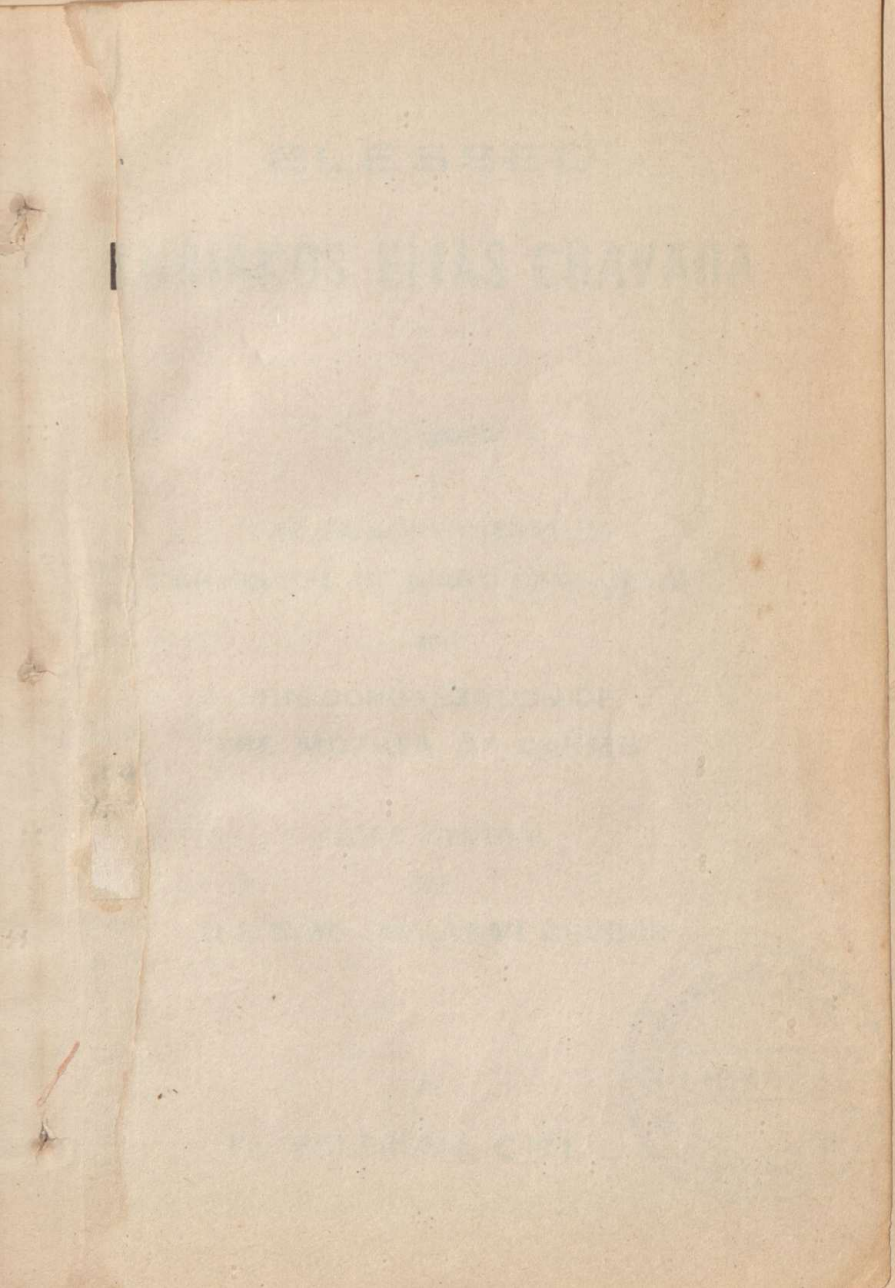


WORKS  
100  
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RAM COLLEGE

BLESSED

MARIAKOS ELIAS CHAVARA









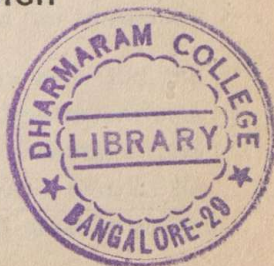
**BLESSED**  
**KURIAKOS ELIAS CHAVARA**

FOUNDER  
of  
THE CONGREGATION OF  
CARMELITES OF MARY IMMACULATE

and  
THE CONGREGATION OF  
THE MOTHER OF CARMEL

VICAR GENERAL  
for  
THE SYRO - MALABAR CHURCH

by  
**Fr. VALERIAN, CMI**



Ac. No. 75110

Call No. K91.1/V236

BLESSED

KUBIAKOS ELIAS CHAVARA

FOUNDER

OF

THE CONGREGATION OF

CARMELITES OF MARY IMMACULATE

AND

THE CONGREGATION OF

THE MOTHER OF CARMEL

VICAR GENERAL

OF

THE SYRO-MALABAR CHURCH

## **FOREWORD TO THE NEW EDITION**

Men come and go. Time passes by. But great men never die. They live through their message. Not all great men are holy. But all holy persons are great. Greatest greatness is sanctity.

Greatness of Fr. Kuriakos Elias consists, not as such, in his wisdom and knowledge - his poems and writings. It does not consist in the many reforms he effected in his contemporary society. Nor should one find his greatness in the founding of the two first indigenous religious institutes. Nor in his ventures in the media of communication and educational enterprises. Not even in his philanthropy or sympathy for the poor and the miserable.

His greatness consisted in his union with God, the Supreme Love. This union made him see the universe - the nature, the rivers and flowers, mountains and valleys, men and the world, as God's own. And, so, he loved them. That was his greatness, the greatest greatness or sanctity.



I am happy to present to the public this new edition,  
on the occasion of the Beatification of the Ven. Servant  
of God Kuriakos Elias Chavara.

Ernakulam,  
3-1-1986.

**Fr. Joseph Pastor Neelankavil CMI**  
**CONVENER**  
*Steering Committee*



## FOREWORD

Fr. Kuriakos Elias Chavara, the subject of this biography was a holy man, and like all holy men he was a dynamic personality. From his very early childhood he seemed to have been marked out by Providence in a special way to perform great things and his life bears out unmistakably that it was not a vain expectation.

The beautiful thing about this holy man was that in him the colossal St. Benedict and the swift and agile St. Bernard blended in a fine harmony. While all his life was a song of love and union with God, he never forgot to sing about the common man and toil day and night for his needs. There was nothing vague about his love of his neighbour, it was definite and as clear as his love of God. He was never a moody mystic lost in the hazy clouds of day-dream, but had his feet firmly on the ground. Never a visionary he had yet vision enough to see far ahead of his times. Many of his dreams have found their fulfilment today. Many await their fulfilment and it is up to his spiritual children, to see that the dreams of their holy founder realized.

He was a great soul because he had the imagination and sensitiveness of the artist about him. The 'broken arcs' were not for him the perfect round; the highest and the best was ever his ideal. That is the grand legacy he has left for his children. May they catch up the spirit and carry on the message of their holy founder, is our earnest and heartfelt wish and prayer.

A cursory glance at the labours of Fr. Kuriakos Elias in the various fields of activity, ecclesiastical, social, and literary reveals the gigantic figure that he was. Great men do not pass away to the beyond without making their marks for the guidance and inspiration for future generations. Fr. Kuriakos has left enough marks on the church and society in Malabar which we can be proud of.

We should be thankful to Fr. Valerian C. M. I. for this inspiring biography.

"Lives of great men all remind us

We can make our lives sublime"

Changanacherry

26-10-1953

**Mathew Kavukatt**

*Bishop of Changanacherry*

## INTRODUCTION

The Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (C. M. I.) is the first Indian indigenous religious Congregation. It sprouted in Kerala the South Western most coastal state of India, which is the home of the Marthoma Christians who have their Christian heritage from St. Thomas the Apostle, who landed in Cranganore in 52 A. D. then a great centre of Hindu culture and abode of Malayali Brahmins.

Fr. Thomas Palakal, Rector of the Seminary at Pallipuram, his adviser and trusted friend Fr. Thomas Porukara, also Secretary to Maurelius Stabilini the Bishop of Verapoly and Fr. Kuriakos Chavara the brilliant student of Fr. Palackal were three outstanding priests of the time well known and accepted by all for their erudition, piety and leadership. They founded the first monastery of the C. M. I.s at Mannanam on May 11, 1831 dedicating themselves to prayer and the service of the people.

Today the C. M. I. congregation has on its rolls 1805 priests and seminarians. It is constituted of nine provinces with 160 houses. From Kerala it has spread all over India and even abroad to Italy, Germany, United States, Canada, South America and Africa.

8



Fr. Kuriakos Chavara, one of the founding fathers and first superior general of the congregation died on January 3rd 1871 leaving behind him the high reputation of a holy monk. He has already been declared venerable and his beatification is to take place at Kottayam on 8th February 1986, during the visit of Pope John Paul II.

While presenting the public, this re-edited short history I must express my indebtedness to many for their encouragement and assistance, to mention a few of them; late Mar Augustine Kandathil, Mar James Kalacherry, Fr. Aurelian OCD, and Fr. Zacharias OCD and many others in my congregation.

My personal devotion and trust in the holiness and intercessary power of Ven. Kuriakos Elias Chavara goes back to the early days of my religious life, when I obtained extra-ordinary grace of cure of my heart disease. The simple prayer then compiled by my companions in the novitiate gave also Ven. Sr. Alphonsa who prayed to him, a cure, of which she gave her written testimony to Fr. Aloysius, CMI.

