

BISHOP JONAS THALIATH OF RAJKOT

A BIOGRAPHY

By : K. P. JOSEPH



"He possessed great erudition, clarity of vision, a facile pen, a remarkable sense of wit and humour that added lustre and spice to his many colourful activities".

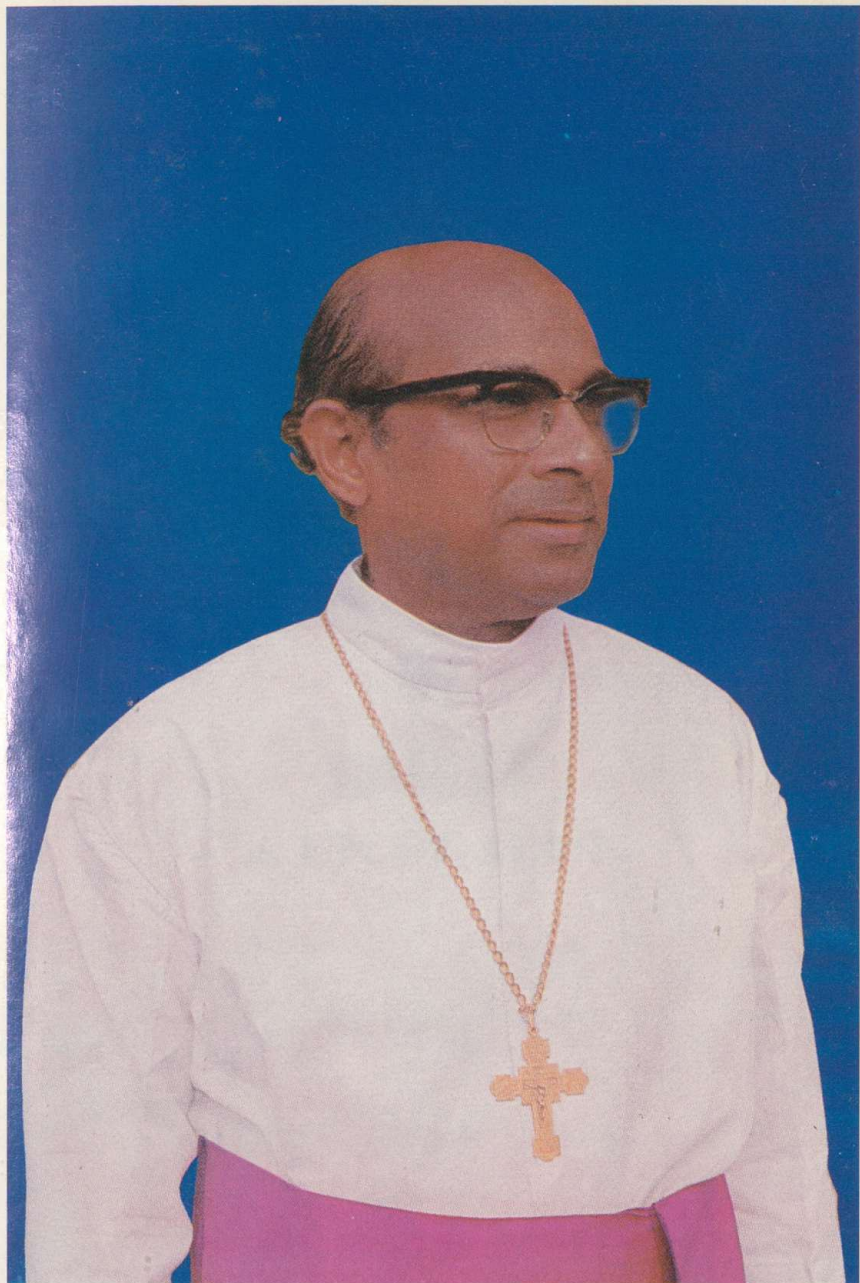
J.R. Victor Karunan

"The contribution of Bishop Jonas to the Church of India is incalculable".

**Gregory Karotemprel CMI,
Bishop of Rajkot**

"Orient and Occident mingled harmoniously in him within the framework of the Catholic faith".

**Kuriakose Kunnacherry,
Bishop of Kottayam**



**BISHOP JONAS THALIATH CMI
1919 - 1981**

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OF
RAJKOT
A BIOGRAPHY**

DEEPTI PUBLICATIONS

Rajkot - 360 005

India

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K.P. JOSEPH

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PREFACE

I am glad that a biography of Bishop Jonas Thaliath is seeing the light of day at a time when momentous developments are taking place in the Church, a number of them fulfilling his own dreams while he lived. Bishop Jonas Thaliath was a champion advocate of greater autonomy for the three Rites of the Church in India as also an apostle of greater unity and Cupertino between them.

In November 1981 I went to Rajkot to take part in the funeral of Bishop Jonas Thaliath, who had passed away in harness while he had put in only few years as the first Bishop of the newly created diocese of Rajkot. A number of the prelates of India, including the late Joseph Cardinal Parecattil, had also come there to share and express their grief of bereavement. It fell to my lot, then, to deliver the funeral sermon, which I took up willingly because I was for a long time an admirer of the founder of Dharmaram Seminary, the benefactor of St. John's Medical College, Bangalore, the dynamic Dy. Secretary General of the CBCI in the seventies and the highly dedicated first Bishop of the mission diocese of Rajkot, all rolled into one, in the person of Bishop Jonas Thaliath. I had said at that time, I remember, rather enigmatically, that in his death, he was being born. The legend of Bishop Jonas Thaliath has grown since then and this biography brought out after a decade and half since his demise, is the proof.

I hope the biography will be read widely and the memory of Bishop Jonas Thaliath will be kept alive to provide inspiration to every member of the family, i.e., the Church in India and specially to the younger generation.

Antony Cardinal Padiyara

Major Archbishop Emeritus of Ernakulam-Angamaly

FOREWORD

(a) Archbishop Mar Joseph Powathil

Son of an illustrious father, Bishop Jonas Thaliath was a great figure that loomed large on the social and religious scene in India during the sixties and seventies. It is heartening to know that Sri K.P. Joseph has written a biography of this esteemed prelate.

Personally speaking, I came to know Fr. Jonas first by reading his book on the Synod of Diamper. It has been one of the books that shaped my thinking as a seminarian. In fact, this book is among the pioneering books that led to the renaissance of the Syro-Malabar Church in recent history. Because of his multi-faceted activities later on, he could not pursue this process - in a way a great loss to the Church.

Bishop Jonas was the chief architect and founder of the Dharmaram College in Bangalore which facility has enabled the CMI order to expand nationally and globally. He is to this day acknowledged as a key figure who contributed to the success of the CHURCH IN INDIA TODAY SEMINAR held at Bangalore in 1969. His term as the Deputy Secretary General of the CBCI, New Delhi, brought out his organisational abilities, leadership qualities as also his erudition and intellectual stamina. These he used in no small measure to serve the Church in India.

As the first Bishop of the newly created Rajkot diocese, he developed and implemented new idioms of evangelisation. The missionary activities he headed embraced health care, sanitation, preventive medicine, etc., for the rural communities of Saurashtra as also education and community development. His concept of establishing hermitages to share the Christian vision and philosophy with the intelligentsia of other religious groups gave new focus to missionary activities earlier addressed mostly to the backward classes and the poor.

Bishop Jonas was in every sense a gentleman, friendly, sincere and ready to give a helping hand to everybody. As a priest and a bishop he contributed much to the building up of the Church in India. He passed away from us unexpectedly, but we would be ungrateful if we didn't cherish his memory.

It is in the fitness of things, then, that at least a biography should exist to tell the next generation about this great man who spent himself for the Church in our generation. Sri K.P. Joseph is to be thanked for undertaking this task. I am sure the biography will help us to keep Bishop Jonas alive in our memory. He could be our inspiration in many of our pastoral enterprises.

Archbishop Joseph Powathil

Changanacherry

(b) Very Rev. Fr. Prior General

I am very happy to learn that a biography of the late Bishop Jonas Thaliath CMI, is being brought out by the Diocese of Rajkot.

Bishop Jonas Thaliath is one of the illustrious sons of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), the first indigenous Congregation of India. The CMI Congregation was co-founded by Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara priests of the Apostolic Church of Saint Thomas Christians in India. In the loving providence of God, which has been constantly guiding us, the Congregation grew and achieved new heights both at the national and international levels, making herself available to the service of the church and the people of God.

Bishop Jonas stands out among those who have responded actively to the call to share and shape "according to the needs of

time and place," the intense spiritual movement initiated by our founding fathers. Known for his energetic pursuit of goals, Bishop Jonas - both as a priest and bishop - set himself totally to the cause of the church and the people in India. When he became the first bishop of the newly-erected mission diocese of Rajkot, his concerns spilled over the needs of "mission" to the socio-economic field. His initiatives to provide the rural poor in Saurashtra with a livelihood through the breeding of goats imported from Europe, are still cherished with gratitude and love. The service rendered to the foundation of Saint John's Medical College, Bangalore, is another notable contribution of Bishop Jonas to the church in India. The establishment of Dharmaram College and its sister-institutions in Bangalore is, however, considered to be the crowning glory of his vision and mission.

The biography of Bishop Jonas is of special significance at a time, when the Syro-Malabar Church is at crossroads in her search for identity, especially in liturgy and worship. It becomes all the more relevant at this time, when the Syro-Malabar Church is conferred autonomy within the fold of the universal church, a cause which was so dear to Bishop Jonas. I wish and pray: 'Let the Biography of Bishop Jonas be a source of strength for those who are engaged in the service of the Lord and His people, and a source of inspiration for those who aspire to join the vineyard of the Lord'.

Very Rev. Fr. Alex Ukken CMI

Carmelites of Mary Immaculate

INTRODUCTION

I consider Bishop Jonas Thaliath as undoubtedly one of our great churchmen. He was, indeed, an able administrator, a shrewd judge of men and matters, a great organiser, a skilful planner, a builder of institutions and, above all, a great visionary. He was erudite and articulate. In short, he possessed a many-splendoured and charismatic personality. He was a man of deep faith and of fierce loyalty to the Church. He committed himself totally to the service of the Church in India and during the last years of his life, to the growth and development of the infant diocese of Rajkot of which he was the first Bishop.

I had the privilege of knowing him for over a quarter of a century during his life time. In 1978, while we were travelling in an airbus from Trivandrum to Bombay (my first trip to Rajkot as Provincial of the Sacred Heart Province of the CMI Congregation after the Rajkot Diocese was entrusted to the care of the Province), Bishop Jonas told me in mid-air:

“Father, please go to every station and meet every priest and get their feelings about me. I would like to maintain very good relations with each and every one. I know some priests have certain apprehensions about me. If there is any defect in my approach, I am most willing to correct myself.”

These words reveal the true character of Bishop Jonas. He did not want to take things for granted. He was not opinionated. He stood for improvement and change. He wanted to maintain healthy relations with all those who worked with him. He was convinced that team-spirit and interpersonal harmony were necessary for the success of his pastoral efforts.

As Bishop Jonas desired, I visited the priests in the various stations of the diocese and conveyed, later on, to him their feelings and anxieties. He, on his part, most willingly accepted the

suggestions and promised to modify his policies in the light of the views expressed by the missionaries working in the field. I know well that all through his apostolate he tried meticulously to act in the spirit of the statement he made to me in 1978. He loved his missionaries. He used to tell me "Above all we must have trust in others." Bishop Jonas placed complete trust in his fellow-workers and gave them full support in their evangelical efforts. This was the secret of the peace and harmony that prevailed in the diocese of Rajkot.

Bishop Jonas' far-sighted and creative vision and optimistic outlook had worked many wonders. The Dharmaram Pontifical Institute and the attached institutions in Bangalore will ever remain as a glorious tribute to Bishop Jonas. He was the master-mind behind the whole complex. With meticulous planning he set up Dharmaram. I do believe that Bishop Jonas is the greatest son, the CMI Congregation ever had during her chequered history of a century and a half.

Here in Rajkot, when he planned for the Bishop's Home, he also had in mind a Provincial House. So adjacent to the Bishop's House, he offered to the Province a compound of three acres. In another part, in the outskirts of the city, he had set apart another five acres of land for the Novitiate. All these show his love for the Congregation and his visionary planning.

St. John's Medical College, Bangalore, and the Indian Church as a whole will ever cherish the memory of the selfless services and contributions Bishop Jonas made for their growth and development. When St. John's Medical College became a white elephant to the bishops of India, it was Bishop Jonas who came forward and undertook the burden of raising funds for its smooth operation. He travelled far and wide and spent much of his time and energy for raising huge funds for St. John's. His concern for the Indian Church as a whole was so great and remarkable that some of us even used to complain that he had no much time to spend for the diocese of Rajkot.

As Christ used to refer to his own death as a baptism he had to receive, Bishop Jonas often used to refer to his own death. Between 1978 and 1980, at least a dozen times he told me: "I have only four or five years left. Please give me more priests so that I can do something for the diocese and go." He had a strange feeling about his impending death. For him death was the celebration of the victory of his life. In the celebration of the Eucharist the most solemn moment is the consecration when the priest utters the consecration words: "This is my body. This is my blood." As for Bishop Jonas, death was such a solemn moment. He offered himself to the Father: "This is my body which went about doing good." In 1980 he repeated his premonition of death and told me: "You must come to Rajkot and I like you to be my successor." When I expressed my intention to join the Bijnor Diocese at the end of my term as provincial in 1981, he pressed me to change my plan. As the elections approached, he again repeated his request that I join the Rajkot region. When I said I had no intention to change my decision, he said: "Anyway you will be elected provincial for a second term. And so there will be no problem for another three years." And his prediction came true. I was elected provincial for a second term in April 1981. And when we met after the elections, he repeated what he told me earlier. "Now there is no problem for another three years." Now I can see that it was not only an invitation to come to Rajkot but it was also a prophecy. Even in my wildest dream I never thought Bishop Jonas would leave the scene so unexpectedly and I would be appointed his successor. The ways of God are mysterious.

Bishop Jonas would never tolerate nonsense and so he had obviously some enemies. He had to suffer rejections. As one who knew him closely, I knew very well how much he was rejected. Once he narrated to me the rejections he had to face during his priestly life. He faced these situations with a Christian spirit and went as far as to help those who engineered such rejections.

In England it is a custom that, when a King dies, the people would come to the streets of London and chant "The King is dead. Long live the King." In the same way let us say: "Bishop Jonas is dead. Let the legacy he left for us live among us and inspire us." Let us make his legacy part and parcel of our life so that we can go about doing good to our fellow human beings. As his successor, I know I am not worthy to step into his shoes. I have followed his policy and tried to implement the master plan he had for this diocese. The legacy he left will continue to inspire me.

I take this opportunity to express my most sincere gratitude to Mr. K.P. Joseph who undertook the difficult task of writing this biography at my request from the material which were already collected.

I am sure this biography, long in the making, will keep the memory and spirit of Bishop Jonas Thaliath alive.

Gregory Karotemprel CMI

Bishop of Rajkot

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

I have had no personal association with Bishop Jonas Thaliath like some of my friends who knew him well. When I decided to take up writing the biography, his personality, was by and large, an unknown quantity to me. But as I plodded through the mass of material I knew I was in for a unique task as a writer. For the image that emerged from the documentation was that of a person with charisma cast in heroic proportions. Bishops of the Catholic Church are no ordinary men, but here was a bishop who stood out among them all.

The biography has been in the making for a long time. Bishop Jonas expired in Rajkot on Saturday the 7th of November 1981 when he had hardly completed 62 years on our planet. The bishop passed away in harness. He was not bedridden even for a day. The profound sorrow evoked by his demise proved that his foot-prints on the sands of time were indelible.

Soon after, a spontaneous demand arose that his inspiring story should be enshrined in a biography. Fr. Ignatius Rathappilly CMI started the ball rolling by addressing letters to all who knew Bishop Jonas to put in writing their memory. Fr. Davis Paul Manjaly CMI, Fr. Geo Mangara CMI and other priests pitched in their efforts to collect material for the biography. The compilation of the material was ably accomplished by Fr. Mani Giles CMI. This painstaking labour of love was passed on to me, along with all the correspondence files. During the work I visited Bangalore, Delhi and Rajkot the places where Bishop Jonas had lived, worked and dared to translate his dreams into reality. Accompanied by Fr. George Earathara CMI, I called on a number of his contemporaries, including the venerable Fr. Canisius CMI, in Pariyaram. A fleeting visit, again in the company of Fr. George Earathara CMI, was made to Puthenpally the birth place of Bishop Jonas.

But for the initial pooling, sifting and competent compiling of the material this biography could not have been written. My role,

I consider, in completing the task, can be compared to the last runner in a long and arduous relay race. I would own fully the mistakes that have crept into this work.

This biographical work is being completed at a time when momentous events are taking place, some good and others with sinister implications. The attainment of greater autonomy by the three Rites would have made Bishop Jonas happy because he had always stood and pleaded for it while he lived. He had a keen sense of the need for 'Inculturation' and regard for the spiritual heritage and legacy of our country. On the other hand, as of this writing the Church is also facing new existential challenges in the sub-continent. The rise of religious fundamentalism has kindled new fears in the minds of religious minorities. Despite the unique provisions in the Indian constitution and the bold pronouncements of the judiciary, the sense of security is often bruised. The dastardly murder of Sister Rani Maria in Madhya Pradesh, the earlier killing of nuns in Bombay and the criminal and unprovoked trespasses into the peaceful abodes of nuns elsewhere, are events with great foreboding. The denial of the benefits of reservation to the Dalit Christians in secular and democratic India is yet another jarring note in the relationship of the Christian community with the Establishment. There is reason to feel that had Bishop Jonas been living today - he would have been only in his mid seventies - the right counsel to deal with the threats and challenges of the day would have emanated from him and enriched our resolve to seek justice, with blessing from God.

If this biography can contribute to the awareness of Bishop Jonas Thaliath whose absence today is more conspicuous than his presence, then its writing not have been in vain.

Kochi

K.P. Joseph

April, 1996

Chapter ONE

SCION OF AN ANCIENT FAMILY

The day was the 21st December 1919. A shrill cry of the newborn pierced the nippy air of the December dawn. It was the signal of the Thaliath family being blessed with the arrival of yet another scion of its proliferating branch at Puthenpally.

The country midwife known as Vayattatti who officiated in the primal ceremony of birth in the large many-roomed house was all smiles. She had attended times without number to the deliveries of the women of the house. It was always a touch and go affair. She was a lean gaunt woman who went about her business in a spare cotton sarong wound around her waist. She looked fiftyish and did not cover her torso. She wore a black string with a gold thali. Her skin was the colour of ground coffee. She was unlettered but appeared efficient in her job. She had been trained by her mother in the art rather than the science of midwifery. Her mind was already on the fee she would receive and the food she would carry home on the day of the baptism of the baby, which followed soon after.

Times were changing. Doctors were being called instead of Vayattatti for helping women in labour. She was apprehensive whether this time the chore would escape her. The father of the child was very educated. He was a Vakil (advocate) who lived and worked in the city of Ernakulam. The father had been to England from where the white-skinned rulers of India came. Educated men preferred their wives being attended to by doctors of English medicine. Probably it was on the insistence of the old man of the house that she had been called instead of the doctor from Ernakulam. The old man liked the old, tried and sure ways of doing things. Of course, there was the problem of time. A doctor from Ernakulam would have to be brought by country boat rowed manually by

professional boatmen over the 'Kayal' waters. By that time any decent baby would have arrived.

With the satisfaction of one more triumph in her career she cut the umbilical cord of the baby. The cord tugged ever so lightly and the baby began to cry raising its voice. The surrounding clutch of women laughed. It was fun to watch a new-born baby cry. Outside the delivery room the men moved in clusters. Who were the men?

Ouseph Varkey, the grandfather of the new-born babe, was there. He was of more than medium height, fair in complexion, carrying a forest of salt and pepper hair on his bare torso. He wore a black beaded rosary around his neck. His head was closely cropped. He had a prominent nose, well-formed lips and even rows of teeth stained red by pan chewing. As the servant brought a 'kindi', he gulped the water from its spout and walked a few steps away to spit out and make the mouth clean. He took the porcelain mug with the black coffee sweetened with raw sugar and sipped the contents thoughtfully. Present were also his brothers Kochu Mathai and Kochu Paulo. They had come from their dwellings nearby. In their physical presence and features they resembled their younger brother Varkey. They wore the ubiquitous snow white dhoti and a second cloth that dangled in rope shape from their shoulders over the bare torso. They too picked up black coffee mugs and started drinking, a signal that the crisis hour was over.

In the pre-independent days Kerala was divided into three parts. The northern part named Malabar was directly administered by the British through the Governor of the Madras Province at that time. In the middle part of Kerala was the small principality of Cochin ruled by the Perumpadappu family whose princes were noted more for their scholarship and dedication to the fine-arts than valour in war. The state of Travancore represented the southern segment of Kerala. Travancore had an array of ambitious rulers and still more ambitious Divans. In a series of local conflicts they nibbed away at the territory of Cochin principality. When territorial stability

came, the state of Travancore almost surrounded the state of Cochin with only a narrow tongue of territory extending to the Trichur area and touching the Malabar segment.

Although belonged to the Travancore State the nearest urban centre was Ernakulam, the capital town of Cochin state. And as was the custom in those days the citizens of Travancore passed into Cochin state freely for employment, education and trade. The British rule had provided a semblance of unity and for all practical purposes there was common citizenship for people irrespective of their residence in the princely state or the Malabar territory directly ruled by the British.

“He will come today evening for the Christmas holidays”, Varkey replied. There was pride in the voice of Varkey as he spoke of his son, the young barrister educated in England who would one day be the chief justice of Travancore state and the first chief justice from the Christian community. The grand-son born to Varkey the patriarch was the future Bishop Jonas Thaliath. In the name Jonas Thaliath, Jonas represents the name the latter assumed on embracing the monastic order and Thaliath stands for the house name. Before assuming the name of Jonas, the baptismal name, Jacob, was used.

Using the family name as the surname is a common practice among the Syrian Christians. Syrian Christians have no surnames as the upper caste Hindus or the Christians in other parts of India. The Hindus have surnames like Nair, Menon, Kurup, Namboodiripad, Nambiar which denote their position in the caste hierarchy as also the particular segment of the caste to which they belong. In places like Goa and Mangalore where Christians abound, western surnames like Fernandez, Pinheiro, Lobo etc. are adopted and used. Not so among the Syrian Christians in Kerala. Not only they don't have western sounding surnames they also use Christian names which are derivative forms of Aramaic, Hebrew or Greek names in Malayalam. The use of Anglicised forms became

fashionable long after the advent of the British and to a large extent after the spread of English education. So Poulouse became Paul, Ouseph became Joseph, Marium became Mary and Chakko became Jacob. Jacob was thus called Chakkapan in his house. Chakkapan is formed by combining the traditional Hebrew form of Jacob i.e., Chacko with 'appan' the Malayalam appellation ascribing the position of male parent as a means of respect. Appan and achan are traditional appellations to the Christian names which denote respect. Such appellations were considered necessary because in the caste hierarchy the Christians assumed that according to tradition, they were on par with Nairs and castes above. The appellations gave the assurance to the Christians to believe that they automatically got respect. If 'achan' and 'appan' were added to male names the word 'amma' was added to female names while the lower caste members addressing Christian people. Amma means mother and Annamma meant Anna plus amma. In South India by tradition the appellation of amma was added to the girls' names to assure respect for women.

As a crow flies, Puthenpally is less than ten kilometres north of the city of Cochin. It is a picturesque village with a concentration of coconut groves in well spread compounds occupied by the largely Christian population both of the Syrian and Latin rites. It is part of the large island set in the Cochin backwaters adjacent to the ancient port city of Mussiris. Varapuzha itself was a prosperous entrepot of pepper, cinnamon, ginger, cardamom etc. from the hinterland reaching up to the rolling hills of the Western ghats. In ancient days the spices were transported to the sea-going vessels at Mussiris in large country boats fitted with rushmats serving as sails for catching the favourable wind.

Varapuzha indeed finds mention in the book of Ptolemy (AD 75-162) -Mussiris. Present-day Kodungalloor became dysfunctional as a port in 1341 AD due to the cataclysmic floods at that time leaving large scale sedimentation in the port-mouth. The forces of nature simultaneously opened up and widened the

access of the backwaters to the Arabian Sea at the Kochi region, replacing the latter as a port city of the region.

Apart from its historic association with the port city of Mussiris, Varapuzha is a place of prominence in the annals of the Christian Church in Kerala. There is a legend that the name Varapuzha originated from the Latin 'verapolys' meaning the City of Truth, or rather, the place where the people who believed in Truth, viz. Christians lived. Varapuzha diocese became prominent during the Portugese period and the Carmelite Order had established its headquarters in Varapuzha. The Varapuzha diocese was later separated from the Syro-Malabar diocese of Ernakulam leaving the original name to the Archdiocese of Varapuzha for those following the Latin Rite. Puthenpally in Malayalam means the "New Church". The area itself got its name with the establishment of the present St. George Church in Varapuzha area. Recently Puthenpally celebrated its second centenary with an inter-religious conference. The image of the equestrian St. George charging with his spear on a seven-headed dragon is considered unique and attracts pilgrims from surrounding areas.

Puthenpally can be said to be in the middle part of Kerala, the southernmost state of the present day Indian union. Kerala lies along the West Coast of India tucked into the southern pocket of the Indian subcontinent. Kerala is half the size of Sri Lanka, but holds almost double of Sri Lanka's population. The density of population is between 600 - 700 persons a square kilometre as against one third of that level for India as a whole. One of the poorer regions of the Indian subcontinent in terms of per capita income Kerala boasts of a physical quality of life un-matched by any other place in South Asia except Sri Lanka. The average longevity for India is 60 years whereas it touches 70 years for citizens who live in Kerala. The infant mortality rate is as low as 22 per one thousand births which is a figure one fourth for the country as a whole. In the early nineties Kerala achieved universal literacy while the country hovered around 50% literacy level.

The Kerala State Tourism Department calls Kerala 'God's Own Country'. It really is so, with its natural beauty, chequered history and the many splendoured racial cocktail making up its population. Here is a place where all the major religions of the world had existed side by side and still exist. Hinduism, of course, forms the base, but it is intermingled with the fiery legacy of the Dravidians as also the dark and invigorating additive of the pre-Dravidian inhabitants. Witchcraft, animism, anthropomorphism, ancestral worship and pantheism coexist with the most sublime Upanishadic contemplation and perception of the Godhead in Hinduism as practised in Kerala. There is a period in its history when Buddhism flourished in the area. Jainism, too, was present in Kerala in the ancient past followed by a not inconsequential presence even today. Sankaracharya, the fountain head of the Vedantic renewal in Hinduism in the 8th century AD., infused new vigour in the contemplative religion of the Aryans. In the process it swallowed Buddhism and Jainism. The historic vicissitudes and triumphs of Hinduism in Kerala had however left sufficient room for Christianity and Islam to coexist and prosper.

Islam came to Kerala almost at the time of prophet Mohammed preached his religion in Arabia. For Kerala was the place which linked India to Arabia through trade from time immemorial. Unlike in other parts of India, Islam came to Kerala in peace and not with its conquering sword. No 'death or faith' option was offered to people in Kerala. The ruling houses of the various principalities into which Kerala was divided invariably were from the Hindu fold although there had been Muslim and Christian princelings at various periods in its history. The Arackal princely house of Malabar and the princely house of Villalvattam of Udayamperoor of central Kerala were respectively Muslim and Christian.

The racial mosaic of Kerala and its history was shaped by and large by its geography. Sandwiched between the waters of the

Arabian Sea and the high mountain ranges of the Western ghats, it had been a rain forest from immemorial times. Capsulated in this strip of earth are the incredibly fertile lowlands with its criss-cross of back waters and beaches caressing the sea and the midlands with its cash crops of rubber, tea and coffee. It is the monsoon rain in its thousand manifestations that has made Kerala what it is. The water which the monsoon brings is the water of life and hope for Kerala.

For those visitors from far off regions, Kerala should have appeared as an enchanted place, blessed by God and nature in the abundance of its flora and fauna. The climate made it possible for the residents to lead a life free from extremes of cold and heat with neither sun strokes nor freezing winter. The water and sunshine combined themselves in nature's chemistry to form its bewilderingly lush vegetation. Such was this piece of good earth in India to which Christianity was brought in the first century A.D.

Who brought Christianity to Kerala, a geographically distant point of the globe, as it radiated from Judea after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus? None other than Thomas, also called Didymus, a Jew from Palestine, a fisherman by profession and one of the twelve Apostles by choice. So say the St. Thomas Christians based on their folk lore and racial memory embedded in tradition and acknowledged by church historians.

The Jews had a settlement in Kerala even before Christ. To the Kerala ports the ships of King Solomon had sailed to stuff its holds with cinnamon, cardamom, pepper, ginger, peacocks, monkeys, ivory, sandalwood etc. in exchange for gold, silver and frankincense. The major reason for St. Thomas deciding to come to Kerala would have been that it was a place frequented by his countrymen. Kerala was known for its salubrious climate, abundance of natural beauty, vegetation and rain among the seafaring peoples of the ancient world, including the Jews from Palestine who frequented its shores for trade.

From 6th Century BC Jews had begun migrating to Kerala. Cyrus the Persian emperor persecuted the Jews. The first wave of Jews would have come down to settle down in Kerala from about that time. The second wave of Jewish migration took place in AD 68. It appears in the second wave around the thousand Jews disembarked from several ships and they settled down in places like Palayur, Kodungalloor, Paravoor, Mala, Pulloott etc. The Jews were traders, and the places they settled were around the entrepot of the day. Seven centuries of contact would have made Kerala a familiar destination for trade and immigration for the Jews. There is no wonder, therefore, that the area was included in the list of places for evangelization by the apostles of Christ. Thoma, the more daring member of the apostolic group, would have included distant Kerala, outside the Semitic regions, in his itinerary for the challenge it offered in evangelization.

When Thomas Didymus landed, a few Brahmins had already come down and settled in Kerala. Brahmins were the priestly class who alone were allowed to study the scriptures and held the highest rank in caste society. The next in line were Kshatrias, the rulers and warriors. The third category were the Vysyas, people who conducted trade. The fourth class were Sudras who did manual work in agriculture or handicrafts or the service sector. Below these four castes were the outcastes, the untouchables who did obnoxious jobs like scavenging.

When he landed in Kerala, St. Thomas (52 A.D.) would have taken initial lodging with some Jewish family. It is possible that the first converts were a few Jews. It would have taken a while for Thomas to pick up the local language from the Jews. It is quite probable that communication with the Brahmins was easier than with members of other communities who would have been largely illiterate. For the Brahmins of the time, nurtured in the humanism of the Upanishads and the principles of Buddhism, the message of universal love preached by Jesus would have looked very attractive.

The other communities, denied Vedic learning and kept outside the spiritual aura of the Upanishadic tradition, would have been beyond the pale of such a message of hope and spirituality that Christianity represented. This could have been the reason why the original converts to Christianity were from the upper caste Brahmins.

In A.D. 345 Thomas of Cana, a leader of the Christian trading community from Syria, landed at Kodungalloor with 72 families to escape persecution in his country and to settle down in Kerala. The Knananites became a major tributary of the rising power of St. Thomas Christians. A large number of Jews who had earlier settled in Kerala also embraced Christianity. No major effort towards further evangelization came from the first converts to Christianity in Kerala for a very long time.

St. Thomas Christians enjoyed a high position in the caste hierarchy of Kerala. This was not only because of the fact that they were supposed to be descended from converts from higher castes and also from the rich immigrants from Syria and Judea but also because of the material prosperity which they achieved by hardwork. The St. Thomas Christians excelled in three occupations: agriculture, trade and soldiering. Of these, trade was anathema to the higher castes of the time. To this day the pre-eminent position of St. Thomas Christians in trade and commerce remains. In fact it can be said that, in the caste hierarchy of Kerala, the Christians filled the gap created by the absence of an indigenous Vysya sect, who by tradition attended to the trade and commerce of the community. There was a time when the local chieftains used to measure each others' importance by the number of Christians who lived within their areas.

The supreme symbol of the social position of the St. Thomas Christians was the genesis and functioning of a Christian principedom in Kerala to which a reference was made earlier in this chapter. According to V.K. Joseph Mappila there was an inscription in the Udayamperoor Church about the demise of Prince Malhulla around

800 A.D. His was not a territorial sway, but suzerainty over the Christians which the royal house of Villalvattom was empowered to exercise in the territory otherwise ruled by the Hindu princes. The Villalvattam dynasty originally functioned from Chennamangalam which for centuries remained a settlement of Jews and Christians. In course of time because of the rise of Muslim trade power the Christians were scattered from their original dwellings in Kodungalloor and surrounding places including Chennamangalam. The second home of the Christian royal house was Udayamperoor, a sleepy town in the neighbourhood of modern Cochin and a centre of Christians at that time. There are no brick and mortar relics of the royal house available today, but to this day the place where the Christian palace stood is called 'Kolothuveli'. The palace ground and the tank, which was the royal tank, is called 'Kolothum kulam' meaning the palace tank. 'Kolothu' means 'belonging to the palace'.

