one hand a re-linking with Persia was least helpful. On the other hand, the Carmelite missionaries, as they were found at that time, were not helpful to preserve and develop the identity and specific aspects of the life of the St Thomas Christians. Just as the agitators against the missionaries, so too Blessed Chavara and like minded persons could not think at that time of the possibility of a native bishop heading the St Thomas Christian Church. Perhaps in their mind that eventuality was not

realizable in the immediate future. Chavara was keenly aware of this dilemma. His prophetic mind sought other solutions to tide over the critical situation which the community was facing. Now we will try to analyse briefly the characteristics and qualities of a prophet in general and see how far they are traceable in the vision and mission of Blessed Chavara.

One of the basic characteristics of any society is that it undergoes changes, sometimes as a sudden breakthrough, at other times as a gradual process, through the role certain individuals play in the course of its history. This is true of social, economic, political, cultural as well as religious realms. Think, for example, of the radical changes brought about in recent past at all India level by Raja Ram Mohan Roy or Mahatma Gandhi; at the regional level by the collective Channar /ShaNar agitation in former south Thiruvithamcore, by Chattambi Swamikal, Swami Narayana Guru and others in the whole of Kerala. These changes were the result of the sense of history of some individuals or groups, from which arose their awareness of the existing situation and their vision of the future. In the Catholic Church we are all conscious of the phenomenal change that the Second Vatican Council effected. We owe this almost entirely to the prophetic vision of the great Pope John XXIII whose awareness of the history of the Church is well known.

Who is a Prophet ?

Now we might ask the pertinent question: who is a prophet? The word is derived from the Greek *prophetes*, which is the translation of the Hebrew *nabi*, most probably stemming from the Akkadian *nabu*. *Nabu* basically means 'call'. Hence *nabi* would mean a person who is called, and also one who calls forth. Combining these two connotations, we could say that a prophet is one who is aware of being called by God in order to speak forth and act in the name of God, in a particular context, especially in a context that is critical for a community. The most important mark of a prophet is the sense of history. It is the power of discernment by which one is able to understand events and their implications for the total context of his life. To live with the sense of history means to be sensitive to the needs, concerns and problems of all persons.

The prophets of the Old Testament had this sense. Though it is true that the past is gone for ever and the future is beyond one's reach, the prophets of the Old Testament were more than conscious that it was the past of Israel's history that fashioned their present and it was the present that would decide their future. It is this consciousness that made them to intervene in their contemporary events, to render them conformable to the designs of God revealed through history and thus assure continuity according to the same designs. When they found material prosperity led to a deviation from the covenant between Yahweh and his people, when they found that it led to injustice and inequality, the few haves occupying the top enjoying everything and the have-nots, who formed the large mass, ground into poverty, the prophets voiced their deep concern in terms of threats and promises. In the early Church we can hear the voice of New Testament prophets against the discrimination of Greek widows, against the myopic and sectarian approach of the Jerusalem based Jewish Christians: Peter defending his action in the case of Gentile Cornelius; Stephen emphasizing the revolutionary view that Judaism had only a relative role to play in history, that the Christ event was something transcending and fulfilling the history of Israel; Philip preaching the gospel to the Samaritans; above all Paul championing the cause of the Gentile Christians and the Council of Jerusalem approving it. It is Luke the historian, who had a deep insight into historical continuity that highlighted these events, events which pointed to a crisis in the Church. In the later history of the Church too we can recognise such prophets rising, whenever the Church faced crises. Reference has already been made to Pope John XXIII and his prophetic vision and mission.

Crisis in the Kerala Church

The fact that, according to a strong and persistent tradition, it was Apostle St Thomas, who introduced Christianity into Kerala, is well known. It is believed that the Church here, during the first three or four centuries, was indigenous with full autonomy. Then came the relation with the East -Syrian Christians of Persia. This relation is evaluated differently by different writers (cf. Mundadan 1992: 7-11). Fr Bernard says:

(With the East -Syrian) connection the succession of indigenous prelates came to an end and in their place foreign prelates started to rule over the Malankara Church. This, we

can say without any hesitation, did more harm to the Indian Church than good (Bernard 1992: 234f.).

This relation is supposed to have been engineered by the Persian merchant Cnai Thomman (Thomas of Cana), some time in the fourth century. We do not know how the indigenous community reacted to this relation with the Persian Christians. Whatever it be an attitude of antagonism between the so-called Southists or Cnanites (claimed to be the pure progeny of Cnai Thomman) and the so-called Northists (the original Christian community of Kerala) prevailed for many centuries (cf. Mundadan 2001: 97f.). Is this antagonism a sign of the displeasure of the indigenous group (the majority) against a tendency of the Persians to dominate? We cannot affirm it with sufficient evidence. However, the persistent tension between the two groups is a fact.

It was after the death of Mar Abraham (d. 1597) and with the Synod of Diamper that the St Thomas Christians were severed from the East-Syrian or Chaldean Church. Since then their attitude is somewhat ambiguous. Whenever they had trouble with the Latin prelates ruling over them, they would spontaneously look to 'Babel' (the Church of Babylon or Persia) for relief. However, on various occasions they manifest their preparedness for autonomy directly under Rome without any juridical relation with the East-Syrian Church. Developments since the mid-17th century: the regime of Chandy Parampil (17c.), the first and second Angamaly conventions (18c.), the feelings of the community when Cariattil was made archbishop, their bitter disappointment at his untimely death, their efforts to get Paremmakkal made archbishop—all these are strong indications that they would have been happier if someone from among themselves were chosen as their 'head' (cf. Mundadan 2003: 91f.). Again there is a change in their approach: as their conflict with Carmelite missionaries grew sharp towards the close of the 18th century they turned to 'Babel' for bishops (cf. *ibid.*: 74f.). It is in the last quarter of the 19th century, after the unsuccessful intervention of the intruders Mar Roccas and Mar Melus, and after Rome had taken a firm stand against Chaldean intervention in the Indian affairs, that the St Thomas Christians made a clear demand for indigenous ritual prelates. This is one of the factors to be considered as background to Chavara's vision of, and mission for, the Church in Kerala.

Another factor is the relation of the St Thomas Christians with the Latin West, which started in the 16th century. Deeply rooted in the memories of St Thomas, and in the ties with the East-Syrian Church, and fully integrated into the socio-cultural milieu of Kerala, the St Thomas Christians had developed an identity of their own. Till the close of the 15th century they may be said to have lived in two worlds: the geographical, political and socio-religious world of Kerala, and the ecclesiastical world of close association with the East-Syrian or the Persian Church. With the coming of the Portuguese in the 16th century they were prepared for, and initiated into, a life in three worlds. The third world was that of the Latin or Western Christendom. This new world would in course of time exert so deep an influence on them (whether they wanted it or not), that it would become hard to shed its traces. The first representatives of this world, the Portuguese, were cordially and even enthusiastically welcomed; soon they would pose a challenge to, and even threaten, the particular identity, autonomy and unity, which the St Thomas Christians had developed through many centuries. The new world did not only distort the identity, but shattered the unity and destroyed the autonomy of the Indian Church of St Thomas. There would follow a very hard struggle to restore or rediscover them in a new way.

The 16th century opens with a bright outlook. The Portuguese felt satisfied that their centuries-old dream of discovering India and Eastern Christians had been fulfilled; that through their instrumentality, Western and Eastern Christendoms had been brought together. They set great hopes on the Christians of India. The Indian Christians, on their part, experienced a spontaneous relief and joy at the arrival of powerful Christians from the West and expected the newcomers to help strengthen their own privileged existence. It is in such an atmosphere of euphoria that a life-contact began between the Portuguese and the St Thomas Christians. This contact, after many vicissitudes, culminated in a moment of tension created by the circumstances which preceded in the Synod of Diamper at the close of the 16th century. With the synod the longstanding relation of the Church of India with the East-Syrian Church of Persia was terminated and the St Thomas Christians were brought under the Latin jurisdiction of the Portuguese Padroado.

To grasp the tension and setbacks in the relations it is necessary to understand the attitudes and mentalities of both sides.

The official attitude of the Portuguese towards the Christians of St Thomas (as towards all other Christians) was one of sympathy and understanding, but always motivated by a sense of superiority about their form of Christianity, which was, according to them, the true form and to which all Christians had to conform in order to be perfect Christians. The local customs and the particular usages of the different Rites were adulterations and abuses, which had to be suppressed. In short, the Christians had to conform to the Portuguese in everything.

The Christians of St Thomas, on the other hand, were of a different view. They could never imagine that only the Latin form of Christianity was the true Christianity. Their idea of the Church was more or less this: both the Portuguese and they were Christians and both belonged to the universal Church. But each local community had its own customs and usages including Church-discipline, the peculiar customs etc., probably going back to the times of the Apostles themselves. They could never entertain the idea of giving up their customs and practices, both social and ecclesiastical, which had been sacred to them for many centuries, even though they were not closed to certain good influences coming from the Western Christians.

Thus the approaches of the Portuguese and of the Christians of St Thomas were very different and from almost opposite angles. The St Thomas Christians conscious of their history and their particular identity and autonomy wanted the communities to remain unimpaired in every respect, each independent of the other, but each extending full co-operation to the other for the good of both. To use a modern term they wanted co-existence and not absorption of one community into the other. The Portuguese were unable to grasp this idea of co-existence. What they wanted was absorption, and that too of the local Christians into that of the Portuguese.¹

The Synod of Diamper (1599) and the '*Coonen* (Bent) Cross Oath' (1653) and the consequent split are two high points in the conflict. A modicum of peace was established by the substitution of the Jesuit missionaries with the Carmelites, and especially by the appointment of Metropolitan Chandy Parampil as vicar apostolic. Though some Carmelite missionaries suggested the

¹ For details see Mundadan 2001: 152ff., especially 242ff.

continuation of indigenous rule (cf. Mundadan 2003: 57, 60) the appointment of a wrong person—Raphael Figueredo de Salgado as coadjutor and successor of Metropolitan Chandy upset this peace. A sort of pacification was brought about by the appointment of a Carmelite vicar apostolic—Angelo Francis—in 1700. In the second part of the 18th century tensions began to mount, the grievances of the St Thomas Christians against the Carmelites took a turbulent turn. It burst out after the death of Vicar Apostolic Florence of Jesus of Nazareth (1773). It was in the wake of this that the first Angamaly Convention was held. Some understanding was reached at the end of that convention, though there were many who continued to fight for a national head for the community and for the union of all the St Thomas Christians. This culminated in the appointment of Joseph Cariattil in 1782 as Archbishop of Cranganore. The untimely demise of Cariattil at Goa in 1786 aroused strong feelings and the search for a national head gained greater momentum. It was in this context another convention was held at Angamaly in 1787 under Administrator (Governador) Thomas Paremmakkal. Frustrated in the attempt the community again began to turn to Babel. There followed the Paul Pandari episode and other unfortunate developments up to the intrusion of Mar Roccas and Melus (cf. Mundadan 2003: 34-79 for details).

Having briefly analysed the context in which Blessed Chavara found himself, we might try to see how he understood the historical developments which led to a critical situation and how he evaluated this situation. For this we may be guided by three documents the Blessed has left behind: 1. the introduction to his description of the Roccas story ('81: 173ff.; '90: 146ff.); 2. an isolated note, which he had entitled, *Alocana* or 'Reflection' (CWC IV 1982: 83-85; 1990: 57ff.); 3. his last testament addressed to his fellow religious (ibid.: 98ff.; 69ff.). These writings reveal Chavara's grasp of the history of the Church in Kerala, as well as his sense of history, the main characteristic of a prophet.

The Blessed declares that what he is writing about past history is what he had heard from elderly persons. He learned from his malpan, Thomas Palackal, especially the events that happened in the last decades of the 18th century and the early ones of the 19th (cf. '81: 174; '90: 146). We will first see the evaluation of both Palackal and his disciple Kuriakose Chavara about the East-Syrian connection. Palackal who studied under Malpan Abraham Thachil and then served as secretary to the Vicars Apostolic of Verapoly,

knew all these quite reliably (cf. *ibid.*: 175f.; 148). The following is Palackal's understanding of the events.

The story of Archbishop Joseph Cariattil and Cathanar Thomman (Thomas) Paremmakkal, those of Bishop Paul Pandari², of Pandari-(Avira) Kattakkayam faction and of the support Mathu Tharakan gave them, of the illegal ordinations Pandari conducted at Changanachery, were all well known to the malpan. Mathu Tharakan's brother Abraham Malpan could not tolerate Pandari's activities as he considered the latter a rebel. He tried to dissuade Tharakan from supporting the rebel bishop but did not succeed in doing it. Frustrated the malpan decided to go away to Pandi (Tamilnadu). But Bishop Aloysius Pianazzi, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly (1784-1802) advised against this decision and secretly appointed him a quasi vicar general with the authority to absolve those who had joined Pandari (cf. *ibid.*: 174f.; 147f.). The conclusion Malpan Palackal drew from all these events, which he knew well and partially experienced, is that the attempt to re-link the St Thomas Christian Church with the Chaldean patriarch was ill conceived and fraught with danger. He believed that it was out of ignorance and stupidity that some people in Kerala said that the Portuguese sent one of our Syrian Bishops down to the bottom of the sea and did away with Archbishop Cariattil at Goa (about these allegations, see Podipara 1970: 152; Tisserant 1957: 96). Here Chavara alludes to the negative view Palackal had developed about the Chaldean connection:

After the heresy of Nestorius was made known his followers from Babel and Baghdad came to Malankara and ruled the Church. But our ancestors, being ignorant of this, let themselves be governed by them ('81:176; '90:147).

Chavara adds:

My malpan was of the view that no spiritual good would come from Babel or from the Syrian prelates and so insisting upon getting them would only lead the remaining churches also into schism. He went on to advise me to remain for ever under the wings of the Carmelite order, which had been a

² Paul Pandari had gone to Mosul and got himself consecrated bishop by Administrator John Hormez (cf. Tisserant 1957: 103f.).

mother to me and to suggest that *Vartamānapustakam*,³ which was written at Vadayar and kept as a sacred book should rather be burned than read ('81: 176f.; '90:148).

It is true that this negative assessment regarding the East-Syrian Church was influenced by a western legacy. Ever since the Council of Ephesus (431) pronounced strictures against Nestorius, such a view began to prevail in the Churches that opposed Nestorius and his masters of the Antiochene School, and adopted the opposite Monophysitic tendency, first in the Church of Alexandria (the Coptic Church) and then gradually in the Byzantine and also the Antiochene Churches. The Latin West also followed suit. Although there appeared later a rethinking among theologians and historians⁴, in the 19th century and before, it was to the negative view that the missionaries held fast, and that exerted a definite influence on leading personalities in Kerala like Thachil Abraham Malpan, his disciple Malpan Palackal, the latter's disciple Malpan Chavara and many others. At the same time certain historical facts need to be taken into account in this context. In the West, starting from at least the fifth century, the Persian Church was viewed as separated from the communion of the Catholic Church under Rome and fallen into Nestorian heresy. Many Western scholars have taken the position that the Persian Church gradually drifted into 'schism' and 'heresy' during the fifth century. The utterances of some of the synods of that Church and a few leading theological thinkers, e.g. Babbai the Great (d. 628), and ecclesiastical leaders helped only to confirm the position of the missionaries. The gradual isolation of the Church of Persia from the main Christian bodies to the West during the Islamic expansion further strengthened the negative view. These and several other factors gave rise to suspicion in Kerala about the orthodoxy and Catholic communion of the East-Syrian Church. The painful events

³ Cathanar Thomman (Thomas) Paremmakkal, *The Vartamānapustakam* (in Malayalam meaning "News Book", actually a history and travel story), trans. into English by Placid J. Podipara CMI, Rome: Institute of Oriental Studies, 1971. It has three Malayalam editions.

⁴ For the details of this more positive approach to Nestorius, Theodore and the derived theological tradition of the East-Syrian Church, see Mundadan 2001: 497-501.

from the time of Cariattil and Paremmakkal, especially the rise of the unfortunate alliance of Pandari and Avira Kattakkayam, which Palackal personally witnessed, further deepened his conviction that no good could be expected from a re-linking of the Church in Kerala with 'Babel', the Chaldean Church.