Despite discouragements from certain corners I continued writing and publishing short lives of the Venerable and praying. Many joined suit in this who all rejoice today along the faithful and clergy of India. I must humbly confess that it is a happy coincidence that this happy event—Beatification—takes place when I am in the 50th year of my priestly ministration.

Palai

3-1-1986

— Fr. Valerian Plathottam, CMI



**Joseph Cardinal Parecattil**  
*Archbishop of Ernakulam*

Archbishop's House  
Cochin-682 011  
Kerala State, India

No. R2 / Misc. 759 / 74

December 31, 1974

Dear Father Valerian,

I am happy to learn that your book "The Servant of God Fr. Kuriakos Elias Chavara" is being reprinted with fresh additions. I am sure this inspiring biography of the venerable founder of the Syrian Carmelite Congregation will be a beacon light to generations to come, leading them to a life of sanctity and perfection. Let everyone imbibe his spirit and zeal and become a real witness to Christ in today's world.

Invoking God's blessing upon you and the readers of the book,

Yours sincerely in Our Lord

(Sd.)

Archbishop of Ernakulam

Rev. J. C. ...  
...

...

...

...

I am happy to learn that your book, "The Christian's  
God-Fatherhood" (New York: ...), is doing splendidly.  
In addition, I am sure this book will be of great  
value to the reader of the "Christian's God-Fatherhood".  
I am sure it will be a book that will be of great  
value to the reader of the "Christian's God-Fatherhood".  
I am sure it will be a book that will be of great  
value to the reader of the "Christian's God-Fatherhood".

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## FR. KURIAKOS ELIAS CHAVARA

Few places in Asia could rival Kerala in its ancient traditions, scenic beauty and natural resources. Centuries before Christ, the Aryans migrated into this land and established themselves in various centres extending from Cape Comorin to the extreme North. Under their influence, Kerala developed new trade and cultural relationships with the rest of the world. Celebrated ports like Cranganore facilitated negotiations with foreign traders and attracted foreign missionaries in later years.

As early as 52 A. D. St. Thomas the apostle arrived in Cranganore, in fulfilment of the mandate his Lord and Master had laid on him. "Go out all over the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." By his exemplary living, repeated exhortations and by performing miracles he succeeded in drawing a large community into the fold of his Master. He also ordained priests and bishops to perpetuate the structural integrity of Christ's kingdom that he extended to this land. The ruins of seven ancient Churches in Kerala still bear testimony to the antiquity of the Church here.

A reinforcement of Syrian christians under the leadership of the "Armenian" trader Thomas of Cana colonised Kerala in or about 345 A. D. They attracted the attention of the then ruling dynasties and secured from them many royal prerogatives and privileges. Several ancient European missionaries, traders, and visitors have described the flourishing community of St. Thomas Christians they met in Malabar-Kerala.



Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the solidarity of the christian community here suffered severe set-backs. The advent of Latin missionaries and their failure to appreciate the oriental rites led to considerable disturbances in the ecclesiastical administration and to several schisms one after the other. The internal dissensions rose to a very high pitch under their rule till in the 19th century Archbishop Bernardine of Verapoly himself admitted it and passed orders commissioning Fr. Kuriakos Elias Chavara as Vicar General. To Fr. Chavara was thus given the opportunity and the privilege of infusing new life and vigour into the decadent community of Syrian Catholics in Kerala.

### KURIAKOS CHAVARA

Fr. Kuriakos was born on 10th of February, 1805, the youngest son of Kuriakos and Mary Chavara. The Chavara family could trace its ancestry to the celebrated line of Pakalomattom, in Palayoor one of the foremost christian families of Kerala that received the faith and priesthood from the Apostle himself.

He was born at Kainakary, a tiny village in Kuttanad, near Alleppey. The quiet village lies to the east of Alleppey and can be reached by motor-boat in about thirty minutes. There are no roads leading to the place even today and can be reached only by boats. The whole of Kuttanad is interspersed with numerous island formations like Kainakary and they are connected by the canals and small lakes. The backwaters of Kerala form one of the most attractive features of the lovely landscape.



Chavara, descending from the Pakalomattom family from Palayoor could claim as its members many noble sons who shaped the fortunes of the Syrian Church in Kerala. Mar Alexander, several archdeacons who ruled over the church in Kerala, Bishop Mar Louis Pazheparampil, Bishop Mar Thomas Kurialacherry, all descended from this line. The late bishop of Changanacherry, Mar James Kafacherry was also related to the Chavara family. It was perhaps providential that Fr. Kuriakos the co-founder of the Carmelite Congregation was a scion of the Pakalomattom family.

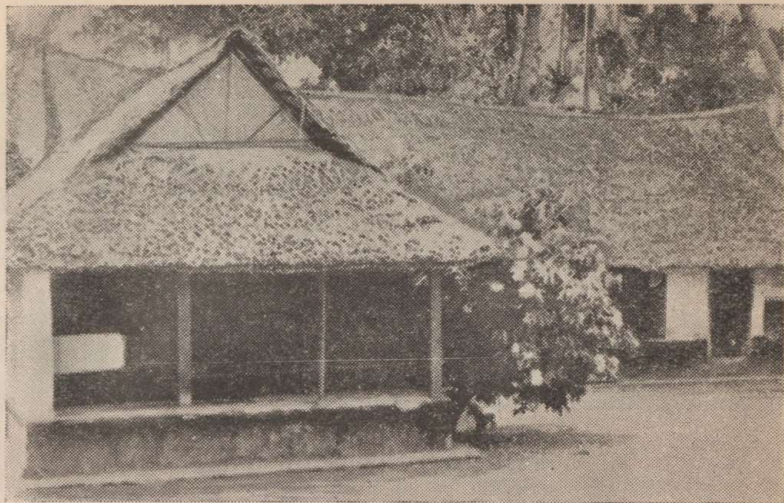
The educational facilities in Kerala were far different in 1805 from what they are today. There were no proper schools at all and the young students had to go to the local guru (the asān as he was called) at whose feet they learnt the rudiments of the mother-tongue and mathematics. The asan held his classes in a low thatched shed and children of various ages and intellectual standards sat on the floor, loudly repeating whatever the asan said. Often it rose to the level of a chant but every student participated in it eagerly, and in the process, the basic principles were learnt by heart. Young Kuriakos spent about five years in this local school and picked up sufficient knowledge of Malayalam and Tamil.

From his young days he showed great concern in perfecting his character and developing those virtues which marked him out for recognition in his later career. Most of this training was imparted to him by his own mother. She was a pious and deeply religious woman, who by her many acts of devotion impressed on her son the significance of such things. Even as she fed him she recited to him various prayers which she made him commit to memory. Later in life, he recalled memories of his

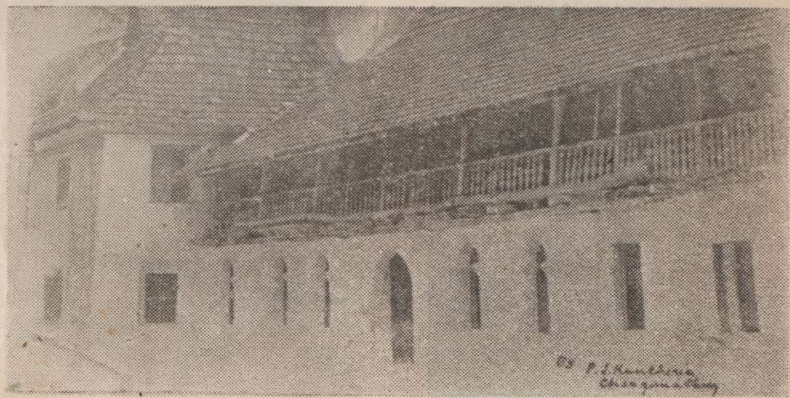
mother getting up regularly at night to say the rosary. Spurred on by her example, he developed a keen desire to devote himself completely to the service of God. The stirrings were manifested by the enthusiasm he displayed in studying the prayers in Syriac to enable him to assist at the Holy mass. It was only natural that the zealous acolyte aspired to priesthood. The encouragement of Fr. Thomas Palakal, malpan in the Pallippuram seminary was very timely and in 1818, Kuriakos was formally admitted to the seminary to undergo the training necessary for ordination.

Fr. Kuriakos Eliseus of Porookara speaks about this period: "His life in the seminary was very exemplary, is admitted by all his colleagues. His devotion, meekness, obedience and charity were all outstandingly impressive. The seminary was a new one and the discipline enforced was particularly strict. Yet throughout the rather long period of his training, there was no instance of his having been reproved for even the slightest offence. On the contrary by virtue of his character, zeal and talents, he acquired great proficiency in Syriac and other languages. Also because of the great regard and esteem in which he was held by the Malpan, he was sent to other places to gain more knowledge in Portuguese and Latin." Fr. Leopold, the celebrated foreign missionary gives corroborating testimony: "As would be endorsed by many of his colleagues still alive, Fr. Kuriakos was particularly interested in the service of God. Without any consideration for worldly achievements, he zealously attended to his study. He was quite orderly and God-fearing. He was always pleased with and charitably disposed to his fellow students. He deprecated the ill-temper and impatience that often characterized youngsters."