In a letter sent by Pope John XXII in 1328 A.D. the Villalvattam king is addressed as 'the lord of the Nazranis'. According to tradition the Villalvattam Christian king used to send every year pepper as gift to the Holy Father in Rome. Unfortunately for the St. Thomas Christians the royal house became least productive of heirs to its throne. When there was no means to continuing the lineage the land and possessions of the Christian royal household went to the Raja of Cochin. This was around the time when Vasco da Gama visited Kerala for the second time in 1503. The Christians gave him the royal mitre of the Villalvattam dynasty and requested Vasco da Gama to protect them. This was done not because of any rupture of relations of the Christians with the Hindu princes but because of the affinity they felt based on religion and also due to the culture of the day which did not see anything "unpatriotic" in the gesture. The Hindu royal houses of the day were themselves seeking protection from the foreigners who seemed to have superior technology in a trial of strength.

After the arrival of the Portuguese and the epochal but dubiously legitimised holding of the Synod of Diamper in 1599 by Archbishop Menezes of Goa, there was a sea-change in the life style of the St. Thomas Christians. These changes were for the good and bad. Until the Synod, the Christian community had been integrated into the caste structure of Kerala as regards their mode of dressing, hair styles, eating habits, rituals at the time of birth, marriage, death etc. which did not come openly in conflict with their Christian faith. The St. Thomas Christians enjoyed a social status above the Nair community, but below the Brahmins from whom they claimed their descent. Evangelism in the narrow sense, i.e., Christianisation by conversion, was anathema because it contained the danger of accommodating the lower caste converts within the Christian fold. The St. Thomas Christians practised untouchability with a vengeance if only to retain their superior position in the caste hierarchy. Conformity to Brahmanism went as far as sticking to a vegetarian diet in many Christian families. To take note of the positive contribution made by the Synod of Diamper, it banned untouchability as unchristian.

Before the days of the Synod, priesthood was conferred only on the members of selected families. The priests could marry. Other indigenous customs included wearing of tufts in true Indian fashion. Military training was compulsory for Christian males between the age of 6 and 20, and the males used to carry their swords to the Church. It has taken centuries to get over the caste prejudices for the St. Thomas Christians although it can be said in the last decade of the twentieth century caste prejudices were at last being wiped out from the community.

After the arrival of the Westerners evangelization became a major process. St. Francis came to Kerala following the settlement of the Portuguese. Members of the backward and lower castes embraced Christianity partly due to the egalitarian Christian

message of hope and partly to escape the caste tyranny in the traditional Hindu fold.

Today it will be too much to claim that the Christians are the descendants of the high caste Aryans. The wide variety of physical features met with among the Syrian Christians speaks volumes for the broad racial base. They are truly a segment of the Indian mosaic, a stimulating cocktail of racial strains, and as Indian as any one can claim to be in the state of Kerala as well as the Indian Union. It is to this community of Syrian Christians that the Thaliath family belonged.

PARENTAGE

The Thaliath family is one of the most ancient, noble and aristocratic St. Thomas Christian families in Kerala. One of the great grand fathers of Bishop Jonas had moved from Angamaly to Cheranelloor and from there to Puthenpally in the 18th century. The grand parents of Bishop Jonas Thaliath were Varkey Joseph Thaliath and Lucy Joseph of Kallookaran family in Ollur. A grand uncle of Bishop Jonas was Fr. Basil CMI (then TOCD) who was the Prior General of the CMI congregation from 1908 to 1914.

Born on 30th June 1888 Chev. Joseph Thaliath, father of Bishop Jonas, had his school education in St. Albert's High School, Ernakulam, St. Thomas, Trichur and his college studies in St. Aloysius, Mangalore and St. Joseph, Thiruchirappally. When higher education abroad was rare and expensive, he went abroad in 1910 and took his Master's Degree and Bar-at-Law from England.

During his studies in England the young barrister happened to read the autobiography of St. Teresa of Lisieux. The tenderly devotional and poetic autobiography touched the deeper chords of the sensitive heart of young Thaliath. He became an instant devotee of the Little Flower—the more popular name of the saint. En route his journey back home from England in 1914 Joseph visited Lisieux. He went to the Carmelite convent of the Little flower and saw her room, grave and her parental home, and every object which had association with the saint and her suffering. A burning devotion to Teresa filled his being.

Thereafter he used every opportunity to propagate the devotion to the Saint. The autobiography of the Saint appealed to him. Even after becoming a busy barrister in Kerala, he found time to translate the book into Malayalam. From the young barrister, the devotion

to the Little Flower spread among many members of the Thaliath family. The children of the future chief Justice of Travancore too imbibed the devotion. The special devotion was to form part of the domestic ambience in which Chakkappan grew up as a child.

Joseph Thaliath settled and started his legal practice in Ernakulam, the capital of Cochin State. Before long he was appointed a judge of the High Court at Cochin. His reputation as a legal and juridical luminary grew and spread to the neighbouring state, i.e., his home state of Travancore in which his family lived.

It did not take long for the Government of Travancore to offer Judge Thaliath of Cochin the more exalted position of Chief Justice of Travancore. The appointment stirred up a hornets' nest of severe criticism from the leaders of the upper caste Hindus, for the appointment of a member of the Christian community was a revolutionary step in the 1920's when the communal loyalties were strong. The members of the dominant communities of the period had enjoyed the privilege of occupying important public offices for long. How could they tolerate others adorning the same positions? It was against such a background that Chev. Joseph Thaliath became the first Catholic Chief Justice of the Travancore State. He continued in office for 17 years earning esteem and respect from every quarter, including his earlier critics. For in him was combined an intense religiosity with a burning quest for excellence in temporal life. Joseph was a powerful communicator. Even as he climbed the ladder of success the habit of hard work and study remained with him. He was not averse to burning the midnight oil to acquire knowledge. He retired as Chief Justice at the age of 58. He was covered with glory for his substantial and enduring contribution to the country, to the state of Travancore and the state of Cochin and to his community. After retirement Justice Thaliath shifted to Madras where his son Joseph Jr. was a very prosperous film producer. The great man passed away due to cardiac arrest on 13th January 1959. He was then 71.

There is a touching tribute to Justice Thaliath in a letter written by Fr. Hambye, SJ, an illustrious church historian to the future Bishop who at the time was Fr. Jonas: "Barely three weeks ago, I had been the guest of your father for one full day. I had reached Madras by the Trivandrum express and immediately proceeded to his bungalow.

"Then together we had gone to the nearby parish of Kilpauk, where I celebrated Mass for him and had the joy of giving him communion. I agree that, then, he was not in the best of health. But who could have believed that he could be called so quickly to his reward? Thus God wanted him to hasten to the eternal vision and being so keen on liturgical subjects to the eternal contemplation of the sacrifices of the lamb.

"Your father was known to me since 1952 at least, and a real friendship grew between us. We shared many common ideas and we enjoyed to spend time in discussing them. He was a man of very vast culture, such as one rarely finds, especially in Kerala. And he had the courage to keep himself informed of many topics. Besides he was a Christian of rare and sterling piety. Nothing sentimental but profound and balanced. Above all he had by himself, I believe, a personal approach to liturgical piety, which made him so lovable and attractive. Needless to add that his charity had become a byword especially in Madras. People liked him for his simplicity, generosity and direct approach. He was very alert to social situations and the remedies for them.

"Well, it remained to us to pray for him, and soon to pray to him to help us to carry on his message and especially to form laymen like him. I wish many will come out on his footsteps."

Joseph Thaliath, father of Bishop Thaliath was a great leader of the people in general and Christian community in particular. In his time, he loomed high above the controversies and confusion as a prophetic figure to whom people turned for enlightenment and guidance. Despite all adulation he remained a man of God. He was

filled with an abundant reserve of Christian charity, courage and zeal. Throughout his life, he never compromised himself on principles or yielded to the pressures of worldly power for temporary gain.

The education Bill of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer was meant to dismantle the autonomy and influence of Christian Educational Establishments. A great agitation against the Bill raged during the period Joseph Thaliath was Chief Justice. He was part of the erring Establishment and it needed courage in those days to speak against the head of the Establishment and against the official policy.

Justice Thaliath rose to the occasion. Remaining silent would have been cowardly. Acting on impulse would have been foolhardy. He wanted the government to know where exactly his sympathies were. Soon an occasion presented itself to air his views in unequivocal terms. He addressed a mammoth gathering at Trivandrum in October 1948. In his speech hardly palatable to the government he belonged to, he analysed the issue threadbare into its elements. In a masterly way he isolated the core issues from the secondary ones and shed light on the points that affected autonomy of the Christian community.

This is how he defended the Catholic clergy: "Our clergy is the greatest asset we have. Here, as anywhere else, you will not find a body of men more educated and cultured than the Catholic clergy." "A man who spends four years in the university after his School Leaving Examination comes out with one or two letters of the alphabet added to his name and he is then considered an educated man by all. But our clergy have to spend eight years of intense study, after the school leaving examination, the minimum qualification prescribed for entrance into the theological colleges, before they are ordained priests. A good many go for priesthood after taking their degrees. During these eight years they learn languages, the humanities, science in general, history, ethics, philosophy and theology. They have also to learn religions.

Our clergy are educated in different centres like Alwaye, Kandy, Mangalore, Poona, Shembagannoor, Kurseong and Rome. Picked men from such religious orders like the Jesuits, the Carmelites and others are the professors who teach and train them. Always a stream of students is going from here to the Urban College, Rome, which is an international institution where students coming from all nations live together like brothers, for all the seven years they have to undergo their studies there. You will find there Indians, Chinese, Japanese, English, Irish, Americans, Negroes, Turks, in short, all nationalities. Our students while they are in Rome study together and often live together with men like Archbishop Spellman of New York and Archbishop Griffin of Westminster, whom the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of England would be proud to count among their friends. Of our present bishops four had undergone their studies in that famous international college. Again a good number of our priests are receiving regularly foreign newspapers and periodicals under the remaining system and they are thereby keeping themselves in touch with what is going on in other parts of the world".

"Those who advise our young men to rebel against our clergy perhaps think that our clergy constitute a caste by themselves, as is the case in certain other communities. There is no priestly class among Catholics. Our priests and bishops are our own kith and kin, blood of our blood. They are either our uncles, brothers or sons. An uncle of mine was a Carmelite priest and he was the Prior General of their Order for some years and a grand uncle had held a similar position earlier. A first cousin of mine was a bishop. And a son of mine is now studying for the priesthood. This boy having stood first in the State of Cochin in the School Leaving Examination was the recipient of a gold medal and a scholarship from the State. But when he expressed a desire to study for the priesthood, I gladly gave him my consent. And ever since, whenever I had an occasion to speak at jubilee celebrations of priests or celebrations connected with their ordinations, to bring home the dignity of priesthood to

the common people, I have always said, and that more sincerely, that I would be a far prouder and happier parent to see that son of mine working as a priest in a humble parish than to see him occupying the high office of the Divan of Travancore. Those who advise our men to rebel against the clergy are asking them to revolt against their own uncles, brothers and sons. Can our advisors be employed in a more foolish enterprise than this?"

Justice Joseph Thaliath was a loving father, ideal husband and good brother. God-fearing man as he was, he brought up all his nine children as intense Christians, living their faith. He felt it was due to the special blessing of God that one of his sons had become a Carmelite priest (i.e., Fr. Jonas CMI) and one of his daughters had become a Carmelite nun (i.e., Sr. Teresina AC).

Mary, mother of Bishop Jonas, hailed from the 'Moolayil Tharakan family of Chertala, an aristocratic family as that of the Thaliath family. Mary and Joseph were in the nobler sense of the modern phrase a couple made for each other. She was comely, gentle and affectionate. As the doting mother she took extraordinary care in the upbringing as well as the education of all her offsprings. Mary was as religious as her husband and loved to attend the divine liturgy and to receive holy communion every day.

Mary's will is a remarkable document that displays her strong religious faith: "Subject to the payment of all my funeral expenses and my other debts and obligations which I have to discharge, I direct my executor to arrange for five Gregorian Masses to be said for me and one Gregorian Mass for my son, Fr. Jonas and one Gregorian Mass for my daughter, Sr. Teresina. . . . I give my blessings to all my children and to their families. The greatest thing I desire in this world is to see that all my children and their families live in fear of God, adhering to our faith and according to the laws of God following the good example set by their father, whom God had chosen to give us as the head of our family and in mutual love. My only concern is about this. I offer to God singly and collectively all

the children God has designed to give me. For the fulfilment of their duties according to their status of life and reunion of all in heaven in the beatific vision and presence of God I offer my prayers, my life and my death. Amen". Mary had survived her dear son Bishop Jonas.

Chakkappan, further Bishop Jonas, was very fond of his mother. When he joined the CMI Congregation he would write to his mother almost every week telling her about his health, whereabouts and activities. She used to write back advising him not to overwork and to take good care of his health. Further she used to retail all domestic and non-domestic news in her letters to Chakkappan. When A.J. John, the Governor of the then Madras province, died, she reported to her son: "A.J. John had come to Madras to die and to rest himself by the side of St. Thomas." As an aspirant for priesthood and later, he was in her prayers. Chakkappan was also in the habit of requesting for her special prayers for him.

After his father's death in 1959 the son used to pray to his father rather than remember him in his prayers. This he could not do to his mother since she outlived him. The filial devotion of the Bishop was expressed in many ways. He preserved the last letter received from his father as if it was a sacred relic. There is this story that when a close relative of his sister was sick, Jonas tore a little portion from one letter where it was written 'yours affectionately' and sent the same to his sister with instructions how to use it. The sick person recovered fully from the sickness. The Bishop used to tell this anecdote to his friends.

At a time when large families were the order of the day rather than the exception, the flourishing barrister's family grew in number. Mary and Joseph had nine children, three sons and six daughters. Jonas' elder brother George passed away on the 4th February 1982 about three months after the Bishop's demise, due to a myocardial infraction. Befitting the strong religiosity that infused the Thaliath family, George received Holy Communion and the last sacraments in preparation to meet his end on earth, and he said he was going to his younger brother's (Jonas) place, and uttered 'Jesus, Mary,

Joseph' and then kissed the crucifix before gasping for his last breath on earth.

The second brother of Bishop Jonas, Joseph (Jr)—also called Baby by his folks, was a very talented and entrepreneurial person. When the Malayalam movie industry was in its infancy, he it was, who became one of the pioneers who produced movies of high quality. One of the films 'Jnana Sundari' (The Wise Beauty) became a hit movie of the time. The film is still recalled with admiration by the elderly people. Joseph Thaliath (Jr) owned 'CITADEL' a film studio in Madras. He produced many more good movies. He was also a versatile artist who could paint and sculpt. Joseph (Jr) passed away in January 1984.

Of the six sisters, Dr. Lucy Thaliath, remained a spinster and was the professor in Gynecology and Obstetrics at St. John's Medical College, Bangalore, from 1967 for about ten years. She passed away on the 5th September 1983 in New York. Annamma, another sister was married to Thomas Kuruvinakunnel of Palai.

Sr. Teresina AC who had been principal of some of the schools run by her order and became Provincial of her order was the third among the sisters. Mrs. Mary, wife of Joseph Vadakkekalam, Alleppey, and Mrs. Elikutty, wife of Mr. Antony Variamparambil, Cochin, and Mrs. Rosy, wife of Nicholas Karimpanal, Kanjirappally, are now house-wives, and along with their husbands function as pillars of the local community to which they belong. Sr. Teresina used to write regularly to Jonas, sometimes asking for pet birds to be procured for her. She also used to admonish Jonas on his proneness to overwork. In one letter written while the construction work of Dharmaram College was in progress she mentioned that one Kuruvinakunnel Mathachan had told her that he had found Jonas always in the carpentry shed, whenever he had occasion to visit him.

The Thaliath family was very close and the bonds of love and mutuality grew stronger with the passage of time.

Chapter THREE

GROWING UP

When he was about four years old, Chakkappan developed amoebic liver abscess. The child developed this all on a sudden without initial symptoms like dysentery as is usual. The physicians could not diagnose the ailment. The liver abscess burst into the lung, into the pleural space, causing empyema. Chakkappan had high fever with cough. The physicians at Cochin diagnosed the disease as tuberculosis of the lung. Chakkappan's father planned to take him from Ernakulam to Madanappally in Madras province where the best medical care for tuberculosis was available in those days. But this was postponed at the insistence of his grandfather. Instead, they went to the ancestral house at Puthenpally to have ayurvedic treatment. Both his parents had deep faith in the power of prayers. They fervently appealed to God to cure the disease of their son and initiated special devotions and novenas to the Little Flower and to St. Don Bosco.

One day at Puthenpally, by accident a doctor-friend of Chakkappan's father called on him. The visiting doctor was told about the illness of Chakkappan. After a preliminary check up the doctor said that the child did not have TB but he could be suffering from liver abscess. The parents could not believe this at first, since the better qualified doctors at Ernakulam had diagnosed the ailments as TB. The doctor insisted on taking the child back to Ernakulam and presenting his views to the doctors.

The parents realised all on a sudden that it was the 9th and final day of the Novena to don Bosco and believed that this doctor was a god-sent messenger. Post-haste, they took Chakkappan to Cochin and explained to the doctor who had attended on the child earlier all that they suspected about his illness. The doctor at Cochin

conducted a stool test and found it teeming with amoebae. By this time the affliction had far advanced. Chakkappan was reduced to skin and bones and his recovery became doubtful.

The treatment took months of stay in the hospital and a long period of recuperation. All the while the parents 'stormed' heaven with their incessant prayers. There were two surgeries without anesthesia to remove the abscess from his liver and lungs. It was doubtful whether the child would survive the operations. When Chakkappan was brought from the operation theatre, he was in death agony. The attending family members looked on with surprise when the child, even as he suffered and was in great anguish, raised his hand and pulled out the picture of the Little Flower from under the pillow and kissed it.

The parents and relatives were of the firm belief that the diagnosis of Chakkappan's illness and his cure were events bordering on the miraculous. They attributed it to the intercession of the Little Flower. In the community and among religious orders the episode received wide publicity. It was reported in the local periodicals of the church. It was also reported in a French Catholic magazine 'La Obra Maxima' in November 1926 by Rev. Bonaventure de San Jose C.D.

Chakkappan received the first Holy Communion at the age of five. It was about that time that Pope Pius X had instructed the bishops and pastors that Holy Communion could be given to little children. His parents and the parish priest had found him preconscious in his understanding of religious dogma and found him fit to receive the Holy Communion. Dr. Lucy recalls that "...during the illness my parents made a vow that if he is cured they would very much like him to become a priest, but since they cannot decide on it, they will give him a favourable environment for this, i.e., they will send him as an aspirant at Thevara for his studies. The sickness had debilitated Chakkappan so badly that he had to start everything anew from learning to walk etc.

In Kalamassery where he was taken to recuperate his health, Chakkappan was presented with a kid lamb to play with. He had a weakness for lambs, a trait curiously evocative of his future role as spiritual shepherd of the Church.

Chakkappan had his primary education at Ernakulam. After that at the age of ten he joined the Aspirantage of the Carmelite Congregation at Thevara. Chakkappan enjoyed good food and had a good appetite always. He liked also home-cooked food and when he came from the aspirantage expressed his liking by eating the food cooked at home heartily. One day his mother asked him "what do you do at the boarding when you feel hungry?" Chakkappan's instant reply was: "I go and drink water." The food served at the aspirantage would have been very simple, but his sister remembers that he had never complained about the food at Thevara.

Fr. Canisius, a long time colleague and close friend of the Bishop, remembers very vividly the days at the Aspirantage: "At that tender age, Chakkappan knew well the importance of the decision he had taken. A friend of his father met little Chakkappan on the road, clad in white cassock with blue sash (it was the type of uniform the aspirants wore those days), and asked in wonderment, why on earth he had taken the decision to leave his father's house and shut himself up within the walls of a monastery. The boy's answer was thought-provoking. Pointing to a hill facing them, Chakkappan said: "Look at that hill; if I climb it and look down from a height, I get a wider vision of the world around. That will enable me to associate myself with the world from a higher level and give it proper leadership. Hence I am not at all running away from the world, but trying to serve it better."

Another co-aspirant of Chakkappan at Thevara and Always recalls, "He was the youngest of the lot as he was only ten when he joined the aspirantage. He had a sharp intellect and unusual memory power. He was always happy with a beaming face and was sincere and straightforward in his dealings with others and

ready to help all. In studies he scored always the first place and he took a very active and lively part in games and sports, in cultural performances and in all the activities of the aspirantage. During the intervals and recreation time he cracked jokes, narrated stories, sang songs and entertained the community. Though he hailed from an aristocratic background he had no difficulty to adjust himself to the poor and simple surroundings and life style of the Aspirantage of 1931."

Joseph Thaliath, who climbed to the pinnacle of success in his profession, was deeply anchored in spirituality while he had taken the decision to send his youngest son to priesthood knowing its full implications. Chakkappan came to his father to get his consent to become a priest all through the early years. While he gave freedom of choice, he often made clear the great pride and sense of fulfilment he felt in his son becoming a priest. One day Joseph Thaliath paid a visit to the Aspirant's Home at Alwaye. The rector Fr. Patrick took him to the community. In his talk Joseph remarked emphatically, "I will be much more satisfied to see you my son, Chakkappan, as a fervent religious priest than a very high official in any sphere in the State." His father's vision of life and conviction made an indelible impression on the mind of Chakkappan.

Although the parents fully supported Chakkappan taking up priesthood, there were also negative innuendoes from other family members. His sister Dr. Lucy remembers that Chakkappan was referred to as an Araprantan (semi-mad in Malayalam), a condescending reference to the English word aspirant. She remembers that during holidays Chakkappan came home and took active part in their vacation activities, playing games, and picnics etc. Just as any other member of the family Chakkappan enjoyed home-made food. He was fond of lime juice. Once he had jokingly told his maternal grandmother that he would come riding on an elephant's back to bury her after her death. This was a prophetic statement. It came to pass that he did bury his grandmother who

passed away at Bangalore at her son Joseph Tharakan's house. Chakkappan was then the Rector of Dharmaram College, Bangalore. He officiated at her funeral.

A touching testimony about Chakkappan's aspirant days comes from Fr. Fabius CMI: "Jacob came to St. Antony's Monastery, Alwaye in May 1930 when he was hardly eleven. I have lived with him for two years at Alwaye, two years at Thevara, one year at Ambazhakad and three years in Bangalore during the construction of Dharmaram. We were together from the 5th standard. The qualities, I remember, about Jacob those days are his sharp intellect, perfect memory, warm-heartedness, sincerity in behaviour, innocence, humility, gentlemanliness etc. He could concentrate on studies well and study faster. His scores in examinations were always high. He used to get cent per cent marks. Once Chakkappan happened to score only 97 per cent in mathematics; the Rector asked him what had he done with the three marks"?

He was interested in physical activities, literature and even music. Though quiet and pious, he was good at cracking jokes. He could enliven any company with his humour. Once he made and presented a memento to Fr. Fabius, a spiritual bouquet. The contents of the spiritual bouquet were, punches so many, pinches so much, backbiting so many, gossip so much and so on. This caused much merriment among the pre-teen aspirants. According to Fr. Fabius, Jonas used to take part in 'Akshara Sloka' (traditional versification competition). One of the quartets composed by Jonas in Malayalam when translated ran like this:

If you do the verse
it should be good
and not bad or worse
Please help us Little Teresa
to avoid flaws.

Chakkappan had an uncommon ability to compose rhymes in the tight Sanskrit metres:

Chakkappan passed SSLC standing first in Cochin State in 1936. He earned the highest marks in mathematics and earned the gold medal. Coming first in the SSLC cast doubts in the mind of some of his relatives and even friends whether he should pursue secular studies. Chakkappan's father was even accosted with the query that if the boy was allowed to become a priest it would be a "a loss to the Catholic Syrian community". Dr. Lucy remembers her father having replied: "the best must be given to God". Neither Chakkappan nor his father wavered in their resolution for the former to continue in the seminary to become a CMI priest. Chakkappan now acknowledged as a brilliant boy joined the Novitiate of St. Theresa in Ambazhakad. On 23rd November 1936 he donned the CMI habit which was followed by the canonical novitiate. On the 24th November 1937 the first vows were taken and he went to Koonammavu.

Chakkappan was endowed with a very high I.Q. Apart from the religious fervour and adherence to discipline, the young aspirant also impressed his colleagues, superiors and people around him by his intellectual acumen. He was a problem solver for persons caught up in the conundrum of life. Once when he had gone home for holidays there were some financial problems which stumped the elders who could not find an easy solution. Young Chakkappan overheard the discussion and volunteered to provide a feasible solution. And he did provide the solution which proved to be a pleasant surprise for the family members. When his sister commented on his intellectual acumen, Chakkappan quipped, "All of us are endowed with the same intelligence; it is the training I got at the aspirantage that makes the difference."

Chapter FOUR

THE PRIEST IN THE MAKING

Chakkappan joined the novitiate house of the CMI Congregation at Ambazhaked in Trichur District. During novitiate the candidates learnt about religious vows, asceticism, spiritual life, the history and traditions of the religious congregation etc. The novices were given the monastic habit and a new name at the beginning of the novitiate to show that the novice was dead to the world and had taken to a new life in religion. Chakkappan was given the name 'JONAS' by which name he would be known later. Chakkappan felt that he was born again under the new name, i.e., Jonas. He enthusiastically took to the novice's life of prayer, reflection, solitude, simple living, religious poverty and self-denial.

The novices celebrated the divine liturgy in their private chapel, but they joined the community for meditation, divine office and common meals. They had regular classes on religious life, prayer, asceticism etc. given by the novice master and other professors. They spent considerable time in silence and reading spiritual books. They also did manual work, played games and at the appointed hours turned to rest and relaxation. They had to learn East Syriac, the liturgical language. Till recent times Syriac was the liturgical language of the Syrian Catholics of Kerala whereas Latin was used by the Latin Catholic Community. This has now changed, and today Malayalam has replaced both Syriac and Latin.

After a novice is properly initiated into religious life, he is under close observation. At this stage the views of the staff community and the judgement of the novice master become crucial. Only if there is unanimity of opinion regarding the suitability of the person, will he be recommended for making the religious profession of vows.

A co-novice of Jonas, Paulinus Jeerakathil, who later became the Bishop of Jagdalpur, recalls his novitiate days thus: "Even while a novice, Jonas' excellence was appreciated by his companions. A few of them rather adored him. His religious superiors cherished great hope about him. I do remember the golden jubilee celebration of the Novitiate House. There was a conspicuous gathering on the occasion. It was the privilege of Jonas to read to the gathering a rather long piece of Syriac poem he had composed to the applause of all. Though he must have received help from the Syriac scholars and Fr. Ludovic, the poetic conception was his own."

Another colleague of Jonas says: "We were most intimate in the novitiate as we were then so fresh without any inhibitions, bias or group feelings. We soon came to know and appreciate each other. We stole the show during the feast days and celebrations throughout the year."

After the novitiate period, Jonas made his first religious profession on 24th November 1937, the feast day of St. John of the Cross. Along with a few others Jonas started the philosophy course at St. Joseph's Seminary at Mangalore, where he stayed with other CMI students in the CMI hospice near the Seminary.

SCHOLASTIC AT MANGALORE

At the Mangalore seminary Jonas impressed his superiors as a truly religious aspirant endowed with multifaceted abilities and profound humility in equal measure. Fr. Canisius, one of his confreres, testifies: "While Jonas was a young scholastic at our Carmelite Hospice at Mangalore, one could easily notice in him a true religious who preferred to be one among the many, in spite of his outstanding qualities of head and heart. He was the first to accuse himself when occasions presented themselves and was ever ready to be of help to his brethren. Once the superior pointed out to the

community a fault which, according to him, quite a few had committed. Jonas promptly admitted the fault. Actually he was the only one to accept that with humility. When our choir master was about to leave us after ordination, the superior wanted me to take up that assignment. This new assignment was bound to prove a tremendous burden to me. Considering my modest talents for music, Bro. Jonas, four years junior to me, sensed the situation, apprised the superior of it and offered to take up the burden himself so as to relieve me."

Another classmate of Jonas, Fr. J.C. Manalel, writes, "At St. Joseph's Seminary we were attending science classes together. We often used to discuss problems and exchange ideas. It was sometimes a pleasure for us to muse over the future. Jonas was multi-talented and could turn his hand to anything with success. He had a method in every thing. Above all he was a man of vision, which stood him in good stead in all that he undertook."

Exposure to the philosophy courses brought out the intellectual eminence of Jonas. His professor was so impressed and his performance was of so high a standard during the first year that he was selected before completion of the philosophy course for being sent for studies in theology to the Papal Seminary in Kandy, Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

Providence was working for Jonas in a caring way. He got the best secular and ecclesiastical education available in his time. Though there was no custom of sending young scholastics to Kandy for doing theology, his superiors thought it was quite opportune and proper to send Jonas to Kandy. In this they were discharging their duty to give the best training and education to their wards and to develop the potential in them so that they would in course of time become worthy instruments in the hands of God, fit to render greater and better service in the Church.

An uncut diamond can look like an ordinary stone, but if it is expertly cut and polished by a diamond-cutter, it can metamorphose

into a precious stone coveted by many. Only a keen-eyed superior would discover the potential raw diamond from among the rough stones given over to his charge and send that to a diamond cutter. More often than not religious superiors become the object of severe criticism from various corners in the matter of selection of candidates for higher studies whether in India or abroad. If only the superiors make the selection on the basis of objective criteria and according to the dictates of their conscience, after having used the time-tested means of evaluation of the merits of the candidates, they can rest assured that exceptional individuals of the calibre of Jonas will receive justice.

Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the fact that the selection processes for higher studies in seminaries are not always above board. As regards the selection of Jonas for studies in Kandy the decision was clean and above board as proved by later events.

KANDY

In Kandy Jonas laboured for a degree in philosophy which was then called Licentiate in Philosophy. He did the course so well that his professors were full of admiration for him. One of them wrote a laudatory letter to Jonas' father who was then the Chief Justice of Travancore State. The letter said that the professor had not had in recent years such a good student.

Fr. Canisius, his co-religious, recalls their life in Kandy. "Three of us—Fr. Januarius (later the bishop of Chanda), Bro. Jonas and myself—were sharing one large room partitioned by screens. We used to share our experience almost every day.

"Life in the seminary impressed us to such an extent that we picked up a lot from there to shape our vision of our own scholasticate. The Kandy seminary and its wonderful spirit are highly spoken of even today in ecclesiastical circles. That was a seminary where the staff admired the students and students admired

the staff—a brotherhood that grew together with deep concern for the growth of one another. The experience at Kandy had been afterwards a subject of constant reference in our discussions on the details of our scholasticate, and eventually of Dharmaram College, of which Fr. Jonas was the architect par excellence.”

One morning Jonas was not feeling well and did not go with Canisius and Januarius to the church. The room mates found when they came back that Jonas was lying collapsed in the bed. He had a spell of unconsciousness when he visited the toilet. Trying to be cheerful Jonas said: That gave me the opportunity to experience and know what it was like to become unconscious. Canisius says that this inquisitiveness and thirst for knowledge was to be the hall mark of Jonas’ character throughout his life.

Jonas did his theology too in Kandy. During the time the institution was transplanted to Poona, present-day Pune, in Maharashtra. Jonas did three years of philosophy, during which time his superiors thought of grooming Jonas into a professor of philosophy. This however did not materialise.

In the seminary the priests are taught to take down notes, on small sized cards allocating one card for each separate idea so that the cards could be shuffled into the desired sequence to form a continuous stream of thought or argument. Canisius remembers that Jonas had devised his individual method of classifying and preserving the notes even before the method was taught in the class.

Jonas returned to Kerala for his priestly ordination. He was ordained priest by the late Archbishop of Ernakulam, Mar Augustine Kandathil at the St. Mary’s Cathedral on the 21st December 1946. Jonas’ sacerdotal ordination was one of the summit events in the Thaliath family, but happiness among the family members was marred by misunderstanding.

Practices in traditional communities could often prove to be anachronistic and raise the little storms in the tea cup leading to

alienation between friends and relatives. One such practice among the Syrian Catholic Community was the custom of invitation by personal visit for participation in family events like marriage, baptism, first holy communion, ordination of a new priest of the family etc. The Joseph family did not follow the custom strictly and omitted visiting some close relations to personally invite them for the ordination. Instead the invitation was made by sending printed invitation cards. An old fashioned relative felt that his importance was diminished when the personal invitation was substituted with a cold and impersonal printed invitation card. He and others like him and their family members kept away and did not attend the ordination functions held at the Cathedral Church, Ernakulam.