It is against this background that one has to evaluate Palackal's estimation of the Western missionaries, starting with the Portuguese, especially the Jesuits and reaching up to the Carmelites. Chavara heard from his malpan how these missionaries saved the community from falling victims to the 'errors' of the Chaldeans:

It was after Jesuits like St Xavier and the Carmelites had come from Europe, risking their lives and facing much hardship, some dying on the way, that they were liberated from schism... (see above).

It is this attachment to the Carmelites that made Palackal to denounce the *Vartamānapustakam* of Paremmakkal, who was aggressively critical of the Carmelite missionaries.

Malpan Palackal's knowledge of historical events, his analysis of them, and his attitude towards the Chaldeans and that towards the missionaries, especially the Carmelites made a profound influence on his beloved disciple. Chavara's own experience, especially of the Roccas episode, of its antecedents and consequences only helped to confirm the inferences he made under that influence. He reflects:

Now that things are developing before my eyes in the way he [Malpan Palackal] feared, I feel that I would have fallen into spiritual ruin by joining the Roccas Schism, unless I had been given the warning by him. There shall arise false Christs and false prophets capable of deceiving even the very elect, it is written. And now into Malabar came Bishop Roccas and he went about doing a lot of harm to the Church until he was finally excommunicated and left by ship (ibid.:176f.; 148).

Chavara goes on describing the whole story starting with Fr Panamkuzha Kuriype of Kuravilangad and his attempts to bring a bishop from 'Babel', and going to the activities of Frs Denha bar

Jona, Antony Kudakkachira, Anotny Thondanatt and ending with the arrival and activities of Roccas (cf. chapter 6).

Chavara's Personal Evaluation

In *Alocana* ('Reflection') Chavara acknowledges that the St Thomas Christians had a natural tendency to look to 'Babel'/the Chaldeans, with affection and a sort of nostalgia—this on account of the congeniality with them in matters of ecclesiastical tradition and worship. The Christians of Kerala preserved a deep consciousness of this fact. On the contrary they did not have the same emotional attachment to the missionaries from the West, even though they possessed high qualities in many respects. In the introduction to the Roccas story Chavara strongly emphasizes the above mentioned tendency of the Christians to look to 'Babel':

As the magnetic needle always points towards the north, the brethren of my own flesh and blood called the Nazrnīs of Malankara had their hearts set, from the earliest times, on getting Syrian Bishops ('81: 173; '90: 146).

Similarly he points out in the testament:

In the absence of this [a close union with the Holy Church] when they [the Chaldeans] come saying, "Brethren, we are of the same blood"⁵, we easily fall to that side and at the slightest provocation run towards Babel and when one person appears, the whole flock goes after him (CWC IV 1982: 101; 1990: 72).

Hence the desire and agitation for a bishop of the same Rite had some legitimacy. Chavara told the agitating party that although their attempts for a prelate of their own Rite and their proposed petition to Rome for this were good in themselves, they could present the petition at an opportune time, after first humbly submitting themselves to the reigning vicar apostolic (see p. 12 above).

⁵ He gives the Syriac form for it: "ahain d had dem hnan". We do not know in what sense this expression is used. It may be noted that the 'Southists' or 'Cnanites' claim to be the progeny of the Chaldean Thomas of Cana.

This is again stressed by Chavara in *Alocana* when he painfully reflects on the existing situation:

When we see that the Greeks and the Latins have excellent theological books and good treatises, and when we ask ourselves why we the Syrians have not produced so far good books or treatises and how this situation can be improved, the answer we find is that all nations and people and not only the monasteries, have their own bishops and missionaries who are well-versed in sacred studies and that they have produced in the course of years good literary works and theological treatises (CWC IV 1982: 84; 1990: 57f.)

After this he depicts the sad situation in Kerala:

But in Malabar our priests know only the Syriac language, which they use for liturgical purposes, but their bishops and missionaries use a different language and follow a different Rite. This situation stands in the way of unity. The mutual understanding that should exist between the father and his spiritual children is entirely missing here. Day after day mutual relations are not improving; rather even the thought for unity is being obstructed and the mutual relations have deteriorated. The orders given with the best of intentions by the hierarch are interpreted by our people as coming from one who does not know our Syriac language and who does not follow our Rite, and as intended just to destroy our Rite. The ordinary people in their simplicity believe these and they cling back to the Babylonians and do not hesitate to put themselves in slavery under them (ibid.).

Again he points to another discrepancy that prevailed here. The language and the rites the bishop used for ordination (Latin) are different from those used by the priests (Syriac). That leads to the diminution of devotion and alienation of father-children relationship that should exist between the bishop and priests, instead deteriorate into master-slave's relation. This gives rise to slavish fear in the priests and in the common people. Such a discrepancy or mixture of rites is not found anywhere in the world except among the Syrians of Kerala. Chavara feels that the community is on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand he, as his malpan, was fully convinced that no good would result from a re-linking of Kerala Christians with the Chaldean Church.

When we consider the frail faith of the Babylonians, their greed for money and the simonies practised among them on the one side and on the other, the power of endurance, generosity, devotion, the readiness to work for the glory of God and the other virtues we have seen among the missionaries, I think no one with wisdom and prudence would opt for a Babylonian to be appointed to rule over us (*ibid.*: 83f.; 57).

Equally convinced was Chavara, just as his malpan, that salvation from the precarious situation created by the dependence on the East-Syrian prelates had been brought about by the Latin missionaries starting with the Portuguese (Meneses and the Jesuits) and coming down to the Carmelites. He exhorts his sons in the testament:

Remember one thing. We are greatly obliged to remember the benefits Archbishop Meneses and the Jesuits, who had come from the kingdom of Portugal, have rendered to our ancestors lest they fall a prey to Nestorianism. But they were not able to unite us in the bond of charity. We do not know who is at fault, we or they? Had the Jesuits admitted us into their fold and taught us the European languages, like Latin, it would have detached us from the Babylonians, and we would have been more closely united with the Holy Church (*ibid.*: 101; 72). This being so the Christians are easily deceived by the bonhomie tactics of the East Syrians; the community at the slightest provocation would run to "Babel", and be deceived.

Regarding the Carmelites this is his estimation:

Thanks to the Very Rev. Archbishop Bernadine, the missionaries, Marceline and Leopold who led us through the right path, taught our children, and made them practise these truths, we shall not again fall into schism. We are convinced of this from our recent experience with Roccas. Hence we are obliged to remember gratefully in our prayers these four people mentioned above (*ibid.*).

Chavara considers it a sin to oppose the missionaries, which is the source of the so many evils found in the community and the lack of virtues. What he states in the introduction to the Roccas story is significant:

This [the turning to 'Babel'] had often endangered their spiritual life and led them to split away from the communion of the Holy Church. And as any close observer can perceive, the holy way of life and exemplary conduct has not yet taken root in our Malabar. For this Malabar, which had received the faith from St Thomas, the apostle, remains barren, not having produced even one saint, while other countries and islands, which received faith much later, have brought forth several saints.⁶ From those lands have come many missionaries prompted by good intentions and absolute charity leaving their relatives and homelands, with the sole motive of teaching the true religion and the way of salvation.

To these spiritual fathers and prelates, who spread the true faith and show us the way to heaven, we submit only because we need them and since there is no alternative left to us. But what God expects of us is to love them wholeheartedly and to accept their words as God's words because they gave up everything they had to save our souls and are striving and suffering for us out of true love. As we never trust, love or heartily obey them, their efforts fail to bear fruit and hence they have to work without any satisfaction. We then, without reason, go after other prelates and find one who either splits us away from the Holy Church or does not give absolute obedience to it; and shift our loyalty to him thus falling into spiritual perdition. After sometime we turn repentant and the Holy Church lifts us up and takes us back. This was what we had been doing again and again, our grandfathers tell us, during the last decades ('81: 173f., '90: 146.).

Chavara's Solution

In the passages quoted above the Blessed touches on the real crisis, in which the Catholic St Thomas Christians found themselves in the 19th century. On the one hand the people looked for a normal state of things: a community with an ecclesiastical head of their own Rite and congenial rituals. But the actual

⁶ It is satisfying to think that the reform initiated by the Blessed and the other founding fathers has produced in the 20th century not one but several saints, five having been already declared Blessed, the first being Chavara himself.

situation was that the head was of a different Rite, the Latin Rite, performing the rituals in the Latin language and Rite, while their tradition and rituals were of the Indo-Oriental Rite. Chavara's concern was to find a real solution to this critical situation. Knowing the ups and downs of the Chaldean Church since the union of 1552, knowing as well the uncertainties and tergiversations of the reigning patriarchs and the other prelates of that Church in the 19th century, Chavara's sense of history and his prophetic vision would not allow him to search for a solution by re-linking the Kerala Church with the Chaldean Church. Neither was he prepared for a course of confrontation or agitation. Moreover, in the given circumstances he could not envisage the emergence of an indigenous person to give the necessary but competent leadership. Hence he is forced to adopt a *via media* for the time being. The plan envisaged in *Ālocana* is this:

Supposing the Pope wrote that he would appoint bishops and missionaries to rule over us only after an overall consultation with the people of Malabar and only on their recommendation, a committee may be formed among us to study the matter and to give the said recommendation (CWC IV, 1982: 83; 1990: 57).

The possibility of a Chaldean being chosen is ruled out. Yet the problem of the difference in language and rites did persist (cf. *ibid.*: 83; 57f.) Chavara's suggestion is:

So the only means of weaning the Malayalees from the people of Babylon is to convene all the members of the congregation and make a resolution in the conference to bring down a few missionaries from Europe, people who are prepared to study the Syrian language and who are willing to adopt our Syro-Malabar Rite so that they may offer Mass in our language and in our Rite. In due course along with the petitions from the churches, let us also send a petition to the Holy See to appoint, on the termination of the tenure of our present archbishop, one of these missionaries as our prelate. If we succeed in getting European missionaries in whom are combined the knowledge, devotion, and familiarity with our Syriac language and our Syro-Malabar Rite, there can be no greater blessing possible to our community. And when such missionaries will be appointed as vicars in our parishes, we will get several blessings, our Church will also give rise to saints (*ibid.*: 84f.; 58f.).

This is the proposal Chavara makes some time in the middle of 1860s. A slightly different idea seems to have emerged after the death of Archbishop Baccinelli in 1868. May be it was an inspiration from Fr Leopold¹, who stood for a ritual division of the Vicariate of Verapoly with two prelates, one for the Latins and the other for the Syrians. Whatever be the case, here is Chavara's petition sent to Alexander Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation, probably through Fr Leopold who accompanied Archbishop Leonard Mellano on his visit to Rome in 1869:

Your most humble son, Fr Kuriakose Elias the Prior of all the religious houses in the Vicariate of Verapoly, united with all the parish priests and religious priests of the Syro-Malabar Church, wish to inform you of certain facts with a pure conscience.

There is no dissension or any difference of opinion regarding matters of the Church among the faithful here. All are by now fully aware of the cunning machinations and greed of the Chaldean Syrians who have come to us in Malabar, especially of Bishop Thomas Roccas. Although they are now living in peace, we can say from our former experience that this "calm" will not continue for long. Though at present they are at peace, it is possible that in the minds of those who wish to lead a life of laxity, quarrelsome thoughts may arise at any time.

We are Mar Thoma Christians who have received our faith from St Thomas. For the past many years we had no bishop of our own. But those who have received their faith in very recent times have a bishop of their own. Provoked by such envious thoughts, when they get an opportunity they will go to Babel, saying, "let us resort to Babel for getting a bishop of our own Rite". They will at last petition to them in writing; and those greedy people will accept such a request.

Hence, Your Eminence, I am placing before you a suggestion which I consider good. It is good to have two

¹ Fr Leopold discussed this matter with OCD superior general in Rome in the beginning of December 1869. The general promised to consider the question of the division of Varapuzha into two (cf. Parapuram 1328, 1338f., & fn. below).

bishops here: one for the Latin Church and another for the Syrian Church. Then their longing to have a bishop of their own will cease. Then gradually their relationship with Babylon will end.

This would be very opportune and useful. There are also many non-Catholics in our midst who are our own kith and kin, now known as Jacobites. The above solution will help them renounce schism and return to the unity of the Catholic Church (ibid.: 26-29.; 13f.).

It is not clear whether Chavara had in mind an indigenous ritual priest or a Latin missionary with all the qualification he had envisioned in *Ālocana*. Whatever it be this letter is said to have greatly influenced the Propaganda Congregation to grant an indigenous bishop for the Syrians. It is also alleged that this incident raised a severe storm in Varapuzha and caused great displeasure in Archbishop Leonard towards Blessed Chavara (cf. ibid.: 26).⁸ There are references to the letter Chavara wrote in Pazheparampil (cf. Pareparambil 1920: 4) and in the mass petition of 13 January 1876. The petition informs the Pope:

Moved by this, Fr Kuriakose Elias [Chavara]...together with his fellow religious sent a petition to the Holy See in [18]70 requesting for a prelate of their own to preside over the Syro-Malabar Church. But till the year [18]69 nothing has happened (*Positio*: 538).

From these references it is clear that the agitations for a ritual and national prelate appreciated the gesture of Chavara. As the Propaganda had a high regard for the Blessed it is quite possible that the letter of Chavara played a role in the decisions of Rome from 1876 to 1896 (cf. Mundadan 2003: 84-89).

⁸ The reference given here is to Parapuram, p. 1015. Actually it should be p. 1465. Parapuram does not speak of the letter but says that the archbishop expressed his displeasure because Chavara had agreed with the opinion of Fr Leopold that the vicariate should be divided into two. Archbishop Mellano and most of the fellow missionaries turned against Fr Leopold for this reason (cf. Maniakunnel 2005: 115ff.).

However Chavara would have been, for the time being, satisfied with the moderate proposals he envisaged in his *Ālocana* and in his letter of 1869 to the Propaganda Congregation. At the same time he could not have ruled out the possibility of indigenous leaders emerging, in due course, as heads of their Church, the Syro-Malabar Church. The spiritual and cultural reform Chavara initiated were destined to produce such a result. It was what happened from 1886 onwards till 1992 in which year the Syro-Malabar Church was recognized by Rome as an autonomous (*sui juris*) Church, with a major archbishop and a synod and ever since continues to progress despite some odds (cf. Mundadan 2003: 95-115).

Chavara's Prophetic Mission

In the mean time the Blessed did not remain idle looking forward to things to happen. He strenuously worked for the all round reform, renewal and development of the Church and the people. He as well as the other two founders of the CMI Congregation, being quite aware of the precarious situation of the St Thomas Christians that had developed from the 16th to the 19th century, initiated several programmes for remedying it and set the community in the right track for progress. Chavara describes the dismal situation in the introduction of his story of Roccas (see p. 11 above).

The founders of the CMI Congregation knew only too well that the Church in Kerala had an authentic apostolic tradition and a genuine spiritual wealth, which had got blurred and confused through the historical vicissitudes of 16th to 19th centuries. They were aware only too well that the Church in Kerala was in need of a radical renewal and revitalization. The reform the three started together, Chavara continued alone from 1846 onwards.

The first thing, which got the attention of the reformers was the absence of religious (consecrated/vowed) life in Kerala. Realizing that a lot of good was being neglected because of this the founding fathers yearned for a *tapasubhavanam* (a house of penance) or a monastery. After great deal of toil and moil they realized the establishment in 1831 of such a religious house, a *darśanaveedu*, a *besrauma*, a house on top of the Mannanam hill, and made it available to the service of the Church and society. Those who know the history of the Church are quite aware of the

immense good that accrued to the people of Kerala both Christians and others, through the establishment of this religious community. Chavara longed for a similar community for women and realized it in 1866, which served the Church and society equally well, particularly with regard to the progress of women folk.

Another urgent need of the Church in Kerala was reform of the clergy. Much was wanting in the training of the seminarians. What Chavara says in his biography of Palackal is indicative of the deficiencies in the existing system:

The malpan category of leaders did not bother about this because they taught all that they knew only to their nephews or to a few others in whom they were specially interested and taught the other students only how to say the Mass and recite the canonical prayer ('81: 73; '90: 64).

Books were a rare commodity in the malpan seminaries, even many parts of the Bible were scarce (cf. *ibid.*). It is in this context that the importance of the seminaries of South Pallipuram, of Mannanam and those attached to the other monasteries founded by Chavara to be evaluated. These seminaries mark a new era, a paradigm shift, in the theological education among the St Thomas Christians (cf. Mundadan 2007: 44-46). Chavara gave some order to the books of the Divine Office for better recital by the priests, which was in a miserable state till then. The ongoing formation of the priests was assured by him conducting special retreats for them and making available spiritual books and other literature.