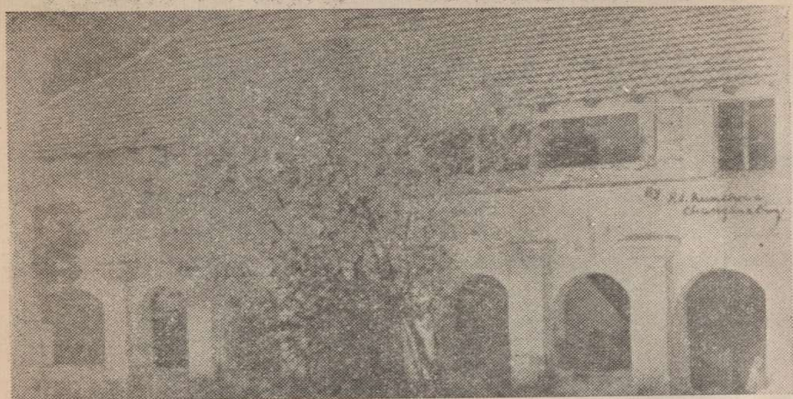




The house of Fr. Chavara



Seminary at Pallippuram



Presbytery, Thanky Church



Malpan Thomas Porookkara



Malpan Thomas Palackal



Several of his classmates have remarked that Fr. Kuriakos was the foremost in study and in the practice of devotions. How admirably holy and dignified his life was can easily be summarised from the fact that his superiors had occasion only to commend his activities in a community built up of members of different temperaments and dispositions. After a period of training and study extending over eleven years, in 1829, he was ordained priest by Monsignor Stabilini, *interim* vicar apostolic of Verapoly. He was only 24 years of age. He celebrated his first Mass on the 26th of November, 1829, in his parish church at Chennankary.

He stayed at Chennankary and Pulincunnu for some time after his first Mass. Not long after he returned to Pallipuram and helped Fr. Thomas Palakal in the conduct of the seminary affairs. His zeal to work for the salvation of souls received a great impetus at this time. One of his great aspirations was to work for souls. Even in the ordination service, while he was co-celebrant with the bishop, he had prayed for the blessings of founding a religious congregation in this country to work for the salvation of souls at large and for the spiritual perfection of its own members. Providence had also willed it, that the outstanding aspiration of this new priest at the altar, was realised.

In those days, Sunday sermons were not common. Fr. Kuriakos set about to reforming this state of affairs. He went about from church to church preaching sermons. The memory of the preaching he successfully conducted at Pulincunnu is cherished even to this day. But this did not satisfy him. He worked out for himself a new line of activities for the spiritual regeneration of Malabar. He

also had the benefit of the co-operation and guidance of two other celebrated leaders, Fr. Thomas Porookara and Fr. Thomas Palakkal. The former enjoyed great popular recognition as a holy and virtuous priest, bent upon receding as much from the world as the world chose to honour him and extol his worth. The latter, his Malpan, was at this time leading a life of asceticism and renunciation in the seminary at Pallipuram. They were on terms of great intimacy and mutual regard. These were the leaders with whom Fr. Kuriakos was privileged to work. The similarity of ideologies that inspired all of them was greatly responsible for the success of the organisation which was reserved for Fr. Kuriakos to found officially, in its present form.

## FORMATION OF THE CONGREGATION

In the history of the Syrian Carmelite Congregation - Congregation of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate - the three outstanding names are those of Rev. Fr. Thomas Palakkal, Rev. Fr. Thomas Porookara and Rev. Fr. Kuriakos Elias Chavara. The First conceived the idea of starting a religious society of some kind in Kerala. Fr. Porookara entertained the idea of running away from the world to the wilderness like the ascetics of old; but Fr. Chavara was not in favour of that, even though he liked the idea of a religious society. Hence they decided to place the matter before Father Thomas Palakkal whom the two held in high esteem and deep respect. Fr. Palakkal gladly accepted and heartily approved their idea of founding a religious society of some kind. The next day he, along with Fr. Porookara met the bishop Mgr. Maurelius Stablini, a Calced Carmelite (OCD), seeking help and guidance in the matter.



The bishop knew them pretty well; Father Thomas Palakkal was the chief of the diocesan consultors and Father Porookara was his Secretary. They were the most learned and holy priests of the day. Naturally enough the bishop was rather reluctant to part with their services, both to himself and to the diocese. He gave them a patient hearing and approved of their idea. He convinced them that the need of the hour was a service-oriented religious society, independent and indigenous, living among and for the people. He strongly discouraged the idea of a flight from the world.

The priests were convinced of the need of such a religious society and agreed to the bishop's proposal. The bishop asked them to draw up a petition rather an episcopal circular delineating therein the nature and scope of the religious community they had envisaged and exhorting the faithful to reach out financial aid for the same. They drew up the circular and submitted it to the bishop in no time. The bishop sealed it with his hearty approbation and himself headed the list of Contributors.

Soon after getting the episcopal approbation, Fr. Porookara began his fund-raising tours of the country. Within a short time the required amount was raised and then the search was for an ideal spot to build their temporary monastery whence to start their activities. Fr. Porookara and Fr. Chavara felt that the hillock at Mannanam was the most suited place. The choice was applauded by their colleagues and arrangements were made for the construction of the temporary shed and for the laying of the foundation stone of the first house of the first independent and indigenous religious society in modern India.



The foundation stone was laid on may 11, 1831 by Fr. Thomas Porookara in the presence of Mgr. Stabilini, Fr. Thomas Palackal, Fr. Chavara, over fifty priests and hundreds of laymen.

Mgr. Stabilini sent the community his episcopal approbation on Dec, 8, 1831. Along with this he sent them a code of conduct consisting of ten articles. The members of the community began their life according to these rules.

Ten years later in 1841, Fr. Thomas palackal was called away to his eternal abode. Five years later Fr. Porookara also died. Thus it fell to the lot of Fr. Chavara the task of completing the work they had begun together. It was indeed a herculean task. But relying on divine providence he devoted himself completely to it.

In the wake of the arrival of the Portuguese traders, there came to Kerala, several religious orders such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites. The founding fathers became familiar with some of these. They found out that these religious orders had been approved by the Holy See either as pontifical or exempt. Naturally Father Chavara desired to obtain for his congregation such an approbation from Rome. With this purpose he met the successors of Msgr. Stabilini one after the other. They were Msgr. Francis Xavier, Msgr. Ludovic and Msgr. Bernardine. The first two were favourably inclined and they promised all help. But they could not realise the desideratum. One died in 1844 and the other was called back to Rome in 1853.

Fr. Chavara now approached Msgr. Bernardine who was not very favourable in his attitude. He put Fr. Chavara and the community to several severe tests to check their constancy. They stood them all with the utmost submissiveness and patience. But even after that instead of obtaining the approbation of the Holy see he sent them the "Regulae and Constitutions" of the first Order of Carmel with instructions to note down the changes desired and to return it.

The small community at Mannanam consisted of about thirty members, including priests, clerics in minor orders and aspirants. Fr. Chavara in consultation with the others noted down certain changes in the constitution keeping in mind the conditions of the torried zone, the demands of the church and the period in which they were living and returned it to the bishop. But utterly regardless of their suggestions Msgr. Bernardine sent back the constitutions of the First order with such changes as he deemed fit. This plunged the whole community into despair. The strict law of enclosure, too many fasts, too many community exercises etc. were all such as to defeat the very purpose for which they had formed into a religious community. Fr. Chavara wrote to the bishop that the constitution was too exacting and would defeat the purpose for which the community was formed. But the bishop was inexorable. He persisted in his stand that they should accept them and that those unwilling must quit. He sent Fr. Marcel O. C. D. a missionary to preach the retreat preparatory to the profession of vows. The constitution was to come into force from the commencement of the retreat.



Fr. Chavara found it very hard to part with some of those who had first come to join the community. All these years they had lived together, dined together, prayed and worked together for the greater glory of God. Fr. Chavara persuaded his confreres to go into the retreat and to make their final decision after that. Just before Holy Mass on December 8, 1855 Fr. Chavara read aloud before Fr. Marcel O. C. D., the words of profession of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Then in the capacity of the supreme head of the community Father Chavara received the vows of the other ten that remained. Till his death in 1871, Fr. Chavara remained the prior general of the new religious community. Besides the mother house at Mannanam he also founded the houses at Coonammavu, Elthuruthu, Vazhakulam, Pulincunnu, Ambazhakad and Mutholy.

## SEMINARIES

The Missionaries who came to India set up seminaries in places like Cranganore, Vaipicot, Sampalloor, Angamali, Alangad, Kaduthuruthy and Verapoly. Many of these disappeared in course of time and only the one at Verapoly continued to function during the 19th century.

At the time the religious house was founded at Mannanam there was a crying need for a major theological seminary and such a one was started at Mannanam in 1833. The archbishop Msgr. Francis Xavier encouraged it in every way. Soon after the death of Fr. Palackal he promoted Fr. Chavara as the Malpan. The order issued by the Arch bishop is still preserved at Mannanam. It reads as follows;



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

I authorise you hereby not only to permit the ordination of those whom you have examined and found qualified but also to allow the priests to preach sermons and hear confessions. I do hereby command all those on whom this decree is binding to recognize and obey you as the qualified Examiner and Malpan..."