After the ordination, Jonas went to Puthenpally for his first Mass in the Parish Church. The families who felt they were let down, boycotted his Mass and also his prayers at the grave of his grandfather. It was a sad and hurting development that on becoming a priest he was not honoured by his own relatives in his own town. Jonas was pained but did not take to heart the insult. He visited all the relatives in their houses and paid his respect to the elders as if nothing had happened. As recalled by a family member, the incident remained in his mind and in May 1981 he went to Puthenpally while he was the Bishop of Rajkot and went to the houses and personally invited all to his Mass at the church the following day. The gesture was appreciated and all attended the Mass and said prayers at the grave of the grandfather in a touching demonstration of family solidarity. He also offered prayers at the grave side of the recently deceased members of the family. This was however to be his last Mass in his native place.

Even after Chakkappan's becoming Reverend Father Jonas his sister Lucy continued to address him as Chakkappan. One day she told the newly ordained priest that she would address him 'eda Chakkapa'. Jonas retorted saying that he would not let her do that. He was younger to her of course but Jonas was certain that the person of a priest should be respected.

Among the Thaliath brood there developed a special relation between Lucy and her younger brother Chakkappan. While Jonas was getting ready for his priestly ordination, Lucy, his sister was doing her final MBBS examination. She was rather a good student and cleared the exams creditably during the first four years of the medicine course, but in the final examination in the fifth year there was much distraction from studies, and the result was that she failed in the final examination. Her failure caused severe anguish not only to herself but also to her dear brother Jonas. When Lucy wrote to Jonas of her failure, Jonas wrote back, "I re-read your letter kneeling before the crucifix which I have more than once made wet with my own tears. And I laid down your burden at His feet."

In another letter Jonas told her, "I see you when I make the stations of the Cross. At the 8th station I see our Lord consoling you with these sweet words 'you of little faith take courage'." In another letter Jonas confided that he had said the Easter Mass for her success. "Don't lose heart. I expect, if there need be, even a small miracle for your sake." Dr. Lucy speaks of these letters written by Jonas as three of the most beautiful letters a brother priest ever wrote to his sister. Lucy cleared the MBBS when she wrote the next examination.

The loving brother and sister could also quarrel on principles. Lucy recalls a discussion about the ethical side of a certain medical problem involving obstetricians. Jonas stuck to the Catholic view and Dr. Lucy differed from him. She said, "According to medical principles I know what is right and wrong, and this should be left to the doctors." Jonas became very angry and told his sister, "Why talk to a person who has no faith?"

The Chief Justice and his family used to travel comfortably. When they travelled by train they at least chose second class—equivalent to or better than present day first class—in the Indian Railways. Once Jonas was travelling from Poona to Ernakulam. He had written to Dr. Lucy that she could see him if she came to Arkonam Junction near Madras. She went there with a friend and found Jonas travelling

in the third class compartment with hardly any freedom to move. Jonas had travelled in that level of comfort or discomfort all the way from Poona. Distressed at the sight, Dr. Lucy bought a second class ticket for the rest of the journey and gave him a lecture on "what to do on his journey and on reaching Ernakulam". Jonas silently listened to the sisterly sermon and at the end of it he told the friend who had accompanied Dr. Lucy, "You know I have travelled more than her, but I just listen to her." Dr. Lucy remembered that Jonas had travelled to Kandy, Poona etc. whereas her travel was confined to much more modest destinations in the Ernakulam, Trivandrum, Madras triangle.

Yet another touching sister-brother encounter was when Jonas came from Bangalore to Madras on learning about the death of his father on 13th January 1959. There was a certain feeling of guilt in Dr. Lucy for not having taken her father to the hospital when he had the heart attack to which he succumbed. Dr. Lucy was employed and was with her father at Madras. When Jonas arrived she could not but burst out, "It was my fault that our father died." He consoled her saying, "It is all God's will. Not even a strand of hair will shed without His knowing it."

After his priestly ordination Fr. Jonas spent his days in reading books on religious philosophy and church history. He also became an ardent observer of the unfolding political drama. India was to attain statehood as an independent country, and the Muslim League was demanding a separate homeland for Muslims. The possibility of partition and the formation of Pakistan was in the air. The Thaliath family was nationalist in their views and did not have the slightest doubt that the coming of freedom would present the Indian Christian community with any problems. Fr. Jonas shared the view and was further aware of the harm done to the indigenous church by the arrival of the Portuguese in Kerala and their efforts to Latinise the Eastern Church that flourished in Kerala for one and a half millennia from the time of the apostles. He knew what happened in the Synod

of Diamper and had vague plans to make the Synod the theme of his special study later. He was also more than vaguely aware of the affinity between the sublime Upanishadic thought and the high reaches of Christian theology. Vague thoughts about Indianising the Church flashed through his mind.

Fr. Jonas knew in his heart of hearts that only good would come to the Christians from the British quitting the shores of India. Along with thoughts of living in an independent India his mind dwelt on the problems which would be faced by Independent India. The poor of India whom he had seen in his travels up to Poona and also in Kerala conjured up in his mind grim pictures of the struggle ahead. Ever so vaguely and often with clarity, he thought of the ways in which the CMI Order, as also the Catholic Church in India, should respond to the challenges to be faced by the new India. On the midnight that separated 14th August from 15th August in the year 1947 he kept vigil and prayed for the new nation. He joined the special prayers for the country and its people. The thoughts which passed through his mind during the time were to gain clarity as time passed and result in his unique efforts to bring means of livelihood and minimum sustenance to the rural poor through animal husbandry, dairy-farming etc. later.

Chapter FIVE

IN THE ETERNAL CITY

During the Second World War (1939 - 1945) Rome and Italy were practically closed to other nations, especially to those countries on the side of the Allies. After the world war the prestigious universities in Rome were again made accessible to the students of other nations.

Having got the reputation as a young priest with prodigious talent and potential for growth Jonas was selected to study canon law at the Gregorian University in Rome. Fr. Canisius his friend who later became the Superior General of the CMI Order was also selected to study the scripture and accompanied Jonas to Rome for studies. They sailed from Colombo in the ship named 'Champolion' in the latter half of 1948. Fr. Canisius remembers the journey as most pleasant 'under the leadership of Jonas.' Without much waiting or formality the two priests from India were inducted into the famous university. Jonas liked the well-stocked library, the erudite and dedicated faculty and the luxury of space that the University presented to the students.

Jonas was setting foot on European soil for the first time. He was excited about the impact it would make on his sense of history and religion. He was a Christian, a member of the old Syrian Christian - Catholic community that received its faith from one of the Apostles. The arrival of Christianity in India was contemporaneous with its arrival in Rome. He remembered that other parts of Christian Europe received Christianity much later. This was true of even the British who had been ruling India for the last one hundred and fifty years or there-about.

Yet Europe was Christian and India his motherland remained by and large Hindu. There was a tenacity to the Hindu religion. With its plethora of beliefs, religious practices and philosophical traditions, it was so unlike Christianity, unlike Islam and even Judaism, all of which had a unified system of beliefs and practices. There was a time when the average European poured scorn on Indian culture and Hindu religion. The word heathen as made applicable to the Hindus represented an element of arrogance and sense of superiority. But that was now part of history. Many a Western scholar had re-discovered the Orient and there was a respect and recognition for the culture and religious traditions of the Orient including those of India. Inculturation of the Indian Church had become a major movement now. The Indian Christians did not want their religion identified with the West. Many felt that Christianity with its 2000 years tradition was as much Indian as any other religion. There was indeed much affinity between the universality of Christian and Hindu perceptions. Here was an opportunity to go to the sources of Christianity and to discover its unity and harmony behind its present Western garb at the very place it had flourished and radiated its message of hope and redemption to the farthest corners of the globe.

Italy and Rome were war-ravaged. Post-war reconstruction was on. Even so the deprivation and lack of organisation at the individual and social level were of a lesser order than conditions in India. He felt that evangelisation in the context of Indian socio-political reality had to be different. The poverty of the Indian masses could not be wished away. In every effort to spread the Christian message attack on economic backwardness was a task.

Jonas joined the Gregorian and easily made friends with priest students from many other parts of the world. There were a number of Malayali priests as well, apart from his bosom friend Canisius with whom he travelled to Rome. At every available opportunity he set out to see the monuments and the splendour of its famed artistic treasures and architecture.

The St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel took his breath away with their great murals, frescoes and statuary. He stood gazing at the magnificent frescoes by Michelangelo; The Last Judgement, the Creation and the many stories from the Old Testament. The muscular and awfully handsome Adam, God with his wind down hair and beard and the numerous angels in the 'Creation' - an overpowering spectacle. The 'Last Judgement' with its symbolism and visual sweep overpowered Jonas just as any other serious visitor. He inspected with humility and admiration the 'Pieta' - the limp body of Jesus brought down from the cross placed across the lap of Mother Mary - the perfection of form, the harmonious unity of its composition; and the religiosity and humanity that suffused the masterpiece in marble.

Jonas did not leave out the secular Roman monuments either. He moved out with his friends, as time permitted, and took in the magnificent remnants of a lost civilization into the spacious galleries of his mind. He saw the magnificent ruins of the 50000 seat sports stadium known as the Colosseum built in the first century AD by Emperor Vespasian. He saw the Forum of Caesar, the temples of Saturn and of Concord, the Arch of Augustus, the ground where the Vestal Virgin's House stood, the Mausoleum of Hadrian, the Catacombs - the subterranean burial places - and the famed Pantheon with its gabled top and tall rounded monolith columns copied by architects the world over times without number.

He also read about Rome and the history of the early Church. Very soon Jonas became an authority on the monuments and the architectural masterpieces of Rome. He gladly accepted invitations to take around visitors from India eager to see the Eternal City.

Jonas approached once the outstanding canonist scholar, Fr. Coussa (later cardinal Prefect of the congregation for the Oriental Churches), the then Head of the Department of Canon Law at the Lateran University, to clear a doubt. After the meeting the canonist scholar and the student from India became close friends. Fr. Coussa

used to call Fr. Jonas 'Doctor Subtilis' (Subtle Doctor). Another time the professor of Jonas at the Gregorian, Fr. Capello S.J. patted him on his shoulders with more than paternal affection and congratulated him when he scored high in the 'viva voce' for the Licentiate in Canon Law. Soon his friends and teachers started commenting that here was a person who filled the bill for appointment as a bishop in future.

While in Rome his parents visited Fr. Jonas during a Holy Year trip to Rome. Jonas escorted them to all the holy places of Europe. He explained to them with the authority of a priest and a scholar the subtleties of history and religiosity as applicable to each church, shrine or other structures. The parents found that their son had become so much more articulate and self-confident than ever.

It was time for choosing the subject for the doctoral thesis. According to him the subject had something to do with his very own St. Thomas Christians of Kerala. When he made mention choosing the Synod of Diamper as his doctoral theme, he was told that it had already been the subject of a doctoral thesis. But when he examined the particular thesis he found that the dissertation had defended the Synod and its conclusions. Jonas was well aware that the Synod had its own weak and vulnerable attributes which called for a dispassionate and fresh study. His friends warned him that the subject would be riddled with difficulties. For one thing he had to learn Portuguese and visit the Lisbon archives to get to the heart of the matter. Jonas had the habit of making a decision and implementing it whatever be the vicissitudes and problems on the way. He finally decided that the Synod of Diamper, which had had a profound impact on the church of the St. Thomas Christians, would be his theme for doctorate.

It was during his return from one of the journeys to Portugal for collection of material for the thesis that Jonas developed a severe lung disease. From that time he was a sick man although he continued

to be jovial as ever and exerted his utmost to make his stay in Rome as productive and useful as it could be.

Fr. Lucas Vithuvattical, another colleague of Jonas then pursuing higher studies in Rome, reminisces his illness in the following words; "His illness started almost suddenly. I got up and went to his room. Fr. Jonas was in bed and coughing blood and seemed very ill. Though very much perturbed I immediately called in Fr. Canisius and Januarius who were in the same premises. We contacted the house doctor by phone. But his response was far from consoling. He said he would visit the patient the next morning at about 8.00 a.m. In the mean time we were asked to give ice cubes through the mouth and apply ice on the chest. We took a lot of trouble to procure ice during that hour of the night and luckily we managed to get some. Small pieces of ice were spread on his chest. Fortunately his whole organism co-operated with this treatment. Within one hour the flow of blood subsided. The next morning the house doctor arrived and straight away gave two injections to the patient. Then he was taken to hospital for further observations. Finally it was declared that Jonas was suffering from T.B. Since it was in its initial stage, it could be completely cured by medicine alone and no surgery would be required. The professor in the Polyclinic, himself a specialist in heart and lung diseases, undertook charge of treatment. After the tests Jonas was sent back from the clinic and for the sake of convenience he was accommodated in the infirmary.

Two injections very day for the first week were prescribed and streptomycin injection was to be continued without any interruption for thirty days. In fact the streptomycin injection was given for 120 days. After the first month of treatment, the doctor prescribed pneumothoracic collapse therapy. This treatment consisted in pumping air into the pleura. The doctor inserted a thick needle from the back so as to reach the lungs and then he pumped in a fixed quantity of air. The process was, indeed, very painful. The

patient felt after the air was pumped in, as if a great weight was pressing on his chest and a sense of suffocation which he had to bear all through the week. By the end of the week as the air slowly escaped he would feel at ease and then the process would be repeated.

After this treatment Jonas appeared to be completely cured. Almost six months elapsed before he got back to his room. He has to stay in Rome for yet another year of convalescence. It was during this period that he wrote his doctoral thesis on 'The Synod of Diamper' which he defended at the Gregorian University with maximum credit.

DOCTORAL THESIS

As earlier mentioned the decision to choose the theme of his doctoral thesis reflected his love for the people and St. Thomas tradition. The Synod of Diamper can be said to be the most decisive watershed event in the history of the Malabar Church. The westernization of the indigenous church attempted by the "Portuguese" Archbishop Menezes of Goa, who masterminded the Synod, resulted in a major split. A sizeable number went out from the Roman Catholic fold and attached themselves to the Jacobite Church of Syria.

Jonas examined the Synod from the juridical angle. Rallying historical data Jonas concluded that Archbishop Menezes of Goa did not have authority over the Malabar Church as he claimed and therefore the Synod of Diamper he convened and its decisions were not legally valid. The thesis further unravelled the contents of the two briefs dated January 27, 1595 and January 21, 1597 respectively issued to Archbishop Menezes by Pope Clement VIII. These papal briefs were flaunted by the Archbishop to prove that he had authority to convene the Synod. Jonas held that the briefs did not say a word about the conduct of a diocesan synod nor could it be said that such faculties were contained implicitly in them. As the Archbishop of

Goa was not vested with authority specifically to conduct a Synod even by the briefs, there was no legitimacy for the Synod of Diamper.

There was a modern-day politician in Archbishop Menezes who prepared the ground for the conduct of the Synod and who with meticulous care had orchestrated and masterminded its outcome by creating an artificial majority that would support his resolutions.

In the space of three or four months he ordained a hundred priests who assured him majority support in the Synod. The actual number of priests who participated in the Synod was 153. The ordination of new priests of the Malabar Church had been kept in abeyance by the Third Provincial Council of Goa in 1585 as the Malabar Church had already been well provided with sufficient number of priests. It was therefore against the very decision of the Ecclesiastical Council that Menezes went about ordaining priests in the eleventh hour. In those times the status of a family used to go up steeply if a member was ordained a priest. Hence it was easy for the Archbishop to recruit candidates for ordination as priests. In modern times a young man becomes a priest after undergoing a minimum period of study extending to seven years and beyond. The custom was different in the 16th century and the family background and demonstration of piety were more decisive factors than rigorous training and well planned study.

Having assured the majority, the Archbishop drafted the various decrees to be passed in the Synod. There was a crusading spirit that imbued the Archbishop. Here was a Christian group, according to his thinking in a pagan country fouled up by doctrinal schism emanating from the Chaldean church of Asia Minor and in the zone of Nestorian influence. They were also practising pagan customs like carrying swords while going to the church, males wearing ear rings, observing pagan practices for the dead, the priests abjuring celibacy etc. It was his mission to bring the St. Thomas Christians to the Roman fold. He sincerely believed that he was doing a great service to the local Christians, by purifying them from their

schismatic contamination and pagan influence. He had already heard the story of the St. Thomas Christians coming to Vasco da Gama and submitting themselves as Christians to the care and protection of the Portuguese king. They had given a fabulous present to the Portuguese captain: the sceptre and the royal emblem of the Christian Royal House of Kerala, which had come to an end due to lack of heirs.

Even as Jonas was knocking the bottom off the legitimacy of the Synod, he paid compliments in the body of the thesis to Archbishop Menezes. This is how Archbishop Menezes is introduced and assessed in Jonas's doctoral dissertation:

“He hailed from one of the noblest families of Portugal, the Menezes.... If we might single out a virtue that was characteristically his, it can be said without any hesitation that it was zeal; though sometimes rather ill-inspired, it animated all his actions. He had the boldness to conceive big plans and the pluck to execute them. In doing so, if he did not respect at times, the natural sentiments of others or occasionally did not hesitate to employ rather dubious methods, as we shall see later on, we must not forget that those were days of colonialism and the inquisition. To win lands and people for the Church and the King was the ideal that motivated his career and action... In regard to the Church of Malabar his role has been compared to that of Borromeo with regard to the Church of Milan... Moreover let us not lose sight of the good he did, all things told, for the Church of Malabar. But nevertheless our impression is that historians, not in the know of the full story of the Synod or perhaps not taking sufficiently into account its baneful influence on later events, have had a tendency rather to exaggerate the indebtedness of the Church of Malabar to Menezes.”

“... Menezes was a tireless worker. Once he made up his mind he put himself heart and soul into the project and strained every nerve to realise it. The bringing of the immense population under

his sway, especially when he thought of how this would make them accept the Roman authority in the way he wanted and he could establish the Portuguese patronage over them, was an idea that fired the imagination of Menezes both as Archbishop and Statesman. In furtherance of this cause he used every means at his disposal. He would wield political as well as ecclesiastical power, and where one failed, he would invoke and exercise the other until the desired goal was reached....”

In bringing the St. Thomas Christians to the subjection of the Portuguese, Menezes expected resistance. One unknown quantity was the support of the Hindu princes of Travancore and Cochin in whose territories the St. Thomas Christians lived. In order to assure their support Menezes coaxed them by titles and presents. The Raja of Cochin was given the title of the ‘Brother-in-arms’ of the King of Portugal. Although the Raja of Cochin appeared in the beginning to support the Arch Deacon - the local ecclesiastic administrator of the St. Thomas Christians, next to the Archbishop who was a non Keralite - the pressure from Menezes worked. The Raja ordered the St. Thomas Christians “to obey and pay allegiance to Menezes’ under pain of losing their privileges and incurring penalties.”

The clever strategist he was, Menezes tried concurrently to enlist the goodwill of the Christians in every way. He visited the poor and the forlorn and gave alms lavishly. Many people were attracted by his kindness and love for the poor. The ordination of new priests, besides being a strategy to ensure majority in the synod, provided the much needed moral support of the families which left honoured by their members being ordained as priests.

The Synod began on the third Sunday after Pentecost, June 20, 1599 and went on till June 26, 1599. In a spirit of triumph the Archbishop collected the Syriac books of the St. Thomas Christians and burnt them ceremoniously to demonstrate that from that time, the frame of reference for faith, sacraments and rituals was the decrees of the Synod.

This was followed up unauthorised insertion of canons in the body of the text of the decrees of the Synod which was sent to Rome for papal approbation. The dissertation says : "Without knowing the full story, Pope Clement VIII issued the brief 'Divinum Dei' in 1601 showing his satisfaction at the work accomplished and bestowing his Apostolic blessing on Menezes and his endeavours, especially in the conduct of the Synod". The dissertation brings out that the Papal brief did not contain any formal approbation of the Synod as such, even in an implicit way.

Menezes abandoned the idea of getting the Acts of the Synod of 1599 approved by Rome. Instead he made arrangements to get them published at Coimbra. The compendium came out in 1606 together with the story of Menezes' visit to Malabar. Archbishop Roz, who was nominated by Menezes as Archbishop of the St. Thomas Christians by decree from Rome in the metropolitan seat vacated by Mar Abraham - hailing from Babylon, had to face the music of almost militant opposition to the Synodal decrees. He therefore convened another diocesan synod in 1603. In this meeting many of the decrees of the Synod of 1599 were dropped or altered. It was proposed to get the papal approbation on this modified version of the Synod of Diamper. However, the Latin translation on which the approbation was to be obtained was lost in transit and no second attempt was made at Latin translation.

Keeping a copy of the original translation was a gargantuan task in those days when making a copy involved as much work as preparing the original. After all, in the 17th century, carbon paper was unavailable and the reprographic process in the womb of time. Archbishop Roz felt the need for publication of the modified version of the decrees of the Synod and compiled a statute book for the diocese of Angamaly. According to the thesis this job was not carried out.

A little later a copy of Gouvea's Journada (journal) containing the original decrees of the Synod of Diamper reached the Indian

shores from Portugal. Archbishop Roz could have concluded erroneously or otherwise that the decrees of the Synod of Diamper had been approved by Rome by that time. The prelates who followed Roz were ignorant of the background and accepted the decrees and enforced them by their own legislation. In 1745 a Latin translation of the decrees was made by one Raulin. This made the Synod more acceptable. And willy-nilly the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of Faith was led to enforce some of the Synod's decrees.

Here below is how the dissertation puts in words its well argued and well documented conclusion regarding the invalidity of the Synod of Diamper of 1599.

“So unless and until one is able to produce a document showing the formal approbation of the Holy See redeeming (i) the lack of authority in the one who invoked it, (ii) the absence of intention in the one who conducted it, (iii) the lack of form in the manner of conducting it and (iv) the lack of integrity in the texts promulgated, the INVALIDITY OF THE SYNOD STANDS PROVED.”

According to Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry, Bishop of Kottayam, “His (Jonas’) research opened the way for a series of historical studies relating to the Church in India about the pre-Portuguese period and the successive period of Portuguese dominion in the Malabar Church. The studies throw a good deal of light on the hitherto unknown facts of history. Jonas very well knew that a thorough study of history, both ecclesiastical and secular, is also necessary for any one who wants to update and serve the Church of India... Any organic growth, he maintained, must be deeply rooted in history. In the various canonical developments he was able to perceive the role of history, persons, and events. And this enabled him to take interest in canon law with a practical acumen. For him canon law was very much part of history.”

ST. THOMAS CENTENARY AND PAPAL BRIEF

The entire Church in Kerala (the Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara and Latin) was planning for a grand combined celebration in 1952 to commemorate the 19th centenary of the arrival of St. Thomas, the Apostle of India, on the Malabar coast and the 4th centenary of the death of St. Francis Xavier, who is called the second Apostle to India. The final and principal celebrations of the two centenaries were designed to be held in December 1952 at Ernakulam the headquarters of the Syro-Malabar Rite and the residence of the Archbishop of Varapoly of the Latin Rite. The bishops, priests and nuns and laity spared no pains to make the celebration a milestone event of unity between the Syrian and Latin churches in Kerala. Meticulous preparations were being done. The Pope had agreed to send a special Papal Legate in the person of Cardinal Gilroy to attend the celebrations on his behalf and to give a special papal message on the occasion. Every Christian in Kerala was eagerly looking forward to the colourful centenary celebrations.

Some sinister hands in the meantime were trying to spoil the very spirit of the centenary celebrations. Misguided by these elements, the official organ of the Vatican, "L' Osservatore Romano" made a semi-official announcement on the 27th July 1952 and on the 15th October 1952, that a Papal Delegate would be attending the celebrations in Kerala in connection with the 400th death anniversary of St. Francis Xavier. The paper ignored the fact that the celebration planned was a joint one and that the Syro-Malabar Christians were desperately enthusiastic to celebrate the nineteenth centenary of St. Thomas' arrival in Kerala. Ignoring the memory of St. Thomas in the centenary celebrations hurt the feelings of the Syro-Malabar Church, especially the hierarchy. They were seriously considering if they should back out from the celebrations. When the feelings ran high in Kerala, Fr. Jonas was in the critical phase of writing his doctoral programme in Rome.

From Collegio Damasceno, Rome on the 5th November, 1952, he wrote identical letters to Archbishop Augustine Kandathil of Ernakulam, Bishop Severios of Thiruvalla and Bishop Mathew Kavukatt of Changanacherry:

“Your Lordship,

I am writing this to inform you of certain things pertaining to the centenary celebrations of St. Thomas, our Apostle. You would have heard of Fr. Schurhammer S.J. There are not many people like him who sincerely loves us, St. Thomas Christians. I am writing this on his instruction. I got an opportunity to talk to him regarding our centenary celebrations. Immediately he cancelled all his programmes and started to work to sort out the problems connected with our centenary celebrations. In doing so, he does not have any other motivation except that of helping us. Not only he is influential in Rome, he is the number one historian among Jesuits. He has gathered materials to write a volume about the apostolate of St. Thomas in India. He on his own initiative has met all the concerned people and discussed with them at length and prevailed over them. He was given an assurance that in the Papal message for the occasion of the centenary there will be only matters favourable to our interests and traditions. Then I told him that our Bishops will not be in a position to go ahead with the celebrations unless the announcements of Osservatore of July 27th and October 15th were properly corrected. He reassured that he had taken steps to make the proper amendments. I had maintained that I did not know anything about the position which our Bishops should assume in their conference of October 28th and that nothing prejudicial to that should be committed. As soon as the results of the October 28th conference reached here I conveyed that to him and he carried the message of the conference to the responsible people. I wrote to you so much to tell you how much we owe to Fr. Schurhammer. One thing we have to learn from this sad experience connected with the celebration is that we ourselves have to bear the burden and give leadership in affairs pertaining to us.

Before I close this letter please let me tell you one more thing. Since we have proceeded this much in the matter of centenary celebrations, there can crop up some difficulties if we plan to postpone the celebrations to next year and to have it together with the visit of Cardinal Tisserant. Whatever be the attitude and likings of the Cardinal, since his visit was in an official capacity, it will be embarrassing for him to participate in a programme not recognised by Rome. Even if the Cardinal attends the celebrations formal damage done to our tradition will not be redressed. However, I hope, by the grace of God, everything will be set right now. We need any new step only after seeing the statement of the next issue of "Osservatore....."

Earlier Fr. Jonas had written to Fr. Schurhammer on the 2nd November 1952.

"Very Rev. and dear Father,

Please excuse me for disturbing you during your retreat. First of all I wholeheartedly thank your reverence for the arrangements made. If responsible people had interested themselves to get at the facts and consult the people who ...

"I am writing this letter to clarify some points which I was not able to ask you through the phone. What I understand in this is that your Reverance has made all the necessary arrangements to the effect that in the papal message that will be given on the occasion of the celebrations in December our claims would be fully recognised; (i) that we are celebrating the 19th centenary of the arrival of St. Thomas in India and (ii) that the principal celebration at Ernakulam is the centenary of St. Thomas, the Apostle. If we get these points recognised, we have no reason to complain and that we shall be quite satisfied and content. But there is one difficulty to which I would like to draw your attention. Since at present the semi-official announcements made in the Osservatore of July 2nd and October 15 stand, our Bishops will find it very difficult to

proceed further with the programme of the celebrations, without first getting the position officially clarified by the announcement of at least equal importance as those that have appeared in the *Osservatore* in a way that would reflect the final pronouncement of the Holy Father. I am sure that if your reverence succeeded in such a short time to arrange for the final papal message, you will certainly be successful in clearing the way to that event. Without these guarantees it will be imprudent on my part to write to the bishops that everything is all right."

Meanwhile, the issue of the centenary celebration and the semi-official announcements in *Osservatore* had created immense sensation in the Kerala Church, especially among the Syro-Malabar people. It was feared that the Syro-Malabar hierarchy and the people would not cooperate if it were just the centenary celebration of St. Francis Xavier. At this juncture Fr. Zacharias' mission was not quite helpful to Fr. Schurhammer and Fr. Jonas who were sorting out the problem with great finesse.

In the meanwhile the Kerala Syrian Catholic hierarchy sent one Fr. Zacharias to put across their position to Rome and sort out the matter. Fr. Jonas had worked hard for the resolution of the crisis of confidence felt by the Kerala hierarchy and progress had been achieved in the matter when Fr. Zacharias arrived in Rome. He wanted the fact to be known to the bishops.

Fr. Jonas wrote the following letter to Mar Augustine Kandathil, Archbishop of Ernakulam, on 24th November 1952.

"Your Lordship,

As I have informed you in my earlier letter the things were rectified here even before Fr. Zacharias reached Rome. In a report presented by Fr. Schurhammer to the Secretariat of State he had according to my request formulated the text which was to be published in *Osservatore*. That was the same as that published in *Osservatore*, except for that within the brackets. Then the

Monsignor at the Secretariat insisted that the reason for the year A.D. 52 also should be included in the formula.

“Fr. Schurhammer explained that he could add in the formula ‘according to the tradition of the Church of Malabar.’ When he conveyed the news to me, I remarked that the phrase can be applied only with regard to the year of his arrival in AD 52 and not with regard to his arrival and apostolate in Malabar. Then he added ‘of course, that is evident.’ Fr. Zacharias reached here when the situation has improved this much. The next day of his arrival here I met Fr. Zacharias together with Fr. Lombardi at the Sacred Congregation. As I understand that Fr. Zacharias did not have much knowledge about the procedures and working of the departments here and that he was planning to go to the Secretariat of State together with Fr. Lombardi, I confidentially told everything to Fr. Lombardi. Then Fr. Zacharias, Fr. Lombardi and Msgr. Giovanelli visited Msgr. Glans in the Secretariat of State. When he mentioned about the text to be published in *Osservatore* they replied, ‘We are indifferent about it.’ Then I emphasised that it is very important to see that the text is published in *Osservatore* without which the impasse developed in the Malabar Church will not be cleared. Moreover, at this juncture it is very vital to get a public record of the centenary through *Osservatore*. Then he said that the Bishop had appealed to include ‘St. Thomas centenary only in the Papal brief.’ Then he became quite emotional about the matter. I told him that I would immediately write to the Bishops of Kerala about the developments here. Then he retorted that he would send cables saying ‘Fr. Jonas is spoiling the whole affair’. I reacted saying, ‘send any number of cables you like.’ The next day with a letter of Fr. Schurhammer I approached the Monsignor at the Secretariat of State and also Msgr. Montni and appealed to them to publish the text in *Osservatore*.

“The text was published in the evening of the 12th November 1952. Immediately I contacted Fr. Schurhammer and expressed our sincere thanks. Then he said that he was summoned to the Secretariat

of State on that morning to go through the text which they wanted to be included in *Osservatore*.

"When I met Fr. Schurhammer on the next day, I told him that instead of the description 'According to the tradition of the Church of Syro-Malabar rite' the words 'according to the tradition of the Church of Malabar' would have been more appropriate. He then said that he had given to the press the latter one, but the Monsignor there changed the words for reasons not known to him. I requested him to take enough precautions to avoid this mistake in the Papal brief and radio broadcast of Pope which would be made in course of time. I also informed our Cardinal Tisserant about the matter".

"I hope to reach Kerala before Christmas. I will convey more when I meet you in person."

It need not be explained further from what is said above, that Jonas played a significant role in connection with the Papal message and announcements in *Osservatore* to protect the interests of the centenary celebrations of the arrival of St. Thomas in 1952.

By the end of 1952, after completing his studies in Rome Fr. Jonas returned to India. On his return he was assigned to the CMI Scholasticate as a member of the staff and was given the commission to start a common study house for the Congregation, outside the limits of the then existing three Provinces, by Fr. Maurus, the Prior General of the Congregation at that time.

DHARMARAM: THE DREAM

The spiritual, intellectual, cultural and social background of Jonas, the desire of his parents to make their child a servant of God and the composite education he received in temples of higher learning all made Jonas the man with a mission within and outside the confines of the CMI order. The critical illness during Jonas' childhood about which we learned in the opening chapter resulted in the parents dedicating the child to the service of God, should the child survive the illness. The triad of illness, its miraculous cure and parental dedication shaped the destiny of the child.

Unlike the congregations of foreign origin functioning in Kerala with their national and global network, the CMI Order in the fifties had confined its operation within the limits of Kerala. The members belonged to the Syro-Malabar rite. It was monastic in infrastructure and outlook. It had inherited the constitutions and traditions of the discalced Carmelite order, though in spirit and practice it was an active religious congregation dedicated to working in the Church and the community.