For the general renewal of Christian life several schemes were introduced: regular preaching of the Word of God, retreats, pious associations and confraternities, various devotions besides the regular and very devotional celebration of the liturgy and efficient administration of the sacraments, especially that of confession and penance. Starting of schools attached to parishes and of the Sanskrit school first at Mannanam was a great step forward for imparting knowledge in general and particularly the higher values of religion. The printing presses established at Mannanam and later at Koonammavu helped to provide good reading material and ensure continued education. Through all these means Chavara was unassumingly giving a boost and a Christian ethos to the learning process. With the emergence of various agitations and movements such as the Channar /Shanar struggle in

South Thiruvithancore in the first half of the 19th century, the *nayar* revolt under Chattampi Swamikal (1854-1924), the socio-religious movement led by Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928), the social reform movement initiated by Ayyamkali (1866-1941) and various other similar social and political movements (cf. S. Menon 1967: 373-94, 355-65), Kerala society was taking a radical change. At the same time there was an explosion in literature and arts (cf. *ibid.*: 402-36). The work of the Protestant missionaries especially the educational process they initiated had a great role to play in all these developments. Blessed Chavara does not mention this process, but he must have been a silent observer of all this. Probably taking inspiration from the Protestants he emerged as a renaissance leader by establishing educational institutions and giving a boost to the print media. So too the concern for the conversion of the so called low caste people, their educational and social advancement became a great concern for him. Similarly his efforts to serve the sick, old, the weak and suffering, especially for the empowerment of women and the low castes are being well recognized now. Besides, as we have seen, there is a significant amount of literature he composed, which is considered to have contributed to the renaissance of the 19th century. This has been quite recently recognized by writers. The well known Kerala historian Sreethara Menon presents Chavara as a renaissance leader born before the age (see above p. 1).

Physical Features

The best information we possess about Blessed Chavara's physical features is in the testimony of Fr Louis of Manjummel. Fr Louis⁹ was a disciple and spiritual child of the Blessed at

⁹ Rev. Fr Aloysius Mary TOCD, often referred to as Fr Louis of Manjummel of the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites of the Latin Rite (now the Manjummel Province of the OCD) was born in 1852 at Ochamthuruth. He entered the religious community under Chavara at Koonammavu in 1863 and was a postulant when Chavara started living there in 1864. He had spent about a year and half till 1865 at Elthuruth Monastery (cf. *Positio*: 421) and made his novitiate at Koonammavu and made the studies there. Chavara used to dictate to him certain historical events, which he wrote down. Occasionally he also accompanied the Blessed on journeys. He was 19 years old when Chavara died. After that Fr Louis continued his studies at the seminary of Puthenpally, where he was ordained priest in 1874. After

Koonammavu and was present when the latter died in 1871. We have two documents of Fr Louis about Chavara: one, a letter written to Fr Marceline Alackappally TOCD (CMI) on 12 January 1936 (cf. *Positio*: 561f.) in answer to one from the latter¹⁰; two, an interview he gave to Fr Placid Podipara CMI on 4 February 1936 at Manjummel (cf. *ibid.*: 562-5). Fr Placid was deputed by Fr Sylvester Akkara TOCD (CMI), the then prior general to gather this information. We have already referred to these documents in other chapters. In this chapter we will use them to get at the personality of Chavara. First of all we try to draw from it a picture of the physical features of Chavara.¹¹

Blessed Chavara was rather short in stature, hardly five feet in height and was obese but not notably disproportionate, and was balding. His eyes were rather large but fitting his face. The face was round with a short nose. His complexion was so fair that Fr Marceline heard from Chavara's contemporaries the following story: when the bishop of Coimbatore (probably Charbonneaux) during a visit to Kerala saw the Prior, he asked the latter, when he had come to India from Europe. The Prior responded that he was born in Kerala. The bishop took time to believe that Chavara was not an Italian (cf. *Positio*: 568). His body was so well-built and

ordination he, together with a few religious scholastics of the Latin Rite, went to Manjummel where Archbishop Baccinelli had built a monastery in 1866 exclusively for the religious of the Latin Rite. After the ritual division of Varapuzha in 1887 Fr Louis was elected prior of Manjummel. In 1889 when the monastery at Koonammavu was assigned to the Latin Rite religious he was elected prior general of the Latin Third Order Discalced Carmelites, which office he held several terms. He was a good writer in Malayalam. Among his books the following may be specially mentioned: *Vēdaprasangasarami*, *Vyakulaprasangam*, both translations from Tamil; *Marāṇa Bheeti*, *Marāṇapatrika*, *Mātāvinṭe Vanakamāsam* (Monthly Devotion to Mary), *Kuḍumbapālanam*, *Perunnāḷukal*, 'Biography of St Aloysius Gonzaga', 'History of the Church of Ochamthuruth'. He died in 1937 at the age of 85 (cf. *Positio*: 560f.)

¹⁰ The original letter of Fr Marceline has not been traced.

¹¹ Most of the material for this is found in the interview of Fr Louis Manjummel with Fr Placid referred to above. A few other aspects are added from the testimony of Fr Marceline and are indicated in the proper places.

handsome that, according to the testimony of Fr Marceline again, Fr Gerard Beccaro had said that the hands and legs of the prior were as if sculptured from ebony (cf. *ibid.*: 566)

The Prior lived in a single room situated to the south of the westernmost end of the second floor of the Koonammavu Monastery building.¹² In the room were a table with a few books on, a simple bed with a pillow, and a chair. The very name of embroidered bedclothes and cushions was a scandal at that time. There was a jug containing water for ordinary use. Most of the time the Prior spent in this room and habitually sat in the chair. Thus seated his head was bent so that his chin touched the chest. Being obese he walked rather slowly. As we have already seen he was from the seminary days on affected with filariasis (see chapter 10: 4f.), which resulted in the thickening of the foot. While walking his hands used to fling about sometimes. In later years he used a walking stick. While walking on the lane he used to keep his hands under the scapular. His hair had greyed but not the eyebrows. His voice was like the sound of birds and yet his sermons were quite audible and clear and he sang the liturgical chants beautifully. Kuriakose, whose conversation as a boy is said to have been pleasant and eloquent, turned into a powerful public speaker as a priest. Fr Louis heard his *malpan* (teacher) remarking: "On the pulpit Chavara was a lion". In ordinary conversation, however, he spoke in a low voice. His teeth were intact till death. The Prior was vested in a white tunic (cassock), the scapular, cowl and a leather belt. The last three items were later additions. Though the Prior wore a cowl he never covered his head with it. For Fr Louis Chavara looked exactly like St Alphonse Liguori represented in a picture he used to keep with him. He said that when some other priests were shown a similar picture of St Liguori, they agreed that the Prior looked like the saint.

Chavara used to take the common food, with nothing special. The common meal at that time consisted of *kaññi* (rice gruel) and one curry for breakfast; cooked rice (*choru*) with two items of curry for lunch and some *kaññi* at 4 o'clock in the evening and cooked rice with two items of curry for dinner, except on days

¹² At present it is the only portion preserved of the old monastery building and has been converted into a Chavara shrine being regularly visited by pilgrims.

of fast. For medicine he used to take a little opium. Perhaps he used to inhale tobacco powder (cf. CWC IV 1982:107).

Humane Personality

Blessed Chavara possessed many eminent qualities both inborn and cultivated, of mind as well as heart. The very fact that he was born of a good family, of exemplary parents (cf. chapter 1), inherited to him so many natural virtues such as goodness, piety, righteousness, uprightness, integrity, honesty, probity, decency and so on. Fr Leopold Beccaro knew that Kuriakose was the darling of all on account of his unusual piety and other fine traits of character. Malpan Palackal was pleasantly impressed by the boy's character and piety. According to Fr Kuriakose Porukara, Kuriakose from his childhood so excelled in humility, pleasing manners, modesty, piety, intelligence and eloquence that he was loved by God and men. One of his colleagues in the seminary, Fr Chandy Mangalath, makes this casual remark in his *Commentaries*: Chavara never quarrelled with anyone. Fr Philip Koyipallil knew that the pious mother of Kuriakose was particular that the boy grew up dear to God; that he was brought up in the fear of God, was loved by all on account of his piety, gentleness, modesty and courteous behaviour; that Malpan Palackal discerned his brilliant qualities when he was just eleven years old, as the proverb says "the tree can be known from its seed" (see chapter 2: 2f.). Fr Leopold learned from Kuriakose's fellow seminarians that the young Kuriakose was deeply interested in studies, observing the rules, and cultivating the fear of God. He never harboured any petty jealousy or bad blood against his companions, but was always kind and charitable to them. Similar is the testimony of Fr Kuriakose Porukara: his fellow seminarians had great respect, regard and love for the Blessed, because he was a model of devotion to God, of humility, obedience and brotherly love. His malpan, who was a strict disciplinarian, had no occasion to find fault with Kuriakose. Because of his fine character, diligence and intelligence the malpan was very much pleased with this disciple.

Chavara's fellow seminarians held him in great respect, regard and affection. This must have been one of the reasons why Malpan Thomas deputed to him many responsibilities already when he was only a student. As soon as he was ordained deacon he was given greater responsibilities in the running of the seminary and in teaching the seminarians. From that time onwards the

number of Chavara's disciples began accumulating. All his disciples were very much attached to him, and cherished his memory with high regard and great esteem. The words of Frs Palakunnel, Louis of Manjummel, and others are very touching. A number of his student priests who could not be present at his funeral, later visited Koonammavu and expressed their appreciation of the Prior to Fr Leopold and the other fathers (cf. Mannanam Chronicle III: 26, *Positio*: 581). The missionaries and the vicars apostolic treated him with much consideration and appreciation. Many prominent contemporaries stood in awe before him. In connection with the description of the Roccas affair we have already seen the regard the priests, especially the *malpan* category had for him; so too the prominent laity like the Parayi Tharakans of Thaiccattussery and others looked to him for leadership and guidance. The very fact that Bishop Roccas and Bishop Abdisho (Antony Thondanatt) and others tried to elicit his support for them is evidence of the high popularity he enjoyed among the people. A prominent layman of the time Mathu Tharakan (probably the grandson of the better known Mathu Tharakan of the eighteenth century, the elder brother of Abraham Malpan Thachil) is said to have admiringly observed: "I have not seen so good a person as Chavara" (cf. Fr Marceline, *Positio*: 566). Fr Ambrose told Fr Marceline this incident: once Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli visited the Prior in the latter's room. As there was only one chair in the room the archbishop forced Fr Prior to sit on it and he himself stood on his feet (cf. *ibid.*).

Whenever Fr Prior would visit the seminary at Mannanam there was perfect silence among the students. The students and the priests showed him a reverence and honour equal to that given to a bishop. Whenever he visited a parish the people thronged to have a *darsan* of him and received him very solemnly as if a bishop (cf. *Positio*: 567). On one occasion the Prior was visiting the church at South Pallipuram. Fr Louis of Manjummel (still a student) accompanied him. As they were going from the eastern gate to the church they heard a priest shouting from a house on the way. Fr Prior hid himself in a hedge and listened to the reviling of the priest. After some time he called out to him: "Leave all that to them, you please come here". Hearing the voice the priest recognised it as that of the Prior and came to the latter and greeted him quietly.

The presence of Chavara was awe-inspiring for his contemporaries. At the same time he had no qualms to mix with all sorts of people, both high and low and even with children. Fr Louis reports that Fr Prior used to sit and watch the games of the boys — usually they played two kinds balls (*pila* and *bola*). When he was present the boys did not quarrel. During this time the Prior used to narrate to the boys historical events and the happenings in other dioceses. Not only he used to watch the boys playing but according to Fr Marceline even joined them and played ball with them. One day Fr Kuriakose Porukara, then vicar of Mannanam Monastery, visited Koonammavu and was wonder-struck seeing the Prior playing with the boys. He used to distribute among the novices the sweets he got as gifts. On solemn feast days he would announce to them: "I have blessed the whole of the orchard", by which was meant that he permitted them to freely pluck mangoes and other fruits and eat them. He treated the youngsters sweetly and affectionately (cf. *Positio*: 568f.).

We have already referred to the Prior's humane consideration for others. One telling example is the attitude he showed in the case of Fr Scaria Kalathil being allowed to visit his dying uncle priest (cf. chapter 5: 6). We may see here other examples of how the Prior was kind and considerate towards his fellow religious especially the sick and the disabled; how very generous he was in acknowledging and praising the positive traits of his dependents and co-operators. Just note the appreciation he showed for a good deed of Fr Jacob Valliara about whose character he had reservations previously. How eloquently he speaks of the fine personality of Fr Nellissery (cf. chapter 5: 12f.). The high regard and respect he showed his parents and superiors is another brilliant aspect of his lofty humaneness.

Hailing as he did from an agricultural family he showed great interest in farming and cultivation. The special variety of mango, popularly known as *prior mango*, owes to him for its spread in Kerala. He is careful to instruct the sisters of Koonammavu convent about coconut cultivation in their compound (cf. CWC IV 1982:112f., 115f, 116). He also knew the elements of architecture so as to supervise construction of buildings.

An Outstanding Intellectual in Pursuit of Wisdom

Almost all persons who knew Blessed Chavara gave unstinted tribute to his intellectual acumen and continuous pursuit

of knowledge. In all his writings and correspondence, as in many of his other endeavours, we can easily discern a person of keen intelligence thirsting for acquiring and spreading knowledge. His sense of right discernment and correct judgement flowed from his intellectual acumen and wide knowledge of various aspects of life. The early training he received from his mother was a great asset in his intellectual career. The elementary education he received at the *kalari* (village school), although, looked at from western colonial perspective, disturbed his childhood innocence, did stand in good stead for his intellectual growth and acquiring of wisdom. It is during his seminary days that his innate talents grew into full bloom. Fr Louis tells us that the Prior diligently read Tamil books and the monthly publications containing mission news and arranged them to be read by the other members of the congregation. The same priest witnesses to Chavara's love for history. He used to dictate to Fr Louis many historical events, which the latter was asked to write down. He used to narrate to the boys many historical events. When Fr Louis reminded him that unless these things were written down they would vanish from memory, the Prior would reply: "Good, I will see that they are committed to writing". He entrusted the task of writing them down to Fr Louis himself. He took down whatever the Prior dictated. He knew that the book thus written was kept in some monastery library. Chavara was not a trained historian but he had a very keen sense of history and the ability to store them in his sharp memory and to narrate them or write them down with great accuracy. Many of his writings are illustrations to this fact (cf. *Positio*: 379f.).

The short biography he wrote about his *malpan* Thomas Palackal reveals how enamoured he became of the intellectual pursuits of the *malpan*, which definitely acted as a stimulating force all through the life of the Blessed. Chavara ruefully tells us that though in early centuries there were learned persons to teach and guide the Christians here, and from the sixteenth century the Jesuits tried to improve the situation, since their departure the situation worsened (see chapter 7: 32f.). What he opted to notice in the missionaries was not their negative side but their faith, knowledge and piety. In a well thought out plan to ward off the negative influences that might result from re-linking the Church of the St Thomas Christians with the East-Syrian Church by accepting a bishop from there, Chavara's suggestion was to ask the Holy See for a bishop from among the missionaries who would be able to combine in him the superior knowledge and the ethos of the East-Syrian language and liturgy (see above p. 12). The analysis

Chavara made in *Ālocana* about the traumatic predicament, in which St Thomas Christians were placed then and the plan he proposed as remedy, is a masterpiece. It is a good example of Chavara's intellectual acumen, his ability to discern situations and his far sighted vision.

It was his thirst for knowledge that moved him to learn languages. He continued to improve the mother tongue Malayalam. The establishment of the Sanskrit School at Mannanam and the services of its teacher Warier must have helped Chavara to build on the Malayalam and the little of Sanskrit he had learned as a boy. This enabled him to write not only simple and clear prose literature but also fine poems of a lofty calibre. He was master of Syriac language. Fr Louis says that the fathers used to approach him with what they had written in Syriac to get them corrected. He just changed three or four expressions and the text was perfect. He used this expertise for teaching the seminarians but also for liturgical composition; about which we have spoken at length in chapter seven above.