After the death of Fr. Porookara, Fr. Chavara was solely in charge of the affairs of the seminary. He found that the building at Mannanam was not sufficient to serve the needs of a growing community. He planned to start a seminary on a grand scale. He drew up a scheme for the purpose and made an appeal seeking the co-operation of all the parishes in the diocese. He suggested setting up two establishments in a place chosen by the bishop. In one the boys were to be taught Tamil, English, Latin and Syriac. The second was for those who completed this course and wanted to pursue theological studies. All this meant a lot of money and he made an appeal to the people to contribute generously to the noble cause.

There was considerable delay in executing a suggestion such as this. So under instructions from the Archbishop two seminaries were opened: one at Vazhakulam and the other at Elthuruthu. A bigger seminary was started at Verapoly in 1863 and it absorbed all others. In 1887, the Carmelite Congregation was taken under the direct control of the Holy See and was relieved from

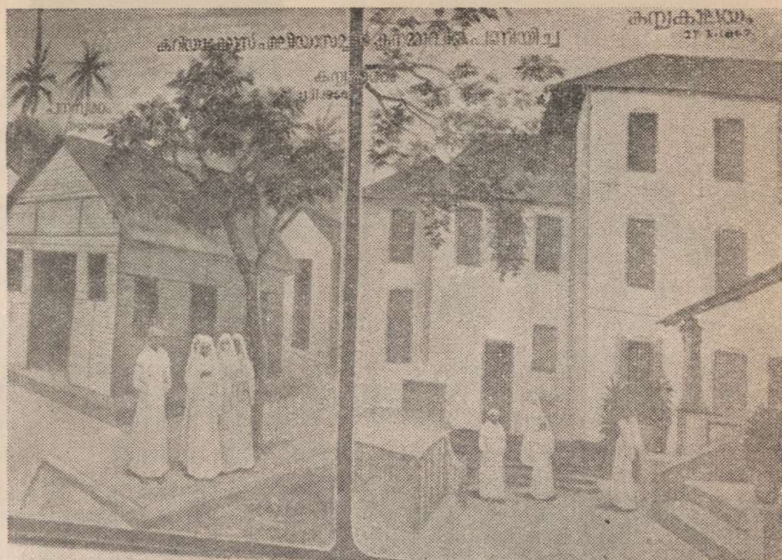
Verapoly. The Verapoly seminary was later transferred to Puthenpally. In all these places, Fr. Chavara wielded great influence on the young aspirants. The service rendered by the Carmelite seminaries has been gratefully appreciated and remembered to this day.

### PRESS APOSTOLATE

Ever since he set foot at Mannanam Fr. Chavara dreamt of a printing and publishing institute. But the financial implications were far too much for his resources and he could not do anything for long. At that time there were only two printing concerns in Travancore, the Government Press at Trivandrum and the CMS Press at Kottayam. Fr. Kuriakos thought of fabricating a wooden press to start with. He went to see the working of the press at Kottayam. But he was not allowed even to see it. So he went to Trivandrum and saw how printing was done at the government press. He went back and made model of the press and got a working press made by local carpenters. That is the first press which set the present St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam, working.

At that time it was necessary to get permission from the Government to publish books. He secured this with the influence of the Resident, General Cullen. With great difficulty he managed to publish "Ganapiyoosham" (Spiritual Nectar) - the first book in Malayalam from Mannanam. Printing was very expensive and most of the time he was in terrible difficulties. One day when he was almost driven to despair, a stranger approached him and offered him 500 Chakrams (Rs. 17½) and promised him





Bamboo Convent

First convent of CMC's

Coonammavu



Sr. Elisua Vakayil  
First Superior General



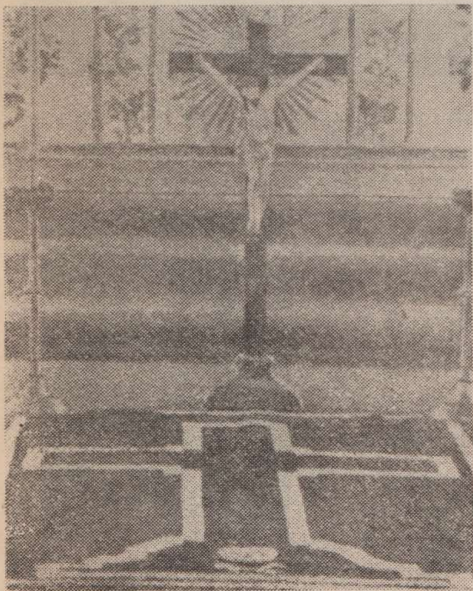
Sr. Anna Vakayil

First members of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel

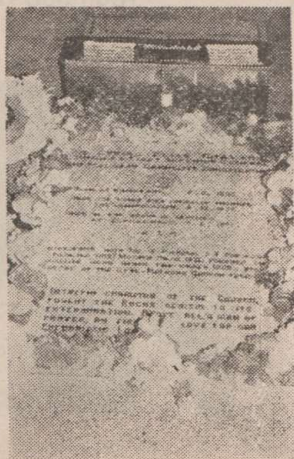




Sr. Clara Puthanangady      Sr. Theresia Vaippissery  
First members of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel



Tomb, St. Philomina's Monastery



Tomb, Mannanam

more, if he wanted. It was thought to be a positive gift inspired by St. Joseph the patron of this press and monastery.

St. Joseph's press Mannanam was the first to publish prayer books in Malayalam. At that time prayer books in Tamil only were common. The first wooden press built by Fr. Kuriakos is preserved to this day, as a precious relic attributed to his skill, foresight, perseverance and patience. St. Joseph's Press, over a century old, rises today as a glorious monument to its indefatigable founder and a beacon - light to the whole of Kerala. Perhaps there is no christian house in kerala where atleast one book printed at the St. Joseph's press cannot be found. The Malayalam translation of the Holy Bible, the innumerable prayer books, 'Flower of Carmel', a monthly and the daily 'Deepika', now published from a branch house at Kottayam, were all perhaps in the dreams of the saintly founder. Fr. Kuriakos will certainly be remembered as a pioneer in the field of printing and publishing which was to have far reaching effects on the religious and social life of Kerala.

### HIS SCHOLARSHIP

Fr. Chavara was reputed as a deep scholar, a versatile literary genius and a charming speaker. He knew Tamil, Sanskrit, Syriac, Portuguese, Latin and Italian, besides being well versed in Malayalam with its many local variations.

Fr. Palackal had noticed the literary talents of Kuriakos when a boy and sent him to Verapoly to gain further proficiency in Latin. But owing to some unexpected



circumstances, he had to return from there. He then went to Thanki and there he learned Latin at the hands of the missionary priest, Fr. Main. A teacher was brought down from Trichur to instruct him in Sanskrit. The mastery he had over the language is well reflected in the many poems and other writings he has left to posterity. He is one among the most talented catholic writers since the days of Fr. Governador Paremmakkal. A hundred years ago, there were very few authors who could claim anything like the achievement of Fr. Chavara in this line. His work "Nalagamam" written in two volumes, spread out over the period, 1829 to 1870, is a true historical picture of the church in Malabar. His history of the Rocos Schism is also a valuable authoritative document. The poem "Athmanuthapam" is mostly autobiographical. The "Lamentations of the Repentant Soul", "Parting Advice of a Dying Parent", and some other minor works are the most devotional among his writings. All his writings are compiled today into four volumes.

Fr. Chavara was not among those who had the benefit of higher university education. Even in the seminaries there were not such advanced courses of instruction in Theology and Morals as there are today. The Bible was the main subject of study. It is no exaggeration to say that he knew the Bible almost by heart. He had studied its implications so well, that he could have held his ground on Theology and Morals even against those foreign missionaries who had special instruction in these subjects. They marvelled at his great wisdom.

There were only few Syrian churches, if any at all, in Malabar which Fr. Kuriakos had not visited in his capacity as the Vicar General of the Syrians. He invariably



preached in all the churches he visited. His winning eloquence, ringing voice and special talents in driving home certain favourite ideas of his, are still remembered and recounted in high esteem. He was ever willing and ready to preach to any congregation. Even when speaking at short notice, he never failed to make a good impression on the audience. Several instances of his impressive extempore sermons are popularly talked about to this day. The panegyrics he preached at the funeral service of Archbishops Bernardine and Francis Xavier, are often quoted as outstanding examples of his great talents in this direction.

### EDUCATIONIST

In addition to his being a brilliant scholar in literature and the sciences, Fr. Kuriakos Elias was a great educationist. Till his time, the church in Malabar had not advanced much in the field of education. But proficient as he was in several languages he became a powerful influence in the cause of catholic education.

His interest in the field of education of students for priesthood, the establishment and conduct of seminaries—has already been dealt with. He was also concerned with the general education of the laity. The protestant missionaries had already started running a few English schools. They were in the field from about 1816. He realized that the community would ever remain downtrodden if they did not move with the times and so he decided that his new congregation should concentrate on educational work. So in 1846, the monastery started a new institution for Sanskrit studies.

As Vicar General of the Syrians, he took a very bold step, for which the country at large should be grateful to him. He issued a mandate, calling upon all parish churches under his jurisdiction to raise schools attached to each of them. He had planned a central college for Catholics. But it did not materialize owing to various unfavourable circumstances. If today the Catholics of Kerala are literate to a high degree, it is largely because of the farsighted policy of Fr. Kuriakos, in the establishment of a school for each parish. Today the community manages a number of first grade colleges, high schools, L. P. Schools, elementary schools and other technical institutes. The first English High School of Syrian Catholics was founded at Mannanam in 1885.