The CMI followed the Syro-Malabar liturgy. The liturgical functions as well as the prayers were conducted in East Syriac. The congregation reflected in this regard the age-old practice of the Syrian Catholics of Kerala whose first forebears were converts from the time of St. Thomas i.e., from the first century A.D. As it was of the laity, the medium of communication of the CMI congregation for formal and informal purposes was Malayalam. There is a special flavour to the Malayalam used by Syrian Christians to this day with its archaic and quaint Dravidian words pointing to the antiquity of the Syrian Christians dating to a time prior to the Sanskritisation of Malayalam, an offshoot of the Dravidian group of languages.

As the membership of the Congregation swelled and the flow of the Community's manhood entered its portals, the quality of the human asset of the CMI congregation grew. The growth in the numerical strength was matched by growth in material resources - land, real estate and institutions - at the disposal of the CMI monastic fraternity. Any perceptive observer could conclude that if properly developed and deployed, the CMI could achieve astonishing results in the spiritual and temporal fields.

Human resource development, the catchword of the nineties, had been an article of faith with the CMI congregation for well over half a century. In this field it stands comparison to the Jesuit order - the Society of Jesus - which from early years in the century, had spread out in India establishing temples of learning for the people which attracted the best minds in India. Colleges named after Loyola or St. Francis Xavier were established all over India and the pursuit of excellence practised by the Jesuits drew acclaim from every quarter.

In any monastic order human development had to start from the training of the aspirant priests. A major component of up-gradation of facilities for the CMI in the area was creation of an opportunity to take the priests outside the geographical limits of Kerala to give them a broader exposure to the intellectual, spiritual and cultural possibilities across the vast expanse of the Indian subcontinent.

A small minority in the CMI congregation had already chased the dreams in this direction, but they could not initiate any concrete action because of the formidable obstacles. Getting the green signal from superiors was itself an impossible feat. The tradition-bound elements as also the conservative shuddered at the very mention of the idea of the congregation spreading out across the geographical periphery of the Kerala region. They sincerely believed that the step would scale down the monastic spirit and worldliness would creep in willy nilly.

The traditional jurisdiction of the Syro-Malabar Rite was confined till 1955 to an area between the river Pampa in South Kerala and Bharathapuzha in the north. This comprised hardly one third of the area of Kerala State. In 1955 the Sacred Oriental Congregation extended the territorial limit to the entire Kerala region and across the Kerala border to the Coimbatore and Ootacamund districts of the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu as also to the districts of Coorg, Chimera, Measure and Maundy of the Karnataka State. This quadrupled at one stroke, the territory of the Syro-Malabar Rite.

There was good reason for extending the territorial limit. Immigration of the laity in search of land, job and trade had resulted in sizeable Syrian Christian pockets in these areas. The opening of government jobs to educated Syrian Christians resulted in the transfer of residence of many to southern parts of Kerala where the capital of the State was located. Concurrently there was large scale migration of Christians from middle Kerala to the Malabar region in search of virgin land for cultivation. Indeed, the migration and settlement of the Christians of the erstwhile Travancore state to the hills of Malabar is a saga of superhuman efforts, perseverance and bravery of epic proportion.

The migration of Syrian Christians to the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka was for jobs. Some started petty trades like tyre-retreading, running workshops, eateries, provision stores etc. Once established in a small trade or profession many bought land to start intensive cultivation. The result was the presence of a large number of Malayali population in these states. Such presence was more pronounced in the districts adjacent to the boundary of Kerala. There was no network of churches or church related institutions in the new areas inhabited by the Syrian Christians. It was in this background that the extension of the territorial jurisdiction of the Syro-Malabar Rite became a pressing need.

But the extension of the territorial jurisdiction of the Syro-Malabar

hierarchy was not a step which could be implemented without opposition. The hierarchies beyond the confines of Kerala followed the Latin Rite and the Church establishment already functioning in the area did not welcome the geographical expansion of the Syro-Malabar Rite. If this was true, it was an impossibility, as it seemed to many members of the CMI Order at the time, to get ecclesiastical clearance for founding a major seminary outside the territory of the Syro-Malabar Rite.

Those who dared to dream about the founding of such an establishment in spite of the odds, were daunted by the herculean efforts required for mobilising financial resources needed for accomplishing the task.

It was Jonas who harboured within himself the daring and the 'devilry' to attempt this near impossible task against the covert and even overt opposition of the parallel Church Establishment as also the mortal fears within the congregation about the project being aborted midway due to lack of funding.

Jonas' dream was no ordinary dream. In the space of his mind the future seminary rose with a splendour common to the established institutions like the major seminaries in Kandy and Rome where he had his higher studies. Even during the novitiate the embryo of the dream had sunk its roots in his mind. He was to write later:

"... during the novitiate, the idea was there before my eyes, and I remember trying to learn New Testament Greek, through a book Fr. Ludovic, our novice master, gave me, with the intention of equipping myself for future work. You might think me crazy, but it was a fact that right from the time I was out of novitiate I started drawing plans of the future scholasticate as a pastime. Slowly the ideas matured. My own experience at different study-houses gave me golden opportunities to look for ideas that could be integrated into the ideal of the scholasticate we wanted for our congregation. In this context, I must avow on the other, Kandy made a great impact

In this context, I must avow on the other, Kandy made a great impact on me and I think, also on the other pioneers, most of whom were exposed to Kandian influence. During our study in Rome, when I was asked by Fr. Maurus (Prior General) to take up this work, I had in my mind very concrete ideas regarding an ideal Scholasticate, most of which were shared also with my companions".

"I should remember here three persons who have contributed very significantly to the evolution of this vision and its realization. First and foremost comes His Eminence, Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, who was at the helm of affairs of the Sacred Congregation for Oriental Churches, when the seed of Dharmaram College was sown. It was only because of his patronage, guidance and assistance that the seed sprouted and grew into a big plant. Fr. Maurus CMI was for thirteen uninterrupted years the Prior General of the CMI congregation, coinciding with the formative stages of Dharmaram. It was because of his paternal care that this institution could surmount all the difficulties it had to face in its infancy. I consider Dharmaram College as a perpetual memento to Fr. Maurus's far-sightedness, vision and love for our congregation. I feel I should here remember our good father Chrysostom who was the first Rector of Dharmaram, who completely identified himself with the institution and spent himself for it."

Here one might raise the query whether some other CMI member would have taken the initiative and raised the major seminary of the CMI had the task not been entrusted and taken over by Jonas. The answer to this question is in the negative. One recalls what Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, philosopher statesman and one of the illustrious Presidents of India, had said; "If Vasco da Gama had not discovered the sea route to India, some one else would have done it; if America had not invented the atom bomb some one else would have done it; whereas but for Kalidasa there would have been no Sakunthalam and but for Shakespeare there would have been no Hamlet."

Similarly it can be said that but for Jonas there would have been no Dharmaram College. In the extract from his article on Dharmaram given above, Jonas is seen paying tributes to Cardinal Tisserant, Fr. Maurus CMI, former prior General of the congregation and Fr. Chrysostom for founding Dharmaram. The tribute is more a proof of his humility and generosity than truth. In reality, throughout the conceptual, planning and implementation stages of Dharmaram the moving spirit, the executing agency and the guiding hand were combined in the person of Jonas himself and him alone. Tisserant, Maurus and Chrysostom were patrons of Jonas in his endeavours, but each of them was eager to acknowledge the role of Jonas in establishing Dharmaram whenever an occasion for such acknowledgement rose. Indeed it was a herculean task which Jonas accomplished with single-minded devotion. Jonas had to educate and motivate the CMI hierarchy of the need and viability of the Seminary outside Kerala, get approval and blessings for the project from his superiors and keep alive the flagging spirit of those who supported him. Many a senior member of the CMI at the time did not endorse the idea of Dharmaram at all. The spade-work needed for realisation of the idea involved constant travelling at a time in his life when his health was very fragile. Jonas had to hunt around for a suitable venue, arrange for the architectural plans, mobilise funds and mastermind the cash flow in line with the zigzagging progress of the project and arrange for the staff and trained personnel for the pedagogic part of the venture. On the other hand, Jonas' master plan for the project looked unrealistic, crazy and fanciful to many. Even Cardinal Tisserant, whom Jonas acknowledged as the benefactor and patron of the project, had his reservations about having the seminary in Bangalore.

Being aware of the stormy opposition to the very concept of a scholasticate outside Kerala, Jonas developed a way of presenting his case, forcefully and boldly setting forth the pros and cons of the case but always managing to end the presentation with a deadly

logic favouring the case. This is how he presented the case for locating the seminary in Bangalore to the Cardinal:

“Your Eminence had entrusted me with a SMALL DUTY, during that pleasant interview granted me at your residence on the eve of my departure to India - namely, to send Your Eminence a report on the choice of a site for future scholasticate of the congregation ” (emphasis added).

The deadly use of the word ‘small’ before ‘duty’ was Jonas’ way of hinting at the transactional inter-relationship between the Cardinal and the young priest of the Indian congregation. The sanction for the seminary was a small thing for the cardinal although it was tied up with his life’s mission for Jonas. By qualifying the ‘duty’ as ‘small’ Jonas also underplayed the significance of the clearance of the proposal for easier decision.

The letter to Cardinal Tisserant continued: “I had during my talk there, mentioned to your Eminence, that some were thinking of Kottagiri as a suitable locality, and that, in my opinion, however, Bangalore would be a better selection, considering the cultural environment required for a study house. You had commissioned me to talk about the matter to the Rev. Apostolic Visitor and send an informal report to you. I spoke about the issue to the Apostolic Visitor, who directed me to express my view to the newly elected Definitory. The Definitory nominated me as one of the four-member committee, constituted to find a suitable site for the future common novitiate and scholasticate. Thus now I am sending to your Eminence as one who was asked by your Eminence himself to report informally about the matter and as one who was appointed by the Definitory to study the question. In the second role I am acting only as my own spokesman.”

How cleverly does Jonas make the letter an informal report for which the Cardinal had asked and a formal feedback in his capacity as the appointee by the Definitory. There is a certain attempt to present

afresh the case before the Cardinal as well as an effort to make the letter self-contained, all the while keeping the need for getting clearance for Bangalore in view.

He dismissed the claim of Malabar (Northern Kerala) to be the home of the proposed scholasticate, which would one day become the pride of 'our' congregation and a monument of the Sacred Oriental Congregation's benevolence towards us. Jonas put down the criteria of selection of the proposed site. He set forth two criteria: pleasant climate congenial to serious study and cultural environment for interaction with learned men both in the ecclesiastical and secular spheres.

He dismissed Malabar once again after laying down the criteria. It is impossible to find a place in Malabar which can combine these two requirements, he concluded in the letter.

After disposing of the case of Malabar, a flashback of the interview which Tisserant had granted to him while in Rome at the Cardinal's residence was given in the letter. The Cardinal had made at the time a demand to spare CMI fathers to teach in the Always Apostolic Seminary. Jonas clarified that the possibility of starting a scholasticate close to or as part of the present Apostolic Seminary had tickled his imagination since a major Seminary was already functioning at Always. But it was difficult to say whether Always fulfilled the two criteria. Always was hot and humid. Apparently that had not stood in the way of the present Seminary developing into a major centre for priestly training and education. So how does Jonas accomplish the task of beheading the claim of Always?

He submitted that CMI priests had a separate identity and he would not like to let CMI students study in Always along with the secular clergy. The letter touched on the possible opposition from both Bishops of the Syro-Malabar rite who held sway at the St. Joseph's Seminary Always and from the dyed in the wool-type Carmelite first order fathers. He was afraid of the diocesan group

mentality which could arise in such a formation of priests from the different dioceses spoiling the camaraderie of the CMI clergy. He concluded that according to him only in a scholasticate which was entirely CMI-managed, with no outsiders, could the CMI train its students according to the spirit of the congregation. After reaching such a conclusion to balance the perception Jonas made the admission: "I do not ignore some of the advantages of a mix-up, but I am of the opinion that, at least in our temperament, the disadvantages would seriously outweigh the beneficial aspects."

Jonas decimated Alwaye in so many words but gave the coup de grace by referring to its hot humid climate and the cultural vacuum of its surroundings even after the letter making a passing mention of the picturesque of Alwaye as a place.

The Cardinal had mentioned to him about the CMI fathers teaching at the Alwaye Seminary. Jonas said it was premature to execute the idea as the CMI was hard up for qualified hands. He said that it would take some ten to fifteen years before the CMI could supply capable and qualified hands to teach at Alwaye and it would take more than 20-25 years to run it entirely 'on our own'. So the idea of establishing a linkage with the Seminary at Alwaye by sending CMI teachers and taking over the entire institution at a later date had to be dismissed.

After having defined the logic of rejection of Kotagiri (Malabar) and Alwaye as the place for the future scholasticate, the letter detailed the advantages and also disadvantages of locating it in Bangalore. The advantages were the pleasant climate, the potential of growth of the city, the proximity of the place to Malabar, the presence of immigrant Syro-Malabar Christians in Bangalore, the centrality of the place with reference to the country's geography but above all the mission spirit which would be fostered because of its location outside the Kerala region. The only disadvantage of Bangalore was with reference to liturgical approbation. After saying that functioning in Bangalore would not mean fully imbibing the liturgy, he stated that this was an exaggerated statement.

Here was a masterly presentation of the case executed in true professional fashion but with an informality without seeming to be doing so. It is said (and several of Jonas' colleagues had vouchsafed for it) that there was a potentially brilliant member of the legal profession hiding in Jonas. No wonder, he was the offspring of Justice Joseph Thaliath. Later at the Church of India Seminar 1969 and at the CBCI in New Delhi as Dy. Secretary General Jonas' powerful pen was to prove a great asset for accomplishing the impossible.

The letter convinced Cardinal Tisserant that Bangalore was the right place to locate the CMI seminary. He granted permission to go ahead. The detractors and the proponents of the case for Kotagiri, Malabar and Alway were surprised by the ease with which Jonas was able to get the permission in favour of Bangalore.

It should be mentioned that the candidacy of Kotagiri as the location for the seminary near Ootacamund was supported by a sizeable number of CMI priests. For one thing the congregation had already in possession a few acres of land and a small residence. Kotagiri was quite and cool throughout the year.

In April 1953 Jonas went to Kotagiri and stayed in Montfort Villa for over three months. The lack of cultural environment and isolation of the place from vibrant urban centres as also the excessive rain and wetness of the place for a large part of the year made Kotagiri an inappropriate place for the proposed seminary. He could, after the visit, speak from experience rather than from hearsay and tick off those who were inclined to have the scholasticate at Kotagiri. The Prior General of the CMI and the General Council were impressed by the arguments of Jonas. Convincing the enthusiasts of Kotagiri of its unsuitability became easy.

Dr. Thomas Pothakamury was at the time the Archbishop of Bangalore. Without a green signal from him nothing could be started

in Bangalore. Jonas went to Bangalore and visited the Archbishop. He submitted to him a formal application to start a common study house for the CMI in Bangalore. The Archbishop gave tentative permission to search for a suitable plot, pending consultation with his councillors regarding permission.

In Bangalore there was ready help available for Jonas. His maternal uncle was settled in that city. He ran a farm called 'Tharakans Farm'. Jonas enlisted the help of his uncle and went around the city in search of suitable land. He stayed with his uncle. Days of search resulted in locating a few places. Jonas wrote long letters to Fr. Maurus the Prior General of the CMI, to keep him in the picture preparing his mind for giving approval before the final selection.

This is how Jonas presented the case of a plot to the Prior General Fr. Maurus; "After having seen many places during the last two days I feel two of them are suitable for our purpose. The first one is about 2.5 miles away from the city market and cantonment. It is an open, breezy and elevated place from where one can see the entire city. On one side of the plot there is an open well which has about 10-12 ft. of water. The quality of the soil is satisfactory. We can get granite stones from the same plot for the construction of buildings and can also make bricks from its soil. The plot is 55 acres in area and belongs to 3 or 4 persons. A middle man has agreed to get the entire plot at the rate of about Rs. 1500/- to 1700/- per acre. Very soon this area will be included within the city limits."

The description is unerring. He was not merely looking for a plot but a piece of land which would economise construction by providing raw material like granite stones and brick-making mud. He was adept in not only forward but also backward integration of his project. A man who possessed a truly managerial mind!

The stream of letters from Jonas to the Prior General detailing his quest for a suitable location for the future Seminary in Bangalore continued. In one of the letters the conclusion was like

this: "I am offering a Novena Mass to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus as we need the blessings of the Sacred Heart for our undertakings ..."

He had faith in the power of prayer, but such faith was blended with pragmatism. In Malayalam there is a proverb which says: Oneself is half and God is the other half. The meaning is that everyone has to do his piece of the action for God to produce results. The student has to study well and also pray to God for plucking success in examination. The sweat is important as well as prayer. Jonas prayed but also spared no pains to do the physical and mental part of the exercise to achieve the desired results in his endeavour. There was increasing pain and labour as Jonas went about seeing pieces of land one after another to select the site for the CMI house of learning.

Here is an interesting episode in one of the letters. "While hurriedly going around in search of places yesterday I lost my pen, a Parker 51. I bought another pen for Rs.3/- I am writing this letter with the new pen and it seems to be better than the Parker 51." In the early fifties after the departure of the British power, manufacturing industry in India was coming into its own but there was a general assumption that only foreign goods were of the required quality. Possession of foreign made writing material was the hallmark of the educated and here is a priest writing to his Superior that the local variety of fountain pen was better than the international brand Parker 51. Apart from the 'swadesi' pride reflected in the letter, it also shows the informal and homely flavour of the letters written by Jonas to his Prior General as also the rapport which they had developed for each other.

In October 1954 an agreement was signed for purchasing the land for the Seminary. The real sale deed followed later, after the footpath in the property was legally cleared by the landlord. The property was 30 acres in area outside the limits of the city - at that

time - in the Koramangala area. The price was Rs.75,000/- only. Only a road separated the land from the formal city limit and what is more it was soon becoming a part of the city.

The next step was the preparation of physical construction plans for the buildings. Jonas contacted M.Fernando, a well known architect of Madras. The charges for doing the work was 2% for sketch, 2% for detailed plan, 2% for estimate, bill checking 1.25% and architect's inspection 2%. The architect offered a concession bringing down the overall percentage to 5% in view of the fact that the work was for an educational and religious institution. The architect also offered to accept a lump sum instead of a percentage compensation.

Those were the days when professional architects were coming into fashion in civil construction in India. Many depended entirely on the engineer, and the concepts of the engineer were mixed with the un-baked ideas of the owner. This process sometimes resulted in grotesque constructions, functional anomalies and above all wastage of money and time. Jonas, having been exposed to the western ways, realised that employing an architect would result in economy of expenses and optimum use of space.

In November 1954 Jonas wrote again to Cardinal Tisserant giving an update of the developments. The letter was written on his own accord, but invoking the name of the Prior General. The Prior General knew that there existed a deep rapport between the Cardinal and Jonas, and the former held a lot more respect for Jonas than any one else in the CMI order.

The Archbishop of Bangalore had given permission but all was not well with the CMI project in Bangalore. The local Church thought that it was a kind of invasion by the Syro-Malabar Rite into the territory of the Latin Rite. There were rumblings. The exact nature of the goings on was a mystery, but communication channels were clogged with messages opposing the establishment of the seminary and pleading with the Sacred Oriental Congregation in Rome to stall the project.

One objection against the CMI taking root in Bangalore came also from the Franciscans who already had a study house for philosophy in Bangalore close to the site proposed for the CMI. They were yet to build a church and start operating a parish. The Franciscans were afraid that a major religious complex of the CMI congregation coming up in Bangalore would affect their own plan of setting up a forceful presence of their congregation in Bangalore. One morning the CMI Prior General received a letter from the Archbishop of Bangalore that he was in receipt of a letter from his Eminence Cardinal Fumasni Bondi asking him to be more indulgent towards Syrian Carmelites and that he had waved the conditions previously imposed.

It was after considerable long distance prodding from Rome that local objections were overcome and the green signal to sign the agreement for buying land was given.

Jonas had projected the profile of the future requirements of priestly training for the CMIs in his letter to Cardinal Tisserant as follows: At the rate of increase current at that time the priestly vocations in the CMI were to provide for 120 students in 1956, 200 students in 1957. In another four or five years the number could be around 400. The facilities had to be built up around this figure. There could be still further enlargement of the number of vocations considering the expansion of the missionary activities in India, but the upper limit for which the facilities were being put up could be 400. According to Jonas 400 was the optimum number which could be looked after well and trained in one place. Any number beyond it would prove to be unmanageable and the quality of the training would suffer. He was aware of the view held by others that the optimum number for training was 300 and 400 was an unwieldy crowd.

Jonas explained in the letter that the plan for the optimum number would be executed in three or four stages, catering to the needs as they rose from lower to higher level.

There was a crucial sentence in the letter to Cardinal Tisserant and it ran unobtrusively like this: "Your Eminence knows very well that all this will require an immense amount of money and we are hopeful that you will help us to the utmost. According to the plan the money needed for the construction and facilities were to come from three sources: from Rome as grant, from Catholics in foreign countries as donations and from the local funds of the CMI congregation".

The footpath in the land was a bone of contention and it became a headache to Jonas. The local people were involved as also the revenue authorities. Jonas took the help of his brother in expediting the process of obtaining orders for the clearance of the foot path. The local magistrate visited the place and took evidence from the residents of the locality. Afterwards the Tahsildar made his recommendation to the Collector. This was then cross checked by the Deputy Collector. Luckily the recommendation and decision came one after another, after which the final deed was signed.

Soon Jonas got deeply involved in discussions with Fernando the architect. He advised the architect to visit the Papal Seminary at Poona to get a feel of the architectural feature of the house. Jonas was happy at last that he had been able to mobilise events to start construction.

Chapter SEVEN

THE LIGHTNING STRIKES

As the preparations for starting construction activities on the newly acquired site rose to a crescendo a lightning struck causing the elaborate arrangements to go berserk. For the human fulcrum of the great project on hand became dysfunctional.

Jonas had a relapse of the bleeding which he had at Rome. Its earlier diagnosis was that Jonas had tuberculosis of the lungs. Jonas moved to be with Joseph Thaliath (Jr.) his brother (film producer), residing at 17, Taylors Road, Madras.

At that time Joseph was a prosperous bachelor with an array of successful films he had produced to his credit. With him lived his parents: Joseph Thaliath, Mary Thaliath, and his unmarried sister Dr. Lucy Thaliath. Madras and its neighbourhood had at that time, as it has today, the best facilities in medical care in South India. Madras was the most congenial place for a sick Jonas carrying within his breast the dream of the future CMI seminary. As his flesh suffered from the onslaught of the old ailment and he became weak, his dream flickered inside him. The best doctors in Madras could not diagnose his disease, nor they could give any temporary relief. His health became worse day by day. He was allowed to offer holy mass only occasionally.

It was the month of March. The mercury shot up in Madras. The weather was beastly compared to the temperate climate of Bangalore. This made the suffering of Jonas worse.

The few doctors who attended on him advised him to go to the Christian Medical College Hospital at Vellore. CMC Vellore was even at that time a great name in medical care all over India and

even abroad. The sick from every corner of India came there for treatment which often included surgical intervention. Doctors, both Indian and foreign, were on the rolls of the hospital. At that time Dr. Betts, a missionary doctor from the United States, was also serving in the hospital.

Dr. Betts saw the many X-rays of the chest of Jonas that had been taken earlier. A new X-ray was taken to study the current state. There was a cavity in the lung, according to Dr. Betts. But the cavity was not necessarily tubercular as was diagnosed earlier. A tomogram—X-ray photos at different levels of the lung—was added to the existing X-ray series. In addition a bronchoscopy and a bronchography were taken.

Dr. Betts concluded that Jonas had never suffered from tuberculosis. In his view what was feared to be tuberculosis was only bronchitis which meant dilation of the bronchi. This was something which could be fully cured. But surgery was needed. Dr. Lucy, attached as she was so much to her brother, pondered over the matter. She had a different view. Bronchitis did not always need surgical intervention. The surgery, although of a routine nature, was a major one. She would rather have non-surgical alleviation or cure than advise a risky surgical procedure. Thoracic surgery in the fifties in India was associated with great risk. The hesitation to undertake surgery was therefore understandable. Jonas' brother, Joseph Thaliath (Jr.) also did not support the idea of surgery suggested by Dr. Betts.

Jonas wrote to Dr. Betts that he would rather not have the surgery. But Dr. Betts wrote back: "I note from your letter that you have decided not to have this lesion operated upon at the present time. I believe that you would be far wiser to have it done, before you have more trouble. But that is a judgment that you alone can make. If in the future we could be of help, we shall be happy to do so. It gives me immense pleasure to have the privilege of serving people here in Christ's name".

Jonas was in a dilemma. On one side was the family, including the doctor sister not letting to undertake the surgical treatment. On the other side was his suffering and the conviction of a reputed doctor who felt that surgery was necessary before the condition could get worse. He consulted another doctor in Madras who explained to him further the nature of the ailment labelled bronchitis. This doctor was of the view that the best treatment for the condition was surgical intervention. There was no medical cure for it. Bronchial ends would be swollen and stuffed with pus and phlegm. Normally the opening of the bronchia would remain closed, but occasionally it would open out and pus and blood would come through the bronchial pipe into the mouth and nose. It was very nasty when the condition occurred. The condition was not fatal in itself, but was very unnerving and revolting. One had to be very cautious. If such a development took place during a journey when medical attention was not quickly available, Jonas would have had it.

Jonas turned for a decision to his sister who was not for surgery. She too was in a painful dilemma. How could she advise her younger brother to undergo the surgery when it was such a risky procedure? She almost evaded taking a decision by herself telling Jonas to decide.

Brother Joseph remained neutral when he was told of the consequences of not submitting to surgery. But Jonas' brave mother supported the surgical solution. She said with finality if surgery is required, it should be done.

Jonas consulted Fr. John Berchmans, his Provincial, and also made submissions to the Prior General. In the letter to the latter he wrote: "We have to be guided by the light we get from Almighty heavenly Father."

On the 20th of June 1955 Jonas was admitted to the Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore. The brother and the sister and some other members of the family accompanied him as also a few colleagues of his from the CMI congregation.

Jonas was in a prayerful mood. He was aware of the risk involved and the consequence if his system failed to stand the invasion of instruments or if something else went wrong with the surgical procedure. Before he was taken to the operation theatre he asked for the crucifix. He also asked and received the last sacraments. He kissed the crucifix many times.

As Dr. Betts performed the long major operation, the family members and the CMI priests waited outside the operation theatre with bated breath. They prayed silently as also aloud at times.

The operation was successful. The pathological examination later proved that it was not a case of TB. Dr. Betts liked his patient well. He expressed his liking in many ways. He was a good listener to whatever the patient was saying. He explained in detail the curative process after the operation. He greeted the patient with a special warmth. There was an obvious joy and liking on Dr. Betts' face when he spoke to Jonas.

Dr. Betts was asked for the bill for his services. He said "Fr. Jonas, for you, there is no bill."

Jonas family insisted on payment, at least a nominal fee. Dr. Betts said that he would take it only as a donation for buying streptomycin for poor patients.

Jonas was discharged from the hospital on 2nd August 1955. He took leave of Dr. Betts and asked him of the regimen during the post-operative convalescent period. He was advised that normal activities could be started in two months. When queried by Jonas jokingly whether he could play basket ball, Dr. Betts said yes. Jonas was to keep in touch with Dr. Betts later. He visited Dr. Betts in the USA to which place he had returned after completion of his term in Vellore.

Jonas could not wait for two months to resume activities. For a month he stayed with his brother in Madras and it helped the healing

process. Jonas returned to Bangalore during the first week of November 1955 and plunged into a busy schedule.

Fr. Dismas was looking after the work during Jonas' absence. Soon Jonas realised the problems faced by Fr. Dismas during his absence from Bangalore.

Even as Jonas was recuperating in the hospital the foundation stone of the study house was being laid by the Archbishop of Bangalore in a simple and elegant function attended by a select gathering.

In the welcome address the Prior General stated that it was a pleasant coincidence that the laying of the foundation of the CMI study house at Bangalore coincided with the centenary of the foundation of the first indigenous religious congregation in India. (The first canonical establishment of the CMI was founded in Mannanam in Kerala in 1855.)

The foundation stone formally laid by the Archbishop of Bangalore had earlier been blessed by his Eminence Eugene Cardinal Tisserant during his visit to Kerala on 3rd December 1953.

As the ceremony of laying the foundation stone was performed Jonas was in the picture, although he could not be physically present. Lying in the hospital bed, in Vellore his heart jumped with joy and he became impatient to leave the confinement of the hospital to take up the work of the study house. The welcome speech of the Prior General on the occasion was written by Jonas from his hospital bed. This was Jonas' way of participation in spirit in the ceremony.

The laying of the foundation stone was like the birth of a baby. It was time now that a name be found for the new born. Jonas had his schooling in Sacred Heart School, Thevara. Obviously the first name occurred to him was SACRED HEART College. A letter-head was printed in the name for carrying on with the correspondence. But Jonas was in search of a more appropriate name which reflected the changing times, the advancing inculturation of the Indian Church, and more specifically the value orientation of

the institution, and above all the Indianness and the indigenous roots of the Syro-Malabar congregation.

It was in a letter dated December 1, 1955, that he wrote to the Prior General on the progress of the preparatory work for construction that the mention of Dharmaram was made for the first time. It was introduced in the letter as the word chosen for facilitating easy telegraphic communication. Otherwise, the entire address containing many words had to be used for sending telegrams. The word could have very well risen up from the subconscious, for Jonas had said in the letter that it may be good to find the Sanskrit or Hindi form of the word Dharmaram.

The word sank into his consciousness. The word Dharma (part of the name) had a many-splendoured corpus of association with justice, duty, virtue, religious goodness etc. There was no equivalent word for Dharma in the English language. It is pertinent to note here that the 'Dharma' word has fascinated many distinguished Indian Christians. Acharya John Sachidanand has named his Renaissance movement as Dharma Rajya Vedi. Jonas was convinced that no better name would be given to a religious study house wherein young men were to be trained for religious life and priesthood. The 'Aram' part of the name, meaning a garden, was an aesthetic appellation to Dharma. Jonas was happy with the total Indian flavour of the name. The letter to the Prior General on 25th January 1954, contained four variations of Dharmaram. Dharmaram or Dharmaram College or Dharmaram S.H. College or "Dharmaram" S.H. College. Jonas also indicated to the Prior General that his preference was for Dharmaram College.

The study house was finally christened Dharmaram. Fr. Maurus, the Prior General, pointed out a linkage with Dharmaram and the motto of the institution on its coat of arms, viz., Ishabhakti Param Jnanam. He said in his speech welcoming Archbishop J.R. Knox the Internuncio who solemnised the inauguration of Dharmaram later on 23rd February 1958.

“It is our intention to educate the young men committed to our charge, enabling them to prepare for their life of dedication and service by making them saints, gentlemen and devoted citizens of Bharatmata. We believe in the primacy of the spirit and souls, and consequently give an important place in our scheme of education to spiritual values which is beautifully expressed in disciplining the intellect and will of our students with the knowledge which will illumine their minds and the practical wisdom which will enable them to face the complicated issues of the realities of life in their lives’ battle. Dharmaram means a garden of virtues, which will ever give out the sweet perfume of Ishabhakti—devotion to God, from which flows ‘Param Jnanam’ the greatest wisdom.”

In the same speech the word Dharmaram was linked to the original name, viz., Sacred Heart College: “The Dharmaram is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which is in fact the real Dharmaram, the garden of virtues in the fullest sense of the word.”

The Prior General also spoke of the relationship of the name with the CMI, i.e., Carmelites of Mary Immaculate. Carmel in Hebrew means Garden of God. Dharmaram was therefore a garden “where the seeds of the priestly virtues will take root and grow.... Dharmaram, therefore, speaks volumes for the motivation behind this sacred institution.”

The very Indian flavour of the name had made people assume it was a Hindu institution as the name was pronounced differently: Dharma-Ram, i.e., the virtue of Ram. One CMI priest had once quipped: so much the better.

Chapter EIGHT

DHARMARAM: THE TRIUMPH

As soon as he was out of the hospital, Jonas pieced together the reports made available to him from Bangalore and also conferred with Fernando the architect regarding the sketch plans of the complex. Jonas wrote a detailed letter to the Prior General containing updated information on the state of the work and its progress. He promised to coax the Madras-based architect Fernando to speed up the work. The letter mentioned that the sketch plans would be sent to the Prior General shortly. He expressed his eagerness to start the construction work soon after the detailed plans were ready.