Though the Blessed knew Sanskrit he did not write in Sanskrit (Devanagari) characters but in Malayalam. He had a working knowledge of Latin, Portuguese and Italian. He studied Italian in the last years of his life, when he came to realize that there were very good books in that language (cf. Louis, *Positio*: 564; also chapter 10: 8 above). Like his malpan he also read Tamil books and probably helped in the translation of some into Malayalam. The printing press he established at Mannanam did this job in a masterly manner. Fr Marceline Alackappally heard from elders that the Prior had knowledge of Malayalam, Tamil, Sanskrit, Latin, Syriac, Portuguese and Italian languages. He learned Italian in his old age in order to read the book of Maria A Greda. This effort affected his eye sight. Fr Marceline further says that the Prior had learned by heart the whole Bible (cf. *Positio*: 567), which may mean that Chavara could quote from Bible or refer to Biblical passages with perfect ease. As we have observed earlier in chapter nine Chavara's objective was not to be a versatile linguist but to acquire knowledge and wisdom and communicate them to others.

Although Chavara had no formal training in western theology, his knowledge of the Bible was profound. By constant reading of books and reflecting on them as well as through

conversation and familiarity with the missionaries he acquired substantial knowledge of western theology. Hence Fr Marceline could say that his knowledge of theological subjects, both dogmatic and moral, was comparable to great theologians. His skill for solving difficult problems was such that even the missionaries marvelled at that. This theological wisdom was a gift of God. Fr Marceline produces few examples to illustrate his capability to do things. When Fr Kuriakose Porukara, the second prior, was asked to write out completely the divine office of feast days, he answered: "I cannot do it; if it were the Prior [Chavara], he could have certainly done it". Rev. Fr Alexander (Sr) Kattakkayam once exclaimed to Fr Marceline: "O wonder, how much the Prior accomplished in a short time! Could anyone other than he come near to it" (cf. Marceline, *Positio*: 567f.). Here we may just refer to the many achievements of this eminent scholar and administrator. A cursory glance at the labours in the various fields of activity reveals the gigantic figure that he was (cf. Chacko 1959: 5).

Moral Dimension of Chavara's Personality

We are now entering into an analysis of Chavara's spiritual personality. In this section we will see the moral or natural ethical dimension of it. In the following sections a deeper penetration will be made into his faith-oriented spirituality and mystic aspects of the same. Of course what we denote as moral virtues cannot be understood, in the case of Chavara, apart from the other dimensions of his spirituality. Yet we can discern these virtues in all good men, whether priests or not, whether religious or not, whether Christian or not. However it is not easy to consider them in a Christian saint apart from his faith. With these cautious observations we will try to assess Chavara's moral personality.

Chavara had a high sense of justice. He administered the finances of the monasteries, keeping scrupulously accurate accounts of every paisa received and spent. The Prior received many donations, and strictly adhered to the obligations attached to these donations, whether it was for celebrating Holy Masses, or for distributing alms, etc. All this he noted down in separate accounts. Mr Sankaran Ilayathu, who was for a long time the account keeper of Mannanam Monastery, was familiar with the account books Blessed Chavara used to keep. He testified before the diocesan tribunal that the Prior had maximum care to note down even the least expenses (cf. PO: 577; *Positio*: LXX and 424). The

instructions Chavara gave to the members, e. g. Fr Kuriakose Porukara, vicar of Mannanam, are clear evidence of his sense of accountability (cf. CWC IV 1982: 63). He instructed the sisters of the Koonammavu convent to keep accurate accounts of receipts and payments. To help them to do that he himself wrote their accounts for the first six months (cf. his letters to the sisters, e. g. CWC IV 1982: 115).

To build the convent the Prior had collected funds from churches and generous individuals. There arose a doubt about the legitimacy of one hundred Rupees received. He consulted his spiritual father and with the consent of the vicar apostolic spent that money for the poor (cf. '81: 138). Mr Chacko Thayyil testified before the diocesan tribunal the following story which he had heard from the contemporaries of Chavara. When Chavara was prior of St Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, Mr Narayana Pillai, the advocate of the monastery, came to know that someone owed to the monastery a huge amount. Fearing that the monastery would lose the money unless action was taken immediately he filed a petition in the civil court at Vaikom in the name of the Prior with a forged signature of the latter. In the court doubt arose about the authenticity of the signature. The court summoned the Prior to testify. He, after scrutinizing the document declared that the signature was not his. The consequence was that not only the monastery lost the money but also the advocate was punished. The Prior refused to tell a lie in order to avoid this unfortunate outcome (cf. *Positio*: 611).

This delicate conscience of the Blessed comes out in his testament to his people at Kainakari. Among the twenty-four general exhortations he gives them the seventeenth is this:

"Do not allow stolen articles to be retained in your house even for a moment..." He confirms the evil consequences of such an act with quotations and examples. He warns against doing business (trading) which can be harmful to one's soul and even to one's wealth. If it is not possible to find another profession there is no objection in doing some business, but it should be carried out with care and good sense of justice and not for accumulating wealth through cunning means and tactics. Another important item of his exhortation is to treat servants justly, never refusing them just wages, never delaying payment. One should cause no insult to the poor or

vex them, because if God sees them weeping, He will wreak vengeance on the offenders (cf. CWC IV 1982: 143f.).

Much of Chavara's writings are historical. He took utmost care that he wrote only what was true and objective. About the history of the Kerala Church he indicates two sources: one, what he had learned from elderly persons, especially from his malpan, Thomas Palackal; the other, his own experience. This is very clear from the introduction to the history of the Roccas affair, where he explicitly declares this fact (cf. '81: 173-177; cf. also *Positio*: 400). Hence it has been rightly claimed that the information he gives in the writings is authentic and reliable.

Chavara's delicate conscience always prompted him to see and speak of only the good in others. Perhaps only once or twice he judged others adversely. One person whose one trait he criticizes with all precautions and apologies is Fr Antony Kudakkachira (cf. '81: 183). See how cautiously and delicately he does it. He did this reluctantly, forced as he was to do so because Kudakkachira's action would do immense harm to the faithful and the unity of the Church. He says:

Something should be said here about the man and his past.
But here my heart and this hand that holds the quill tremble.
For though I will be writing only what I have heard and
seen, it would affect his reputation.¹¹

It is the same reason which prompted him to make some critical remarks about people from 'Babel' or Chaldeans (cf. *ibid.*: 173; CWC IV 1982: 83f.).

The Blessed knew well the harm done to the Church by the Portuguese missionaries, Archbishop Meneses and the Jesuits. He was quite aware of the shortcomings of the Carmelite missionaries. He knew all this to be the cause of the antagonism of the St Thomas Christians towards them. But for Chavara it was not these negative aspects which mattered but the several good points the missionaries possessed and the immense good that accrued to the Kerala Church owing to their dedicated work. Hence he exhorts in the testament to his sons in the congregation that they needed to be very grateful to them:

¹¹ See the rest on p.

Remember one thing. We are greatly obliged to remember the benefits Archbishop Meneses and the Jesuits, who had come from the kingdom of Portugal, have rendered to our ancestors lest they fall a prey to Nestorianism. But they were not able to unite us in the bond of charity. We do not know who is at fault, we or they? It will not be so from now (CWC IV 1982: 101; 1990: 72).

Here he recollects what good would have been reaped if the Jesuits continued to serve the community. After this he shares his conviction that the Carmelite missionaries —Archbishop Baccinelli, Frs Philip, Marceline, Leopold and others—did much to improve the condition of the Church in Kerala and the religious community founded here.

Prudence, Sagacity, and Foresight

Blessed Chavara acted only after mature consideration about all aspects of a matter and always held the loftiest ideals before him. In the previous chapters we have seen many examples of this. Here we may recall them briefly. His superiors and contemporaries had the highest appreciation of his prudent and well considered counsels and actions. Chavara was only forty-one years old when he took up the full responsibility of the congregation after the demise of the seniors, Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara. About this Fr Leopold comments:

Thus, our young Fr Kuriakose, who was among the pioneers in all the new enterprises, was left alone. He, however, made up for his lack of age with prudence and exemplary conduct (Beccaro 2003: 8f.).

Archbishop Baccinelli in the letter appointing Chavara vicar general, wrote that he was convinced of the necessary qualities the Prior possessed for the office, such as courage, wisdom, prudence, etc. (cf. *Positio*: 217). The archbishop informed the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Congregation that he appointed Chavara vicar general, who was a very virtuous and very prudent person (cf. *ibid.*: 259). The sisters of Koonammavu Convent remembered the recently departed Prior as one who was of untold prudence and great efficiency (cf. CKC 2002: 207; 1988 II: 17).

Chavara had no qualms to consult persons before taking decisions and launching actions. We have seen the initiatives he

took to get relieved from his assignment as vicar of South Pallipuram and completely devote himself to the work of the monastery started at Mannanam. He went to Vicar Apostolic Pescetto two times with this request. At every step he was particular to get the advice of his elders, Frs Palackal and Porukara (cf. chapter 3 above, p. 41f.). Before going to the court in connection with the litigation which Mr Mathew Kalapura ckal instituted against Chavara, the latter was careful to get the advice and consent both of the vicar apostolic and Fr Leopold (cf. Mannanam Chronicle III: 167, *Positio*: 502).

Chavara not only looked for counsels of others but he himself was a wise counsellor to many. His advice was sought after by all sorts of people: bishops, missionaries, native priests including malpans (cf. chapter 6), religious and lay persons. In a mass petition the St Thomas Christians sent to Pope Pius IX on 13 January 1876 they confess:

Many of the St Thomas Christians were unwilling to submit to the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly but longed for a prelate of their own Rite. When they began to agitate for this, our venerable Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the first prior of the monasteries and founder of many monasteries in Malabar, vicar general of His Excellency Archbishop Bernardine, by his wise counsels dissuaded them, telling that although their desire and petition were good in themselves, they could present it at an opportune time, after first humbly submitting themselves to the reigning vicar apostolic. With this and similar counsels he, in a short time, made us obediently submit to the vicar apostolic (*Positio*: 538).

The superiors of the monasteries quite often had recourse to the Prior whenever they confronted some problem or other. The letters to Fr Kuriakose Porukara, vicar of Mannanam, are good instances. They are mostly answers to the letters of the vicar asking for advice of the Prior on various matters. The latter always gave very ideal, at the same practical counsels. See, for example, the letter of August 1866 (cf. CWC IV 1982: 63f.).

The letter Chavara wrote to Fr Kuriakose Porukara on 2 October 1870, vicar of Mannanam Monastery, is a good example of how wisely and with least offence he gave correction to his subjects. The Prior had information that Fr Porukara was rather

negligent in taking care of an elderly priest in the monastery. In between many other matters he astutely introduces the case of the old priest:

I have my fears about the houses where there are no sick members. The presence of a sick member in the house will bring God's blessings in its wake, says St Teresa. Thomman tells that you do not show much concern for our *Valiachan* [aged priest] and that you are not giving him sufficient bread and milk. This is the reason why he seems very weak (CWC IV 1982: 72).

Chavara knew how careful the pioneers were to select the best suited place for the first foundation, Mannanam. Following that tradition he was very circumspect before selecting locations for new foundations. That is why he raised some objection to accepting Plasnal Monastery. He graciously rejected the offer of a place at Kootrapally by his disciple Fr Palakunnel for starting a monastery in Changanachery area. While negotiating with the vicar of Changanachery for a site at Chethipuzha he gave specific instructions for choosing the right location (cf. chapter 5).

It was consideration of prudence which prompted Chavara to point out to Archbishop Baccinelli that the severity of the rules given in 1855 would adversely affect the progress of the congregation. Actually it did—a number of candidates left the community because of the severity of the rules imposed by the ordinary. Only after the lapse of one year the rules were mitigated (cf. *ibid.*).

Chavara's foresight and watchfulness came out clearly in his administration of temporalities both within the congregation and outside. The purchase of properties in the neighbourhood of Mannanam, such as Kari etc., is a good example (see chapter 7:33). He established a number of projects to help the poor and needy. He saw to it that funds were made available for running them without causing additional burden to the monasteries. Thus at Mannanam he established the custom of giving food and clothes to the poor on 19 March, the feast of St Joseph. For this he started the 'Confraternity of St Joseph for Happy Death', to join which each member had to pay hundred *Chakrams*, about four rupees then. He sent out a circular to priests and lay persons requesting them to

become members (CWC IV 1982: 127f.).¹⁴ In 1869 the Prior began a charitable institute for the destitute at his native place, Kainakari. In a long letter written to his parishioners on 15 October 1869 he exhorted them to become members of the 'Confraternity for Happy Death', and, with the funds collected, to found this institute and provide for its maintenance (cf. *ibid.*: 153-163).

The vicars apostolic quite often relied on the opinion of Chavara for their administration,¹⁵ whether to settle disputes arising among parishioners, or between the parish priests and the parishioners, and any similar matters. In 1853 Mgr Baccinelli sent to the Prior a priest asking him to examine him regarding the duties of a priest and give him necessary instructions and also to take care of his health (cf. *Positio*: 285f.)¹⁶. The vicar apostolic conveyed to Chavara about the financial difficulties the vicariate was going through. Chavara, when he was at Mannanam, told the fathers about this, to which they proposed a solution: to collect ten percent of the income of each parish. Accordingly the prior prepared a proposal. The vicar apostolic accepted the proposal and incorporated it with some modification in his circular letter dated 20 May 1865 and sent to the parishes (cf. chapter 7: 23f.). It was again at the suggestion of Chavara that the vicar apostolic introduced what is known as *pidiyari* project (cf. *ibid.*: 26).

By the efforts of Fr Mathai Mariam Palakunnel a number of *ezhavas* at Kora tti near Kanjirappally were being prepared for baptism (cf. *ibid.*: 27f.). Archbishop Baccinelli wanted to acquire some land there for building houses etc. for them. At the same time he wanted to keep this matter secret till a government order was passed on the matter. He wrote to Fr Chavara to deal with it in secret and get the land registered in his own name.¹⁷

¹⁴ See his letter dated October 1843. The original is at Mannanam (AMSJ 7/211). Fr Thomas Porukara had started something similar when he was vicar of Kalloorkad. This may be the resumption of that practice.

¹⁵ Thomas Palackal was one of their main counselors in his time. The same tradition was handed over to Chavara.

¹⁶ Already in 1844 he had been made examiner of priest candidates.

¹⁷ The letter is published in Palakunnel 1971: 6f. Its original is kept at Mannanam (AMSJ). A Latin translation is given in *Positio*: 373f.)

The various measures Blessed Chavara took in dealing with the intruding Chaldean bishop, Thomas Roccas and those who were prepared to follow him, are very telling illustrations of his prudent behaviour. The Chaldean priest Denha bar Jona was giving all support to the new struggle of a section of the St Thomas Christians to get a bishop of their own Rite. He went around canvassing people and was intent on implicating the Prior and his religious community at Mannanam, whose influence on people was well recognized. He with some others reached Mannanam and stayed there overnight. As the Prior knew he had no permission from the vicar apostolic for saying Mass, after taking the counsel of the community, he decided not to allow Denha to celebrate Mass in the monastery church. They gave the priest hospitality and he was hoping to say Mass in the morning. But the Prior had arranged with other fathers to politely inform him of their inability to oblige him, which made him furious (cf. chapter 6). We have already seen how Chavara wrote the story of Fr Antony Kudakkachira with extreme delicacy and that too just to avoid the danger to the Church and the faithful.

Bishop Roccas arrived in Kerala and Chavara was sure that he came against the orders of Rome. During a retreat he preached to a number of diocesan priests he made bold to tell them that the bishop came illegally. Most were convinced. Others sought his advice about going and meeting the newly arrived Roccas. He told them that he had declared what he knew to be the truth; each one was, however, free to do according to his conscience. Fr Antony Thondanatt (later bishop Mar Abdisho) was the campaign manager of Roccas. He succeeded in convincing many priests, including many a renowned malpan and prominent lay leader, of the pretended authenticity of Roccas. As we have seen in chapter six Malpan Aipe of Pala and some other prominent priests came to Mannanam to seek the advice of Chavara. He suggested that since there were no clear proofs that Roccas came with the approval of Rome, they all could write to Rome and wait for an answer. Foreseeing that the visiting priests would request permission to say Mass next morning, Chavara already in the evening politely warned them that since they had come after kissing the hand of Bishop Roccas he could not permit them to celebrate Mass in the monastery church.