The educational activities of the Carmelite Congregation have won wide acclaim. The service rendered by them in the field of education has been applauded by all. Msgr. Zaleski, a former Delegate Apostolic to India in an official report, has commended the congregation for its special work in the field of education saying "among your modern activities, the schools and boarding houses and hostels form the most important ones always. You have already demonstrated your special talents in this line".

## THE ROCOS SCHISM

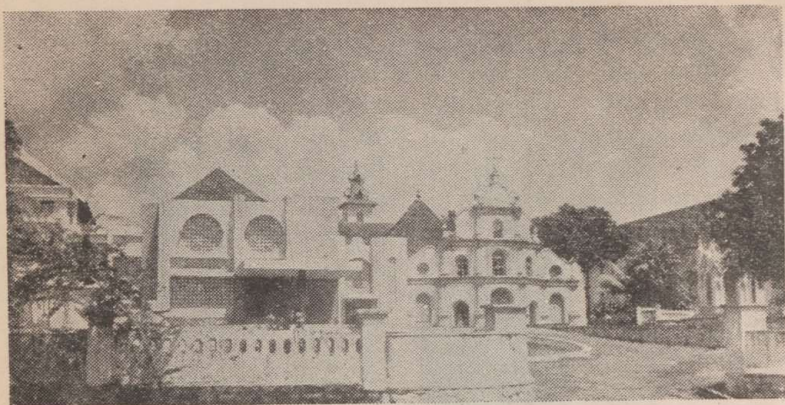
For nearly three centuries the church which St. Thomas founded in Malabar was ruled over by native bishops ordained by the Apostle himself and their legitimate successors. But from the fourth century, the administration was through foreign bishops ordained and sent to





St. Andrew's Church, Arthungal  
where Fr. Chavara was ordained priest

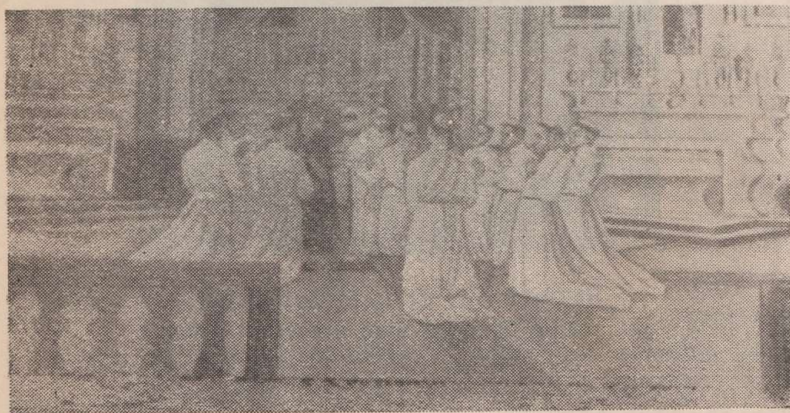




Monastery,

Mannanam

Church



They make profession

Malabar by the Patriarch of Babylon. Though foreigners by nationality, they had the same Syrian Rite and they got along fairly well with the people here. But in the sixteenth century after the Synod of Diamper, the administration of the native church passed on through Don Menezis, the Archbishop of Goa, to Latin bishops. The Portuguese rulers were not familiar with the Syrian Rite and social connections. Further they were lacking in a spirit of accommodation. All this ultimately led to the deterioration of the Syrian Community in many respects.

Leaders of the community in Malabar proud of their ancestry and noble traditions, resented this trend and organized themselves to safeguard their interests. They solicited the authorities in Rome and Portugal to appoint Syrian bishops to Malabar to preserve and promote their social and cultural integrity. But such requests did not meet with favour or success. This led to further alienation between the foreign rulers and the members of the old rite. The more adventurous among the latter volunteered to go in person to the countries concerned and fight for their recognition. Fr. Antony Kudakkachira and Fr. Antony Thondanad led a party of young men to Babylon. Unfortunately, the former died there. But the latter, succeeded in persuading the patriarch Joseph Audo, to send a bishop to study the condition of the Syrians in Malabar. Accordingly the Patriarch sent bishop Thomas Rocos to Malabar. The news of a Syrian bishop coming to Malabar was hailed heartily by the Syrians. But Rocos was not designated as a bishop of Malabar. Even the commission he held from the Patriarch was without the sanction of the Holy See. But the impostors pretended that his appointment was effected with the permission of Rome.



Efforts of the Latin Bishops to vindicate the hollowness of their claims were mostly ineffective. Fr. Chavara was aware of the dangerous situation and forthwith he issued from Mannanam a statement under his hand and seal explaining the position.

On 9th May 1861, Rocos landed in Cochin. He was received and led in procession to Thykkattuchery encouraged and directed by Parayil Tharakan. Fr. Antony Thondanad, as secretary to the bishop wrote to all the churches intimating them of the arrival of the bishop and requesting their recognition and homage. Fr. Elias Chavara too was informed. A great many rushed to the new bishop and paid him their respects and received his 'blessing'. They planned to secure the monasteries at Mannanam and Elthuruth as residences for him. Fr. Elias aware of these demonstrations hastened to contact the bishop and ask him his credentials. But the satellites of the bishop saw to it that their trick was not easily revealed. They refused Fr. Elias permission to meet the bishop. They even tried to humiliat and molest him.

Fr. Elias and his Congregation tried their best to prevent the schism from spreading. Several prominent laymen were on his side. When he found that the schismatics were unruly and interfering with his fold he reported the matter to the Travancore and Cochin Governments. The strict measures adopted by the Government of Cochin soon brought them under control. But the schism was spreading. A large portion of the faithful aligned themselves with the new Syrian bishop and their strength grew. Of the 155 Syrian churches then existing, 86 unconditionally accepted Rocos and 30 gave him partial



recognition. The position was very grave and fraught with dire consequences. Archbishop Bernardine could think of no other alternative to fight the schism than giving a legitimate Syrian bishop. His first choice was Fr. Chavara. But he with his heroic spirit of renunciation declined to accept such an honour. So he was appointed their Vicar General, with wide and unusual powers over the faithful. This was in June 1861, just a month after Bishop Rocos had arrived. The decree appointing the Vicar General ran as follows, after the usual formula of salutation and blessing: "For the information of Very Rev. Fr. Chavara, the beloved prior of Mannanam and other monasteries: considering the difficulties of looking after the needs of all the Christians who have been under our jurisdiction for long, considering our advancing years and consequent weakness and dislocations, and realizing that from our control of their affairs, the clergy and laity are not profiting spiritually, and because of the present happenings, as allowed and directed by the Council of Trent to appoint a Vicar General, when necessary, convinced of your courage, skill, knowledge and saintliness, I do hereby appoint you as the Vicar General of the Syrians in Malabar, to look after their spiritual needs and to govern both the clergy and the laity, with such powers as are generally given by us in the accompanying note. I pray God to give you the grace to minister to the spiritual needs of the faithful attending all our Syrian Churches".

As Vicar General, he strenuously and authoritatively worked to establish order and tranquility in the church: His first concern was to expose the pretensions of Rocos. For this he formally addressed a letter to His Holiness Pius IX requesting information. This was on 19th June

1861. He received a reply on 7th October duly informing him that Rocos was not legally sent by the Pope. A detailed communication from the Pope was also promised in it. The confirmatory communication under the hand and seal of His Holiness the Pope was despatched to Fr. Chavara on September 5th of the same year.

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

They came out in the open and indulged in severe attacks on Fr. Chavara and his followers. Their propaganda led to serious developments in places like Aranattukara, Trichur and Ollur. They openly accused Fr. Cavara and other Carmelites of false propaganda. Defying all charges and criticism Fr. Chavara and his colleagues travelled widely in Malabar, proclaiming the justice of their position with respect to the schism. This led to the reclamation of several parishes from the schism and the reestablishment of several centres in the faith. It was also mostly due to the work and activities of Fr. Chavara that at least a few churches were preserved intact through out, without ever falling into schism at all. History records that the churches at Muttam, Pallipuram, Vaikom, Parur, Ampallur, Kumpalam, Kodavechoor, Muhamma, Tattarampally, Chennankary, Champakulam, Edathua, Pulincunnoo, Thuruthy, Thottakad, Vaipur, Manimala, Nedumkunnam, Kanjirappally, Areethara, Kurumpanadam, Kudamaloor and Kaipuzha never accepted Rocos.



The honour and the credit of having thus kept alive the light which St. Thomas lighted in Malabar goes to him in a very large measure. Rocos was commissioned by the Patriarch of Babylon only to visit Malabar and report on the condition of the church here. Even that appointment was in defiance of definite injunctions from Rome. But, once in Malabar, Rocos yielded to the inducements of his schismatic supporters and superseded the authority he held from his Patriarch, by visiting churches and ordaining priests in the capacity of one with regular jurisdiction over the faithful. When the Patriarch heard of it, Rocos was immediately ordered to return to Babylon. But he defied the order with impunity and continued his unauthorized administration. As this led to breach of peace in several places, Fr. Chavara brought the whole affair to the notice of the civil governments in Travancore and Cochin. The Peishkar of Travancore and the Dewan of Cochin, both interfered with the unauthorized conduct of Rocos and ordered that he should not enter the churches situated in areas under their jurisdiction. At this juncture, Rome issued instructions to the properly constituted authority at Verapoly to excommunicate Rocos if he did not quit Malabar immediately. The Patriarch of Babylon also renewed his order recalling him.