Jonas had an eye for detail and his conception of future requirements was flawless. In the original plan bathrooms were to be constructed at the end of each living block, but Jonas changed this to a separate bathroom block common to all the living rooms. This had its economic logic. Bangalore having a cool climate, hot water would be required for taking bath for most part of the year. It would be easier to provide hot water from a single heating facility if the bathrooms remained together. Another suggestion by Jonas to the architect was that the windows and doors could be fixed close together to provide for a common sunshade which would be cheaper. It was obvious even during post-operative rest that his mind was furiously thinking of the problems of the construction and the use of every means to reduce cost and upgrade functionality.

The excavation work of the students' living block was almost complete. But to his horror Jonas found that the excavations were done in the wrong space. He realised that for this Fr. Dismas, in charge during his absence, was not to be blamed. It was the architect who had wrongly marked the plot. Fernando was summoned from Madras to Bangalore. The plans were studied again in order to fit

in the larger part of the excavations wrongly done. Some revisions were made in the lay out. As a result almost half of the excavations made could be used for executing the revised plans. The revision of plans by Jonas also improved generally the lay out. In the revised plan five feet were added to the length of the auditorium as also to the class rooms. The library got additional open space in the front. Jonas could turn a mistake in excavation to an advantage in construction plans.

Jonas had proposed an isolation building for CMI members coming for treatment to Bangalore from other places. This was a small structure at a distance from the main complex and was constructed first to provide lodgings for the men who supervised the constructions. The structure was completed during his hospitalisation in Madras. On return he found that the floor level was not high enough, and the inside plastering was very rough allowing rust and dirt to be deposited on the walls. When he wrote about this to the Prior General, he was careful enough to exonerate Fr. Dismas who was supervising the construction in his absence. He said, "I think it is not due to lack of attention of Fr. Dismas."

The space selected for construction was not level ground. One way of tackling the ground formation was filling up the lower ground to the highest point. This would have meant considerable expenditure to be categorised as infructuous. Jonas put his thinking cap on and found a unique solution. The complex was divided into three plinth levels so that construction could take place without filling up the low ground. Fathers' quarters and the students' quarters were on the highest level, three feet below would be the academic section and the students living blocks. The refectory and kitchen would be constructed at three and a half feet below the former.

Jonas' all-seeing eye could not leave out the mosquito menace. Living there, he found that the mosquitoes were more populous and troublesome than he had imagined. To solve the problem mosquito-mesh ventilators were added to the facilities. This prevented mosquitoes from zooming into the rooms while allowing air circulation.

As work started transport facility became a major requirement. A cycle was necessary to move within the compound as also for going to nearby places. At that time Indian cycles were only coming into their own, and in urban centres there was still popularity for cycles of English make. Jonas wanted an Indian cycle which could be had for Rs. 260/- the price being less by Rs. 60/- than the English make. Jonas was perhaps not only pursuing the economy angle but also making himself part of the Swadheshi movement: Be Indian, buy Indian.

He also put up for approval of the Prior General in Cochin the case for buying a car for moving about. The Prior General had advised him not to move about but only supervise the work without much travel. This was a contradiction, an impossibility. Jonas wrote that nothing would work that way. For many things, even small things like shopping for building material, seeking electricity connection etc. he had to go out and meet people. If problems are not solved quickly there would be delay and additional expenditure. So he proposed in addition to buying a cycle, a second-hand car should be purchased, his budget for the car being Rs. 1500/- a sum equivalent to the price of a car battery today.

An examination of the correspondence with the Prior General conducted at that time shows Jonas had little monetary powers. Clearance and permission for every little expenditure had to be obtained. Even for purchase of a cycle he needed approval. (The letters to the Prior General are replete with figures of expenditure whether it is an ex-gratia payment of Rs. 100/- to the contractor or buying a cycle for Rs. 260/-.) According to the old system in the CMI the financial powers were not delegated to the member priests. Moreover every rupee had to be accounted for and supported by expenditure vouchers. The system underwent vast changes later, but in the fifties the old rigidities which had their own value and relevance at that time were still in force.

As the correspondence, especially with CMI headquarters, increased, maintenance of files to keep track of issues became a necessity. In the old scheme, letters were written in Malayalam and

no copies were kept at Bangalore. Since back reference of past letters became critical on occasions, a modern system of keeping an office copy of the letters that went out of the Bangalore office became important.

Jonas sought permission to write official letters in English rather than in Malayalam, the 'official' language of the CMI congregation. Jonas also started keeping a summary of letters sent out in Malayalam. The filing system presented difficulties when there was something too personal or confidential in the letters. Jonas requested the Prior General that such messages could be sent on a separate piece of paper.

An endeavour like constructing Dharmaram needed a tidy amount. As the bills mounted there arose a whispering campaign that money was being squandered at Bangalore. In his letter dated 18th January 1957, Jonas told the Prior General: "Every paisa is accounted for everyday. Anyone could see the account books. Initially more money was spent because in many instances provision was made for 450 people. Moreover, timber, stones, cement and steel are stored up taking into consideration our future needs. Cement and steel cannot be got at control price, as and when the need arose. There are 14 masons from Nagercoil working here who are to be continuously employed. The work is planned in such a way that they are occupied all the time. If some of them are dispensed with, the work will slow down and it cannot be accelerated as and when the need arises."

Jonas was very particular with the accounting records. But this became a problem area since a clerk good enough to keep appropriate accounts was not available. The maintenance of meticulous accounting records proved to be a wise step as subsequently, partly based on the complaints of wastage etc., a commission was appointed by the Prior General to study the account keeping process in Bangalore. Jonas himself made his own suggestions to the commission in regard to keeping of accounts.

As the implementation progressed it was clear that the costs would run over the original estimate. In the fifties inflation was rampant and building materials like cement and steel were controlled and cost more in the black market. It was difficult to contain expenditure within amounts estimated originally, especially so when the construction time slipped.

Money makes the mare go, but there was no money and this affected the tempo of work. Jonas had mainly turned his hope for funds during the project on the help from the Sacred Oriental Congregation.

In January 1956 he received an encouraging letter from the Secretary of the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Oriental Congregation, "I can assure you that you and all the Carmelite fathers will have every help from a good friend for the realisation of all the vast and good projects which are coming up and which are intended for the welfare of the dear Malabar Church.

The funding from abroad had one problem. There was no direct sourcing of funds. Every single rupee raised was to have gone to the general kitty of the CMI congregation and later passed on to Bangalore on a case by case basis. This created endless problems of cash flow like withholding of the due advances from the contractors, delayed payment to suppliers, delay in procurement of material required urgently for work etc. Sometimes there was no money for paying the workers. Financial management indeed became the trickiest part of the operation.

Thrift was in the blood of Jonas. Had not his forefathers been thrifty businessmen? Instead of purchasing a new van, he used his contacts to get a second-hand military lorry from Madras. For inhouse transport of materials he made a bullock-cart frame at a low cost (Rs. 250) and a pair of oxen was purchased for Rs. 400. Opting for a bullock cart itself was an economy measure, but making

it in-house was a further improvement of the economy. He calculated that by the use of a bullock cart the saving would be Rs. 3 per day.

Recalled in this context is the story of his visit to W. Germany much later when he became the Bishop of Rajkot for raising funds for the Rajkot Diocese's social welfare activities. With Bishop Jonas was Fr. George Earathara, CMI, a prominent CMI priest who was very active in the work of the AICUF—All India Catholic University Federation—and who later served in Germany as parish priest in a number of places. The Bishop and the priest had just come out of an important meeting. Out in the cold street both felt hungry. Fr. George suggested getting into a reasonably good restaurant. He thought how could the august person of a bishop eat a hamburger from a street-side eatery. Fr. George was mistaken. Bishop Jonas said that it would be less expensive to eat a hamburger in the street rather than enter a well-appointed restaurant.

There was so much of grass growing in the Dharmaram compound going waste. Jonas purchased a milking cow so that the grass on the ground would be converted into milk and butter on the dining table. When there was excess milk, it was sold and some internal revenue was also generated.

Although there was an economy drive all round, this did not result in any niggardliness or lowering of the quality of construction. Jonas proposed teakwood for doors and windows on the basis of its durability and beauty of grain. For furniture he would go for rosewood (very durable and good looking) and jack wood (cheaper and less durable for light furniture). He bought bulk quantities of cement to make a gain of Rs. 1/- per bag.

Jonas made the bricks required for the construction out of the earth dug out from the land. He estimated the requirement of about 300,000 bricks for the construction. This was certainly on the low side considering the size of the structure. But local granite was used abundantly which was stronger, cheaper and more aesthetic.

When it came to cutlery Jonas insisted on buying German made cutlery known for their beauty, finish and strength. The indigenous variety was available at about one third of the price: but Jonas longed for the best thing for Dharmaram. His Swadeshi love also had its conditionality.

Even as the contract for the construction work was given to a contractor by name Joseph Chowriappa on the basis of a contract deed, there was delay in the final drawings on the basis of which work had to be executed. As soon as they were submitted by the architect they had to be sent to the CMI general council for approval.

Jonas foresaw the problem in case there was questioning later about the approval of the plans in parts or on the whole. Jonas requested the Prior General that the plans be made in duplicate and the office copy should be sent back to the Bangalore office with two signatures, viz., that of the Prior General and that of the Secretary of the General Council. Before despatch the plans had only two signatures, viz., that of the architect and of Fr. Jonas. This was a fool proof method to obviate doubts and difficulties regarding approvals and execution at a later date.

Even as the work was progressing the detailed plans of the superstructures remained undelivered by the architect. By mid-December 1955, Jonas visited Dr. Betts at the Christian Medical College, Vellore. Dr. Betts took an X-ray of the chest and said, "Very good, go ahead and simply forget all about the operation." When Jonas asked whether he should go over again for check up Dr. Betts said, "If you want you can come after one year."

The medical check up gave renewed confidence to Jonas and he went to Madras from Vellore, to chase the architect as also to make enquiries regarding the procurement of cutlery, crockery, sanitary ware, mosaic work etc.

Jonas bristled with anger when he found that Fernando was not in station in spite of the fact that he was informed of the visit.

He had discussions with an assistant of Fernando and realised that precious little had been done by Fernando as he had promised. Jonas was upset but he managed to keep most of the resentment he felt under control.

The architectural plans were to be part of the presentation to be made to the visiting Cardinal of the Sacred Oriental Congregation as a prelude to asking for financial aid from Rome.

Fernando came to his office the following day and instead of calling on Jonas sent a letter to him through the assistant. In the letter Fernando raised unnecessary queries in order to buy time. Jonas was now sure that it was time to change the architect who appeared to be not serious about the work. Jonas replied that he could not give an answer to the queries immediately and he needed time to consult his superiors. The heart of the matter was that Jonas was not satisfied with Fernando's performance, and the sketches and drawings did not come up to his expectation. He also failed miserably in keeping appointments and sticking to promised delivery dates. There were mistakes in the layout plan. The elevation plan was wrong. It looked like that of a hospital according to some people who saw it. Fernando sized up the situation which was becoming increasingly unfavourable to his continuance as the architect. He therefore withdrew himself from the responsibility in the following words: "I am very sorry that matters should have reached such a climax. However, I shall give you the longitudinal sections for the church to match the elevation plan now sent to you and shall also be glad to give free advice if you find any major difficulties, provided it does not involve much of trouble or any drawings."

Some money had been paid to Fernando, and that was fee enough for the work he had already done plus the drawings he had promised to deliver. Jonas returned to Bangalore and took the earliest opportunity to get in touch with Govinda Raja Naidu the consultant

of Joseph Chowriappa the contractor. Raju Naidu appeared to be smart, earnest and competent. His fee was also moderate. The remaining work of sketches and drawings was entrusted to Raju subject to approval from the Prior General.

Jonas was pleased by the workmanship and service-mindedness of Raju Naidu. He discovered that Raju Naidu's thinking and approach were very much akin to that of himself. A strong bond of respectful and considerate friendship grew between them. Raju Naidu was receptive to reasonable changes or modifications in his drawings and open to discussion. Shortly after his involvement in the construction of Dharmaram his son Venugopal completed his higher studies in engineering and joined his father in his profession. Thereafter it was the father and son team who together designed and planned and made all the detailed drawing for the new buildings in the Dharmaram Complex and later the Christ College, Bangalore.

In the meanwhile around the end of 1955, pressure mounted to close down the scholasticate in Kerala and shift the apparatus to Bangalore by June 1956. As there was slippage in the programmed work, Jonas realised that adequate facilities would not be in position by June 1956. He suggested continuance of the scholasticate in Kerala for one more year. Jonas also added weight to the idea of postponement of starting classes at Bangalore by inviting the attention of the Prior General that the new constitution envisaged modification in the running of the scholasticate and this could be implemented straight away at Bangalore.

According to the revised plans Jonas wanted to provide accommodation for 100 students by June 1957. The plans included completing kitchen, dining hall, auditorium, bathroom block, a few class rooms, and at least one living block having 75 rooms by that time. There were many factors which contributed to the slippage in completion but the main factor was shortage of funds.

A religious conference was to be held in Thevara, Kerala. Jonas had agreed to read a paper in a session of the conference on 30th December 1955. He wrote in a letter to the Prior General that since he had to attend to the details of almost everything in the construction work, he could not get the free time to write the paper and he should be excused for not attending the conference. Coming from a person with a scholarly mind and who enjoyed intellectual interaction in conferences and seminars, the episode shows how much he was dedicated to his work at that time.

On 12th January 1956 Jonas applied for permission to construct the living block, the largest structure in the complex. The letter explained at length how he was planning to make substantial saving in timber work by buying the timber and getting the item made by employing expert carpenters. There was a difference in the price of steel in the open market and the controlled price and he would arrange for steel at controlled rates. His contacts in the government steel company (Hindustan Steel Limited) made this possible.

Those were the days when self-reliance was the national goal. Only in the 90s India dismantled its controls on imports and exports and dared to take on the global market on its own terms. The self-reliance concept as opposed to the current free market and global concept arose partly from Gandhian political economy and philosophy which envisaged a network of self-reliant village republics producing goods and services for their needs. There was also the influence of the Soviet model of development through central planning. The Gandhian approach de-emphasised growth of large scale industries and was a close cousin of the current 'small is beautiful' concept of Schoemacher. Dairying was an important activity of the self-reliance concept traceable to the Gandhian mode of development. Presumably the obsession of Jonas with dairy activity arose from his fascination for Gandhian philosophy in general, besides his own love for such activities nearer to nature.

In January 1956, he wrote to the Prior General expressing his desire to buy a few heifers from the then ongoing auction sale of animals in the National Dairy. Jonas had ambitions to start a dairy farm and with its income meet the expenditure of the scholasticate of about 400 students and staff. He saw a strong linkage between dairy farm activities and rural development. The students of Dharmaram who got initiated into the know-how of dairy farms could use their skills and knowledge to start similar activities in the mission centres—usually in remote rural areas—when they are sent there.

In the letter he wrote to the Prior General he said: "I had been to the auction sale of the Dairy Research Institute. Ordinarily they don't sell good animals. But this time there had been a few good animals. The Assistant Cattle Yark Supervisor Mr. E. V. Paul from Trichur is an old student of our Thevara College. He had given me complete information of the animals put on auction sale. There was a large crowd of people who attended the auction. I could buy a good cow and three heifers. The cow yielded 20 bottles of milk in the previous litter. Totally it cost us Rs. 1350/-. I would like to buy a few more heifers. It may be possible to get good heifers from Mysore Palace. I am also thinking to buy a few sheep and goats."

From the day of purchase of the cow, the 'dairy' became a topic in his letters to the Prior General. In the letter of 14th February 1956 he wrote: "The cow we purchased from Dairy Research Centre is yielding about 12 litres of milk daily."

"I had been on the lookout for a plot of land for our farm. As it is mid-summer, now is the ideal time for searching for a farm land. The thousand acre plot which was suggested earlier seems to be the most ideal one. I could not find any other place even one-fourth of its worth. Fr. Cyriac and Brother Benjamin are of the opinion that we should go in for it. I will be getting more details of the plot."

The little dairy farm which started functioning in Dharmaram from local sources could not quench his yearning for the real big

one which he had in mind. By 1960 when the major structures of the complex had all been completed, the Dharmaram Dairy Farm had become one of the finest dairy farms in Mysore.

Much later Jonas would carry the farm concept with him when he left for the U.S. on 16th June 1960 for higher studies in Sociology in Chicago.

In the U.S. he would get into touch with running dairy farms. In January 1963 he flew with a menagerie of two high quality heifers, six calves, six goats, 2 pairs of pigs and 3 pups as a gift from a farm in the USA. The airlifting of the animals was not an easy task. He had to obtain special permission for this from the U.S. and the Indian Government. For Jonas this was the first occasion to check whether such imported animals would thrive in India or not. In the U.S. the heifers had a pedigree with their mothers yielding more than 10000 litres of milk. The airlifted menagerie was compared to Noah's Ark in the Old Testament, and Jonas earned the nickname 'Jonas of the Ark'.

The dream of a white revolution seeping across India, due largely to his initiative, had always flickered through his mind. He had also thought of the credit that would accrue to the Church in India as the agent of change showing the way for the poor to earn their livelihood from improved cattle breeding in the villages.

When he would later return to Dharmaram in 1966 to become the Rector of the College, he would get more of an opportunity for concentrating attention on developing the Dharmaram dairy farm by adding more animals to the farm and simultaneously boosting the agricultural operations in the farm at Kumbalguad.

This was to result in a second airlift of about 30 cows and heifers, a few goats, pigs, rabbits and dogs.

The magnificent obsession with the bovine species remained with Jonas till the very end resulting in introducing a scheme for a rural milk co-operative society during the period of his association with St. John's Medical College.

Later, after becoming the Bishop of Rajkot Jonas imported high yielding goats from France for improving the goat variety in Gujrat. The imported goats had the quality of prospering in arid conditions. The animals could be afforded by even the poorest villager.

It is time the focus of our concern is brought back on the tortuous problems of construction of Dharmaram which Jonas faced. Everyone who is familiar with civil construction in India knows that material procurement is the hardest task of the operations. In the fifties when the construction work of Dharmaram College was taken up, India was in the grip of scarcity. The country had adopted in part the Russian mode of planned development. Its essential features were: Industrial growth through investment in the public sector, reserving the basic industries to the public sector and a control and permit system meant to divert scarce resources to priority areas of investment. Steel and cement essential for civil construction were controlled items. Their prices were administered and their consumption was regulated by permits issued on priority lists of civil work. This created a flourishing black market for building materials, specially for steel and cement. The black market prices were far higher than the controlled prices. The problem with the licensed procurement based on permit was that the deliveries took a very long time. Delayed deliveries affected the even progress of civil construction works. The initial difficulties he met with in buying steel set Jonas thinking of the best way to procure steel. The best way was to apply for a permit for the entire requirement based on the detailed plan. The strategy when implemented could result in a substantial saving of Rs. 50/- per tonne. Considerable economy was achieved by buying steel and cement at controlled prices and in large quantities. But it was difficult to stock cement beyond a certain

time in view of the shortage of covered area for storing cement in dry condition.

In January 1956 shortage of steel brought the work to a grinding halt. Jonas regretted this very much and redoubled his efforts to procure steel at controlled prices and stock it in sufficient quantity. He managed to get a permit to procure steel at controlled prices from Bhadravati Iron & Steel Works, a state government undertaking, as also from the Hindustan Steel Limited, i.e., HSL, a Central Government company.

Jonas visited the office of the HSL in Calcutta. Cleetus, a relation of Jonas, was a senior executive in HSL. Cleetus promised Jonas to help him in releasing the entire requirement of steel from Hindustan Steel. For the final orders he had to fly from Calcutta to New Delhi. With disarming simplicity Jonas wrote to the Prior General: "Mr. Cleetus received me with great warmth and love. Everyday he used to send his car for my use. He hosted two dinners for me."

Jonas also chased 'cement' with equal energy and determination. Coimbatore was the nearest place where cement manufacturing companies and bulk outlets were located. He bought bulk quantities and made a saving of Rs. 1/- per bag. This resulted in substantial savings because thousands of bags of cement were consumed in the construction.

Jonas had a way of getting his superiors involved in the work he was doing at a considerable geographical distance from places where they lived. This, he did, by introducing graphic descriptions of the activities and by a cinematic shifting of scenes which ultimately gave the total picture of the work situation and the work.

In one letter he wrote: "Centering has been done for casting work of the dining hall and the pillars have been cast. The work of the kitchen is also progressing. Students block has come up to three feet and a half from the plinth level."

In another letter he is exultant over the finding of water when the first bore well was dug. Availability of water was a perennial problem in Bangalore even in the eighties.

A burglary took place in the night of 31st July 1956. This is how he wrote about the burglary to the Prior General. "In our isolation ward seven of us were sleeping. The burglars opened the first floor with a crowbar and took away a time piece, a torch light, a brass vessel and three other cooking vessels of the kitchen. 2 bulbs, 2 kilos of rice, four coconuts and some clothes of our boy Richard. They took away all these from the place where Richard was sleeping. Fortunately he did not wake up, otherwise they would have man-handled him. They tried to get into the store where horse gram was kept".

"As the boy there alerted others by making a noise, they did not enter there. A petty shopkeeper in nearby circle when he looked out to see who these were, was hit by an iron rod. Our dogs did not even bark. Probably they would have given something to quell the dogs. A little away from our campus they carried away eleven bags of potatoes and eighteen chickens. I consider this as a warning to take necessary precautions for the future. As there are many labourers around the place through out, we can take enough safeguard."

Jonas had given a very detailed description of the burglary—including the articles lost by the neighbour—but the letter ends with the assurance that there was nothing to be afraid.

His letters would shift scene effortlessly from the procurement problem of steel to brick making and centering problem of casting work, from bore-well digging to the yield of milk from the cow, all in one breath, but the manner of straight-forward telling he adopted made the letters readable.

The contract agreement for constructing the refectory, kitchen blocks and corridor connecting them was signed on 15th December 1955. The date of completion was April 15, 1956 which gave the contractor a period of hardly 4 months to complete the work.

The whole complex had to be constructed stage by stage because of the resource constraints and also the strategy of occupying and putting to use the buildings of the first phase while the subsequent phases were in construction. The time set for inauguration was June 1956, but this was delayed by one year. In April 1955 Jonas wrote to the Prior General: "Fr. Dismas is of the opinion that we will have sufficient accommodation only if we could complete the construction of the auditorium also for the next year. I too feel the same way; otherwise we will have to work on 2 living blocks and one bathroom block. If you could kindly inform us what all buildings are to be constructed immediately, we will make the estimate of those."

The living block was taken up only in 1956. This was to be completed before June 1957 when the first batch of 170 people were to be accommodated. In January 1957 Jonas wrote to the Prior General that he would not be able to give satisfactory accommodation to 170 people by June 1957, he said: "75 people can be given single rooms. These cells are so small that they cannot accommodate two each; nor is it proper to put two students in a room. Therefore 3 quarters of the space of the dining hall should be taken to accommodate 100 students. The remaining space can be used as a study hall. We shall put 8 altars in the auditorium. And the remaining space can be used as a common hall. The dining will be temporarily arranged in the corridor behind the space for the dining hall."

There was a real space squeeze. There were difficulties in bringing the first batch in June 1957. But postponement of the inauguration to next year would have meant keeping the built-up parts unoccupied. There was also the psychological advantage of announcing to the congregation and to the world that Dharmaram is no longer a dream, but a reality, a facility under use, an idea that has already been translated into three-dimensional form. How exciting it was to realise that the disparate array of shapely and shapeless materials such as bricks, granite, mortar, cement, steel,

timber, electrical and sanitary fittings had been fused together to form real rooms and spaces for training young aspirants for full fledged membership of the congregation.

The informal inauguration was fixed for 1st June 1957. On that day, sharp at 6.45 a.m., Dr. Thomas Pothacamury arrived with his secretary. He blessed the whole building, viz., the first of the living blocks with 75 rooms, the spacious refectory 180 ft. long and the vast kitchen. The refectory was divided into 4 sections: its eastern end was converted into a chapel, while the other section served as the juniors study hall, dormitory for 34 juniors (who had no single rooms yet) and class rooms for the seniors. The kitchen was divided into two sections, one to serve as refectory for the present.

The Archbishop said the Mass at 7 a.m. He had breakfast with the Dharmaram community members. The Archbishop expressed the hope that the study house would have a profound impact on the future of the country. It was important that the priests who studied in seminaries should have a proper training that equipped them to meet the challenges of the modern society. They should be fortified with sound and deep knowledge of their religious faith and trained to possess the spirit for doing hard work with zeal and dedication.

The Archbishop congratulated Fr. Jonas and his team for having accomplished the work with such competence.

At 10.30 a.m. the gathering assembled in the chapel and sang stirringly 'Veni Creator'. The benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was followed by consecration of the house to the Sacred Heart.

The Prior General rose up from his chair in the chapel and acknowledged the happiness and gratitude that was reflected in every face assembled there. He spoke about the long-felt need for an exclusive study house for the congregation. He complemented Fr. Jonas, as also Fr. Dismas and Cyriac, who had helped Fr. Jonas. He felt that it was only due to divine grace that the House could be inaugurated on 1st June. He read out the names of the Faculty

appointed for the coming scholastic year. Jonas, then 38, was appointed as the professor of Canon Law.

Others on the faculty were: Fr. Canisius Professor of scripture and Greek, Fr. Januarius Professor of theodicy and logic, Fr. Paulinus Professor of theology and ethics and practice of liturgy, Fr. Luke, Professor of dogma and orthodox theology. Fr. J. Britto was appointed Professor of moral theology, critique, history of philosophy and pastoral theology. Fr. Eustace was Professor of dogma and Syriac.

Soon the halls where the smells of new construction and paints hung started reverberating with lectures and discussions, the grave silences of the learning process and the laughter of the interludes of merry making and friendship. Clusters of human voices rolled over like waves hitting a shore bringing to life the rooms, the corridors, the verandas and the wide staircases of the complex. These sounds were music to the ears of Jonas. He felt almost maternal watching the droves of young students moving about in discipline and at times in abandon for whom he had prepared this intellectual, devotional and experiential feast. As he knelt in his room on the first day before the crucifix tears started rolling down his cheeks. For a long time the sense of fulfilment overwhelmed him and there was no sleep coming.

The finishing touches like completing electrification, clearing of the yards etc. were still on, for in another seven months the formal inauguration of the whole complex of Dharmaram was planned to take place.

Eight months of hectic finishing work followed. By the beginning of 1958 it was clear that the formal inauguration would be unduly delayed if the event was kept pending for 'complete' completion. But the major part of the essential spaces had been put up and it was decided that the formal inauguration should be conducted in February 1958. The slippage was pardonable considering the

difficulties in material procurement and the need for giving attention also to the seminary in operation in the completed rooms and spaces of the Complex. On 23rd February 1958 the inaugural functions were solemnised by His Grace Archbishop J.R. Knox, the then Papal Internuncio to India. He said in his speech; "I am very glad to inaugurate the Dharmaram College, which is a monument of achievement of the Syro-Malabar Carmelite Congregation on account of the great interest the Holy See, especially the Sacred Oriental Congregation, has in the institution." He also dealt with the significance of the name Dharmaram: "A seminary must be a veritable garden of virtues. Any garden if it is to thrive must undergo rigorous pruning. Similarly strict discipline must characterise the training imparted in the seminary. But a seminary is a garden of virtues where flowers of virtue bloom. The seven years of training and discipline will produce the energy in solitude and silence conducive to the development of the virtues. Discipline helps the development of the spirit of detachment from the world's goods. The detachment produces purity of heart. Blessed are the pure of heart, such a life of detachment and purity of heart will prepare the students for the arduous missionary life they are to undertake in future."

As Prefect Director of Studies, Jonas set the goals and objectives of the study house. He was going to set goals far beyond mediocrity in achievements. He wanted every student to pursue excellence. He wanted to ensure spiritual growth with intellectual development, but also wanted physical training and involvement in social and cultural activities and concerns. Study times were interspersed with manual work, sports, games and cultural programmes and other creative activities.

Even as the seminary bloomed under the care of Jonas and the new faculty, he was busy with the rest of the construction work. He strove to give maximum attention to his classes in canon law which soon became popular for their innovative teaching style. His students

admired his erudition, the breadth as well as the depth of his vision and his broad humanism rooted in Christian faith and values.

By 1960 Jonas was able to complete five living blocks, all the class rooms, library, museum, workshops, in addition to kitchen, dining hall, auditorium etc. which were completed in 1957.

It was time for Jonas to take a long vacation after his long involvement with the Dharmaram College. The Prior General asked him to go for higher studies in sociology in the University of Chicago, USA. Jonas gratefully agreed. He flew to Chicago on 16th June 1960, his mind full of images of the reality of Dharmaram. The flickering flame of a dream had now become the blazing sun of reality.

Since 1960 Dharmaram has expanded and developed further. As it enters the 90s it is a huge complex of many institutional units consisting of, besides the original Dharmaram College complex, the Dharmaram Vidhya Kshetra teaching theology and philosophy for students from the CMI and other monastic orders, a Centre for Study of World Religions, a Centre for the Study of Man, the Centre for Biblical Studies, the Centre for Eastern and Indian Christian Studies, all associated to DVK, the co-educational Christ College offering courses in unconventional subjects such as computers, catering, journalism, the Dharmaram school of printing, the Dharmaram dairy farm and poultry farm, the Christu Vidyalaya running K.G. classes to plus two level CBSE course, the Dharmaram Publications—English, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam—and last but not the least the Dharmaram book centre, a retail outlet for the sale of Dharmaram and other publications. The Dharmaram College, the Christ College and the Dharmaram Vidya Kshetra have superb library facilities with their population of books growing at a fantastic speed yearly.

The architecture and decor of the Dharmaram complex has become a unique blend of Christian and Hindu symbolism and an

expression of the Biblical and the Upanishadic traditions. Here St. Mary is sari-clad and the infant in her hands holds the Dharmachakra. At St. Mary's feet is not the cloud and the half moon but the Indian lotus in bloom.

The Jesus figure in Dharmaram, executed in ceramic mosaic tiles, is a divine Guru in deep meditation. His arms are held in the adhyapana mudra, i.e., teaching gesture. There is a bodhi tree in the background, presumably representing enlightenment. There is the cross and also the flower depicted in the background pointing to his death and resurrection. There is also the Indian lamp, two halves of a coconut—symbolising the divine and the human person in Jesus in rustic Kerala style, a cluster of black grapes invoking the idea of the Eucharist along with the bread and chalice shown close to each other. The Dharmaram chapel is circular in shape and has a hemispherical dome, a major architectural departure from the traditional Gothic shape of the churches.

Dharmaram today is an inspiring destination to any visitor in quest of sources of spiritual and intellectual excellence. Those trained at Dharmaram have spread themselves out to many parts of the globe, the North and the South American countries, Europe, and countries of Africa. The CMI order has truly built a global presence and reputation, assisted by its most distinguished institution, viz., Dharmaram.

JONAS AND THE CHURCH IN INDIA

The "Church in India Today Seminar" was a model event for Catholics in India. The Seminar owed its origin to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) which encouraged the spirit of reform and renewal within Catholicism. The Seminar was, so to say, the logical expression of the renewal process applied specifically to the Church in India.

The Seminar was two years in preparation. Jonas was a member of the Steering Committee formed for the conduct of the Seminar in February 1967, by the CBCI (The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India). The Committee was entrusted with the responsibility to consider and finalise the themes to be discussed in the Seminar. The tentative listing included Indian culture, Indian philosophy; Indian religious tradition, relevance of modern trends in Indian society to Christian life, social activism and social service by Christians etc.

Jonas was one of the three member task force appointed by the Steering Committee to draw up the detailed programme and parameters on the number and nature of the organising committee and the level and size of the participation.

The objectives of the Seminar drawn up by the Committee *inter alia* contained the followed statements: "We in India have a special problem. Owing to historical reasons the Church has not been fully integrated into the country. She has not been, therefore, fully the sign and the sacrament of Christ to the country. Besides, the technological revolution which is beginning in India is leading to change of cultural and social values."

“Hence the mission of the Church in India appears in a new light. She must understand her responsibility for the country in a new way, and offer assistance in solving the pressing problems of man and society. She must study the environment in which she lives and the concrete tasks she has to perform if she wishes to fulfil her mission that cannot be fulfilled by the conversion of a few individuals.”

In August 1968 a Central Organising Committee of 41 members including two Cardinals, eight Archbishops and two Bishops, was set up. Jonas was a member of this committee and represented the seminaries in India. Since the Central Organising Committee was too large in view of its extensive representational coverage, a smaller Executive Committee with Cardinal Gracias as chairman was formed. It was this committee which provided the forum for close interaction between Jonas and the dynamic Cardinal Gracias. But for the Seminar and the encounter with the Cardinal which it made possible the graph of the ecclesiastic career of Jonas could have been different although not necessarily less resplendent.