Finally when the Blessed realized that the movement was going on without any abatement he, together with his fellow

religious, wrote to the Pope for clarification. He insisted on a reply and that too in Syriac language so that all the priests and leaders could read for themselves. His journey to Thaikkattussery and the way he discussed the question with Avira Tharakan Parayi, the manner in which Chavara, as directed by the vicar apostolic, managed to send back Bishop Roccas, the fashion in which he dealt with Antony Thondanatt, once the latter relented, all reveal his wise and prudent mind (cf. chapter 6 for details). In these instances not only his prudence but his moral strength comes out very clearly, which we shall describe next.

Moral Strength, Persistence and Courage

Chavara was a man of great moral strength and fortitude. While only eleven years old he sensed the call of God to dedicate himself for priestly life and had no hesitation to respond with alacrity to that call even though the parents raised some objections. At the age of thirteen, leaving his parents and family, especially his dear mother he entered the seminary. When he was studying in the seminary he lost his parents and the only brother. That did not deter him from following his vocation, though some of his relatives, concerned as they were about family succession, tried to dissuade him. On the contrary he, trusting in the Blessed Mother, devoted more diligently to his studies. At the same time he made wise arrangements for the family succession (cf. chapter 2). During the 'time of stress' under Vicar Apostolic Pescetto the Blessed showed great persistence and courage repeatedly visiting the bishop and pleading for relief from the work at Pallipuram parish to devote to the work of the monastery, and that despite rebuffs and reprimands from the part of the prelate, to which the Blessed humbly submitted. Although he always acted with the advice of the elders, he singly confronted the prelate. For his spirit of humble daring no other illustration is needed. His persistence finally was crowned with success (cf. chapter 3). The same spirit is visible in the starting of the printing press at Mannanam. The difficulties he had to overcome and hardships he had to go through were many in setting it up. He endured all that and finally succeeded to the satisfaction of all (see chapter 9).

The Roccas episode provides us with so many instances which clearly manifest Chavara's moral strength and persistence. Within a few months after the entry of Bishop Roccas into Kerala the scene became very grim, and equally firm was Chavara's

determination to overcome it. Of the 155 parishes, 86 fully and 36 partially submitted to the intruder. Most of the leading priests and prominent lay persons, nay even the civil administration appeared to support Roccas and his followers. Threatening messages reached Chavara and his religious community. But the Blessed never lost courage. Firmly confiding in divine providence and with unswerving determination he fought out the cause and within ten months he was able to send the intruder away from the shores of Kerala, and within two years, to bring back all the parishes to Catholics unity (cf. chapter 6).

During his life time Chavara had to face many stresses and strains in carrying out his tasks and commitments. He had to make arduous journeys on foot, or in canoes, or by bullock carts through rugged paths, which often affected his health. Think of the journey he made in connection with fund-raising for the construction of the convent at Koonammavu (cf. chapter 8), or that for reconciling the parishioners of Anakallu, and for the founding of the monastery at Mutholy (cf. chapter 4: 16f.). The testimony of Mgr Kurian Vanchipura, who as president of the historical commission for the cause of Chavara's canonization knew in detail the life and activities of the Blessed, is very relevant here. He admires the constancy and zeal found in the Blessed. He proceeds to say that there were so many discouraging circumstances, which could stand in the way of anyone's zeal, e. g. oppositions, dearth of finances, long journey through rugged paths, through rivers in boats, on land by bullock carts or often on foot. In the obituary note pasted on Chavara's coffin is, among others, this significant observation:

He laboured much for the Holy Church, for this religious congregation, and for the salvation of souls...and as vicar general during the schism of Roccas toiled hard for the good standing of the faithful (cf. Mannanam Chronicle III: 267, *Positio*: 506).

From the seminary days on Chavara suffered obstructive filariasis or elephantiasis. Towards the close of his life he developed several maladies. The treatment he had to undergo were painful, especially the one Dr Guenther prescribed for the problem in his eyes (cf. chapter 10). The Prior, as Fr Moolayil says, endured all this with exemplary patience and courage (cf. *Positio*: 546). Similarly the sisters of the convent at Koonammavu express their

admiration of the way the Prior endured his illness during the last three months:

He suffered all the above mentioned diseases with great patience and resignation for three months. But the one thing that surprised people was this...(see rest on p.)

In treating matters of faith and ecclesial communion Chavara showed extraordinary courage. He did not hesitate to declare to the priests gathered at Mannanam for retreat that Bishop Roccas came to Kerala without permission. In spite of the fact that he knew that prominent priests and lay persons were supporting Roccas, he had no fear to publish a circular telling the truth about Roccas. Similarly even when there was threat to his life he made bold to declare publicly the illegal action of some parishioners of Anakallu who, against the instruction of the Church authorities, adhered to schism (cf. *Positio*: 545). He did not fight shy of telling Denha bar Jona very courteously, and on another occasion Malpan Iype Muprayil and party that he could not permit them to celebrate Mass in the monastery church (see above). Fr Louis of Manjummel testifies that whenever the Prior talked to the schismatics (the Roccasian party) he manifested the firmness of mind (cf. *Positio*: 564). Fr Leopold was convinced that Chavara never held himself back from any work, nor did he fight shy of any difficulty, as he was always prompted by two motives: obedience to the bishop and the salvation of souls.

Modesty, Humility, Temperance and Asceticism

In the matter of food and drink Chavara was very sparing. He ate the coarse common meal without anything special. The life of Chavara, as that of his fellow religious, was sufficiently austere as is clear from the constitutions and the testimony of the missionaries (cf. *Positio*: 193-96). Regarding the modesty and self-effacing nature of Chavara there are many references. Those who knew him intimately did not hesitate to consider him an 'angel'. Chavara was a man of profound humility, assuming always a low profile, self-effacing, and never showy or presumptuous. A religious who had taken the fourth vow of humility, the Blessed shunned any position or dignity. Archbishop Baccinelli was convinced that he would not accept the dignity of bishop or even that of vicar general unless commanded under the precept of obedience. He had, as other members of the congregation,

professed humility together with the three vows: not to seek any position or dignity in the Church and in the congregation. Chavara scrupulously adhered to this promise all his life. Although he was appointed vicar general in 1861 he never mentioned it in his writings. Archbishop Baccinelli informed the Propaganda Congregation about this appointment. He even suggested the Prior could be ordained co-adjutor bishop. But the Archbishop warned the Congregation that unless an order under obedience was made he would not accept such a position and dignity. He had to have recourse to this measure when he appointed him vicar general (see the prelate's letter of 15 June 1861; *Positio*: 259f.).

When Bishop Roccas offered to bestow on him the dignity of a bishop, Chavara's response was prompt: "I do not desire to be ordained a bishop, it is enough for me that I save my soul" (cf. chapter 6). Chavara's writings especially *Ātmānutāpam* and *Dhyānasallāpangal* are filled with contrition and confession of sins, even though he had preserved his baptismal innocence unsullied. How humbly does he ask pardon not only of his co-religious (see ch. 5) but even the nuns at Koonammavu (see ch. 8 and below). How often in his chronicle and other writings does Chavara lament his faults and shortcomings? In the beginning of *Dhyānasallāpangal* the Blessed, after recollecting the advice his mother had given him—to keep away from pride and self-complacency—humbles himself saying that he was unworthy to reach high degrees of prayer and sanctity, because he was "a great sinner with a heart impure and opaque without virtues of cleanliness and modesty". He asks a number of heart piercing questions:

For is it because of my power and skill that I did things whatsoever? How is it that you came hither? Who called me from home? How did I become a priest? How could I join the community and become a member of the congregation? Why should anyone address me as prior? Do I deserve any one of these favours. The answer is: "Not at all, to be sure" (CWC III 1981: 1; 1990: 1).

He repeatedly laments his sins and pleads for God's mercy. In *Dhyānasallāpangal* the Blessed compares himself to the prodigal son of the Gospel, and repeatedly speaks of his 'sins and unworthiness', e. g.:

I deem not myself worthy to reach high degrees of prayer and sanctity. As I am a great sinner with a heart impure and opaque without virtues of cleanliness and modesty, I realize that I am not worthy to receive the spirit of contemplation and attain perfection.

There are on every page of it confessions of every sort:

My God! A great sinner as I am, I am struck with fear to enter this chapel, the abode of your presence...O Lord, I thank you for showing great mercy on me a wretched sinner (cf. *ibid.*: 25, 14, 39 etc.; 9, 19 etc.).

In his history of the Roccas affair Chavara writes that he was prepared to meet Roccas inside closed doors and to kiss not only his hands but even his feet, but, of course, not his ring the sign of his illegal consecration.

Chavara was always ready to acknowledge his mistakes. Think of his reflections in the chronicle in the wake of his bitter experiences from Vicar Apostolic Pescetto; so too is the confession of his guilt feeling about his 'wandering about' after the ordination, which was not to the liking of his malpan Palackal (see chapter 3: 2). Note how he does belittle himself in some of the letters he wrote to the sisters of Koonammavu Convent:

Again you can expect only difficulties from me. You will have no benefit from me. Not that you had benefits from me till now. But now I am giving occasions for others for service and sufferings, which I have not done for others. Moreover, because of the wickedness and ill nature of my stinking body, I have reached a state when I have to make others suffer irritation and difficulties on my account.

When father delegate comes and looks through his glasses, to see how I have formed you in my ignorance, I don't know what accusations he would hail at me. I have real fear for the reprimands of the Great Delegate.

So you need not mind on the directions given by your ignorant priorachan (cf. CKC 2002: 200; 1988 II: 7; cf. also chapter 8).

Fr Leopold correctly writes: "All who knew him had no doubt about his profound humility" (Beccaro 2003: 12). Whenever

Chavara refers to himself in his writings his deep humility comes out very transparently. He starts the chronicle of Mannanam with these words: "These are written by humble Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara, a disciple of our Father Thomas Palackal" ('81: 1). Kuriakose Porukara, (1905: 32) describing how Chavara succeeded the two elderly founders, says that the grief-stricken Prior, "in extreme humility, trusting in God and the intercession of the Blessed Mother and St Joseph, and above all with his meek and docile nature [*sādhugunam*] started to walk in the path of his predecessors". Well trained in the school of humility he never made much of himself but attributed any achievement to others, especially to his collaborators. In speaking about various achievements the Prior's connatural tendency was to present himself playing only the second fiddle, never projecting himself but always others with whom he worked. Regarding the foundation and early development of the CMI Congregation it is to his two seniors, Frs Palackal and Porukara that he gives the credit (see chapter 3). In the same spirit it is to Fr Leopold that he attributes the credit for the establishment of the convent at Koonammavu (see chapter 8).

There are many other virtues Chavara cultivated, such as spirit of poverty, chastity and obedience. Perhaps they too have a natural moral dimension. But we may treat them in the section on the spiritual dimensions of his personality.

Blessed Chavara was an ascetic observing faithfully the prescribed rules of fast and abstinence and lived a very disciplined life. He performed various forms of penance including corporal ones such as self-flagellation. Modesty was a hallmark of his conversation, deportment and all his dealings. He was like an angel even in these respects (see above).

Chavara a Paradigm of Christian Virtues

What we have said so far about the personality of Blessed Chavara cannot be seen apart from his Christian vision and spiritual outlook. But features like faith, hope, charity, temperance, poverty, chastity and obedience have a specifically Christian orientation. Chavara was a brilliant paradigm of these virtues, which we are now attempting to explore. Much of what we have to say here have been referred to in the previous chapters of the book. The following assessment of special categories of virtues and holy

traits is based on *Positio*: XLII-LXIX, LXXVII-LXXXVII where the sources are indicated.

Christian Faith

The living and warm faith which shone in Chavara is witnessed to by many. Fr Leopold in the 3 January 1871 entry as well his biography of the Blessed, speaks highly of it. In Chavara's own writings it is quite visible. He firmly believed that God is the creator of everything and he attributes every gift—physical, intellectual, and spiritual—he possessed, to God, e.g.: he was born with a healthy body without any deformity; he was preserved in his life; he was born from believing, moderately rich parents and so on. He thanks the Almighty for the great grace of baptism; that he did not die before receiving it but was baptized in his early childhood itself, thus inheriting the grace of divine sonship and being called to beatific vision in heaven. He firmly believed that he was selected by God to minister to Him in priesthood. He considered it God's special grace that he was called to the religious life.

In every happening of life, whether of his own or of others, Chavara sees the hand of God at work, whose providence turns all the happenings to end well. He advises the nuns that God would provide them with money and other necessities when they needed them. His own experience was that. When he discovered accidentally a book on formation he sent it to the sisters as if sent by God Himself. Writing to the mother superior of the Koonammavu Convent he exclaims that God treats us like a mother who wakes up her infant and feeds it with milk even though the infant does not know to communicate to others its needs. The change over from the original Dominican style of life to that of the Carmelites he attributes to the divine providence. Filled with such fervent faith he always lived in the presence of God that people like Br Rocky, Tahsildar of Meenachil, and the people of Kollam saw him as one enjoying the vision of God, or 'a person endowed with the grace of God' (cf. also the section below). In his letters to the nuns he reminds them to cherish always and everywhere the presence of God. Many passages in his *Dhyānasallāpangal*, especially the way he addressed the Lord as *appa* or *ente appa* ('father' or 'my father'), are expressions of his deep faith in God and Jesus Christ.

The great joy the Blessed expressed in many ways when he records the news of the definition of the Immaculate Conception of Blessed Virgin Mary in the First Vatican Council (see chapter 10, fn. 5) is remarkable. There are many proofs of his deep faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. This prayer in the *Dhyānasallāpangal* is very touching:

O my Saviour as a last proof of your love for me, you gave me your body and blood for my food and drink. You offered yourself as a victim. You did this so that I might always keep in mind your sacred passion and your life, which you gave up for my salvation. Never separated from you sacramentally and spiritually till my death, and keeping you in my mind with the eyes of faith let me be united with you (CWC III 1981: 43; 1990: 21).

The devotion that his celebration of the Mass generated in others, the frequent visits he made to the Blessed Sacrament, the way he promoted the feast of the Corpus Christi, the forty hour adoration are all well known.

Chavara's faith in the Holy Catholic Church and loyalty and attachment to the Holy See need to be specially commented. The relentless fight he put up against the intruding Bishop Roccas and its consequences alone suffices to prove his deep faith in the Church. There are also many other instances which confirm it. It is this faith, which made him to obey almost blindly the vicar apostolic, the missionaries and so on. The same prompted him to denounce disobedience to authorities, and to exhort all on the necessity of obedience. It is again this faith, which moved him to work for the union of the Jacobites with the Catholic Church, to promote evangelization among the people who had not yet received the Christian faith. It is again to give a boost to Catholic faith that he wrote books and established the printing press, established confraternities and charitable institutions. He was very sensitive to the various calamities the Church and its heads, especially the Supreme Pontiff, faced.

The Virtue of Hope

From this ardent faith arose Chavara's complete trust in God. Chavara had to encounter many trying situations or crises in his life, e.g. the early death of not only his parents, but also of his only brother, which left the family orphaned; the thought of a moderate displeasure he felt that he caused to his dear malpan just

at the beginning of his priestly career, the bitter experiences he had from Vicar Apostolic Francis Xavier Pescetto, the difficult situation that arose in connection with the establishment of the seminary at Mannanam and its running, the Roccas disturbances which threatened to spread widely (actually the majority of churches fell victims to it), and to encroach upon the monasteries, and the illness and maladies, which were his life companions, worsening towards the last two or three months, causing great pain and discomfort. Despite all these and other trying situations he never uttered a word in despair, but always trusting in the Lord courageously confronted them and came out victorious. Chavara had initiated many projects, such as construction of buildings, setting up of the printing press, and help for the poor and sick. Often he launched them without any cash in his hand but with absolute trust in the Lord. And always he managed to succeed in all the undertakings. His slogan was: this is not our work but God's, and He would provide once we do what we can. The construction of the convent buildings at Koonammavu is a good example. Pointing out this to the nuns he would tell them to put complete trust in God (see chapter 8).