Driven to such helpless straits from all directions Rocos retired to the church at Gnarackal. On 30th November in the Cathedral Church at Verapoly, Dr. Bernardin, under instructions from Rome pronounced excommunication on Rocos in the name of the Holy Father. Fr. Mathai Mariam Kappil, Vicar of the Carmelite parish at Coonammavu volunteered to convey to Rocos



the official decree of his excommunication. He went to Gnarackal, proclaimed the excommunication in the church after the community Mass and later called on Rocos in person and handed over the document confirming the punishment. The supporters of Rocos created an uproar and tried to surround and manhandle the Vicar, who however escaped from the crowd and with the help and support of one Mr. Kunjipailo Parekkat, safely returned to Coonammavu.

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

## CARMELITE CONVENTS

Fr. Chavara also founded a congregation of Carmelites for women. In this endeavour, he was considerably helped by Fr. Leopold who was equally interested in the formation of religious houses for women. Fr. Chavara organised the convents as centres from where christian education and culture were to spread among the women of the country. He had also envisaged them as enclosures for those women who wanted to devote themselves to a life of prayer and mortification and service of souls.

One may wonder to hear that Fr. Chavara founded the first convent with the capital of 58 Rupees of which 40 were collected from the churches at Gnarackal and Alleppey, and the rest was a donation from his monasteries. The enclosure that he put up for the convent at Coonammavu "St. Teresa's convent" was mostly made of bamboo mats and coconut fittings. He built a common prayer hall, refectory and three single rooms for the nuns, all walled in from the outside. The first members of this new congregation were Elisba, a widow, her daughter Anna, Thresia of Karthedath parish and Elizabeth of Puthenangady, Vaikom. They came to live in the new convent on February 13th 1866. Four postulants were received after two days and they were given the scapular.

Fr. Chavara was not happy with the temporary shed made for the nuns. He toured the southern districts of Kerala and raised Rs. 8000/- within eight months to put up a permanent house for them as well as a school and boarding house for girls. The building was completed in March 1867. On the 27th of March, the nuns were transferred to the new house and on the same day they were vested with the habit of the religious and given Constitution and Rules designating them as the "Third Order of Carmelites". Aspirants to the new Order arrived from even distant places and in a short time the necessity for establishing sister-houses in other places became urgent. Branch houses were founded at Mutholy (1888), Verapoly (1890), Ampazhakat (1897), Karukutty (1899), Parur (1910), Ernakulam (1915), Gnarackal (1925), and subsequently in several other places.



In 1887, the ecclesiastical administration of St. Thomas Christians was brought under Trichur and Kottayam dioceses. This division had its impact in the indigenous religious Congregations too. Consequently those sisters of the Latin Rite were transferred to Varapuzha in 1889. This branch then known as T.O.C.D. is now known as Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (C.T.C.). Those of the Syrian Rite, then known as T.O.C.D., is now known as Congregation of Mother of Carmel (C.M.C.).

Today the C. M. C. Congregation has 4440 sisters with 374 houses. The C.T.C. has nearly 800 members and more than 40 houses. These two congregations having the same origin at Coonammavu in 1866, extend their dedicated services today in various apostolic dimensions such as education, mission work, medical relief and social apostolate throughout India and abroad.

## SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

Just as internal dissensions in a country would upset its equilibrium and retard its progress, so also schisms in the Church have great repercussions on its solidarity. The schism engineered by Rocos and his supporters, naturally led to a lessening of respect for constituted authority. Decline of faith and disrespect for authority developed side by side. It was left to Fr. Chavara, not only to drive away the schism, but also to effect a thorough reformation of Christian life in Malabar.

First, of course, he had to start with the clergy. He saw to it that the seminaries under him specially tried to



enforce the strict discipline among the students. He effected the necessary reforms and raised the standard of instruction. He insisted on an annual retreat for all priests. He also insisted that the priests should recite the 'Divine Office.' In all these, he had the support and blessings of the Archbishop.

He also tried to popularise the idea of retreats for the laity. He sent the priests of his congregation to all parishes to conduct periodical missions. Sunday sermons were made general in the parish churches. Ardently devoted to Christ in the Holy Eucharist, he introduced the Forty Hours' Adoration in the Syro-Malabar Church. Thus he tried to infuse great enthusiasm and devotion into religious life and among the faithful at large.

Not satisfied with concentrating on the education of the well-to-do, he interested himself in the rehabilitation of the under-privileged both materially and morally. He started missionary activities and tried to spread secular as well as religious education among them. He put up a home for the destitute at Kainakary and it stands as a monument to his charity and consideration for those in want.

He introduced several reforms in the administration of the churches. Those who have studied the reforms he brought about in the church, have compared him with great administrative reformers in the country.

The liturgy and rubrics of the Syrians also suffered with the advent of Latin control. The Synod of Diamper effected considerable changes in the Syrian observances. The Portuguese insistence on the Syrians using unleavened

bread and the vestments according to the Latin Rite for mass is a historical fact. Fr. Chavara tried very much to reinstate the old practices. But the opposition was too strong for him. He could only formulate what those in higher authority suggested. So with the approval of the Archbishop, he wrote out clearly every minute detail of the Syrian Mass. He also laid down the exact procedure for High Mass, Solemn High Mass, Vespers etc. He popularised the Syrian Calendar for church services. Office for the Dead was also codified by him. With the permission of the Holy See he translated the services for Holy Saturday from the Latin original and added it on to the Syrian Liturgy to complete the Holy week services which had already been translated from Latin and incorporated in to the Syrian Missal.

Another of his memorable contributions to the Syrian Liturgy is the preparation of the Breviary. The prayers for different days and seasons were all scattered over four different books: Hudra, Kaskol, Gaza and Kala. It was not easy to refer to all these and recite the prayers proper for each day. Even as a cleric he had already realised this difficulty and compiled a composite volume including all the prayers for the different occasions. With the permission of the Holy See Archbishop Leonard commissioned him to arrange the prayers of the Breviary which he did in due time.

## SAINTLY LIFE

Fr. Chavara endeared himself to all, more by virtue of his saintly life than by his grand achievements in practical life. All those who have come in contact with him including the foreign missionaries have unequivocally



complimented him in this respect. Archbishop Bernardine and Fr. Marceline have on several occasions given expression to their high respect and appreciation of his sanctity in personal life and of the exemplary conduct of the religious under his guidance. Reviewing his predecessor his immediate successor observed: "By his quiet and perfectly disciplined life in the monastery, by his charity, humanity, obedience and love of God, he soared in the highest planes of sanctity and encouraged others to such high perfection by advice and example."

Fr. Leopold, his spiritual director and confessor says: "It is more proper to say about Fr. Chavara that he did these virtuous things more by his sanctity and good example than by his advice and authority. He commanded obedience and respect of others by himself being humble, charitable and obedient to his superiors." One of his own students Fr. Aloysius, who had stayed with him for long at Manjummel recalls the memory of his revered master in the following words: He was very keen on observing the spirit of obedience, love of God and devotion to the vows of the congregation. He spent the whole time of meditation in the evening on his knees, in tears and overpowered by emotion. He had to be reminded by those near by that the allotted time was over. Other priests held him in high esteem..." Even non-Catholics respected Fr. Chavara as a saintly man. He easily created the impression that he was a man specially sent by God to fulfil some special mission on earth.

### **APOSTLE OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST**

The central theme of the devotional life of Fr. Chavara was the Holy Eucharist. Even as a boy, Fr. Chavara was impressed by this august sacrament. His desire to



serve at Mass was a clear indication of this. His life in the seminary gave his colleagues further examples of his ardent love of Christ in this sacrament. His career as a priest was unceasingly utilised in propagating this devotion all over Kerala. The great attention and care he bestowed on the cleanliness and order of the church and precincts also arose from his devotion to the Holy Eucharist.

He preached devotion to this sacrament as a means for the growth and reformation of the church in Kerala. He recorded specific instructions on this devotion in the document he bequeathed as his will and testament to his people.

He enforced the practices of this devotion among the religious congregations both for the priests and nuns. Public exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and adoration were ordered in all the monasteries and convents for all the days following the feast of Corpus Christi. The beautiful prayers meant for public use on such occasions were also compiled and popularised by him.

The Forty Hours' Adoration, first started in 1866, has now become an annual feature of all important parishes in Kerala.

Devotion to the Blessed Mother of God is co-existent with devotion to Christ. Fr. Chavara was ardently devoted to the Virgin Mother. He was taught this devotion by his own mother. Even as a child, he was taken by her to the Church of our Lady at Vechoor and was dedicated to her care. She continued to advise and direct him, on this meritorious devotion. She woke him up at night and encouraged him to kneel down with her and say the Rosary and other prayers in honour of the Blessed Virgin.

The deep impression such insistent advise and practice made on him is visible in the innumerable references he makes in his autobiographical poem the "Atmanuthapam".

The great love he had for the Mother of God fulfilled itself in many ways. When his parents and an only brother passed away leaving him the sole male heir to the patrimonial possession, he offered himself to Mary as her spiritual Child and thus ensured his vocation for priesthood. He propagated this devotion among his colleagues in the Seminary. He enjoyed explaining to almost everybody he met, the beauties of this sublime devotion. He did everything possible to spread Marian devotion among the people. It could be said that the Blessed Mother remained with him throughout his life and he could say confidently on his deathbed that through the mediation of Mary he had the rare grace of preserving inviolate his baptismal innocence till his death.