Cardinal Gracias, India's first Cardinal, was a born leader. He could easily spot a person as regards his leadership qualities when he met one. The Cardinal was then the President of the CBCI and was in search of a dynamic priest who could take over the functions of the secretary. Even in the first few encounters Jonas Thaliath stood out as a person of great dynamism who could energise others with whom he worked. Here was a happy blend of the personality of a thinker and a doer. Whenever an issue was raised in the committee Jonas would go to the heart of the matter and articulate many a hidden aspect of the problem and its possible solution to the surprise of the group which listened to him. He had his views on every aspect of the Seminar. He expressed them with clarity and without inhibition but only when his turn came to do so. He was ever willing to take over responsibilities for implementing

decisions. Very soon Jonas evolved as the man Friday of the Seminar organisers, both in the intellectual and physical domain.

So it came to pass that the availability of the premises of St. John's Medical College for the entire Seminar became doubtful because of the changes in the dates of university level examinations of the medical students. The participation expected in the Seminar was of the order of 600 persons, and alternative premises with adequate space and facilities was not to be found easily. Jonas realised the gravity of the problem. In a quick flash of the mind he could identify one place among others which provided equal or superior facilities to conduct the Seminar vis a vis St. John's Medical College premises. That was Dharmaram.

The Organising Committee and the Local Committee of which Archbishop D.S. Lourdasamy was the chairman were so pleased with the effortless solution to the venue problem, that their esteem for Jonas went up. At that time the Prior General was Fr. Canisius, a priest several years senior to Jonas but one who was a colleague of Jonas in Kandy and Rome. The formal permission to use the Dharmaram premises was obtained with great ease. Dharmaram had a large dining hall, chapels, auditorium, class rooms for workshop sessions, library, lounge, living rooms and of course its vast and beautiful grounds. It was decided that Dharmaram students would go to Kerala so that all living rooms could be at the disposal of the participants. The rule that women could not be accommodated in Dharmaram was suspended for the period of the Seminar.

The change of venue of the Seminar resulted in much deeper involvement of Jonas in the conduct of the Seminar. The spade work of the Seminar was immense. The All India Seminar was a culminating event of around a hundred regional diocesan, national consultative and seminaries-based seminars, which discussed the Seminar's thematic profile and sent up suggestions and recommendations. It is estimated that over ten thousand priests, nuns and laity participated in the preparatory seminars. Jonas among

others gave himself fully to the task of scanning and studying the papers of the preparatory seminars. This gave him the key role of shaping the intellectual, spiritual and physical parameters of the Seminar. One participant recalls that Jonas displayed the quality of omnipresence during the days of the Seminar. One moment he was in the workshop session on Liturgy, but the next moment he was in the kitchen helping the sisters in charge of the catering department for the imminent lunch after the morning sessions. He freely delegated his responsibilities to the few seminarians who stayed back to assist in the work of the Seminar. Yet he kept his eyes and ears wide open and he was right on the spot whenever a problem in the arrangement sprang up and an instant solution was called for.

Besides Cardinal Gracias, many others could discover the organising abilities in Jonas. One such eminent person was the chairman of the committee, Fr. Balaguer. Fr. Balaguer at 69 was twenty years senior to Jonas and found in the latter the support he wanted beyond measure for the great endeavour. He leaned on Jonas without reservation when bottle-necks surfaced during the preparatory stage as also during the seminar phase. Jonas did his best to fulfil the trust reposed on him by the president of the Seminar, Cardinal Gracias and the chairman, Fr. Balaguer. The Cardinal found a kindred soul in Jonas. It was the time a second Cardinal had been appointed for the Church in India in the person of Joseph Cardinal Parecattil, Archbishop of Ernakulam. Cardinal Parecattil was the apostle of inculturation. He made a stirring call to the participants in the Seminar in his homily to make the Church incarnate in the Indian culture. Cardinal Parecattil said that 'the Church would not strike deep roots in the Indian soil until and unless we take pains to Indianise her, as far as possible, especially in regard to her liturgy and thought patterns'. Jonas was very much impressed by Parecattil's words.

Had he not been burdened with the nitty gritty of the Seminar arrangements, more time would have been available for Jonas to

contribute to the intellectual and spiritual cargo it carried. Initially Jonas was known to the participants as a member of the core group on whose shoulders the responsibility for the physical arrangements of the Seminar rested. So every one was pleasantly surprised when he found time to express his views in the liturgical session and stole the show with his brilliant analysis of the problem.

Liturgy had been a core issue with the Church in India for some time. The Seminar organisers had decided that there should be no complaint regarding the representation of the three Rites existing in the Church in India. The religious ceremonies, mainly the holy mass was to be said according to the Latin Rite on the opening day, according to the Syro-Malabar Rite on the closing day and according to the Syro-Malankara Rite on the intervening Sunday. In addition, at noon every day, concelebrated Mass was offered for the benefit of the participants in one of the three Rites.

One of the themes of the workshop sessions was liturgy. The Seminar was to consider the manner in which the Vatican II decree on liturgy should be made applicable to the Church in India which followed three forms of liturgy under the three different Rites.

During the inaugural session, the Papal Delegate Archbishop Pignedoli had touched on the issue in the following words: "The Church in India must be a church rooted in the Indian soil, thoroughly at home in her various languages, culture and ways of life, intimately sharing the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the Indian people and acknowledged by them not as foreign but very much their own. The Syro-Malabar Rite and the Syro-Malankara Rite claimed two thousand years of Christian tradition in India whereas the Latin Rite had its beginning only four centuries ago after the advent of the Portuguese in India. The Latin Rite on the other hand had an all India presence whereas the other two were local affairs limited to Kerala, although in the recent past such geographical containment was giving over to historic overflow to other regions. An example of spreading out was the institution of the Dharmaram College itself in whose premises the Seminar was being conducted."

The issue of evolving a common liturgy for the Church in India was hotly debated in the workshop for liturgy. As the discussions progressed passions ran high. Latin Rite had greater geographical coverage and there were pleas that it should replace the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara Rites. The followers of the latter felt that their ancient Christian heritage would be compromised or even blotted out if they adopted the Latin form of worship. Jonas listened to the various points of view expressed by the participants. Even when the possible solutions were worked out with considerable logic, unanimity in any one solution seemed impossible. At one point during the discussions Jonas rose in his seat and walked to the podium in measured steps. He held his head high and straight. He started his speech almost inaudibly. There was a hush as the majority of the audience craned their neck to see Jonas, since for them he was not a familiar figure, and even for those who knew him his ability to make a contribution to the theme of liturgy was an unknown element. His voice gradually rose to a volume which when filtered through the microphone reached the participants in the back-rows loud and clear. He held his voice at that level as he explained the genesis and history of the three Rites in the Church in India. He elaborated on the unique characteristics of each one of the three Rites. He proved that no Rite was superior or inferior to another. Even the Latin rite had a two millennium long history if one took into account its origin.

Jonas said that Indianisation of the Rites was important. All the three Rites should be evolved in the process and work together. There should be experimentation towards the goal of appropriate Indianisation.

Jonas said the pursuit of a common Indian liturgy need not result in a rigid uniformity all over India. India was a mosaic of different races, languages, cultures, religions and religious traditions. In view of the regional diversity and the sub-continental geography Indian liturgy could not but be PLURIFORM. The axiom "unity in

diversity” could be applied here. A basic common liturgy had therefore to be conceived and developed with this principle in mind.

When Jonas ended his speech, there was an ovation of approval of his ideas. After the session several participants came to him and congratulated him on making a brilliant speech on a hot issue, cooling the passions and offering a solution to conclude the discussions on a touchy issue on a note of harmony and understanding.

J.R. Victor Karunan, one-time lay CBCI official, reminisces about the Seminar in the following words: “I remember well during the All India Seminar on the ‘Church in India Today’ held in Bangalore in 1969 when the question of the three Rites was being discussed, Fr. Jonas stole the show by offering a compromise solution to the knotty problem which was accepted by the 800 strong assembly with acclaim. Since then I used to admire his incisive perception of men and matters and the masterly way he handled major issues of the Church with facile charm and ease.”

Fr. Canisius, the then Prior General and a participant of the Seminar, writes: “Just think of the part he played at the All India Seminar of 1969 at Bangalore. When discussions on the problem of three Rites in India with its bearing on the mission work of the Church in India caused alarm and distress, Fr. Jonas got up, spoke with wonderful tact and brought in sunshine which dissipated the dark clouds of alarm and anxiety.”

The recommendations made by the Seminar on the question of Rites carried the stamp of the Jonas formula. They were:

- [1] While protecting the autonomy and identity of the three existing Rites efforts should be made to integrate Indian elements of worship. The reform process should not lose sight of the regional diversity in culture, language, religious traditions, and social customs. While freedom should be available to those

who desire experimentation and adaptation, those who do not desire change should also have the freedom to retain traditional forms.

- [2] Protect autonomy and identity of the three existing Rites. Work toward integrating Indian elements of worship in the Rites as practiced today....

The recommendations further said: "As practical preparation for an authentic Indian Liturgy, all concerned should promote prudently and gradually an Indian atmosphere in our worship by adopting suitable Indian decorations, objects, postures, gestures etc., by promoting Indian architecture, sculpture, painting and music and composing prayers and hymns which take inspiration from Indian religious literature.

The final recommendations also underscored the need to take the laity into confidence and respect their reactions without neglecting the duty of enlightening and educating them in liturgy. When the Seminar came to a close, Jonas had gained a large circle of admirers and he had the satisfaction that he had contributed to its success in a significant way.

Throughout the course of the Seminar and more so towards its close Cardinal Gracias' 'searching eyes' followed Fr. Jonas. Several times he put the question to himself: 'Is he the person I am looking for to put new vigour into the Catholic Bishops Conference of India?'

The Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), the permanent association of the Catholic Hierarchy in India, had a standing of quarter of a century even at that time. During the years it had become a powerful body for coordinating the activities of the church and also for providing its institutions with guidance.

Soon after the Seminar Cardinal Gracias requested the Prior General of the CMI to release Fr. Jonas for working in the CBCI

and to do the work of the follow-up of the Seminar decisions and recommendations.

It was difficult for Jonas to part with his congregation and vice versa. He was acting as the Rector of the Seminary which he himself had set up for some time but he was not re-appointed to the position.

He was a strong candidate in the election for the position of the Prior General but he did not come in. The Prior General thought about the displacement of Jonas from Dharmaram and the congregation and decided finally that he should not stand in the way of Jonas going over to the CBCI to breathe new vigour into it.

When an affirmative response came from the Prior General, Cardinal Gracias was very pleased. He wrote to the Prior General: "I have your letter of the 11th July 1969 relating to Fr. Jonas. On behalf of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India I write to express my deepest gratitude to you and to your congregation for releasing Fr. Jonas to work for us. I think it is best that he takes up his new assignment from 1st August 1969 after the follow-up meeting in the first week of July at which his presence is needed".

The news spread and congratulations poured in. Fr. Balaguer who had worked with Jonas for the Church in India Seminar wrote: "I am so happy that you are installed at the CBCI centre. This is one of the best results of the Seminar...."

CBCI

Jonas took over his post as Additional Deputy Secretary General on 1st August 1969. Two years later he was made the Deputy Secretary General.

The position in the CBCI provided him with a vantage point to observe the Church in India. Jonas was responsible for arranging the CBCI meetings, as also the meetings of the branch associations. He was responsible for taking and keeping the minutes of the CBCI meetings. It was his responsibility too to correspond with the

bishops and also the Roman Curia. Jonas' background as a theologian, canonist, scholar, planner and organiser made him the person cut out for his new role.

The first task he took upon himself, on his own initiative, was to make the CBCI self-supporting financially. Should it be done on a short term basis which was easy or on a longer term basis which was difficult?

He posed the question to himself. According to him a modern farm of above 25 acres devoted to dairying, poultry and horticulture could generate the needed surplus. There was plenty of land available around Delhi. He estimated that the investment needed would be around Rs. 5 Lakhs.

Jonas discussed the sourcing of the fund needed for the farm with Archbishop Angelo Fernandes who was the secretary General of the CBCI. Jonas was authorised to write to a German funding agency. His letter to Germany inter-alia read: "I do not want to come to the German hierarchy with a small request and that was the main reason why I had refrained so far from writing to you directly."

Unfortunately Jonas' scheme of making the CBCI self-supporting did not receive the approval of the majority of the bishops in the CBCI. They foresaw enormous managerial problems in running the farm profitably. With hindsight after 25 years one can say that whether the farm could have been run profitably or not, the land value appreciation itself would have made the farm concept a gold-mine of an investment today worth many crores of rupees.

On August 9, 1970, just after about a year since his joining the CBCI, Jonas was called upon to give a presentation on the ecclesiastical powers of bishops. He was not yet the Deputy Secretary General and at that time protocol prevented him from taking a direct part in the discussions of the CBCI meeting. But the canonist in Jonas could not keep silent when a topic in which he felt he could contribute towards better clarity and understanding, came

up for discussion. He therefore offered to give a presentation and this was agreed to by the CBCI.

Jonas prefaced his presentation as follows: "I am taking the liberty in making a few suggestions from the general point of view, basing myself on the Vatican documents, especially 'Christus Dominus'. The presentation turned out to be very erudite, and the bishops were impressed by the intellectual vigour of their new functionary. In his presentation Jonas argued for the decentralisation of ecclesiastical powers and he did not favour the idea of the metropolitans having administrative power over the suffragan bishops of their region. The metropolitans were not expected to share power with Rome over the bishops, although they could report on the conduct of ecclesiastical affairs to Rome. They had primarily a leadership role at the regional level, the regions themselves being, by and large, based on the linguistic nature of the bishoprics. The Metropolitan of an area was to be the leading figure in the regional conference of the CBCI. The regional conferences should deal with questions of liturgy, matters of ecclesiastical discipline, priests, pastoral council, policy on education, liaison and relationship with state government etc.

Another celebrated theme which Jonas presented before the CBCI was 'Function of authority in the Church'. His thesis ran something like this: All authority comes from God. This is the true source of the authority exercised by the Church as also the State. Civil authority and ecclesiastical authority were different areas. The ecclesiastical authority had to be exercised in a manner that it was a model for the civil authorities. The convergence of civil authority with ecclesiastical authority for over 15 centuries from the time of the Emperor Constantine was not a happy episode of history. Times have changed. In the modern era ecclesiastical authority had to be exercised differently from the way it was exercised in the past. Here are the words of Jonas:

“First and foremost the exercise of authority in the Church should be oriented to the good of each person as an individual. There is no common goal for the Church in this world to achieve which is not subordinated to the final salvation of each person. Here the greatest law to which every other law should be made subject to is the ‘*salus animorum*’. Hence it behoves on a person who wields spiritual power in the Church to put the good of the individual above all other considerations. This is not quite so in the State. The aim of the State is the common good here and now in this world. Personal considerations are very important, but they are important as far as the common good will justify. The exercise of authority in the Church should be very much more person oriented than in the case of the State. This itself will make the authority more human.”

According to Jonas the exercise of ecclesiastical authority should divest itself of considerations alien to it, such as explicit or even implicit considerations of personal aggrandisement.

Universal education now available to the laity, including women, is a critical factor in choosing the mode of governing in our times. The modern style of governing is participative, and dialogue is a major tool of participative style. Although this process may be unnecessarily cumbersome and long, in the long run, if it is frankly and sincerely adhered to, will produce lasting results.

Jonas went on to point out that the art of dialogue was difficult and the process needed an open mind, objectivity, humility, patience and self-control on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities. Besides the persons involved should have clear thinking and a capacity to divine the psychology of the other participants.

Jonas compared the process of dialogue and discussion in the Church to the seminars and courses given to modern executives. He felt that the ecclesiastical persons can take a leaf from the secular practice. But there were important differences between the two. The executives have often limited objectives and also measurable

goals. Not so the ecclesiastical authority. For the latter the means were always as important as the ends. 'The goals of Christ's mission are humanly immeasurable.' There was a divorce between the personal life of the executive and his official personality. However, the personal life of the ecclesiastical person is linked with the exercise of authority in the Church. The latter has to bear 'witness to Christ by his life.'

The paper concluded by warning the shepherds of the Church that the perceptions they individually produced among the laity were important, and they had little means of getting to know their private and public images since they were, by and large, cocooned by the hierarchy. It can very well happen that a bishop does not know what even his close collaborators think of him.

The scholarly presentation on the question of exercising ecclesiastical authority in the contemporary world evoked great respect and admiration. J.R. Victor Karunan, who was a close witness to the Dy. Secretary Generals' conduct in the CBCI meetings, reports: "He possessed great erudition, clarity of vision, a facile pen, a remarkable sense of wit and humour that added lustre and spice to his many colourful activities."

Yet another issue which received the attention of Jonas was the minority right enjoyed by the Christian community under Art. 30 (1) of the Constitution of India. There were frequent encroachments on the enjoyment of the right as a result of enactments and actions by the state governments and universities.

St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad had challenged the Ahmedabad University Act amendment of 1973 which made many an in-road into the autonomy of the institution. These amendments imposed on the governing bodies of minority colleges representatives of the government and from electoral colleges of the teaching and non-teaching staff and the students. If implemented this would take away the control of the institutions from the Church

authorities. The Supreme Court in a full bench of 9 judges upheld the educational rights of the minorities under Art. 30 of the Constitution of India. This was a major decision. There were many other judgements at the High Court level also. Jonas thought that there had to be an information pool on these judgements and proceeded to make a compendium of the court cases and decisions relating to Article 30. He titled the book: JUDGEMENTS ON MINORITY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS. The book was published in August 1974 and became an instant best seller with the educational establishments of the Church in India. The preface written by Jonas brought out his perceptions as regards education:

“One who peruses the book will be astonished to find that Christian institutions have gone over and over again to courts to establish their rights, which have been clearly defined in several previous judgements. This itself is an indication to us that, although in necessary cases we should not hesitate to go to the courts, we should also pursue other avenues to redress our legitimate grievances. One such effective avenue will be hopefully offered by the Minorities' Commission with statutory status which we are told will be a reality soon.”

The preface went on to say: “At the same time Christian institutions should try to remove whatever irritants there may be. One of the most touching problems in the whole gamut of minority educational rights concerns the rights of the staff etc. There should be not only fair play, but our institutions should be shining examples of fairness and natural justice.”

While Jonas pleaded for greater autonomous power for the Church, he was also for making progressive rules by the Christian institutions, even after the manner of the government rules where it excelled, to safeguard the natural rights of the members of the staff.

The book was sold out in 3 to 4 months and to this day it is valued not only by the administrators of the minority communities' institutions but also by legal experts in the field.

This is how Victor Karunan reminisced about Jonas in the CBCI:

“Bishop Jonas’ understanding of civil and ecclesiastical law was profound. The fathers of the Church used to look up to Fr. Jonas for an unambiguous expose of the legal implications vis-a-vis problems affecting the Church in India. The elucidation of High Court and Supreme Court judgements over the years on Catholic education and on Catholic schools and colleges in the country was the masterpiece of his published works. These judgements were skillfully put together and published as a monograph of the CBCI, and till today this work is a perpetual monument of the legal acumen of Bishop Jonas.”

ST. JOHN’S MEDICAL COLLEGE, BANGALORE

St. John’s Medical College was set up in 1963 in temporary premises in Bangalore after 20 years of spade work done by the Catholic Hospital Association of India (CHAI). St. John’s was established as a memorial to the International Eucharistic Congress held in Bombay in 1964.

The health care system operated under the umbrella of the Church in India is the largest endeavour of its kind in the country in the non-government sector. Yet St. John’s is the only medical college run by the Catholics in India. It also happens to be the one and only university-affiliated professional institute of higher learning run by the CBCI.

St. John’s has been a pace setter in medical education from its inception not only in India but also in other third world countries. The institution has taken special efforts to provide a new orientation to medical education. The St. John’s medical graduates are trained and motivated to care for the whole human person rather than a specific ailment for which treatment is sought. It was St. John’s which started the scheme of mandatory service for medical graduates in rural areas. Medical ethics is an important component

of the studies in St. John's. This contributes to its uniqueness among the general run of medical colleges.

In spite of its uniqueness the institution had been dogged by financial problems from its very inception. The college faced a recurring deficit every year. Much of the funds for setting up the college was raised in Germany, but running the college proved to be a demanding job requiring a much larger corpus of "working funds" than the amounts earlier anticipated. For six years a dedicated management ran it when a serious financial crisis surfaced. Year after year there was a deficit and the bottom figures continued to be recorded in red ink in the annual accounts presented to the governing body. The moment of reckoning arrived soon. The institution—the six-year-old child of the CBCI—would have to be given oxygen, i.e., hard cash, to keep it alive and active. The start of the crisis in St. John's coincided with the time of Jonas in the CBCI office, New Delhi. On the 27th of May 1972 Archbishop Eugene D'Sousa of Bhopal wrote to Jonas: "This is in the nature of a confidential note regarding something that is worrying me. Somehow I do not feel happy over the results of our meeting in Delhi in connection with the financial crisis facing St. John's. It may be that I did not make my point clear...."

The letter, after expressing the personal concern of the Archbishop over the financial crisis facing St. John's, stressed the need for bringing in funds to continue to run the college. The letter identified the possible sources of funding as Rome, the German Hierarchy, the Swiss and the Dutch governments, the Canadian Catholic Organisation for Peace and Development and the International Educational Development Inc. etc. The Archbishop specifically sought the services of Jonas for making the various trips abroad to present the case of financial succour for St. John's. The Archbishop expressed the faith he reposed in Jonas in the

following words: "I do not have half the competence you have in dealing with the whole problem of the financial crisis facing St. John's."

The Archbishop added: "Outside of you, sincerely, I do not see any one who is competent and interested as you are. It is heartening to see the pains you are taking and the efforts you are making to study the whole problem from every angle and seek ways and means of tiding over the crisis." The Archbishop had already taken the 'liberty' to talk over the matter with Cardinal Gracias and Mgr. Eustace D'Lima of the Bombay Archdiocese.

The Archbishop made Fr. Jonas Thaliath fully responsible for the operation in the following words: "We all feel that if St. John's is to get out of the red and tide over the present crisis, you would be the best person to be entrusted with this urgent and important task. I would beg of you, therefore, to give this request of mine your most careful and earnest consideration and give me your frank opinion."

The letter in effect asked Jonas to take on the "overall responsibility" to resolve the financial crisis faced by the CBCI Institution. Jonas took up the challenge and the responsibility which the CBCI placed on his shoulders. He visited Rome, West Germany etc., but ultimately the funds came from an unlikely source. When they did come, the size of the funds far outstripped the expectation of the CBCI and St. John's itself.

The concept of the Endowment Fund for St. John's Medical College Hospital to put the institution on a durable and sound financial base was the brain child of Jonas. After conceiving the unusual idea Jonas discussed it with his friends. Most of them said, and sincerely too, that it could be a wild goose chase. It was too grandiose a plan to be realised. But the dreamer he was Jonas stuck to his plan and put his heart and soul into realising the dreamlike project.

The funds came finally from none other than the United States government. The whole operation took a long time extending over to his days as the first Bishop of the Rajkot Diocese. Bishop Jonas made contacts at the very top level and got in touch with Mr. John V. McCormick, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Mr. Jack Sullivan, a high official in the US Administration. The job of getting the sanction of the funds was itself a most difficult task for which Jonas had to serenade the officials in Washington D.C. in the bitter cold of the winter months, when the weather could play havoc with his fragile constitution. The temperature often went sub-zero. Jonas looked healthy but the appearance was deceptive. Apart from the abbreviated lung he carried due to the operation, he had diabetes and also blood pressure.

This is how Fr. Percival Fernandez remembers about the visit: "In July 1981 both of us went to the Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. on work. Any one who knows these buildings in Washington know what it means to walk from one office to another. Every fifty meters Bishop Jonas would stop for a breath, and once in a while, to throw a pill or two into his mouth. It was tiring for him and he found it difficult to manage walking long distances. But that did not stop him from achieving his objectives. We had completed the work. And this happened four months before he passed away."

During the negotiations with the US officials Bishop Jonas earned the respect and admiration of a large number of US public men and officials. Mr. John V. McCormick, Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Mr. Zablocki, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Senate and Mr. Jack Sullivan of USAID etc. became admiring friends of Bishop Jonas. When at last the sanctions arrived, the amount of assistance far outstripped the expected level. Its value was rupees 12 crores in Indian currency. This amount when invested yielded an interest for subsidising the uncovered expenses of the college including the medical care for

the poor and needy patients. There was a typographical error in the sanction order, and a larger amount was mentioned in it. When this came to the notice of Bishop Jonas, he promptly pointed out the mistake to the US officials. They were happy with the honesty and charity of the Indian bishop.

But to his surprise more problems awaited the funding process after the funds were actually sanctioned and the money was on its way to the St. John's kitty.

In the corridors of power in New Delhi any direct funding by the US, a foreign power, for the activities of a medical college at Bangalore was unacceptable. Funding for health care was welcome, but which institution would receive the assistance was a decision which had to be left to the government. And the Government leaders and officials had their axes to grind. In this particular case the minister in charge of Health wanted the money to be spent in her parliamentary constituency rather than in far away Bangalore. India was not flush with funds for the health sector and there were umpteen candidate institutions who would gladly receive it. Bishop Jonas literally moved heaven and earth at New Delhi and, like Bhagheerath of our legends, brought down the profuse waters of the river Ganga of US funds to St. John's Medical College, Bangalore.

Development was a major concern of Bishop Jonas in whatever task he undertook in the course of his official responsibilities. He was the author of the concept of giving a rural orientation to the training imparted in the Medical College. In St. John's every medical student had to execute an agreement to serve a minimum period of 2 years in a rural area where the need for doctors was felt acutely. Hence, the admission process was changed taking into account also the motivation they had in themselves to serve the rural poor. Jonas indeed wanted the students to be on probation for a year before final selection to the medical course. The performance in social service activities and commitment to ethical values were

to be treated as factors in deciding on the final selection. This however proved to be difficult, and the selection process had to be watered down. It however proved the exalted concepts of health care that the Bishop harboured in his heart. The probation clause was dropped, but the service orientation after the course was retained. The distinctive humanity of some of the products of the St. John's Medical College is in part traceable to the re-orientation of the course at the instance of Bishop Jonas Thaliath.

Jonas also became the author of the ACHARA, ie. Agency for Community Health Action in Rural Areas. This was a comprehensive scheme aimed at total development of the villages with its pronounced socio-economic and social health components. To an extent the ACHARA concept was copied from the experience of the Gujarat Animal Dairy Project. As envisaged by Jonas the scheme was to cover the whole country. Indeed it was conceived as a national people's movement supported and run by social scientists, doctors, economists, volunteer social workers etc.

The pilot project of ACHARA was started at Mullur, a village situated at a distance of 35 kms. from St. John's Medical College. The scheme was entrusted to the existing milk cooperative of the locality. There was a tie up arrangement between the milk cooperatives of Bangalore Dairy and St. John's Medical College. The arrangement worked even after the Bangalore Dairy withdrew from the scheme. The Mullur Health Cooperative has been a successful example of a self-sustaining health programme run by the people for themselves.

When a person as fertile as Jonas with fresh ideas is involved in the running of an institution, there would naturally be ideas which would be aborted or met with mortality in their infancy. Such a scheme was the plan to establish a central purchasing agency for material and equipment needed for Catholic hospitals and dispensaries for the whole country. According to the plan mooted by the Bishop placements of large-scale orders for drugs and

medicines were expected to result in the hospitals getting the products at rock-bottom wholesale company prices. Unfortunately, this scheme did not evoke the response it expected from the hospitals and dispensaries. The scheme which was not practicable earlier due to transportation, communication and accounting problems could be feasible today when the transportation and communication network are far more developed and the load of record-keeping and accounting could be taken over by the ubiquitous computer. There was this Sultan who ruled the country during the Islamic phase of Indian history from Delhi—his name has an unsavoury association with quixotic action and hence not mentioned—who thought of introducing token currency, an idea ahead of his time. His attempt failed at that time, but today historians single out his action for his foresight. The central purchasing agency as proposed by Jonas probably was one of this kind, ie. a good practical idea ahead of its time.

Jonas had a clear concept about the role of hospitals in general and Catholic hospitals in particular in a country like India where the majority of the population was poor. Very often Christian hospitals constructed with the aim of serving the poor became places seeking excellence in treatment made available to those who can afford it. Jonas wanted the facilities to be made available to the poorest of the poor by providing treatment, either free or at concessional rates.

For Bishop Jonas running a hospital for the poor was true witnessing of Christ. For this purpose he preferred to have religious sisters in charge of as many departments of the hospital as was possible. Bishop Jonas was responsible for identifying and inviting a large number of religious sisters to work in St. John's. Of these sisters some became legends of Christian charity and humanity in dealing with people afflicted with terminal and desperate ailments. Mention must be made of Sr. Carmelann of Australia who became the hospital administrator. Many a religious congregation

contributed their members to work in the hospital, but all of them worked sinking their denominational identities as long as they worked in St. John's. The concourse of sisters from 20 and more congregations in one institution was unprecedented. During one of his visits to the hospital Cardinal Gracias was so thrilled with the sight that he wrote an article titled "Miracle of Miracles" in the Examiner magazine.

Jonas wanted the best available medical personality to take charge of the hospital. In 1974 he went to Trivandrum and requested Dr. C.M. Francis, Director of the Sri Chithira Thirunal Medical Centre, to take charge of the St. John's Medical College Hospital by becoming its Dean. Dr. Francis was by then a renowned figure in medicine having been earlier the Principal of the Government Medical College. Jonas wanted a person of the stature of Dr. Francis to control, guide, and nourish the institution dear to his heart. Dr. Francis refused because Sri Chithira was a premier institution and he had just been inducted into the position. But Jonas was not a person who would take "No" for an Answer.

Jonas told Dr. Francis that St. John's was the only Catholic institution of its kind in India. He further explained the rural orientation of the college and the social objectives of the medical education imparted there. The words struck a kindred chord in the mind of Dr. Francis. His idealism was stirred. He finally said yes to the Bishop. There was considerable difficulty in the State Government relieving as eminent a person as Dr. Francis from their rolls.

This is how Dr. Francis remembers Bishop Jonas: "Ever since I joined the college Bishop Jonas had been a great guide and counsellor for me in my efforts to re-orient the training programme at St. John's. He used to come to our house in Bangalore very frequently and share a meal with us and regularly entertain the children with his talks. The children looked forward to his visits, when he would tell them of various development activities he had

undertaken and the difficulties he had faced. This was an education for them. During discussion he could go straight to the heart of the matter and analyse it and try to solve the problem.”

Dr. Francis goes on: “.... He attended to the minutest details. Whenever there was a problem he worked out every aspect of it and was therefore ready to make arguments from every quarter. He was well versed in every aspect of development—agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, health-care etc. He could not suffer persons who spoke superficially without studying the matter, and this occasionally brought ill will towards him.... Bishop Jonas never thought of age as a barrier to learning. A few years before his death he went to Germany and stayed there for a few days to learn German, to be able to converse with Germans freely. He learned pottery and painting which he used to do in his room when he was in Delhi. He not only learned pottery but also went into its technology....”

“.... Bishop Jonas loved the people he liked and would stand by them.... Above all he had a wide vision of total development in which all aspects of growth were involved—social, economic, health, religion and spiritual.”

According to Fr. Percival Fernandez in charge of administration in St. John's, the Bishop avoided speaking about his achievements. He never gloated over the fact that he was mainly responsible for the Endowment Fund of St. John's Medical College Hospital. He did not say much about his being the main architect of the beautiful institution that Dharmaram is today. Fr. Percival remembers with gratitude the securing of a sponsorship for him from Misereor and arranging a parish rectory for his stay during his hospital management course in the US.

The involvement of Bishop Jonas in the affairs of St. John's Medical College and Hospital represents a golden chapter in his life dedicated to the Church in India and the poor of India.

Chapter TEN

FIRST BISHOP OF RAJKOT

Towards the end of February 1977, there was a symposium on new ministries sponsored by the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference at the Mary Knoll House at Stanley, Hong Kong. Around 45 bishops had gathered there together with priests, sisters and laity, about 120 in all, representing the Churches in 14 countries of Asia.

It was the first day of the month of March. The bishops staying at MaryKnoll House were having their breakfast. Bishop Oswald Gomes, Auxiliary of Colombo, Srilanka, was sitting next to Fr. Jonas Thalliath, Deputy Secretary General of C.B.C.I. Bishop Gomes was fooling around claiming to have the capacity to read the palms of people and putting his skill to use adding to the merriment and excitement of all. During the breakfast he amazed everybody sitting there, saying that Fr. Jonas had some very extra ordinary markings on his palms. Looking closely and intently on the lines of the palm, Bishop Gomes said Fr. Jonas was destined for great things. Even more revealing was the remark of Cardinal Sin of Manila who was sitting close by: Fr. Jonas is going to be a bishop soon and I am going to present him with a ring and mitre. The conversation around the table continued for some more time on the same topic. Nobody knew how the talk originated. Seemingly the only person who knew nothing about this whole affair was Fr. Jonas himself.