We find Chavara grievously bemoaning before God his sins and faults in *Ātmānutāpam* and *Dhyānasallāpangal*. But it is not despair or lack of trust, which we find in all these but deep gratitude towards God who forgave him everything, and profound confidence in the saving mercy of God. He is a prodigal son but in the embrace of his loving *appan* (father), God. He cries out: "I am sure of my salvation because you taught me that through your gospel: this prodigal of yours falls at your feet". What we see in these tracts but sentiments of extreme sorrow for sins, of eternal gratitude singing the mercies of the Lord shown to a prodigal son. After recollecting several graces he received through Mother Mary (e. g. his dedication as a slave of Mary, the early days in the new religious institute living the spirit of St Dominic, finally, as if by luck, his acceptance to the Carmelite family, etc.), he cries out to Our Lady:

As on these I reflect and how you've changed me
Though awful, wicked, I take heart!
Hence at your sacred feet, with compunction
I come weeping, Oh listen to my moans!

(*Ātmānutāpam*, VII, lines 204-27,
CWC II 1981: 53; 1989: 53).

Such emotional outpourings are quite frequent in the *Dhyānasallāpangal*.

Chavara looked at the Eucharist as the sacred pledge of his hope that after death he would be with God eternally in heaven seeing him without veil or shadow, face to face. The last lines of the *Dhyānasallāpangal* are marvellous aspirations of the confidence he had placed in God. This confidence stood him well to die a contented and happy death. On his deathbed he could utter words of satisfaction and happiness, e. g. "I feel joy and peace". He could console the bystanders inspiring in them confidence (see chapter 10).

Charity: Love of God and Love of Neighbour

Like Prophet Elijah, Chavara burned with love of God and it made him open out in charity towards fellow creatures. This love, inculcated in him by his pious mother, grew in depth and width throughout his life. He cries out:

Severed from you, my God my only good
What joy, peace or well-being can be mine?
You my love, my joy and all my good fortune
If not with you, how could I live my life
My very breath, my food, my drink?
What solace have I save in you!

(*Ātmānutāpam*, II, lines 141-46, CWC II: 10).

Chavara, the sweet angel in life, turned a lion in the pulpit and delivered sermons which ignited love of God in the hearers. About his Pulincunnu retreat biographer Kuriakose Porukara comments: these spiritual exercises infused in the participants deep compunction of heart and produced in them immense spiritual fruits. The memory of that event remained ever fresh in them even after many years. Similarly Mannanam Chronicle (Vol. III: 240) speaking about a sermon he preached at Mannanam on the feast of All Saints, says: It was so moving that the faithful were deeply touched. Fr Louis of Manjummel testifies that his sermons were filled with fervour. His words proceeded from a heart burning with the love of God. This fact is eloquently borne out by his writings, especially *Ātmānutāpam* and *Dhyānasallāpangal* and some of the letters. His deep-felt compunction, his prayer experience, his

special devotions, his attachment to the Holy Family; all speak of his fervent love for God (see chapter 8).

The ardent love for God was revealed concretely in his love for others. The Blessed always bore in mind the new commandment of Jesus: love one another and serve them humbly. He was quite convinced of the gospel message of St John: "If any one says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 Jn 4: 20). His fraternal love had no limits or boundaries; it flowed towards all, especially to the poor and the sick. Even bitter experiences did not stop him to embrace in love those who caused them. About his seminary days Fr Kuriakose Porukara says that he was the best model of fraternal charity, and Fr Leopold, that he treated all his fellow seminarians with love and friendship, avoiding the least motions of anger or aversion, which are often found among youngsters living together. Fr Chandy Mangalath, a co-disciple, recollecting the life at the seminary remarks: Chavara was kind and loving and was never found quarrelling with anyone.

Blessed Chavara never entertained any grudge or resentment towards those who apparently did things wrongly. He must have been aware of the harm done to the St Thomas Christian community by Archbishop Meneses and other Portuguese missionaries, especially the Jesuits by their questionable actions. But Chavara does not condemn them as many others did, but points out the good the community received from them and exhorts his fellow religious to be grateful to them. Much more positive is his judgement about the Carmelite missionaries, who had also, he knew well, not acted correctly. How kindly he deals with Mar Roccas, Frs Kudakkachira, Thondanat and others involved in the Roccas affair! If he says anything against them, it was minimum, just necessary to dissuade people from following their leadership and hurting themselves and the unity of the Church.

Chavara was a good conciliator. We have seen how he managed to reconcile Archbishop Baccinelli with Fr Leopold who, the prelate thought, had offended him. Chavara was quite often deputed by the vicars apostolic to bring about peace in faction-ridden parishes and communities. In his testament to his fellow religious, as well as in that to his parishioners, Chavara strongly exhorts them to foster fraternal charity. We have already seen (chapter 5) his concern and care for his subordinates; similarly the nuns of the Koonammavu Convent are articulate about the love, concern and care he showed them (see chapter 8).

Blessed Chavara's forgiving love is well known. Already we have referred to his generous attitude towards those who indulged in wrong doing. Some of them, e.g. Bishop Roccas and Fr Antony Thondanatt offended him personally. But he never uttered a word of resentment or grudge against them. How considerate and generous he showed himself towards them once they turned to him for help (see chapter 6). A telling example of his forgiving love is the case of Sri Mathew Kalapura (see chapter 5). What had in store for all these people, who somehow or other had hurt his feelings, was love and sympathy, no offence, least sign of vengeance or retaliation. Prof. K. C. Chacko testified: to understand the intensity of Chavara's love for neighbours we have to look beyond the normal fraternal charity, to the very generous and noble way he treated those who, in any manner, opposed or wronged him or judged him irrationally. It is enough to think how he behaved towards Bishop Roccas, who caused such disturbance in the Church and even personally offended Chavara (cf. *Positio*: 626).

One important point in his exhortation to the families is the need for fostering fraternal love at home and with the neighbours. He tells his relatives and friends that the honour and good fortune of a family lie in avoiding all factions and living in perfect amity and peace with all. He illustrates: even animals are capable of wreaking vengeance on those who cause pain and displeasure to them. To be unaffected by such wrong doings and to forgive them completely is the mark of great strength and prudence (cf. CWC IV: 138; 104). To illustrate this ideal he brings in the example of Emperor Constantine nobly forgiving his offender. The first paragraphs of this 'testament' to the Kainakari parishioners are all counsels to foster charity.

Chavara's Zeal for Souls

We have already seen with what zeal and fervour he preached his sermons, which moved people to repentance and reform of life. Brother Rocky has an entry in his diary about the talks Chavara gave in the church of Puthenchira during the disturbance caused by Bishop Roccas. The brother attended the sermons. He saw in the evenings the Prior praying for a long time before a crucifix in his room, profusely shedding tears. The devotion the sight induced in him was beyond description. Already within two or three days many dissidents returned to union with the Church. The good brother treasured in memory the contents of those sermons and spoke about it to others (cf. *Positio*: 541). Fr

Louis of Manjummel recollects that the Blessed used to read a monthly publication and Tamil books, which contained good news about missions and used to communicate the contents to others in order to infuse in them zeal for the propagation of faith. Fr Leopold in his letter of 1870 to the OCD superior general feelingfully comments the zeal shown by Chavara and his fellow religious to keep the unity of the Church during the Roccas crisis. He says that it is impossible to describe the false propaganda and the calumnies they had to sustain from the dissidents. Such was their love of and attachment to the Holy See, the vicar apostolic and the missionaries whom the dissidents stigmatized as propagandists and apostles of their Western Latin nationality and Rite. Immediately after the end of the Roccas affair Chavara took the pain to write out its history with the sole purpose of preventing recurrence of such calamities. The interest Chavara showed for the reunion of the separated brethren, the evangelization of the dalits, the establishment of catechumenates, the setting up of the printing press and publication of good books, the varied and often difficult pastoral endeavours are all significant pointers to his zeal for the souls. The courage and dedication he manifested in going to visit and minister to a dying smallpox patient at Pallipuram when he was vicar there is one of the telling instances of the exercise of this zeal.

The Virtues of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience

These virtues, besides being Christian, had a special relevance to Chavara who was a devout monk and religious. Poverty is a distinct mark of any religious and Blessed Chavara is a good example. The declaration of Jesus: "Blessed are the poor", had sunk deep into his personality. He lived poor just leaving everything to the divine providence. That made him free of any anxiety or worry and live the life peacefully anchored in the hands of the Almighty.

Chavara was least attached to money or possessions. He had no qualms to bequeath the whole of his ancestral property to his orphaned niece and follow the priestly vocation unhindered by worldly affairs. From 1832 onwards, leaving his relatives and family, he completely dedicated himself to the religious life. From 1840 he renounced all private income. Whatever he earned personally went to the account of the community. In 1855 he formally vowed poverty together with chastity and obedience. Fr Leopold found the cell of Chavara, as those of his fellow religious,

quite simple manifesting their attachment to absolute poverty. The Prior had not even a spare chair in his room. He considered the goods or possessions of monasteries or of the convent as patrimony of Jesus Christ. They needed to be handled with extreme care and developed by hard work and used very sparingly. There grew an impression among the members of the congregation that Mannanam Monastery was rich. In his letter to Fr Kuriakose Porukara, its vicar, the Blessed refers to this and exhorts:

It suffices to know that God's will is our good fortune. Let this thought be ever present in your mind. Praise the will of God that preserves every drop of the vow of poverty you have professed, though everybody, even our superiors, think that the Monastery of Mannanam is rich and that you lead luxurious life there (CWC IV 1982: 63).

Chavara started and accomplished a number of projects with no funds in hand, even without any idea as to wherefrom it would come. The only capital was his confidence in God and the good will of others. Think for example the construction of the new convent buildings (chapter 8) or of the starting and running of the printing press (chapter 9). In a letter to his nephew Fr Joseph Thresia, he wrote:

When I came here [Koonammavu], I found the sisters in a dire fix, being unable to pay the tax of Rs 120. I borrowed the amount and paid the rent. For this I have sent Fr Chandy with the net and some bait. Till now I have never had to draw the net empty after casting it in the name of our holy Mother. But Fr Chandy has not yet replied that he has failed to draw ashore any fish like St Peter on that Easter morning (CWC IV 1982: 81; 1990: 55).

Chavara lived always a chaste life and made much of virginity and cultivated it delicately. He was pure as an angel. This made him lament some of his experiences at the *kalari*. He saw boys moving about naked, keeping little modesty when taking bath, etc (cf. *Ātmānutāpam* I, lines 108-112).

The Blessed knew chastity was a delicate virtue and extreme care was needed to preserve it. In the section about the bringing up of children in the 'testament' to the Kainakari parishioners he indicates a number of precautions the parents needed to take in the

matter¹⁸. Young children should not be allowed to walk about naked, even inside the house. The elders should be careful not to utter vulgar words and terms of abuse in their presence. Boys and girls should not be put in the same room to sleep. Children should not be allowed to stay in the homes of relatives, because very often they leave the homes as angels and return home as devils (cf. CWC IV 1982: 148; cf. also *ibid.*: 144f.).

The virtue of obedience Chavara practised was well known to all. His spirit of humble submission to superiors was an edifying example to the Prior's subordinates. They used to speak highly of this to the younger generation. The example of obedience the Blessed gave during his last illness was marvellous¹⁹.

In the Pallipuram Seminary Chavara subjected himself completely to the guidance of Malpan Palackal; the same continued in the years that followed (see ch. 3). He observed the rules of the seminary most faithfully. Fr Leopold as well as Fr Kuriakose Porukara emphasize this in their writings. It was in 1855 Chavara formally professed obedience according to the rules and constitutions Archbishop Baccinelli gave to the community. About the observation of these rules and constitutions by the Blessed there are many outstanding testimonies. The observation of Fr Louis of Manjummel that Chavara lived always like a novice may be specially mentioned in this context. Fr Leopold wrote that the Blessed undertook several difficult projects moved by two considerations: obedience to the superiors and the good of souls. If the Blessed found some of the orders of the superiors objectionable he explained to them what he thought and accepted with extremes docility their final decision. We have so many examples: his appointment as vicar of South Pallipuram, the acceptance of the rather severe rules and constitutions and perhaps also the affiliation of the congregation to the OCD, the take over of the Plasnal Monastery and so on. In his last will he forcefully exhorts his fellow religious about the need to be perfectly obedient to superiors (chapter 5). The same spirit can be seen in the circulars he sent to

¹⁸ Some of these instructions might smack puritan especially to persons living in a permissive society. What Chavara wanted to emphasize was the special care parents need to take in the matter of chastity.

¹⁹ See chapters 5 and 10 for details.

the community, jointly with either Fr Leopold or Fr Gerard or Archbishop Baccinelli.

The spirit of obedience Blessed Chavara promoted has a universal dimension: obedience to superiors, to each other, and even to subordinates, and the subordinates, to each other. After mentioning the great peace of mind the religious would enjoy by obeying the superiors, he admonishes:

We owe the same obedience also to the other subordinates and finally to one another. He who practises perfect obedience in all these spheres will enjoy heavenly peace already in this monastery, which is a mini-heaven. This is certain (CWC IV 1982: 100; 1990: 71).

Contemplative Personality of Chavara

Pope John Paul II declared on the occasion of Chavara's beatification in 1986:

His [Blessed Chavara's] success...in all his many undertakings was undoubtedly due to the intense charity and prayer, which characterized his daily life, his close communication with Christ, and his love for the Church as the visible body of Christ on earth.

In these words we might see a succinct description of Chavara's spirituality: intense charity or love of God and fellow creatures, prayer, close communication with Christ, and love for the Church. Chavara was a prayerful person, who achieved great things by virtue of his prayerfulness—close communication with Christ. The Indian definition of such a person is *karma-yogi*, meaning 'a contemplative in action'. This great ideal of spirituality is the key-concept in *Bhagavad-Gita*, a spiritual classic of India. In it Arjuna, who for all practical purposes represents the sincere seekers of God, is persuaded to engage himself in the service of humanity without counting the gains or losses for himself. This is a call for *nishkāma-karma*, unselfish service. This is something like what Jesus meant when he said: "When you have done all that is commanded, you say, 'we are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Lk 17:10). Then immediately the question is raised: can one be so unselfish as to be totally unconcerned about one's own gains and losses in an undertaking? In answer to this question *Bhagavad-Gita* says (2:48), *yogasthah*

kuru karmāṇi, which means: "Do the services while remaining in the state of yoga." To be in the state of yoga is what the Christian tradition of spirituality basically means by being prayerful or a contemplative. Hence the advice is that one should be engaged in activities while remaining a contemplative: be a contemplative in action, a *karma-yogi*. This is the ideal that Chavara, true to his rootedness in the Indian, Oriental and Carmelite traditions of spirituality, realized in his own person.

That Chavara was a person of action is clear from what we have described so far in this book, especially in chapters two to nine. In all these activities the underlying force was his prayerfulness, his intimate union with God. Chavara's greatness lies in the way he harmonized action and contemplation in himself, a task, which *Bhagavad-Gita* says (2: 50) is a matter of skill, *kauśalam* (*karmasu kauśalam yoga*). We are concerned here to explore how the Blessed developed and maintained the spirit of contemplation throughout his active life, until it culminated in the supreme act of total surrender into the hands of the Father, the act of death, in which the dichotomy of action and contemplation is resolved once and for all. Chavara was a person who spent hours and hours in prayer, meditative as well as vocal. Yet, what our attention should concentrate on, is not the amount of his formal prayers but the contemplative mind behind them. Such a person spontaneously perceives, admires and adores the loving hands of the provident God in all that happens to him/her and around him/her. Here one's faith in God is made to bear on every little experience of the person, pleasant as well as unpleasant. This contemplative character of the person is proved beyond doubt in the face of painful experiences, as it happened in the life of Chavara. Just think of the pain and humiliation he experienced when tragedy took place in his family, when he was confronted with difficulties in learning Latin language, when he together with Fr Thomas Porukara were appointed parish priests, when he was asked to take over the monastery of Plasnal, when he had to confront Bishop Roccas and his adherents, when he was transferred from Mannanam to Koonammavu in 1864, when in his old age he had to suffer so many maladies, and so on. Nor would Chavara be elated, when praise and recognition were poured on him. He may be rightly described a *sthitaprajña*, steady-minded person, always keeping the mind fixed on the Lord, whether in

praise or blame, health or illness, success or failure, life or death. He was a *yogi*, a real contemplative!