## CHARITY

Fr. Chavara was ever alive to the new commandment of our Lord, "Love one another as I loved you". He spent his days charitably in activities of social uplift, restoration of faith and salvation of souls.

Ever since his days in the seminary his charitable disposition had enough scope to manifest itself. As a priest the opportunities for selfless service were many. He would hasten to the dying even if they were stricken by the most deadly and contagious diseases. In spite of all opposition and threats during the days of the schism he went about trying to do good even to those who opposed him. He built a home for the destitute and the



poor at Kainakary and established a "Confraternity for Happy Death." Such Organizations conceived by him were the first ones of the kind in the country. They again confirm the deep love and compassion he had for the poor and the unfortunate in the society.

His successor in charge of the congregation has commented upon the insistent demands in chrity, Fr. Chavara made upon all his colleagues and fellow memberss in religion. "Do not let beggars go away from your doors empty-handed. Never fail to give them something when you can manage it somehow. The proper wages for labourers and servants should not be delayed. Do not ridicule or inconvenience the poor." Such were his clear instructions and practice. He made these morally binding on all the members of the congregation: that they live in truth and love and despite their large number, they all grew up as if children of the same mother.

A good many among the poor in this land have enjoyed charitable hospitality from one or the other of the monasteries of the carmelites. Fr. Chavara established in these houses the practice of feeding, clothing and nursing the sick and the poor, to the extent of their resources, when and where possible. His works of corporeal charity and mercy were so well known that the well-to-do always encouraged him with handsome donations. He raised large amounts in such donations and invariably used them exclusively for the benefit of the poor. He always gratefully acknowledged and remembered such help and in his last will and testament, he has requested his fellow religious to remember such patrons with gratitude.



It was in his dealing with those who were inimical towards him that his charity shone out. As the pioneer in many revolutionary and progressive measures and as the stalwart champion of the anti-schismatics he had many enemies in his life time. But he was always considerate towards them. Literally, he was prepared to show the other cheek if he was struck upon one. He sought out those who tried to hinder his work or to humiliate him and promised them all encouragement and co-operation in all their work. In his last testament he has even mentioned as a benefactor, one who had filed false suits against him and caused heavy damages to the monastery at Mannanam.

### PRAYER LIFE

Even as the prophet Elias, the founder of the Carmel was wedded to a life of prayer, so was Fr. Chavara the saintly founder of Carmelites in Malabar, devoted to prayer. Love fulfills itself in frequent and intimate colloquy with the beloved. The great love Fr. Chavara always cherished for his Maker, found expression in his intimate and loving colloquies with his Lord and Master. He tried to fill his whole life with prayer. He made a complete dedication of all his conscious and unconscious efforts to the service of God. Very often he was found lost in prayer, either alone in his room, or before the Blessed Sacrament. Sometimes during the 'one hour meditation' usual in the congregation, he fell into a celestial trance and had to be waked up to normal consciousness and feeling. The yearning to win more souls for Christ spurred him on. Constant prayer and meditation, even for going sleep and rest at times, marked him but as a man of prayer. The sacrifice of the Mass

he offered at the Altar, impressed the faithful as exceptionally devotional.

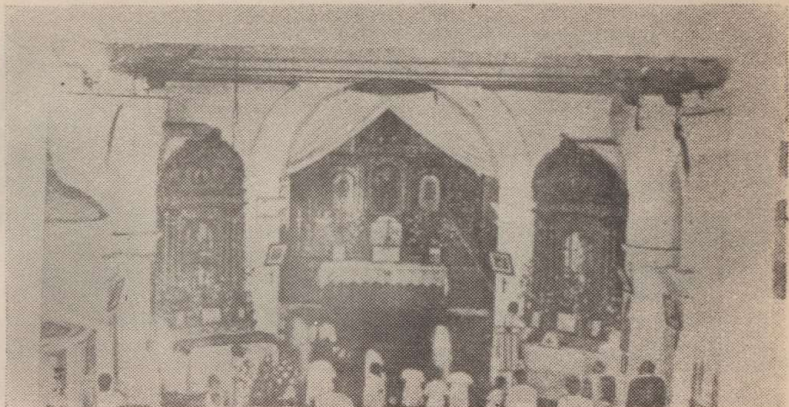
His prayer evinced his great faith in it. He had learned to look at God and His saints in a very personal way. Among the prayers he has written, in the private notes he kept, are many revealing passages in which he supplicates of God, quite confidently, all that he felt in need of. When schisms threatened his institutions and all his well-wishers advised him to seek Government protection he resisted and merely resorted to prayer; and his institutions were left intact! There are instances of his having received great financial help in immediate response to prayer in straitened circumstances. How the meagre capital of Rs. 58 with which he started the convent at Coonammavu swelled into Rs. 8000 in a short time can be accounted for only in terms of his confident prayer.

### FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

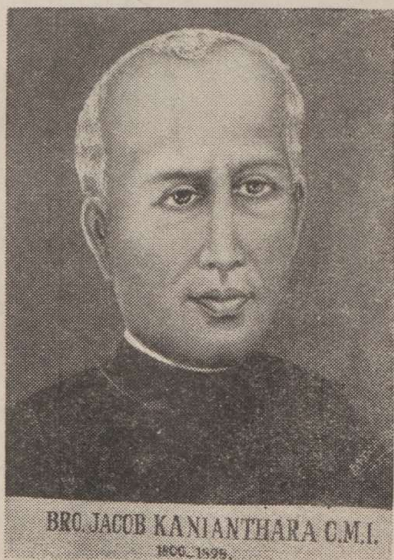
Fr. Chavara believed in God completely and this absolute faith stood him in good stead throughout his life. Nothing could shake his faith. He made his decision to serve God in his young days. Later when the other male member of his family died and there was the lure of all the ancestral property coming to him, he stuck to his decision and remained true to his vocation. He could rise above the transitory and mundane aspects of life and reach heavenly heights because of his faith in God.

This faith also gave him a feeling of strong, unquestioning loyalty to the visible representatives of God on earth. The papacy and the other high ranks in the ecclesiastical hierarchy drew forth his great veneration and



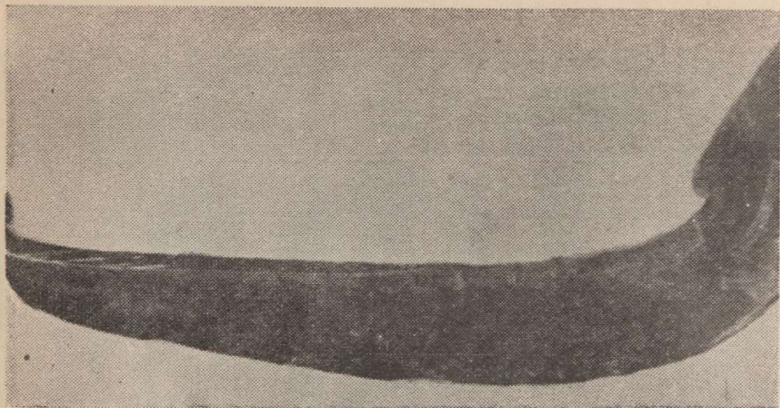


The Altar, where Fr. Chavara was ordained



Bro. Jacob Kanianthara





"Prior" boat



"Prior Mango" tree, cultured and grown by Fr. Chavara

respect. The fervour of the fight he put up against the schism engineered by Mar Thomas Rocos was only one of the manifestations of his belief in the integrity of the catholic church.

The capital from which he drew endlessly to execute many of his schemes was his faith, which gave him as its necessary counterpart hope. We have seen how he started some of his biggest institutions with little more than a few rupees in hand and yet how easily he was able to complete the work, several of which have grown to dazzling proportions today. He has himself expressed surprise, at all that has come to pass and acknowledged the continuous providential protection he always enjoyed. "How have these things come to pass: who called me out of my house; how was the congregation formed; how was I called Prior; how this ..... and this ..... and all this..... do I deserve these..... Hardly any—except that God has made me work thus: that his will, will be fulfilled ....." Such realization of his absolute dependence on God, was more than amply rewarded. "My soul hath hoped in the Lord; I shall not be confounded", the Psalmist had sung and Fr. Chavara lived by its charm.

Such faith and hope could not but have endowed him with a great personal Love of God which was manifested in all his work. He had resolved to live a life of prayer and devotion, whether others observed him or not. He had grown into an ardent apostle of love, living and preaching the message of love. His contemporaries, both elders and juniors, have unanimously acclaimed the zealous devotion for which his sermons were known. He reformed the faithful entrusted to his care by exhortations, by example, by reproof and by granting the pardon of God



in the confessional. He was also what his Master wished and promised His first disciples to be,—one among the "fishers of men."

## EXEMPLARY RELIGIOUS

The founders of all religious orders have been specially inspired by the Holy Spirit and in their lives they set the standard for their congregations. That is why the Church is anxious that each order should live after its founder in all things. An order is founded, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit at a particular stage in the history of the world, to serve a specific purpose. And naturally He gives the founder the necessary graces and directions too. It is against this background that we should review and assess the character and career of Fr. Chavara.