On March 2nd, while the Participants of the symposium were all in workshop sessions, Fr. Ed Malone, M.M, the Asst. Secretary to F.A.B.C., brought a letter addressed Fr. Jonas coming from the Nunciature in Delhi and gave it to him, whispering in his ears, 'Congratulations.' Fr. Jonas did not open the letter, although he had a very strong suspicion that it could be an important communication. Cardinal Sin, who again happened to be there in the same workshop, stopped by Fr. Jonas at the end of the session wanting to see the

finger where the bishop's ring would have to go. Fr. Jonas, who was holding the letter from the Nunciature in his other hand still unopened, told Cardinal Sin in good humour not to fool him too much, and that he might soon be obliged to provide him with a ring and mitre, as promised. Fr. Jonas went to his room, opened the letter and read it carefully in the silence of his room. It was the letter appointing him the first bishop of the new diocese of Rajkot.

There was also a personal letter from the Pro-Nuncio. The bishop designate immediately went to the chapel which was close by and remained there in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament for quite some time. Coming out of the chapel his mind wandered around the idle remarks which used to be made about him by his friends. He had not taken them seriously when they said that he was "destined for great things." Yet he was human and such remarks pleased him, for he was aware at a sub-conscious level that he could not but rise high in or outside the congregation. Once a friend fooled around like the Sri Lankan bishop and had detected on both his palms the letter M. Thereafter others who also inspected his palm linked the letter M with the first letter of the name of St. Mary. He had left it at that for he had no belief in palmistry. However, when the reference was made Jonas was reminded of St. Bernard's words that those who were predestined in Christ would have a very intimate relationship with Mary.

As the bishop designate rose from his prayer and walked to his room, images of his childhood flashed through his mind. He remembered his father who was so proud of his son joining the monastic order, although he could have carved out a high profile career for his son in the world. He remembered his mother who always blessed him with her prayers. He remembered his brothers and sisters, especially Dr. Lucy who was unmarried and was a match for him in intellectual vigour and sophistication. He remembered about his days in Thevara and Mangalore, Kandy and Rome and in Bangalore and New Delhi. He reflected vaguely on his aspiration to

rise in the hierarchy of the CMI and Catholic Church and the jokes he cut with his friends about them all becoming bishops in future.

When Jonas was a teenaged novice he was entrusted with the task of tending the seminary garden. This necessitated carrying of manure for the plants. Jonas had then quipped to his fellow seminarian Fabius that a time would come when both of them would be bishops and like the cow-dug they were carrying now, they would be carried by the people. The future bishop possessed even from childhood a sense of destiny and a devastating sense of humour.

While Jonas was the Dy. Secretary General of the CBCI and long before his appointment as Bishop of Rajkot, he had called for a study of Saurashtra and Kutch. Jonas did so as soon as he was posted with rumours that a new Rajkot diocese would be carved out of the Ahmedabad Diocese of that time, and there was a likelihood that he would be asked to take over its responsibility.

Among the congratulatory messages which Bishop designate Jonas received was a letter dated 26-3-1997 from Archbishop Simon Lourdasamy, Secretary of the Congregation of Propagation of the Faith, Rome, which was as follows:

“My Dear Bishop Jonas,

This brings you my affectionate felicitations on your appointment as Eparchy of Rajkot, as well as my prayerful best wishes for your good health and very fruitful ministry in the new ecclesiastical circumscription entrusted to your pastoral care.

Immediately after the release of the news of your appointment, I wanted to write to you, but I could not do so due to unprecedented pressure of work on all sides.

For your information, I shall be in India again from April 28th to consecrate the first Bishop of Karwar and the four new Bishops in Andhra Pradesh. I do not know when and where you are going to be consecrated. You may rest assured of my presence in spirit and

prayer for the occasion, as well as of my readiness to be of help to you to the extent possible as and when necessary.

It is my firm hope that as Eparch of Rajkot you will equally contribute to the efficient functioning of the C.B.C.I. as you have done as Deputy Secretary of the same.

With sentiments of highest esteem and renewed good wishes.”

Abp. S. Lourdsamy.

The Rajkot diocese was carved out of the diocese of Ahmedabad which had a Bishop from the Jesuit order. In 1972 the Bishop of Ahmedabad and the Jesuit priests working in Saurashtra and the Kutch regions invited the CMI Congregation to take up mission work in the area. The Jesuits also handed over a few prestigious schools and some other institutions in their charge to CMI. In 1977 the Holy See formed a new Mission Diocese with Rajkot as its head quarters along with the formation of other new dioceses like Chanda, Jagdalpur, Sagar, and Satna.

Geographically the Diocese of Rajkot is very large and extends to the whole of Saurashtra and Kutch. The region which juts out from the mainland in the map of India has many a unique feature that marks it out from others in the subcontinent. Sri Krishna, the propounder of the Bhagavadgita and one of the avatars of Vishnu, is believed to have lived in Dwaraka and died in a place nearby, viz., Somnath. Both Dwaraka and Somnath are to this day important places of pilgrimage in Saurashtra. Sri Krishna is credited to have defeated Kamsa, who symbolised injustice and evil, and restored peace and prosperity to the people of the region. Janmashtami, the birth of Lord Krishna, celebrated in the month of August, is the most important festival of the region.

In more recent times, in a small town by name Porbandar, not very far away from Rajkot, was born Mahatma Gandhi who fought through non-violent means, injustice and evil and restored liberty and dignity to the people of India. The greatest attribute of Saurashtra is its association with the birth of the greatest man of our time, viz., Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, or Mahatma Gandhi, to the world.

For scenic beauty and wild life, Saurashtra and Kutch have very special attractions to offer. The land is almost surrounded by sea, and the roar of the sea is matched by the roar of the lions in the forest, the only preserve for lions of its kind in Asia. There are also many lakes and bird sanctuaries found in the region.

The plains of Saurashtra would seem to stretch for miles and miles, but somewhere as a pleasant surprise to the traveller the Girnar mountains with their thick vegetation break the monotony of the landscape. There are also other small mountains and hills dotting the peninsula, lending a rare beauty to the area. Before independence Saurashtra and Kutch consisted of around hundred princely states under British protection. Initially the states were merged to form the state of Saurashtra. In 1960, when there was reorganisation of states on the basis of language, Saurashtra was made part of the new state of Gujrat. Gujrat means the fortress of the Gujar people. The state has great ethnic variety. Because of its access to the sea from ancient times there had been a steady stream of migration into the area. Apart from Gujars the other ethnic strains are the Kathis, the Yadavas, the Greeks, the Huns and the Persians. The Persian immigrants have to this day kept themselves a separate community, viz., the Parsis. The contribution of the Parsi community to the nation has been out of proportion to the smallness of their number.

The climate of the region is very pleasant, except for the three hot months of summer. But even in summer the nights turn out to be cool and the rainfall light except in the southern part of the peninsula

The main crop is groundnuts (also called monkey nuts or peanuts). Saurashtra produces the bulk of the groundnut oil used extensively by Indian housewives for cooking. The other main crops are cotton, sugarcane, wheat, bajra and jowar. Unlike the other parts of Gujrat where buffaloes are around in plenty, Saurashtra is famous for the graceful gir cows which can be seen everywhere. The Gir cow is brick red in colour with occasional patches or spots of grey markings believed to have been left by the patting of Sri Krishna. The visitor to the region can see shepherds, in heavily frilled frock coats and loose, baggy pants, tending their flocks and moving them from one end of the peninsula to the other, seeking greener pastures, according to the season.

Refining groundnut oil is the main industrial activity of the region. Blessed with a long sea-coast, almost one third of the whole sea coast in India, fishing is becoming a very important industry and most of the catch is being exported. Salt is plentiful, as well as calcium in some places. Industries based on these have come up at several places.

The Saurashtrians are a very friendly people. They are noted for their tolerance and hospitality. The trading instinct seems to run in the veins of the people as a whole, and many local men have migrated outside and made fortunes by trading in Bombay, Calcutta and abroad in places in Africa, Europe, North America etc. Some of the more remarkable names of the captains of Indian industry can be traced to Saurashtra.

Barring these exceptions the bulk of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. With better opportunities in the south and with diminishing returns as one moves up north, agriculture still sustains the rural folk of Saurashtra.

In their cultural legacy Saurashtrians stand second to none in India. Their gaiety is reflected in the lively Garba dance and in their singing of Dubas. The pensive mood of the people is captured in their melodies, architecture, and above all, in their writings.

Saurashtra is over 1,09,950 sq. kilometres in area with a population of over 15 million. It has a density of 90 persons per square kilometre. Hindus form the most numerous group. Over 85 percent of the people are Hindus. Muslims make up about 8.5, Jains 1.5, while Christians are less than 0.1 percent of the population.

EPISCOPAL ORDINATION

Fr. Jonas was ordained bishop along with Dr. Paulinus Jeerakath, Bishop of Jagdalpur, at Mannanam, on the 11th May 1977. May 11th is a historic date for the CMI because it was on that day the founding fathers of the congregation made their religious commitments. The congregation was canonically formed on 8th December 1855 at Mannanam.

Thousands of people took part in the colourful and sacred ceremony during which Dr. Jonas Thaliath and Dr. Paulinus Jeerakath were ordained Bishops by Cardinal Joseph Parecattil, Archbishop of Ernakulam, assisted by Dr. Antony Padiyara, Archbishop of Changanacherry and Dr. Charles Gomez, Bishop of Ahmedabad.

The ceremony took place in the spacious courtyard of the historic CMI Monastery at Mannanam. The Church dignitaries present on the occasion included Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorios, Bishops Patrick D'Souza, Sebastian Vayalil, Kuriakose Kunnacherry, Jerome Fernandez, Peter Pereira, Joseph Powathil, Michael Arattukulam, George Punnakkottil, Cornelius Elanjikal, Longinus Pereira, Sebastian Mankuzhikary, Joseph Pallilckaparambil, Joseph Irumpen, James Thoomkuzhy, Mathew Cheriankunnel, Clemens Thottungal, Januarius, Archbishop Abraham, Mar Clemis and Archbishop Paulose Mar Gregorios.

Before the ordination the Bishops designate prayed at the tomb of Blessed Cyriac Elias Chavara, chief founding father and the first Superior General of the CMI congregation. They were later led in a

procession to the altar specially made for the occasion for bishops and other dignitaries. The stage was decorated tastefully in the traditional Indian style with lamp stand and bushels of paddy and flowers.

The bishops designate looked serene and contented as the procession approached the stage, and the choir invoked the Holy Spirit in Malayalam.

Papal decrees appointing them as bishops were read out. The bishops designate paid homage to the relics of apostles and martyrs. Holding the Bible in their right hand, they made the profession of faith in front of the chief celebrant, Cardinal Parecattil. The chief celebrant imposed his hands solemnly on the bishops designate. This was the most important part of the ordination ceremony signifying the legacy of the apostles from the time of Christ. Anointment with oil followed the imposition of hands. The insignia, viz., the mitre and the crozier symbolising the shepherd's head-gear and staff, were provided to the new bishops. The last part of the ritual involved the presentation of the ring and pectoral cross and chain to remind the new bishops that as Christ is wedded to the Church, they too are wedded to their local church, the diocese, and they have to take care of it as if it were their bride.

The archbishops and bishops present, one by one embraced and welcomed the new bishops to the episcopal college. This was followed by the concelebration of Mass in which the old and new bishops took part.

There was a touching moment when Jonas' mother, who was then 86 years old, received the holy communion from her son who was now a bishop. The eyes of the mother and the son met for a brief moment, and the water of joy swelled in her eyes. In silence within himself he thanked God for keeping his mother alive to witness his ordination as a shepherd of the Church. But little did he imagine that she would outlive him, and the sorrow for the loss of her most illustrious son would fill her heart.

The episcopal ordination was followed by a public meeting to felicitate the new bishops. The meeting was inaugurated by the Home Minister of Kerala State, K.M. Many, and presided over by Benedict Mar Gregorios, Archbishop of Trivandrum. Archbishop Abraham Mar Clemis, Dr. Michael Arattukalam, Bishop of Alleppey, Dr. Patrick D'Souza, Bishop of Varanasi, Mother Alphons Maria, Scaria Thomas M.P., P.B.R. Pillai, M.L.A., and Prof. N.D. George, President of All Kerala Catholic Congress, all spoke on the occasion congratulating the new bishops and the CMI congregation to which both belonged.

INSTALLATION OF BISHOP JONAS AT RAJKOT

The installation of Bishop Jonas Thaliath as the Bishop of Rajkot took place on June 19th, 1977 at the small cathedral church in Rajkot. Bishop Charles Gomes of Ahmedabad from whose diocese the new diocese of Rajkot was carved out read the Papal Decree creating the new diocese. Silence descended on the gathering as the appointment letter nominating Fr. Jonas Thaliath CMI as the first bishop of Rajkot was read out. A dramatic moment followed. The new bishop walked to a very old statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the church and placed the crozier in the hands of the statue and put the mitre at its feet. He knelt down and touchingly prayed consecrating the diocese, its people and all its institutions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. His voice choked with emotion as he uttered his brief paryer.

When Bishop Jonas took over the new Rajkot diocese consisting of a geographical area of 1,09,950 sq. kilometres and a population of twelve million, it had just 22 priests, 77 sisters, 6 chapels, 7 convents, 8 high schools, 1 dispensary, and about 5000 Catholics.

The primary task of the Bishop was to carry the good news - the word of God - to the twelve million people and to deliver Christ to them in the best manner possible. After surveying the immensity of

the task, Jonas reminded himself of the words of Christ: "The harvest is much but the labourers are few." He had to devise new modes of presenting Christ to the people in a manner acceptable to them. He repeated to himself the words of St. Paul: "By the grace God gave me, I succeeded as an architect and laid the foundations on which someone else is doing the building. Everyone doing the building must work carefully" (1 Cor 3/10). "I made myself a Jew to the Jews, to win the Jews. To those who have no law, I was free of the law.... I have become myself all things to all men, in order to save some at any cost" (1 Cor 9/20-22).

The words of St. Paul preaching before the council of Areopagus reverberated in Jonas' ears: "Men of Athens, I have seen for myself, how extremely scrupulous you are in all religious matters, that you had an altar inscribed: 'To an unknown God'... Well, the God whom I proclaim is, in fact, the one whom you already worship without knowing it" (Acts 17/22-23).

In a short time Bishop Jonas reviewed and modified the draft of the overall master plan already drawn up in the context of the latest information on the needs and challenges of Rajkot Diocese covering Saurashtra and Kutch. As earlier mentioned the initial draft had been prepared by Fr.L.F Jose as rumours about his appointment as the first bishop of the Rajkot Diocese in formation was in the air. Much prayer and study and consultations had gone into the formulation of the master plan, and he wanted it to serve even as a model plan for other mission areas in India. The plan had divided the field of apostolic preoccupation of a missionary diocese into three areas:

- (a) The general public to whom the message of Christ had to reach through the preaching of the Gospel and through the living example of his followers radiating Christ's goodness everywhere.

- (b) The inner circle of those who are deeply attracted by the message of Christ and want to learn more about him and follow him more closely, consisting of catechumens and neo-Christians.
- (c) Catholics who have been born and brought up as Catholics, whose faith has to be nurtured and fostered.

The master-plan pointed out the weaknesses in the missionary methodology in vogue at that time. But this did not amount to a repudiation of the past missionary activities. "It must also be mentioned that when we are pointing out weaknesses we are not condemning those who have gone before us. They have done in their own time, what they thought was of immediate need and urgency. We are simply saying that, in our present circumstances, we have to take cognisance of some weaknesses in our approach, if we desire to meet the situation as it is now."

The excerpts reproduced below bring out the keen and vivid perceptions of Bishop Jonas: "First and foremost, our missionary planning does not stress the most important aspect of our religious heritage, namely, the realization of the soul's desire for union with God, which is bound to evoke the strongest response in the heart of a Hindu. We are now mainly engaged in social and economic uplift, education and health care, with nothing really comparable in the spiritual field. A Hindu, especially one who has been discriminated against for centuries, will appreciate our humanitarian efforts to help the poor and the down-trodden and those afflicted economically and socially. But if, however, his soul has to be touched, it can be done only by a person whom he recognizes as a man with intimate godly experience. He will willingly take him or her as his 'guru' and what he or she says will be readily accepted. He will go to such a person simply for the sake of 'darshan', the participation of the divine through the presence of one close to God ..."

“Another serious weakness in our missionary efforts in India is the lack of concerted endeavour to reach the middle-class people and intellectuals of the country with a suitable evangelising approach. We have mostly confined ourselves to Harijans and aboriginals, and because of this, Christianity has been identified with the untouchables in North India. It is true, our schools, which we have established all over, have helped us to break barriers and dispel the prejudice of the people in general...”

“Only carefully planned and executed programmes through the all embracing mass-communications media will take us further.” Jonas realised that the ongoing socio-economic work in which the Church in North India was engaging itself was generally undertaken without proper planning or adequate preparation. The master-plan singled out the drawbacks: “(1) Poor identification with the people whom we serve; weak efforts to work with, and not merely for the people. (2) Lack of efficient central organisation in the diocese to give meaning and purposefulness to our scattered and, generally speaking, non-significant efforts. (3) Absence of total commitment to the populace as a whole, with the humility to see the Church truly as the handmaid of service for the welfare of all the people, in a self-effacing manner.”

Jonas’ master-plan offered many more innovative ideas in mission strategy: “The first missionary priority in our planning has to be the founding of many small houses of prayer, through the length and breadth of the diocese. The western type of cloistered convents, with a score or more of sisters living in seclusion and prayer, does not seem to be much suited to Indian conditions. It would be better, instead, if these sisters lived in twos or threes together in very humble surroundings, not far removed from the people and sharing their way of life. The sisters would spend their time in prayer, and by their love and concern help the people who approach them to experience God in their lives. The role of these sisters is primarily to be living symbols of the divine presence, for

the outside world, and also for the members of the Church. Their life style will set the tone for the whole diocese and will be a constant reminder for renewal".

"A similar effort must be made, also to attract some priests or religious brothers, who are disposed this way, to lead, if they prefer, even alone, a life dedicated to prayer in an ashram atmosphere. Such small ashrams can become centres of prayer and religious dialogue."

"... it would seem imperative that a mass-communication media centre is established in some suitable place for Gujarat. After having established its main centre, it can extend its services to various parts of the large Gujarat State through supplementary centres."

"Besides a centre for communications media, there is also the need for a dialogue centre, where religious experience and particularly the prayer life of the people belonging to different religions may be shared. Saurashtra is a stronghold of Jains. Rajkot, therefore, would be earmarked as a centre for studies of Jainism and dialogue with Jains."

"Finally, in the field of socio-economic development of the needy, ... In planning, our first concern should be the total development of rural areas, and in a more limited way, of the entire territory of the Rajkot diocese. If the roles are clearly identified and defined, it is easier to train personnel accordingly, thus making co-ordination and overall planning less difficult. It is with these aims in view, that the pattern described below is conceived."

The master-plan went into the nitty gritty of action as follows:

"The basic unit of planning is a town with a population of 30,000 to 50,000 or more, together with outlying rural areas within a radius of 15 miles. In the town, there would be, ordinarily, a small church with 2 or 3 priests who would be responsible for the spiritual ministry in that unit, as well as for the leadership in the other fields required in the area, a primary school, and where necessary, a

full-fledged high school, staffed by sisters. It is important generally to have a foothold in the city, before one moves to the surrounding rural areas. Besides the city school, there should be 3,4 or 5 small houses for sisters in suitable villages within a radius of 15 miles from the town."

"There should be at least 4 sisters, as far as possible, in each of these houses. Their individual roles are:-

- 1) One sister should be a nurse with a background in public health. She will attend to mother and child-care, hygiene, nutrition, sanitation, preventive medicine and also run a small dispensary.
- 2) The second sister will help the villagers in their socio-economic development schemes, like animal husbandry, cottage industry and agriculture.
- 3) The third sister will work in the field of community development. The role of this sister will be to strengthen the ties of people with one another in the total community. This is done through education and educative action.
- 4) The fourth sister will shoulder the responsibility of superiorship in the house; will have the all important function of giving spiritual and evangelical orientation to the entire work of the group. She would endeavour to make the house resemble, to the extent possible, an ashram of prayer. This calls for a special training over and above the natural traits and aptitudes that qualify her role of leadership.

"It may be useful to present in a graphic way, the inter-linking of the city/town/institution with the satellite centres within a given unity. Below is a typical unit comprising the area within a 15 mile radius from the city with a population of 30,000 to 50,000."

Saurashtra and Kutch, which are co-extensive with the diocese of Rajkot, can be conveniently divided into 30 units as described above. These may be overlapping in some areas if the norm of a 15 mile radius is rightly followed.”

“A city unit will ordinarily consist of the following components:

1) Chapel. 2) Priests’ quarters with board and lodging facilities for 4 youth volunteers. 3) Social work centre and community hall. 4) Primary school. 5) Convent with an annex for girls helping in teaching and social work. 6) Reading room library and youth centre.”

“A full-fledged village unit will have the components indicated below; all buildings would follow local simple architecture.”

1) Prayer room. 2) Convent with facilities for 2-4 girls, helping in the work. 3) Dispensary. 4) Co-operative store for consumer articles. 5) Co-operative store for agricultural inputs. 6) Community hall. 7) Work centre. 8) Boarding facilities for children. 9) Park for children.

The master-plan even gave a schematic presentation of the city centre and village centre.

The master-plan stressed the value of (i) Liturgical prayer life; (ii) Ashram life of prayer and (iii) Bible lectures in town and cities.

The plan pleaded for making liturgical worship an occasion for those who belong to other religions to understand and appreciate Christianity. The latter should be specially invited for feasts like Christmas and Easter. Occasionally paraliturgical services should also be organised with these persons in view. On such occasions the celebrant should take special care to introduce them reverently to the Christian mysteries.

Bishop Jonas envisaged the ashram prayer - life centres or hermitages to be a great source of attraction to non-Christians, who would begin to relish intimately the beauty of Christianity and come to know dedicated people who have God-experience. The bishop

felt that prejudices would melt in such a union of minds and the light of faith would shine through more easily.

Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry, Bishop of Kottayam, wrote on the hermitage concept as “ a new form of witnessing Christ in non-Christian areas.”

The master-plan gave special emphasis to the cause of nurturing neo-Christians: “What is of paramount importance in the welfare of the neo-Christian communities is the Christian education of the younger generation. Missionary experience has taught us that the best means for fostering this is to have special boarding houses, separately for boys and girls. No effort should be spared to establish such houses, wherever the need arises.”

Indigenisation was at the heart of Bishop Jonas. Here are the relevant excerpts. “There are about 5000 Catholics in the diocese of Rajkot. Almost all of them hail from outside of Saurashtra. The spiritual care of Catholics entails renewal work in several important facets of Christian life. First and foremost comes the liturgical life, which has to be made more and more meaningful to the people. The process of introducing Gujarati in the liturgy should be accelerated, preferably with target dates.”

“Biblical revival goes with liturgical and catechetical renewal. Modern methods have to be adopted to make people love and enjoy reading the Bible. As far as possible, every family should have a copy of Bible in the language they know best. The salutary habit of reading a brief portion of the Bible meditatively every day should be introduced in the families throughout the diocese.”

The plan did not leave any areas of Christian life untouched. It said, “Family prayer has to come back with a vengeance, if Christian life is to flourish in the families. New ways and methods of prayer may have to be evolved. The upsurge in charismatic prayer will lend spontaneity also to family prayer, and is perhaps God’s providential way of reviving family prayer. Prayer will become

lively and attractive only when coupled with community singing. Christian families must get all the assistance they need to make family prayer a joyous daily happening to which all the members look forward to with joy and expectation. A priest who is charismatically inclined will have to concentrate on this form of apostolate if the programme is to become effective."

Special attention to the poor was close to the heart of Bishop Jonas: "A concerted effort must be made in all our schools to bring children from poor families to a higher level of proficiency, and special attention must be given to coach them up. Our school facilities should be fully used for teaching catechism in an interesting manner to our Catholic children."

He had a broad -minded view on education: "Our schools should not only excel in academic standards and discipline, but also in personality building. Great attention should be paid to the development of social commitment in our students, by involving them in suitable programmes. If there is one thing in which all our schools should take pride, it should be their ability to impart to the students a social concern. Stress should be given also to the moral formation of the students. Extra-curricular activities should be fostered, e.g., music and other forms of art, sports and athletics and an ability to speak or conduct debates. An all-round human formation is the best guarantee for a happy life when the students leave the portals of our educational institutions."

Housing and employment, figured in the master-plan: "The housing problem has to be tackled in a somewhat big and imaginative way, as most of our Catholics are living without proper housing facilities. The assistance of Government agencies and banks, should be sought for the successful solution of this problem. This will have a most salutary effect on the tone of Christian life in Saurashtra, and will have very far-reaching results in the effective spreading of the Christian message, as traditional Christian communities in these cities can be of great help and support to the new Christian

communities as and when they will have been formed. Similarly our Christians should be helped in all possible ways to find venues of employment. The Church can help people to get organized to start handicrafts or cottage industries. Although in this field the Church may not be in a position to render financial assistance to any considerable extent, it may be able to use its good offices with the established financial institutions to channel their assistance to deserving people.”

The personnel for implementing the plan had to be found by having an adequate number of priests: “An early beginning had to be made to recruit diocesan priests from the locality. All the parish priests and those in charge of institutions and those teaching in our schools should be on the lookout for boys who may show signs of a vocation. No effort should be spared in this direction.”

“Several groups of sisters are already working in the diocese. Some of those have been here for many years already: Sisters of St. Anne, Sisters of Christ Jesus, Carmelite Sisters of Charity, Carmelite Missionary Sisters, Apostolic Carmel and lately CMC Sisters from Ernakulam and Kothamangalam, Adoration Sisters (Tellicherry), Sisters of Mother Teresa and Sisters of the Sacred Heart (Palai). The number of sisters should increase considerably in the coming years. The main arm of work will have to be sisters, who will be going out into the villages establishing 4 to 5 small houses within a radius of 15 miles from the city in which they will have a central institution.”

The plan concluded after covering aspects of funding the implementation through local and external sources and the need for strict accounting and accountability in expenses. Here was a comprehensive document which could have been prepared only by a person in whom was blended the capacity for vision and action and qualities of leadership, and managerial skills.

No sooner the master-plan for the development of the new diocese of Rajkot was ready, Bishop Jonas started its implementation. Very soon the priests and sisters working in the diocese developed a sense of belonging and fulfilment as they had clear ideas of their goals and objectives. The Bishop was an accomplished resource-person. They could always turn to him for any guidance or help. Under Bishop Jonas, the diocese was soon dotted with new convents and community centres at Limbdi: a convent school and priests' residence, at Surendranagaar a convent school and a parish priest in residence, at Rajkot the sisters of Mother Teresa's convent, the Christ the King Ashram, housing colony for sisters with a convent school, at Jetpur another convent school, at Veraval a new establishment with sisters and priests with advanced plans for a church, more sisters for a school at Bhuj, and so on, came up in a short time. Besides there was an ashram established in Bedi village to adapt the Christian way of life and religious culture to the life style of the villagers. Even as the implementation of the master-plan was on, he was keen on getting the right feedback from the grass root level workers for ensuring the best results.

In Morvi the Bishop constructed 200 houses for the poor people who had lost their dwellings in the flood. Today this group of houses is known as Jonas Nagar. He promoted agriculture and animal husbandry in the diocesan area, based on his experience in Bangalore.

After having attended to the needs of his 'folks' to some extent, Bishop Jonas turned to the task of construction of the Bishop's House. The Bishop's House was to be attached to a farm.

Bishop Jonas did considerable ground work to import goats from Israel for giving to the poor in the diocese. There was logic in his selection of Israeli goats because Israel was an arid region, and the goats reared in Israel were the best bet for raising locally a high-yielding breed of goats for sustenance of the poor in Rajkot. Dr. T.N. Vaishnav, Director of Animal Husbandry, Gujarat State, remembers the day when the bishop called on him seeking permission to import goats from Israel.

“When I met Bishop Jonas for the first time in my office, I was rather perplexed as to why a Bishop of Rajkot should ever think of meeting me ... No sooner had we met, than my respect towards Bishop Jonas developed almost like love at first sight... He had come with all the details about the superiority of those goats in Maharashtra and Karnataka states who had earlier imported goats from other countries... He had planned to distribute cross-bred goats to the poor, so that they could feed their children on goats milk and also earn some money from the sale of milk... I was impressed with his bubbling enthusiasm and dedication to serve the poor and his meticulous nature...”

For all his enthusiasm the plan to import goats from Israel misfired; it was a case of global politics coming in the way of bringing succour to the poor in the third world country. For in those days Israel was not recognised by India, and even receiving aid for helping the poor was considered undesirable. Bishop Jonas had to start fresh efforts to import goats. An attempt was made to procure Egyptian goats, but this did not succeed. At about that time Bishop Jonas was invited to address a Eucharistic congress in France at Lourdes. He used the opportunity to make pucca arrangements to import the famous Alpine goats.

In a short span of three years Bishop Jonas won the love and respect of everyone in the diocese. His concern for every section of society, his easy availability and readiness to help impressed the common folks. A major trait in his personality which came out prominently was his gift for administration. No task was ever too big for him. His methodical mind pursued every job with precision and expertise. His potential for leadership came into full flowering. He set goals, devised plans and monitored their fruition relentlessly. Fr. George Nettikkadan who had worked with him as his secretary cum chancellor remembers: “On an average he used to give me ten goals for the diocese to achieve. It was impossible for me to achieve the speed which he expected from me. Sometimes he would lose

his temper. I would become sad and silent. In spite of my being a junior priest when he had cooled down he would come to ask pardon from me. Once he said that he lost his temper for two reasons. For one thing, he wanted everything to be done with perfection. For another he wanted to complete tasks fast so that the next task could be taken up. If I explained to him any genuine difficulty, he used to acknowledge his error in not foreseeing the problem. His mind was ever bristling with ideas. A time came when I was not upset by his losing of temper. I could see his dedication and sincerity. I learned a lot from working under him."

Since it was a new diocese the Bishop had to occupy the few rooms on the second floor of the St. Mary's High School. The arrangements were temporary and makeshift. But he made the optimum use of the facilities while planning for a full-fledged Bishop's House in the future. He spent time and energy to make visits abroad to collect funds to start new stations and activities in the diocese for the implementation of his plans. He took a personal interest in each one's work, encouraging them to put in their best efforts to serve the people.

In his mind were plans for starting training courses for those who worked in rural areas. The concept of the satellite communities was part of this idea. He planned for the development of the whole diocese at different levels. Nothing was haphazardly planned since he had a mind for details. He wanted to stress not only the spiritual dimension of life and growth, but also the material. He established a wide net-work of prayer houses and ashrams.

The warmth and affection he showered on the lay visitors was very touching. He was deeply concerned about each one and never failed to give time to listen to the problems of the lowest member. There was this typist Joseph who was appointed in the bishop's house in Sept. 1980. When Bishop Jonas came to know that it was hardly six months after the death of his father, the Bishop spoke to him, "Do not think that you are an employee. You are just like my son."

Kanji Maharaj Solanki of District Bhavnagar was baptised by Bishop Jonas on 25th March, 1979, through the good office of Fr. Palav S.J. Solanki established an ashram, rather a hermitage, in the forest at Sihor 30 km from Bhavnagar as advised by Bishop Jonas. He used to call the bishop Guruji. The ashram is named Sacchidananda Ashram. This is how Solanki remembers about his days with Bishop Jonas:

“... We were happy after that baptism. But a sad thing happened. My wife Radha-Gouri died. Bishop Jonas came to Bhavnagar to console us. He took my children in his lap. He told me, ‘Do not worry, Kanji Maharaj. Radhaben has gone to pray for us. I would also pray for her...’ He arranged for my pilgrimage to Kerala via Bomaby... We reached Kerala in 3 days... we (were) put up at Rajagiri... in Ernakulam. Five Christian Bishops did ‘yagna’ ceremony - Holy Mass... Bishop Jonas made special seating arrangements for us and first he gave the prasad - holy communion - to us only and embraced us all...”

“Bishop took loving care wherever we went. He arranged prayers every now and then... This continued for 18 days. We came back to Bhavnagar. Then he took me to Vadodara Sangeeth Sammelan (music conference) in Baroda, where with Fr. Palav, Fr. Mandonza and Fr. Devasia and other members of the music groups we enjoyed a lot... After coming back on 26.6.81, when Fr. Modest and I were together, Bishop Jonas told me ‘you start an ashram in Sihore. I will come there and put on sanyasin dress...’”