The Development of the Contemplative Personality

The process started at home from the days of Chavara's childhood. It went on progressing through his seminary training and priestly ministry. It took a decisive turn in *Besrauma* ('the house on top') of Mannanam, and advanced through the association with the vision of Carmel, and attained maturity through his personal prayer experience in later years, and found lofty expression in his writings, especially in the poetic works, *Ātmānutāpam*, Martyrdom of Anastasia, *Parvam* (Dirge), and even more prominently in *Dhyānasullāpangal* ('Meditation Colloquies'), which is almost a semi-poetical outpouring of his soul. Some of his letters especially those he wrote to the sisters of the Koonammavu Convent are equally relevant here. We will now try briefly to analyse the different influences that worked on him and the various stages, through which Chavara turned out to be a veritable contemplative in action, a true *karma-yogi*.

Chavara was the proud heir of a prayer culture, a culture in which prayer was considered a supreme value. In it prayer was an archetype, which he shared from the very birth and even from the conception, so to say. "His parents, who were of excellent virtues", especially his mother, who sowed in his tender mind the seed of the spirit of prayer, were the primary and the most powerful agents of this culture. What he says about this in *Ātmānutāpam* has been referred to earlier in this book (cf. chapter 1: 17f.). By word and deed his mother initiated him to prayer, introduced him to the mysteries of Christian faith, and to the devotions to the Holy Family, the Holy Eucharist and Blessed Virgin Mary; and she brought him up as a disciplined child. As he himself says, under such a motherly care he grew up as a child pleasing to God. The event of his dedication during childhood to the Mother of God by his own mother, the latter's practice of daily prayer on her knees even at midnight, her motherly corrections not with stick or hand but by eloquent looks, and the parents' devotion to the Holy Family, left in his mind lasting and deep impressions, which gradually became the unconscious force in his life, inspiring him to a life of incessant prayer. Those impressions, containing all the ingredients of Christian prayer, in fact became the foundation stone of his prayer life, as a gaze at his later life would substantiate. He

looks back to these early days of innocence and initiation to spirituality with some nostalgia and compares it to the rather dark years of his schooling in a *kalari*. It is with a sense of remorse that he recollects the life in the *kalari*, which he considered a falling away from his childhood spent under his mother's care. This remorse about the little faults continued throughout his life and became food for his continued repentance as we see especially in *Dhyānasallāpangal*, in which he identifies himself with the prodigal son of the Gospel. This holy repentance also became an important element of his spirituality.

Once out of school and with the divine call to priesthood things changed. The seed of the spirit of prayer that had fallen in the good soul of Chavara's heart, duly sprouted, and was further nurtured first by the priest in the presbytery where he was sent by the parents to stay for some time just before he entered the seminary at the age of thirteen. He recalls that "the priest there brought him up, and taught him to participate in and assist at Mass, and practise virtues and avoid whatever is evil". Another great and decisive influence on his prayer life was exerted by the ascetic theologian Fr Thomas Palackal, who was his malpan in the seminary, the spiritual director, and the main source of inspiration in the task of founding the religious congregation for men. About twelve years of life under the personal guidance of Fr Palackal, a person of strict asceticism and discipline, deep spirituality and learning, gave a solid theological frame and intellectual content to Chavara's prayer life. Even after the ordination he continued to be under the guidance of and in close association with Fr Palackal (cf. chapter 2).

At Besrauma (Mannanam Monastery)

We have already seen how Chavara was closely associated with the founding of the monastery at Mannanam. The contemplative vision he entertained from the very early days of his priestly life comes out in various expressions he uses in the section of the chronicle related to the foundation. The founders were in search of a suitable place which would combine the two dimensions of the religious community they were starting: *sthalasaukhyam* and *vellasaukhyam*—convenience of land and convenience of water. The site thus envisaged was an elevated place suited for prayer, penance and contemplation near some water facility for travel for pastoral action (*karma*). The

Olankannamukal hill at Mannanam satisfied their aspirations. Quite probably it was Chavara who christened the monastery *Besrauma* ('House on Top') indicating the contemplative dimension of religious life. In this house on top, away from the 'world', they could pray, do penance, celebrate the liturgy, and meditate in silence on the word of God. The two other names of the house are much more significant. This house on top is envisaged as a *tapsu-bhavanam* or house of prayer and penance, leading to the vision of God and making it a *darśanaveedu* or house of contemplation. Another dimension—of study, learning, and insight—was added to this when a seminary began functioning here (cf. chapter 3 for details). The *Besrauma* thus turned into a place of incessant prayer, penance and meditation. At the same time it beautifully integrated pastoral commitment, realized the original ideal of *sthalasukhyam*. It is the same contemplative architect who gave the mystical interpretations of places like Elthuruth ('Island of God') for Eluvathuruth, and the stream of pearls for Mutholy (cf. chapter 4).

The Dominican Ideal and Carmelite Facts

In the early years of the congregation it was the Dominican spiritual vision, as we have already pointed out, which gave these original ideas of the founding fathers a place in the monastic tradition of the universal Church. All those original ideas were cast, as it were, into a mould which one might qualify Dominican (see chapter 3: 23). And the Dominican way, with emphasis on *contemplata praedicare* (preach what has been meditated upon) fits the *karma-yogi* model: study (*jnana*) and meditation (*voga*) and proclamation (*karma*). Actually the initial heritage from the founders, inspired as it was by Palackal's intention shared by Porukara and Chavara, was a combination of deep study, intense prayer and spiritual ministry. The Carmelite factor which came in unexpectedly in 1855 (cf. chapter 3: 32ff; chapter 4: 22ff.), did not disturb this original combination but only helped it to deepen further.

The rules of the Carmelites were accepted and slight modifications in the habit were introduced (added were a leather belt around the waist and a small scapular inside the cassock)²⁰. It

²⁰ Other three items were introduced a few years after the affiliation: the long scapular over the cassock, the cowl and the mantle.

was with some resistance that some details of the rules were accepted. The religious profession was made according to these rules. A change in the name of the community came into force slowly: 'of Mount Carmel' was added to the probable original name 'Servants of Mary Immaculate'. Otherwise the changes are not made much of. Chavara deals only very casually with the matter of affiliation. It is, however, very striking that Chavara added to his name also that of prophet Elijah and his successor Kuriakose Porukara, that of Elisha. What perhaps impresses us is that the *Besrauma* at Mannanam gets the mark of Mount Carmel, on which Elijah and Elisha resided and enjoyed their experience of contemplatives in action, of *karma-yogi*. The more primitive spirit of Carmel expressed in the rules given by Patriarch Albert of Jerusalem to the monks on Mt Carmel sometime in the second decade of the 13th century greatly appealed to Chavara and his companions; as well as the great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary that the early Carmelite monks fostered. By becoming Carmelites it is the burning zeal (the *yoga* and *karma*) of Elijah of Carmel and the heritage of contemplation combined with the brotherly or filial attachment to the Virgin Mary that the early fathers of the CMI community came to cherish. The juridical aspects of the rules and affiliation were of secondary importance. It is interesting to note that the Carmelite rules were drastically changed in the new constitutions of the CMI Congregation, but the essential spirit of Carmel is kept up. Defining the heritage of the congregation the constitutions refer to three roots: the Eastern, the Carmelite and the Indian. Regarding the Carmelite root, it states:

With the prophetic spirit of Carmel we must pursue a life of inner solitude and sacrifice, reaching out towards the mystical union with God so masterfully explained by great mystics like Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross, and at the same time combine it with the burning zeal of Elias for God's kingdom on earth (c. 4; cf. also c. 6, 84, 108a).

Thus the congregation remains faithful to the testament of Chavara where he, with joy and enthusiasm, reminds his sons that it was by the special grace of God, that "we have been called to be in the Carmelite order so pleasing to our Blessed Mother". This happened because God willed it so and not because man planned it thus (cf. chapter 5: 25f.).

The Ascent of Mount Carmel

Fr Louis of Manjummel wrote in his testimony to Fr Marceline Alackappally in 1936:

According to the first constitution [of 1863] the duration of the evening meditation was one full hour. He [Chavara] spent the whole time on knees, absorbed in ecstasy, continuously shedding tears. Those who went to him during the meditation for any permission had to be satisfied with kissing his scapular. At the end of the meditation he had to be reminded by others that the allotted time was over and that it was time to say the concluding prayers. He went back to his room shedding tears. During adoration of the Blessed Sacrament it was a delight for others to watch him (*Positio*: 561).

Fr Maurus Valiamparambil testified that he had heard from Chavara's contemporaries that the Blessed burned with the love of God and continually kept the presence of God in his mind. He also heard the following story:

It so happened one day that a priest went to visit him. He knocked at the door of the Blessed who was seen writing something in the room. Believing that permission was given the priest entered the room when he found the Blessed absorbed in deep contemplation of God with his face beaming with light. So the priest came out of the room and waited for some time. Then he again knocked and the Blessed responded. When the priest entered the room he saw the Prior's face still brightly shining. The Blessed then spoke these words to the priest: "What a bliss it is for us that God allows us to talk to Him" (*Positio*: 623f.).

Chavara, as seen above, was being prepared to ascend the heights of contemplation from very early years. The Carmelite factor, which started to influence him from 1855, boosted the process. The intimate relation established with Fr Leopold from 1864 provided the occasion for Chavara to acquaint himself with the Carmelite ethos in greater detail, with the Carmelite mystics, especially St Teresa of Avila. It is rather surprising that nowhere in his writings or instructions is St John of the Cross explicitly

mentioned.²¹ However, his mystical theology is essentially the same as that of the latter: one's complete detachment from all that is not God on the one hand and the consummate union of one's spirit with God, on the other. This understanding of spiritual life is unambiguously described by Chavara, not in the characteristically Johannine language of the *Dark Night*, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *Living Flame of Love* and the *Spiritual Canticle*, but in his own simple but convincing terms and style. For example, he wrote to the members of the first community of nuns at Koonammavu:

Above all live in the love of Jesus Christ...When you feel inclined or attached to any other object, this loving Lord turns his gaze on you: "Look at me! Does this object give you greater enjoyment than what I give? Or does it cause you pain or affliction? If so, why should you be worried? I shall make you happy". Is this not sufficient? He is always with you with the sole desire of pleasing you. He whispers to you: "You must love me. Everything is here. Whatever you desire, I have given you everything I have. There is nothing, which I have not given you". Yes, He has given Himself to you. He is the Creator of the whole universe. He asks you: Is this little object greater than Myself? (CWC IV 1982: 114; 1950: 82).

The spousal mysticism which is the underlying theme of St John's writings is basically accepted by Chavara, too, although he uses this kind of terminology only while speaking to or about the women followers of Christ. For examples, in his poem entitled 'Anastasia's Martyrdom', we read:

Anastasia longed to live
A life of service filled with love.
There she came to join them,
The brides of Christ, the King of kings

(CWC II 1981: 175; 1989: 166).

.....
Daughter dear, your blessed Groom

²¹ There are even references to the books of St Alphonsse Liguori (cf. e.g. CWC IV: 108) and a number of other spiritual magnets but not on St John of the Cross.

Calls you with a longing love;
Go, be quick!
Recall your former days of joy,
Days your King stretched out His arms
To clasp you close to Him with love.
The Lord who climbed the cliffs and hills,
The Lord who crowned His head with nails,
The Lord who offered life and love,
It is the Lord, your holy Groom

(ibid: 176f; 167).

Christ the King, her lovely Groom
Welcomed her into bliss with Him.
Jewels of marvel, pearls of price,
All heaped on her by Lord divine.
He held her in His close embrace;
She loved Him deep with warmth sublime

(ibid: 180; 172).

In the letters to the nuns in the convent at Koonammavu, too, he speaks in terms of spousal mysticism:

When a soul delights in solitude, Jesus Christ will come to converse with her in solitude, and begin communing with her. At first you will not understand the language. Then it is that the Lord will lead you to the wine cellar and pour out some wine for you, a little at first. In course of time you will begin to understand the language. When He sees that you understand His speech, He will speak more and more distinctly and show you the magnitude of His love. Then on there will be nothing to fear...

(CKC IV 1982: 116f.; 1990: 85).

May Jesus Christ bless you! Remain with Him in your cell which is His royal chamber with joy and peace of mind...

(ibid.: 109; 78).

Is there any one in the world more fortunate than you?...Consider how sweet is the voice of your loving Spouse. He is vigilantly watching in your hearts jealously, lest you love anyone else more than Him, lovingly looking to all your needs

(ibid.: 115; 83)

The adoration you give your divine Spouse Jesus from the corner of your convent is most pleasing to Him. I have seen with my own eyes that the palanquin in which the queen was travelling, was covered on all sides with a thick curtain to hide her from human gaze. If so, how much more demanding would be your divine Spouse?

(ibid.: 108; 77).

I feel a holy envy at your immense good fortune! It is very true. O! queens and spouses of our Lord and King Jesus Christ, the state of life you have embraced is indeed great and praiseworthy. The terrestrial empresses will feel jealous of you...

(ibid.: 108f.; 77).²²

From these citations it is clear that Blessed Chavara had familiarized himself with the mystical spirituality of St John of the Cross.

As far as St Teresa is concerned Chavara was not only familiar with her teachings but even personalized her style and language of prayer. Even his understanding of meditation is identical with hers, and indeed he acknowledges that he has learnt it from her.

Meditation is a free and friendly colloquy with God. O! my mother, St Teresa of Avila, I have read it in your life history that during the tepidity in the beginning of your religious life, while indulging in the way of the world, you found it a foil to make friends with God and that you kept away from meditation. Of this, O! mother, I am convinced. For if meditation is a conversation with God, it presupposes a friendship with God. For when friends sit close to each other, they find enough topics to talk about without cessation. No one needs to teach either of the two friends how to go on talking. For the heart has a language of its own. The very close presence of the friends with no

²² Cf. ch. 8: 57-65, for details.

utterance of words is quite gratifying and heart warming... (CWC III 1981: 14; 1990: 2).

Chavara endorses also the Teresian view that the essential mark of the Carmelite charism is incessant prayer. Referring to the primitive Rule of Carmelites St Teresa says (*Way of Perfection*: 4: 2). "We must pray without ceasing...for unceasing prayer is the most important aspect of the Rule..." In a similar manner Chavara advises: "Above all learn the art of loving Jesus Christ. Stay constantly in his presence. Walk along with Him. Converse with Him continuously" (CWC IV 1982: 114; 1990: 82). He even recognised the Teresian style of speaking in terms of the grades of prayer experience: 1. Reading, 2. Solitude, 3. Meditative prayer, and 4. Mediation. He tells the nuns: "It is enough for the time being to aspire to this fourth degree of prayer. Our mother Teresa attained to the seventh degree. Some of her sisters reached up to the fifth and sixth. We must reach at least the fourth" (ibid.: 117; 85).

Another point on which there is striking similarity between St Teresa and Chavara is the concentration on the fatherhood of God. For the latter "Our Father" was the most effective prayer, handy for the people of all stages of spiritual life: "Therefore, sisters, out of love for the Lord, get used to praying the Our Father with this recollection, and you will see the benefit before long. This is a manner of praying that the soul gets so quickly used to, that it does not go astray, nor do the faculties become restless as time will tell" (*Way of Perfection*: 29: 5). St Teresa, however, never lost sight of the difference between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. But, for Chavara, even God the Son is his Father! Especially in his Colloquies (*Dhyānasallāpangal*) he addresses Jesus Christ as "my dear Father," and as the prodigal son did, he places himself at His pierced feet: "O my Father dear! I cast myself on my knees before your throne of mercy. I am bent on clinging to your pierced but live feet until you speak to me words of forgiveness..." (CWC III: 17: 5). In 'Compunction of Heart' (*Ātmānutāpam*) "he [Chavara] is ever conscious of the ugliness of sin that pains the heart of the heavenly Father: 'Father, my loving father, I regret my offences', is the long drawn sigh that sweeps

through the whole poem. Hence I am even tempted to suggest for the title [of the book], *My Father, My Loving Father*'.²³

The reference to Chavara's spirit of repentance reminds us of yet another one of his affinities with St Teresa, namely, an abiding compunction of heart. Neither of them has ever been a great sinner, but both of them were very aware of the imperfections they have had once in the past, and were continuously sorry for them. St Teresa, in the early part of her autobiography, recalls in detail the little distractions and carelessness in her younger life. Regarding Chavara, his 'Compunction of Heart', especially its earlier part, is comparable to St Augustine's 'Confessions'. For the most part 'Compunction of Heart' is a meditation on the life of Jesus and His Blessed Mother. As an integral part of it, Chavara looks into himself with deep sentiments of repentance for the childhood follies on the one hand, and on the other with sincere gratitude for the many blessings of God. And in fact the abiding compunction of heart is characteristic of Chavara's spirituality, which becomes ever deeper as he advances in age, and is consistently expressed in all his writings, including the letters, of the last years. In a letter, written probably in 1869, to the nuns is a beautiful example (see p. 206 above).