The life of a monk is well protected by a vow of fortresses in the shape of the divine commandments, the laws laid down by the church from time to time and the regulations of the particular order to which he belongs. It is best for him that he is thus regulated. All the founders of the different orders are unanimous on the necessity of the constitutional regulations of each order for the sustenance of the ascetic or monastic spirit in the monks. No wonder then, that Fr. Chavara was extraordinarily insistent on the observance of the regulations he codified for his congregation. He exhorted others to emulate him in living up to the requirements of the order. Thus by example and precept he built up a congregation which he initiated at Mannanam with a routine discipline that was very much trying to the aspirants, some of whom even gave it up as impossible. If today, it has acquired



a high status and importance it is undoubtedly due to the strict adherence of the members to their declared constitution and objectives. 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 esteem as though it were his own mother. It was to him, his 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. Tedious travels, old age, weakness and even infirmity hardly succeeded in making him relax. He would relax when absolutely necessary, but after asking permission from his 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 the common meals.

He zealously gave to God His due. He found in his superiors God's spokesmen and messengers and unquestioningly accepted their commands. The sacrifice he made in respecting the wishes of his Archbishop to go to Coonammavu and stay there during his advancing years after more than 32 years of association with the monastery at Mannanam, must have been heroic. Even while others persuaded him to return to Mannanam as he grew worse at Coonammavu, he was reluctant to do so because he knew that the Archbishop and Fr. Leopold desired that he should stay at Coonammavu.

The Advice he gave to his fellow-monks was often very touching: "dearly beloved brethren" he would say, "The strength of these monastic houses is not in the bricks and stones where with they are built, but in you,

your devotion and your virtues. We have not come in here, seeking a living, having had no other alternative in the outside world. The joys of the world were ours had we cared to accept them. But we voluntarily gave up our wealth and our relations for the sake of our Lord. And now, if we by our lethargy and indifference give up our Lord, what a folly, what a fancy!" Many other examples of his advice and instructions could be quoted to show how much he laboured to permeate his religious with the idea that the real greatness of the order lay not in material acquisition but in their charity, humility and sanctity. He demanded that each religious should look up to his superior as he would to Christ and thus regulate his relationship with him. He was himself their first superior, and he was ever careful to see that the members of his congregation never had any unbecoming example from him. He tried to imitate our Lord and thus win the esteem and confidence of the subordinates. He did not wait for his monks to go to him for their necessities, but he volunteered to find them out himself and give them the needed. He was even willing to forgo his own necessities to a very large extent. Luxury was far from him, but at times he mixed with others participating in their expeditions and other recreations. This was mainly to know the individuals personally and then treat them with the sympathy and consideration each one deserved.

The congregation maintains happy and proud memories of that glorious period. His death was mourned by all for a long time. The congregation missed in him their genial and saintly friend and guide who combined with his great love and sincerity an equally great administrative skill. They realised that a really holy soul had left them and the gap it created was too great.



## DEATH

When Bishop Leonard returned to Rome to attend the Vatican Council in 1870, Fr. Chavara went to Bhara-nanganam, to settle some disputes that survived the recent schism and troubles. Fr. Chavara had an attack of fever during this trip and his health suffered very much. He returned to Coonammavu and was under the treatment of a specialist from Ernakulam. But there was not much relief. Many of his friends and well-wishers visited him and they all received valuable spiritual advice from him. They suggested a change to Ampazhakat where he went and stayed a few days. As that proved unsuccessful he returned to Coonammavu. He realised that his end was drawing near. He prudently started preparing for it and never allowed himself to be drawn into conversation on worldly things.

On the second of January 1871, he made his last confession to his spiritual director Fr. Leopold. He grew visibly emotional at communion time and his face became singularly bright. In the afternoon he started vomiting. Medicines proved ineffective. He sought his own trusted spiritual director to administer him the Last Sacraments. But the missionary was so emotional that he was unable to comply with his request, so he suggested that Fr. Vicar of the monastery should do it for him. Before the final phase, Fr. Chavara was helped into a half reclining posture on his bed, from which he gave a final exhortation to all the inmates assembled around him.

Pacifying them he said, "Why should you grieve, after all? All men must die some time or other, who or whatever they may be! My hour is come. By the



grace of God, I constantly had the vision of this hour before me and I was preparing for it. My parents always kept me mindful of the Holy Family, which was ever my protection and I am confident of it. I dedicate you all and this humble congregation to the same Holy Family. Rely on it. Let the Holy Family reign over your hearts. Do not be worried or be upset, for I am dying. Willingly submit yourselves to the ways of Providence. God is all powerful and infinitely merciful. He will give you a new prior, who can do much more good for you and our congregation. Stand fast in the observance of all the rules of our elders, our congregation and the church, Love our Lord Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament with all your heart, draw from that fountain the waters of eternal life. You members of the order and particularly elders and priors among you, love one another—be truly charitable. Thus will God be glorified through the congregation which will also grow extensively." This rather long farewell, merged into a blessing to them all and a request for Anointment. The Last Sacraments were soon administered to him. He received them with great calm and resignation, repeating the words of the prayers with the priest. Lapses followed at intervals. But whenever he woke up he was murmuring to himself ejaculations of love. Once during the night there was a serious development but he survived till the next morning. On the third of January 1871 by about half past seven while the priests stood around praying God for absolving and blessing him, he breathed his last. He had completed a sojourn here which lasted sixty five years, ten months and twenty five days.

## THE END

News of his death soon spread all over Malabar. The bishop was close by, on a visit to the parish, in S. Parur. He was prompt to come and officiate the services for the dead. People who heard of his death came in crowds to Coonammavu. The sanctity of Fr. Chavara was so well known that the next morning an unprecedentedly large crowd collected around his mortal remains. The body was dressed in priestly robes and brought to the church for the people to have a last look at and pay their homage. Later, the dress was changed into the simple habit of a religious more becoming a member of an ascetic order.

All the churches that could manage to send their paraphernalia arranged to participate formally in the funeral ceremonies of their late champion. After the most solemn services and a very touching panegyric, the body was taken in procession round the town and finally laid to rest in St. Philomina's church, Coonammavu, close to the communion rails beside the sanctuary.

Fr. Leopold the confessor and spiritual director of Chavara, realising the great sanctity of this soul, distributed token possessions of the late Prior General among the various monasteries. He also gave them each a copy of his last will and testament. A short sketch of his life was also published and distributed by him.

The remains of Fr. Chavara were transferred from Coonammavu to Mannanam, with the special permission of the Delegate Apostolic, when the C. M. I. house at Coonammavu was appropriated by the Latinites on the strength of the order of Rome. They were reinterred with

proper honours at Mannanam in 1889. A marble slab was laid on the tomb on 2nd July 1929.

When in 1955 the diocesan process for Beatification and canonization was started, a new slab was laid where the precious remains were then interned. The three member commission for collection and study of the works of Fr. Chavara and related documents started functioning in 1958. In 1962 diocesan tribunals were set up. Later in 1984 the high level investigation in Rome was over and Pope John Paul II formally made the declaration of Fr. Kuriakos Elias Chavara's heroic virtues. Further it was in May 1985, that the congregation for the cause of saints approved the miraculous nature of the cure obtained by Mr. Joseph Mathew Pennaparambil through the intercession of Venerable Kuriakos Elias. As a pre-requisite for beatification, in June 1985 the remains were exhumed, scrutinised, identified and re-placed.

Now we all await that great day of February 8th, 1986, for the solemn announcement of His Holiness Pope John Paul II :

"Venerable Kuriakos Elias Chavara is a Beatus".





## INSTANTANEOUS CORRECTION OF CLUB FEET (Talipes Equino Varus)

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

When Joseph was about six years old, we happened to hear of the favours obtained by many, through the intercession of the Servant of God, Fr. Kuriakos Elias Chavara and we began to pray to him for the correction of the deformity of the feet of Joseph. My daughter Annakkutty (Anne), Joseph's elder sister, was most interested in the matter. At her insistance we daily recited the prayer for obtaining favours through the intercession of Fr. Kuriakos Elias. Joseph used to go to school in the company of Annakkutty. Very often, on the way, when treading on the sharp stones lying scattered on the uneven path, Joseph used to cry owing to pain in his feet. On such occasions Annakkutty used to lift and carry her little brother over the difficult portions of the way to school.

A few weeks after we began to pray to Fr. Kuriakos. One day Joseph, on his way to school in the company of his sister, felt intense pain in the feet and began to cry. This time, his sister, instead of lifting and carrying him as usual, asked him to pray with her to Fr. Kuriakos Elias. Together they recited one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory be to.....and prompted by Annakkutty, Joseph uttered the supplication, "Oh Father Kuriakos Elias, cure the deformity of my feet". He suddenly felt a shiver in his right foot; the next moment

he could fix the sole of the right foot flat on the ground in the natural position, the deformities of 'Equino' and 'Varus' being simultaneously corrected. This cure of the double deformity of the right foot is permanent.

With profound gratitude and deed trust, we continued our prayers for the correction of Joseph's other foot also. A few month's later, one day Annakkutty and Joseph were going from our house to the neighbouring residence of my eldest son. On the way Joseph felt pain in his left foot. Searching for the cause of the pain, Annakkutty and Joseph could see his left foot turning back from the deformed condition.....

We are praying with great confidence.....that God may soon deign to raise the Servant of God to the honours of the altar.

Koodalanji,  
Malabar,  
November 10, 1960.

Thomas Mathew,  
Penneparampil

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