Concluding his testament, written in 1870, to the members of his congregation, he says:

...to all the members of the monasteries I beg pardon. I beg of them before God to pardon me all my shortcomings and lapses in the performance of my duties. Again, I pray my brothers religious, pray for me (see the rest on p.210f. above).

This comparative analysis of the spiritual visions of St Teresa and Chavara could be carried on further with reference to the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the meditations on the passion of Christ, the devotion to St Joseph, and the love for the Church.

Chavara Spirituality

The end result of the life experiences of Chavara and the various influences on him was the development of his personal spirituality, a 'Chavara Spirituality'. It is unique and specific to

²³ This is a comment by Sr Leo the translator of *Ātmāmṛtāpam* in the introduction to the English edition (CWC II 1989: xii).

him. It is probably after the episode of Roccas that his vision matured. Most of the spiritual compositions—'Martyrdom of Anastasia' (c. 1862), *Dhyānasallāpangal* or 'Meditation Colloquies' (c. 1866-68), *Ātmānutāpam* or 'Compunction of Heart' (c. 1870-71), *Parvam* or 'Dirge' and many of the letters written during this period (1862-70). An in-depth study of these writings is sure to reveal what we call the specific 'Chavara Spirituality'. That does not mean that various influences are not found in them. Even these influences were magnificently personalized, and received the Chavara touch. Towards the end of his life he lost his eyesight. It was as if he closed his eyes on things of this world in order to contemplate them in union with God. It is to be noted that during the last days he would not like to hear conversation on worldly things (cf. chapter 10).

One of the distinctive marks of Chavara's spirituality is the intense desire to see God, the longing for the *darśan* (vision) of God. Included in *Ātmānutāpam* (III, lines 1ff.) are 168 verses, beautifully describing the incidents of the life of Christ. Every other line ends with the words: "I long to see [Jesus]". For example:

The Lord of mercy, the Son of God,
His glorious splendour, I long to see.

.....
How he stayed for nine months
In the womb of His mother I long to see;
Borne in her womb, to Bethlehem he came
To obey mighty Caesar, I long to see.

.....
How Jesus, Anna's grand son,
Was hunger-smitten, I long to see;
And with the Pharisees discussed law
In his twelfth year, I long to see.

.....
The Good Shepherd, seeking his flock
That had gone astray, I long to see;
The Lord of goodness, proclaiming Himself
As our loving friend, I long to see

(CWC II: 17-20; 17-19).

Another feature of the Chavara spirituality is the familial picture so that in it one feels being in the family of God. Already

from the childhood the picture of the Holy Family had impressed on him. And on the day of his religious profession to his new name he added the phrase "of the Holy Family", so that his full name is Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family. In his advice to the members of the congregation gathered round his death-bed, he said:

My parents always kept me mindful of the Holy Family, which was ever my protection and in my imagination. Mercifully it so protected me that I did not ever lose the baptismal grace. I dedicate you all and this humble congregation to the same Holy Family. Rely on it. Let the Holy Family reign over your hearts (see chapter 13: 17).

It is remarkable that Chavara considered the family as the basic and the most decisive factor of the Church and the society. That is why in his letter to his parishioners at Kainakari, which has come to be known as "Testament of a Loving Father", he focuses the attention exclusively on the rules and principles of an ideal Christian family.

For Chavara the supreme rule of the Christian family is, beyond doubt, mutual love, and the consequent unity of mind and heart. In the introduction to the letter "Testament of a Loving Father" he writes that the family is a *koinonia* formed by blood-relationship and love, where there is love and respect for the parents, and peace between God and man. In this our world, full of sorrows, it is to be an abode of sweet consolation, peace, and order. To live in a family without consideration for God and prayer is miserable. The author refers to the commandment of the Lord, "You love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15: 12), confirming it again with another word of the Lord, that a house divided against itself perishes (Mt 12: 25). Mutual pardon brings peace on earth and eternal blessing in the world to come. The norm of justice in Christian family has to be greater than that of others. Chavara asks very pertinently whether we should add to the sufferings we have already inherited from our great father Adam. In the same strain he writes: 'Tale-bearing is a dangerous business. Taking family disputes to the law courts has never helped anybody' (Kaniarakath 1991: 14f.).

The familial picture of the Chavara spirituality has a much wider dimension in which God is understood as the Father of the family of mankind. As we have already mentioned, to call God "my dear Father" (*appa, ente appa*) was for Chavara the most favourite thing. When he uses the expression 'my Father' to address the Divinity, it does not necessarily mean that he is calling upon God the Father, the first person of the Holy Trinity. Even the second person, Jesus Christ, is addressed as 'my Father' as is abundantly clear from his 'Colloquies'. This is a point of which we already made a mention. Let us quote one more passage to illustrate how Chavara addresses Jesus Christ as 'my Father'.

Here I come before You, oh my heavenly Father ... Seated on your throne of mercy in the chapel... O merciful Father!... looking at Your holy head I feel frightened to think how it came to be pierced with thorns... I am ashamed of myself by reason of the part I played in disfiguring Your face... Alas! I myself disfigured my Father's face, the beauty of which David the prophet sang plentifully... Look at His mangled body and His head crowned with crown of thorns!...(CWC III: 18ff; 9ff.).

Chavara's love for the paternal figure is displayed, when in the context of the Holy Family he addresses its head St Joseph as 'my father'. His devotion to St Joseph, which must have been one of the Teresian influences on him, especially as the patron of the dying, was unusual. He prays:

O St Joseph ! My dear father, your paternity fostered young Jesus ... St Joseph, dear father, you abided by the honour and sanctity of Holy Mother ... Oh most kind father, I know the dangers involved in the feeling of self-assurance... O! my gracious father... I am given to shivers to think of judgement ...(ibid.: 31; 13).

In the spiritual family of Chavara, the mother's place was taken first of all by Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom his earthly mother had dedicated him, praying: "I offer this fruit of my impure womb at your feet; accept him and protect him as your servant". The priest then had said to her: "Bring up this child as a servant of this Mother; in fact he is not your son but hers!"(see chapter 1: 11f.) True to this dedication to the Mother of God, Chavara developed tender devotion to her, about which Fr Leopold says:

His devotion to Blessed Virgin Mother was characterised 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 into his mind, he would recall the kindness and mercy of Blessed Virgin, whom he used to call his 'Mother' to overcome the terrible fears and temptations associated with that fateful moment (Beccaro 2003: 13f.).

As his mother died, Chavara prayed to Blessed Virgin Mary: "Therefore O! my Lady, my Mother, now who is there to favour me except you? Certainly I have been your servant ... It is my great blessing that you are my Mother and I am your servant" (cf. ch. 1: 11f.).

Among the other mother figures in Chavara's spirituality are St Teresa of Avila, the Holy Catholic Church, and his own religious congregation. Calling upon St Teresa, who was also his guide for prayer, he says:

O! mother, affectionate and generous, you being a well accomplished mistress in the mysteries of meditation, I again seek your loving intercession in obtaining for me from Jesus the great gift of love... Now that you are in union with Jesus, the Bridegroom in heavenly bed-chamber, your favours with him must be greater now than when you were on earth... O! mother dear, teach me to pray!... I must come to my Saviour Jesus Christ, your beloved Bridegroom, to beg pardon for my sins. Mother dear, in your mercy do go before me into the bed-chamber of your beloved heavenly Spouse ... (CWC III: 15; 2f.).

His devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and to her visible head the Holy Father, too, was unparalleled, to which Fr Leopold testifies as follows:

Among his virtues the most outstanding was his ardent faith and devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and to the Holy Father. He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Catholic Church in all directions; he was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard the trials and persecution of the Church and eagerly longed to see the days of her triumph. Whenever he happened to hear the news of

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 (Beccaro 2003: 12f.).

Chavara's love for the religious congregation was expressed by his commitment to her ideals and discipline, and to his own duties as a member and superior of the community:

From the very beginning till the very end Fr Chavara subjected himself to the order with the interest and enthusiasm of a novice. He regarded the order in such an esteem as though it was his own mother. It was to him the paradise on earth, and he encouraged his disciples to hold it in similar high esteem. He would never willingly absolve any one including himself of the responsibility of conforming to the order. Travel, old age, weakness and even infirmity hardly succeeded in making him relax much. He would relax when absolutely necessary, but only after taking permission from the spiritual director. He was ever anxious to have his meals with the community, frugal and austere as they were. Even while sick and laid up, he tried to manage with just the common meals (Valerian 1953: 51).

In his spiritual family Chavara posed as a prodigal son, come back home, full of repentance and ready to do penance for the mistakes. He prays:

Here I come to you, O! my heavenly Father, with a heart full of repentance and firm purpose of amendment to feel your peace in my heart...O! it is a long time since I saw my heavenly Father's face! Like the prodigal son I have squandered all the nice things you benignly bestowed on me. Now I am a servant to a bad master, feeding his swine. I have grown so famished that I would like to feed on the pods the swine feed on. I have spoilt all the fine clothes my Father gave me to put on, and am now dressed in rags. Still I must be going now in this attire. For further delay is suicidal. So here I am on my feet to make a move to my Father's house with my country cap and walking stick.

O my soul! See the numerous hired servants in your Father's place, living to their hearts content. Seeing them why should you be troubled in heart? Your Father is so bounteous as to forgive and forget every ingratitude of yours. You are sure to be reinstated to your former filial status and privileges...O my Father, I have sinned against heaven and before You. I am no longer worthy to be called Your son...Count me as one of your servants...Therefore, my Father, source of all grace, forgive me all my trespasses due to my selfishness and ingratitude (CWC III: 16f.; 3f.).

The rest of the humanity is then viewed as consisting of his sisters and brothers, which explains his concern for others, especially the weaker and less fortunate members of the human family. At the same time, to some members of this family he feels a deeper intimacy for the simple reason that they, too, had experiences similar to his. For example, considering himself a repentant prodigal son, he feels a close affinity with the great penitents like Mary Magdalene and Mary Cortona, "who have always been helpful to me in evoking repentance for my sins" (ibid.: 16; 3). He also had strong paternal feelings towards those whom he considered and loved as his spiritual children. They include, for instance, the members of his own congregation, the sisters of the convent he founded, and his parishioners. In his letters he addresses all of them as "my dear children". His testament to the members of the congregation, written in August 1870, as he was preparing for death, reads:

Dear children, by the special grace of God we are called to be members of the congregation...My dear children, we, you and I, have not yet become genuine religious... (CKC IV: 99; 70).

To the sisters he writes: "Ah! my dear children, these days you must meditate on the love of Jesus Christ..." (ibid. 113; 82). Again, "my dear children, is there anyone in the world more fortunate than you?" (ibid. 115; 83). Still again, "my dear little children see with what care and diligence our Lord looks after us!" (ibid.: 118; 85, 86). Regarding his love for the sisters of the convent at Koonammavu, Fr Kuriakose Porukara writes:

Just as Jacob loved his youngest son Benjamin more than others, so he [Chavara] loved them [the sisters] more than

others, and looked after them as tenderly as a hen takes care of the chicks (Porukara 1905: 35).

In the 'Testament of Loving a Father' he wrote: "Accept this as a piece of advice coming from one of your ancestors, keep it sacred, practise it faithfully, and make others, too, practise the same (CWC IV: 152; 103). In another letter dated December 1869 he wrote: "Beloved children, in the order of flesh I am the son of Kuriakose Chavara of the parish of Chennankari ... Since I was born in your family, I have a special obligation to do some good to you in justice... So I entrust this [letter] to you, my children of the parish of Kainakari chapel, to be preserved as a treasure" (ibid.: 152; 116).

Chavara's family feelings were extended in a very special way to the dying and those in the state of purgatory. A sure proof of this is his famous letter of 1869 (see chapter 4), mentioned above, in which he advises them to start a confraternity for happy death as a first step for the establishment of a house of charity, in which the poor and the destitute could be taken care of in their material and spiritual needs. In this letter he describes in detail his understanding of Christian death, the need to prepare for a happy death, how to help others in their old age, sickness and death-bed, and advises to pray for the departed souls as well as to be devoted to them. It may be added that prayer to those in purgatory was very much part of Chavara's spirituality. Along with that he himself lived continuously keeping in mind his own death, and this was particularly so during the last few years of his life. In 'Colloquies' death is a theme to which he makes frequent references. The awareness of approaching death was expressed from time to time in his letters, too. In the joint circular dated July 1869 he wrote:

Beloved brethren and dear ones, you are aware of the fact that we who write this letter are both advanced in age and are fast failing in health, and are preparing to present ourselves before the just throne of God...if this letter happens to be the last one of the kind from us, we pray, accept it as our paternal death-bed declaration (CWC IV: 89; 61).

Among the authors of this letter, Fr Leopold was obviously a young man and healthy, and, therefore, the phrases like "failing in health", refer to Chavara's own awareness of death. In another letter to the nuns, written almost the same time, too, he makes a

reference to the approaching death: "I am afraid, my days are coming to an end".

The last, but not the least in anyway, of the constituents of the Chavara spirituality is the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. He is rightly called an apostle of the Holy Eucharist. The liturgical reforms, which he painstakingly effected, included the introduction of the liturgy of the Holy Saturday, the Order of the Holy Mass, the 40 hour adoration, and the renewal of the priests especially through the seminaries attached to the monasteries. Fr Valerian writes:

This invaluable devotion [to the Blessed Sacrament] began to make its appearance from his [Chavara's] childhood itself. He was vigilant to go to communion as much as it was allowed...During the seminary life this devotion grew to such an extent as to cause wonder in his fellow seminarians. There he was an apostle of this devotion (Valerian 1939: 263f.).

Fr Leopold's testimony is unambiguous:

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 (Beccaro 2003: 13).

In fact the Holy Eucharist was the centre of his spirituality and prayer. To use his own terminology, he preferred to remain locked up in the tabernacle with Jesus. He wrote to the nuns: "I lock up your hearts in the tabernacle of Jesus. For your sake, I have locked up my heart, too, there. Stay there until the day of resurrection" (CWC IV: 117; 85).

Let us conclude this study in the words of Fr Marceline OCD, who received Chavara's religious profession of vows in 1855. In the year 1872, he published 'A History of the Church in Kerala', in which he writes:

When the religious house at Mannanam was canonically erected, it was...Fr Kuriakose Elias who was found worthy to be appointed Prior of the monastery. Even if he was the only flower that blossomed at Mannanam, yet the labours of

Fr Thomas Palackal and Fr Thomas Porukara must be considered to have been amply fruitful... (*Positio*: 576).

It was quite fitting that Fr Mathai Mariam Kappil of Thathampilly opened his funeral sermon on this great leader, prophet and mystic that Kuriakose Chavara was: "Today the flag of Kerala has fallen down". We may conclude this biography, a humble homage to this illustrious father, with the very insightful observation with which Fr Kuriakose Porukara, Chavara's successor and the second prior general of the congregation, introduces his short but very beautiful biography of the Blessed:

On 3 January 1871 at 7.30 a.m. passed away our Father Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family the founder and the first prior of the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites, newly established in Kerala, the malpan and vicar general of the St Thomas Christians. This father of ours was a spiritual sun. He passed away like the sun rising in the east, making its day long procession over the horizon, and setting in the west, removing in its course the darkness over the world and illumining it with golden rays, enabling in the process the earth to yield rare metals like gold, silver, etc.; the mountains, precious stones like diamond, rubies etc.; the sea, pearls, gems, etc.; bestowing on all living beings growth and advancement (cf. Porukara 1905: 29).

Bibliography

Note:

¹ It was in 1959 the Syro-Malabar Carmelites assumed the name 'Carmelites of Mary Immaculate' (CMI). Before that they were known as 'Third Order of Discalced Carmelites' (TOCD). Irrespective of this all the writers belonging to this Congregation are qualified CMI in this bibliography.

* Titles marked with an asterisk have the nature of original sources.

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