Kanji Maharaj had this to say when Jonas died: “Bishop Jonas is with God now, but he has lit the light in our hearts. His body is kept in Saurashtra as a seed in this soil and it is going to shoot up, shed its light all over...”

Fr. Gregory, who was the Provincial of the Sacred Heart Province, Rajagiri, Kalamassery, and who later succeeded Bishop Jonas in Rajkot, was once travelling in an Air Bus from Trivandrum

to Bomaby on his way to Rajkot. That was Fr. Gregory's first trip to Rajkot as the Provincial of the Sacred Heart Province. The Bishop told him, "Father, please go to every mission station and meet every priest and get their feelings about me. I would like to maintain very good relations with every one of them. If there is any defect in my approach, I am willing to correct myself."

As proposed by Bishop Jonas, Fr. Gregory visited all the priests in all the stations and conveyed their feelings and anxieties to Bishop Jonas. The Bishop on his part most willingly accepted them and made many an adjustment to help his dear missionaries. According to Fr. Gregory the Bishop loved his missionaries and their shortcomings did not come in the way of personal relationship or in the appreciation of good work done.

One day the Bishop told Fr. Gregory, "Above all, we must have trust in others." He always placed complete trust in his fellow-workers and gave full support in their evangelical efforts. This was the secret of the peace and harmony that prevailed in the diocese. In spite of his unsatisfactory health and busy schedule Bishop Jonas found time to visit the missionaries in various stations to give them guidance and to encourage them.

The sisters in far-off places longed for the Bishop's visits, which were most exhilarating, and enjoyable, and inspiring breaks in their secluded lives. On many an occasion he took the sisters for picnics and outings. The Bishop cut jokes with them and spoke to them in good humour.

The conduct of the "Indo-German Colloquium", a joint meeting of the bishops of the German hierarchy and the bishops of the Indian hierarchy held in India during February 1978 as a follow up of an earlier meeting in Germany, became an occasion for Bishop Jonas to arrange financial aid to the Church in India, to the CBCI and the Syro-Malabar Church.

From the 24th to 27th of February 1978, Cardinal Joseph Hoeffner, President of the German Bishops Conference, Msgr. Homeyer, Secretary of the conference, and Fr. Schmidt of Missio, visited Delhi for talks with the Secretariat of the CBCI and to see some of the pastoral activities in the Archdiocese of Delhi. Present for discussions on the occasion were Archbishop Agnelo Fernandes, Archbishop Henry D'Souza, Bishop Gilbert Rego, Bishop Patrick D'Souza, and Msgr. Eustace D'Lima and Bishop Jonas Thaliath.

Among the items of the discussion were the relationship of the German Bishops' Conference to the CBCI and of the Indo-German Social Services Society to the CBCI. Cardinal Hoeffner expressed surprise that the German Bishops should have an organization functioning in India, disposing of large sums of money without reference to the Bishops of India. It was, however, observed that at the grass-root level, there were no serious problems, since the IGSS generally worked on the recommendations of the individual bishops before sanctioning any project. It was also felt by all participants that there should be closer ties between the Churches of Germany and India. In order to promote mutual understanding between the two Churches, it was suggested that the Indian Bishops during their visits to Rome include Germany in their itinerary for interaction with the German Bishops.

Such a colloquium was conducted from June 10 - 16, 1979 at Maria Laach, W. Germany, at the initiative of Bishop Jonas. The agenda for discussion included (a) role of the bishop, priests and laity in the Church and (b) forms and expressions of religious life among the young people. Bishop Jonas played a critical role in the colloquium, which released later substantial funds for evangelization and development in India.

Even to this day the ideas presented in the document prepared by Bishop Jonas are the basis of considerable financial flow from the German Catholic hierarchy to Catholic social action centres in India.

The reputation of the 'penmanship' of Bishop Jonas spread. Whenever there was need for important documentation to be prepared, it automatically became the responsibility of Bishop Jonas.

The archbishops and bishops of the Oriental Churches (Syro-Malabar Church and Syro-Malankara Church) in India, had a common 'Ad Limina visit' (official visit of the bishops to the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II) in 1980. During that visit our bishops submitted a lengthy memorandum to the Holy Father highlighting the history of the Oriental Churches in India and enumerating their needs and problems. Bishop Jonas prepared the text of this important and historic document which was signed by the Archbishops of the Oriental Churches in India.

The concluding part of the memorandum as reproduced below illustrates the hit-the-nail-on-the-head style of writing of Bishop Jonas in giving articulation to his thoughts on issues which he considered worthy of his support.

"We have humbly requested your Holiness for the following:

- 1) The extension of our jurisdiction to those cities and centres in India, where our faithful are found in significant numbers.
- 2) The assignment of larger fields for our missionary activity. We feel that above two claims can be achieved only by the extension of our jurisdiction to cover all India, making, however provisions for co-ordinated activity by different individual churches.
- 3) The establishment of the Institution of Patriarchate with Synod for the Syro-Malabar Church, and the office of the Major Archbishop with Synod for the Syro-Malankara Church.
- 4) The strengthening of the Sacred Oriental Congregation in the manner described above. The restructuring of the CBCI on a federal basis."

The issues raised in the memorandum to Rome are still hanging fire. Only recently (September 1992) a Pontifical Commission made a visit to Kerala to decide issues of liturgical modification and provision of autonomy to the Syro-Malabar Rite with the installation of a Major Archbishop for the Church. One wishes Bishop Jonas were here as the spokesperson of the Oriental Churches in India.

Jonas was Bishop of Rajkot diocese for only about four and a half years. On December 15th, 1977 he wrote to one of his friends:

“with all the work for St. John’s Medical College, I was not able, for lack of time, to do much for my diocese, which is 1,00,000 sq.km wide with only 5000 Catholics in a population of twelve million. I don’t ever have a house of my own to live in, or a cathedral. Everything had to be built from scratch. But the needs of my people are more urgent than my own.”

“Rome was not built in a day” is the proverb. Bishop Jonas Thaliath made such plans as could be accomplished only over a century by others. Though he made a master-plan he could not get opportunities to see that fully executed. His successors will have a hard time to execute the plans which Bishop Jonas made. Bishop Jonas will be ever remembered for his ideas and visions. As the founding father of the Rajkot Diocese, he planted the seeds which his successors will water and nurse.

Chapter ELEVEN

THE FLIGHT TO ETERNITY

It was November again. An active season was ahead of Bishop Jonas. He loved the winter months and waited for them. He could work more and harder in the bracing weather and also 'slave-drive' his co-workers to perform better. Winter also meant making a new beginning based on the experience gained during the earlier parts of the year.

The first week of November 1981 was devoted to three major events. On the 5th and 6th of November was the annual live-together of the missionary personnel of the Diocese. This would be followed on the 7th by the golden jubilee celebration of the religious profession of Fr. Romuald, the senior-most priest of the Rajkot Diocese. Thirdly, there was the inauguration of the new St. Xavier's Region of the CMI in the Saurashtra - Kutch region.

On the 5th, Bishop Jonas welcomed the participants of the live-together programme. They were all happy to come to Rajkot and happier to meet the friendly and jovial bishop who had spared no pains to make their stay comfortable and the live-together very productive from the psychological and the spiritual angle. The second day was set apart for the concluding sessions of which the major attraction for the participants was the speech by the Bishop.

Bishop Jonas had prepared well for the speech, as he always did. He could speak extempore and capture the attention of any kind of audience. But it was in his nature to labour for producing the best results. His theme was: Apostolic work and plans for Saurashtra. By and large the concepts he wanted to put across were in his own booklet titled: **THE LIGHT OF CHRIST FOR SAURASHTRA AND KUTCH**. But he would embellish them with several anecdotes based on mission-work all over India and also Saurashtra in the recent past. There was no better teacher than experience.

The speech on the second day made a great impact on the participants. While emphasising the need for unremitting social work among the poor, he called for giving greater attention to the image factor. An ounce of practice and the image it generated accomplished more lasting results than a ton of preaching. The most potent force of evangelisation was the Christ-like image of the missionary. This did not mean that the missionary should raise a dead Lazarus to life or cure lepers of their leprosy or restore sight to the blind. But it did mean practising Christian love and developing Christ-like empathy with the poor. It did mean facing up to ridicule and calumny with poise and dignity. It did mean metaphorically, or even actually, offering the one cheek when the other is bashed by the adversary. Above all it meant leading a life of simplicity and Christian charity in a community where the majority were appallingly poor.

The bishop added that there should be a broader focus in future for missionary activity. All along it was concentrated on the poorer sections of the community, especially the scheduled castes. There was nothing wrong in such selective focusing because this segment of the population needed most the emancipative message of Jesus. But the middle class steeped in the spiritual traditions of this great country and leading relatively comfortable lives in the community should not be ignored. All of them were knowledgeable and some of them could turn out to be receptive to the message, if only the similarity of Christian values with traditional Indian and Hindu values and Indian spirituality were brought out. The Christian reverence for the latter should be expressed. The perception that Christianity was a Western religion should be rubbed off gradually from the minds of the educated Hindu middle classes. Christianity should be presented to the Indian community in Indian terms shedding its Western veneer.

After the meeting, the audience, now electrified by his call for renewal and dedication, crowded around Bishop Jonas. Some found

words to express their appreciation of the inspiring speech, others directed towards him admiring glances which were more embarrassing than uttered words of praise. He was thrilled that his ideas and words had not fallen on deaf ears and hollow minds. He prayed silently for results, for a plentiful crop for dear Jesus.

The bishop shared his meals with his co-workers. He moved around the young priests. As he enquired about their personal welfare they felt the warmth of his person. This bishop knew every one by name. Towards the end of the live-together a great spirit of camaraderie seemed to have developed between the bishop and the priests. There was this invisible nimbus of understanding, empathy and sense of belonging that hung like an aura above and around the select gathering.

The arrival of the French Alpine goats meant for the spread of goat-based dairy culture in Saurashtra was expected that very evening. The bishop appeared to be impatient and waited for the goats' arrival throughout the evening. He went to bed leaving instructions that when the goats came he should be called. The goats did arrive but at about 1 a.m. when the bishop was fast asleep. It was decided that he should not be disturbed since he had a hectic schedule on the following day. The goats were kept in the compound of the 13 acre plot that had been acquired for building the new Bishop's House, Diocesan Cathedral, office complex including study houses for priests and offices of the new CMI region.

The news of the arrival of thirty pregnant Alpine goats was given to the Bishop when he woke up on the morning of 7th of November. He chided his staff for not waking him up when the goats arrived. He was keen on receiving the goats himself. For him it was the triumphal moment of efforts of the last four years. He had tried, as mentioned earlier, to import goats from Israel considering the hardness of the breed in that arid country comparable to Saurashtra in climatic conditions. This did not work. A brief attempt was made to import Egyptian goats which also did not succeed. The import of

Alpine goats from France was the result of his visit to Lourdes, to address the Eucharistic Congress there. The French Alpine goats were supposed to give a yield of 7 to 8 litres of milk a day.

From every angle the arrival of the goats appeared to be a good omen which delighted the bishop. His plans for the goats galloped forward in his mind. He would soon donate the goats and spread them out for inter-breeding and multiplying across the length and breadth of the diocesan area. A programme of monitoring the welfare and growth of the goat population would be implemented. The purpose was to inter-breed and replace the low yielding indigenous strain with the high yielding 'foreigners' and bringing economic advantages to the poorest of the poor. He had calculated that in the rural area, around fifty percent of the house expenditure of a poor family could be met from the yield of the few goats they tended. As the thoughts flashed in his mind, he stroked some of the goats. Feeling himself as a shepherd he peered into the eyes of the goats; some of them responded and the goat eyes gleamed on him. He experienced a few supreme moments of empathy for God's creation. The goat eyes became for him at that moment windows opening into a vision of the mystery of creation, of life, of existence, of God.

The bishop did good-bye to the goat guests and returned to his room on the second floor of the St. Mary's School. He knelt down and prayed. He remembered about the Mass at 10 am in connection with the jubilee celebration of Fr. Romuald. For some reason his mind dwelt particularly on the parting words of the priest while concluding the Holy Mass. He did not know whether it would be his last Mass. He did not know whether he would come tomorrow to say the Mass again. Life was so brittle. What was durable was only the life-after. It was God who decided that for how many years, months, days and even hours an individual should breathe on the surface of this planet. Mortality and immortality, futility and fulfillment of human life, joys and sorrows and above all the 'vanity'

the pregnant word in the verses from Ecclesiastes - that pervaded life and the meaning ascribed to the word vanity in the most reflective verses of the Old Testament and lapses and suffering and the fragility of life only God could provide. The on-rush of thoughts and feeling brought tears welling into his eyes. These were not tears of sorrow nor tears of joy, but tears of intense feeling that get released when one puts his finger into the heart of reality, even as the Apostle Thomas felt when he put his finger into the heart-wound of the risen Christ in Palestine. Some of the priests who had come from outside knocked at his door. He received them. He spoke to them of the arrival of the goats and shared his joy with them. He could not resist the temptation to go to the goats again with his co-workers to show them how cute they were. He climbed down the steps again to take the priest to the goats. The Bishop's House on the top floor of St. Mary's building had four stairs, two each to the first and the second floor. This meant that one outing from the room and back involved climbing down forty-eight steps and climbing up an equal number. That day he, a heart patient, was to negotiate 192 steps along the staircase up and down in all.

While returning from the goats for the second time, the bishop noticed that it was a cloudless and clear day. The benign sun of winter was looking on Rajkot with sidelong glances. The Bishop took his bath. As he poured the cold water on his face skin tingled and his eyes flickered. What a bright morning and what bracing weather and what a good day, he thought. A joy of self-hood unutterable in words and a feeling of gratitude to God who had held his hand in whatever he did and achieved in his life so far, filled his mind.

A large number of the priests and nuns had arrived from the various mission stations of the diocese to take part in the golden jubilee celebration of Fr. Romuald. Fr. Romuald Chakkumkal CMI, hailing from Vadayar, Kerala, had spent most of his life, a period of over three decades, in the mission provinces of Northern India.

The grass-root level knowledge he possessed about missionary activity even in a hostile environment had already made him a legend. In the words of Fr. John Fisher, Romuald was the embodiment of 'spirit of adventure and daring in missionary activity.' There is the story of Romuald getting on the altar of his small chapel in Porbandar mission centre during a lightning flood and spending hours that seemed interminable till the floods receded. It was a touch and go affair or a life and death problem since the flood waters had come up to two inches of the level where Romuald had perched himself to survive the fury of nature with only his faith in God to give him hope to hold on. His friends would there after tease him with the story often. Bishop Jonas in his speech, felicitating the crusty jubilarian, said that carrying one's cross with joy and commitment was the core of spirituality and religious life. The example of the dedicated life of Fr. Romuald was there to inspire the younger members of the mission.

During lunch time the bishop went to his room, took the cheese and chocolate he had brought from abroad and distributed them with great flourish and panache to all those who were present. Neither he himself nor his friends and co-workers knew that this was the shepherd's 'last shared supper', and that the bishop's final passion and triumph on his 'Calvary' was near at hand.

At the end of the jubilee function Bishop Jonas inaugurated the Rajkot Region, named St. Xavier's Region, of the CMI Congregation. The name of the region was adopted to acknowledge the obligation to the Society of Jesus which was in charge of the ecclesiastic jurisdiction of the present Rajkot diocesan area. The bishop spoke about the growth and flowering of the congregation founded by Chavara Kuriakose - not yet declared to be Blessed at that time - its humble beginning in the nineteenth century and its current stature in the Church and the possible vistas of its further growth. The opening of the St. Xavier's Region was a significant milestone in the growth of the congregation and the new Diocese

of Rajkot. The joy of fulfillment of his efforts for a long time to get the clearance for starting the Region was reflected in his voice and his words. He had discussed with his staff the desirability of forming new trusts and buying land for setting up health care centres, schools, mission units etc. He would help the Region to do so. According to Fr. George Nettikkatt at the policy followed by the bishop was to establish three trusts for each mission centre; one for ecclesiastical goals, another for social service activities and the third for getting funds for health care of the poor.

At 3.30 p.m. the bishop had discussions with two priests who had come from Palai, Kerala, Fr. Mathew Cheeramkuzhy and Fr. Mathew Kallamackal, on the sharing of responsibility for mission activity. Fr. Mathew Kalathoor was also present. The bishop went into nitty gritty of the issues and did not know the passage of the time. He could not get even a moment to take rest. There were so many people waiting to have a word with him. The bishop came into the recreation hall and said that he had not seen the newspapers of the day. Fr. Mathew Kalathoor offered to him the paper he was reading. The bishop said, "No I will read another". He sat down and quietly glanced through the headlines in another daily.

The bishop appeared restless and wanted to go back to his room. He went back to the room, but was seen, at around 6.15 p.m., collapsed at the door. Fr. Mathew Kalathoor rushed to the spot and poured some water on the parched lips. He sat by the bishop's side, raised him a little on his lap and started massaging his chest. Soon he reckoned what was happening. No longer would Fr. Mathew wait for giving the bishop absolution from his sins. He did it in seconds. Jonas opened his mouth twice. For a third time, too, he breathed. Then it was all over.

An ineffable stillness seemed to have descended on the body of the shepherd of Jesus, the stillness of death, the stillness of a pause in his spiritual pilgrimage, the stillness of a new beginning, the stillness of a moment tied up with eternity with eternal life,

the stillness within the heart of a still revolving planet sending off one of its illustrious occupants home towards the wondrous but unexplored and mystifying abode and ineffable presence of God. This is how his successor Bishop Gregory Karotemprel spoke later about Bishop Jonas's death: As for Christ death was the celebration of the victory of his life, in the celebration of the Eucharist the most solemn moment is the consecration time when the priest utters the words ' This is my body, this is my blood'. As for Bishop Jonas, death was such a solemn moment. He offered himself to the FATHER: "This is my body which went about doing good...."

Hoping against hope the priests decided to take the Bishop to his doctor, little knowing that he had already crossed the barrier between temporal and eternal life. Dr. Chandrana took the pulse which was still. The hand fell down limp from the doctors hand. The doctor groped with his fingers and the stethoscope for signs of life. He opened the half closed eyes and found the light had gone from them. They were so powerful and intense, the doctor reminisced silently. The doctor's voice was solemn when he said that the Bishop was already dead. The body was then taken to the civil hospital on the advice of the doctor. Under the law a post mortem was done on the body to reconfirm that the death came as a result of internal bleeding and cardiac arrest. In the small hours of the morning the body was brought to the Immaculate Conception Church. A crowd was waiting . As the young priests took the body down from the ambulance men and women sobbed.

The sudden demise of Bishop Jonas sent shock-waves to the far corners of the Church in India and to the wide circle of humanity who knew him. His mother was still alive. How could the news be broken to her was the melancholy question for those who knew the Thaliath family.

Mary Thaliath was 93 and still in possession of a clear mind. Some said she had a robust heart, a heart that reposed its faith in God in any calamity. It was she who encouraged Jonas to undergo

the critical thoracic surgery in Madras at the hands of the American doctor in Vellore Medical Mission Hospital when every one had doubts about its outcome. She shared with her husband a willing submission to the will of God. Her husband used to be very fond of St. Thomas More's words: "Never trouble thy mind for anything that shall happen to thee in this world. Nothing can come but what God wills." This saying printed on a picture card of St. Thomas More was kept by Joseph Thaliath in his prayer book. The bishop had retrieved this picture card from the papers of his father and treasured it as a precious paternal memento.

At that time of the death of the bishop Mary Thaliath was with her son Joseph Thaliath [Jr.] who worked in the film world, in Madras. The news was broken to her and contrary to the forebodings of the people around her, she received it with great calm. There was no hysteria, no inundation of the routine of life with the waters of sorrow, no loud crying, but a dignified silence, mere wetting of the old eyelids, a hardening of the lips in the effort to absorb and contain within the mind the most tragic news. Mary Thaliath would have drawn comfort from St. Mary herself who was witness to the crucifixion and death of her only Son and whose bruised body was placed in her lap on its disengagement from the cross as depicted in the famous Pieta picture. Some time after receiving the news Mary took out her rosary from under the pillow and started praying in slow whispers.

Joseph Thaliath (Jr) and the servants took a deep breath of relief. They had accomplished the job which was considered very problematic. They had also taken the correct decision in not keeping the news from her. They knew that she was a stoic personality, and a living lay saint sustaining herself in the late evening of her life by her faith in God.

The news was flashed in the next morning's papers and in the electronic media. All who knew Bishop Jonas said, "This, indeed, was a great man." The funeral was fixed for 10th November 1981,

so that the family members and friends from Kerala, Bangalore, Bombay, Delhi and other places could reach Rajkot. Bishop's siter, Dr. Lucy Thaliath, who was in New York, flew to Rajkot. On receiving the news of the death of Bishop Jonas His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Parecattil who was in Rome flew in for the funeral. Archbishop Antony Padiyara of Changanacherry, Bishop Kuriakose Kunnacherry of Kottayam, Bishop Sebastin Mankuzhikary of Ernakulam and many priests and family members of Bishop Jonas raced to Rajkot on 8th of November.

The funeral of Bishop Jonas was an occasion for an unprecedented confluence of the dignitaries of the Church and the lay world in Rajkot. Bishop Charles Gomes of Ahmedabad and Fr. Stanley Fernandez S.J., Provincial of Jesuits of Ahmedabad, were there to oversee the general arrangements and to help Fr. Thomas Aykara, the Prior General of the CMI Congregation. He personally was in deep mourning at the loss of an illustrious son of the Congregation.

As the hour of the funeral services drew closer, there was a concourse of humanity in the St. Mary's school compound. By the time the body, kept in a refrigerated condition, had been shifted from the Church of Mary Immaculate to the St. Mary's building. Many, who had come to know him personally, shed tears and were seen wiping their eyes. The funeral services started at 9 a.m. on the 10th November with a funeral procession from St. Mary's School, an institution which Bishop Jonas had loved and nursed, along Rajkot city's main thorough-fare leading to the Cathedral Church. Cardinal Joseph Parecattil officiated at the concelebrated funeral Mass. He started with thhte following introductory words: "We are here at this sacred moment, at this hour of sorrow for the diocese of Rajkot, to bid farewell to the first bishop, Bishop Jonas. In fact his death had plunged us all in grief. A line of the poet Wordsworth comes to my mind. "A glory has passed away from the earth". Bishop Jonas was the glory of his family, of the diocese of Rajkot, of the CMI Congregation which gave him formation, of the Syro-Malabar Bishops' Conference and of the Indian Episcopacy in general.

The Cardinal added: "A man of rare abilities, of outstanding intellectual capacity, of wide vision, with a creative and optimistic outlook, Bishop Jonas was a synonym of dynamism. His departure is an irreparable loss to all concerned. I take this occasion to offer my own hearty condolences along with all present to his family, to his mother, who is not able to be present here, to his brothers and sisters and all the members of family, to the CMI Congregation, to the priests and sisters of the diocese of Rajkot, to the public of this locality and all others who have been obliged to stand the shock of this bereavement. I remember what his father, a High Court Judge, said at the time of his priestly ordination. I am glad to have a son of mine as a Carmelite priest."

It was the turn of Dr. Antony Padiyara, presently a cardinal and the new Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, at that time the Archbishop of Changanacherry, to deliver the funeral sermon. There was pathos and an endearing enigma in the words of Padiyara:

"At 6.30 p.m. on the 7th of November, Saturday, at Rajkot, in the year 1981 was born Bishop Jonas. This is a baffling statement. Perhaps many eyebrows are raised hearing the statement that Bishop Jonas was born in the year 1981 at Rajkot on 7th of November at 6.30 p.m. I did not make any mistake at all. My statement is a deliberate one. Between the years 1919 and 1981, Bishop Jonas had several birthdays. The first birthday that he celebrated was in the year 1919, when he was born into the physical life; may be, the same year Bishop Jonas had another birthday also, i.e., his birth into the Christian life, the day that he shared in the life of Jesus Christ. There was yet another birthday in the life of Bishop Jonas the day he was born into the priestly life. In the year 1946 when Bishop Jonas was ordained priest, he was celebrating, so to say, the third birthday of his life. And in the year 1981, on 7th of November at 6.30 p.m. at Rajkot, Bishop Jonas celebrated his birthday, his birth into the eternal life. And that's the real birth. Right from the very beginning, right from the very first birthday

in 1919, his other birthdays, were, so to say, stepping stones, preparation for the very last one, the birth into the eternal life. We are gathered here to celebrate the birthday of Bishop Jonas, his real birth, the birth into the eternal life.”

Archbishop Padiyara continued drawing a picturesque simile: “We shall compare Bishop Jonas to a man who went for a very, very long journey, having to attend to many important and very special duties, and he returned with joy and success and the contentment and happiness of having been able to fulfil all his duties as he wanted according to his conscience. The man comes driving his own car, perhaps. With great joy he comes home, turns off the engine of his motor car, opens the door of his car and he takes his brief case, closes the door of the car and then he goes into the home where he was awaited. That is Bishop Jonas, he did everything that was expected of him, he took his brief case and then, he has gone home.” The future Cardinal allowed the audience to share his reverie:

“It was the year 1969. I had the happiness and privilege of meeting Bishop Jonas and getting acquainted with him at the time of the National Seminar in Bangalore. If the National Seminar was a success, it was chiefly due to the genius of Bishop Jonas. At that time he was only a priest. All of us who participated in the seminar experienced the most efficient and wonderful manner in which all the programmes of the seminar were conducted; and I still remember the blueprint with which he came out, a blueprint suggesting ways and means for various churches to cooperate together in a spirit of brotherhood, in a very harmonious way.”

The Archbishop continued: “Now let us in spirit, open the brief case: four different documents and on all those documents, I find in letters of gold, the following sentences written: “For the greater glory of God.” The four documents referred to are (i) The documents of the Bishop’s Conference of India, (ii) The Dharmaram College, (iii) The Medical College, (iv) The Diocese of Rajkot.”

“Already in the year 1969, the President of the CBCI, namely, the late Cardinal Gracias of Bombay, noticed the talent, the wonderful skill and the will with which the young priest was adorned, and the then Cardinal Gracias did not lose time to pick him out and choose him in order to bring him into the CBCI Secretariat for an efficient Secretary General of the CBCI. Bishop Jonas had done wonderful services. In all the conferences he attended, I can say without any exaggeration that Bishop Jonas was a living encyclopaedia and a living canon law. One could ask him anything at any moment, and on any subject, the answer was right on the tips of his lips. Having the answer ready at any moment, he was a wonderful source of inspiration to all the bishops who were attending the conference and literally he could be called an Ambassador of Good-will. He had a wonderful talent to relate himself to people irrespective of caste, creed, condition, or the community to which the people belonged. To each and everyone he was identifying himself and therefore he was able to win the hearts of all people who came into contact with him. He was, therefore, an ambassador of goodwill. He created understanding among various sections of people in his capacity as Deputy Secretary General in Delhi, and particularly with all those people in the cabinet he was able to establish a rapport and a real contact, which was of very great advantage to the CBCI. It may be easy to found things, but it is very very difficult to get the things on. When the Medical College was styled as a white elephant, Bishop Jonas took upon himself the task of going abroad in order to find finances necessary to keep the Medical College going. Several times he visited Germany and the United States at the cost of great amount of his time, comfort, and his health. Each time, after coming back, he used to tell his friends, ‘Well, I am exhausted, but I am really happy because I could do something for St. John’s Medical College.’ Then the great services that he has rendered to the Carmelite Congregation, of which he was a member are to be gratefully remembered. He was certainly proud of the fact that he was a Carmelite, and always and everywhere he stood faithful and

obedient to the rules of the constitution of the Carmelite Congregation. Evidently he was a man of courage, he was a man of conviction. Having the courage of conviction he used to call a spade a spade."

The Archbishop dwelt on the Dharmaram College too:

"Now as a proof of his great love for the CMI Congregation, we have a wonderful college, the Dharmaram College in Bangalore, which is today an independent faculty of name and fame, not only in India but even abroad. Finally, as a pastor of the Diocese of Rajkot, that is the last document which we see in his brief case marked "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam", for the greater glory of God. Ever since he became the bishop of this young diocese of Rajkot, the very first bishop, his one concern, may I say, his only pre-occupation, was its growth and development from every angle, spiritual, material, cultural, medical, and educational. Wherever he went, he always used to speak about his own diocese, how he could get more and more personnel, more religious and lay people to work in his diocese. I was told yesterday that on the very day of his installation, when Bishop Jonas took charge of the diocese here, that is to say, the administration of the diocese, he had the whole diocese dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ; and then, after having read the formula of consecration, he just removed his crosier and mitre, and placed them at the foot of the statue of Jesus Christ, and then he surrendered himself, his diocese, all the people of his diocese to Jesus Christ. And from that moment he was right loyal to the spirit with which he had begun the administration of the Diocese. Was he reminded of some incident which took place many years before in his own native place in Kerala where the famous Marthandavarma Raja, who, according to historians, having conquered all the neighbouring states, brought the sword with which he was able to conquer all the states to the feet of the statue of Sri Padmanabhan ? (Sri Padmanabhan is the deity to whom the old state of Travancore was dedicated.) Had Bishop Jonas been told

about it by his own loving parents and so was imitating Marthandavarma Maharaja when he was removing his mitre and his crosier and placing them at the foot of Jesus Christ ?

And wherever he went, he approached the bishops and said, I want more priests, I want more sisters, I want men to pray, because he really believed that prayer was the soul of action. And, therefore, he wanted really to communicate with people who would raise their hearts and minds to Almighty God and who would pray for the blessings of the Almighty for all the citizens. After seeing all these four documents, which were contained in the brief case which Bishop Jonas took along with him, I remark another thing, that all these four documents were put in one big envelop and on that envelope there are written two sentences. The first sentence was that, He who is on fire will never sit on a chair, and the second sentence written on the envelope in which all these documents were put, was "Qualis Pater, Talis Filius." - as the father, so the son.

"Now the first sentence, 'He who is on fire will never sit on a chair'. What is the reason ? Bishop Jonas identified himself with everybody, poor and rich, illiterate and learned. The reason was the fire of love burning in his heart: where there is a fire there will be wings for the leg; where there is fire, no one will be willing to sit idle on a chair."

"The second sentence, 'Qualis Pater, Talis Filius'. Literally translated 'As the father, so is the son.' What does that mean ? Who kindled this fire of love in the heart of Bishop Jonas ? The fire of love was already kindled in the year 1919. This was not kindled only in the year 1946. This fire of love, the love of God and the love of neighbour, was kindled in the heart of young Jonas by his own beloved parents. References were already made by His Eminence the Cardinal to the parents of Bishop Jonas. If Jonas became a priest and if Bishop Jonas had an episcopal ring, the cause of that episcopal ring was the wedding ring of his own parents.

What it means to say is this: All that he had, all that he was, was because of his parents, God-fearing, exemplary and wonderful parents, who really considered this child not only as their own child, but the child of Almighty God. Now his mother is still living, and she is 93 years old. As His Eminence said, the son has gone ahead, in order to prepare a place for his mother, and to wait for her. Now the father is dead and gone. When Bishop Jonas came out successfully in the matriculation examination of the Cochin State, as the first rank holder, he made up his mind to become a priest, and his father told him, 'I prefer my son to become a priest of Jesus Christ, rather than to be the Diwan of the State of Travancore.' That was the wonderful faith which the parents had. And therefore the reason why Bishop Jonas remained what he was, was the wonderful example of prayer and dedication given to him by his parents."

The Archbishop concluded his oration on a personal note:

Now, in my capacity as the Vice -President of the CBCI I express the sincerest sorrow, the deepest condolence, to the bereaved Diocese of Rajkot. Bishop Jonas has made sacrifice of his own life for the young diocese. And we are sure that this sacrifice made by Bishop Jonas will bring an abundance of divine blessings upon this young diocese. There is absolutely no hesitation at all when I say that this young diocese is meant to grow day by day, in every angle, in every dimension. And while expressing our sorrow and condolences, we also pray to the Lord, that this young diocese may continue to grow as it started to grow right from the very beginning. Our condolences and deepest sympathy also are due to the Carmelite Congregation, not only for the Bishops of India, and not only for the Diocese of Rajkot, but I would say for the whole nation because he was a brave man, he was a wonderful man. Therefore, let us all pray that the Lord may reward him, bless him for all the services he has rendered.

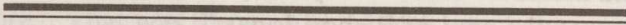
“The star is gone, but the light will continue to travel and travel. The physical star, namely, Bishop Jonas is gone. But his light, the edifice that he has built and given, the spirit that he has left behind, the spirit of a man of duty, a selfless man, a man who identified himself with the cause that was entrusted to him, that spirit will go on travelling and travelling till the end of the world, inspiring dozens of people with wonderful dynamism and with a zest to devote themselves to the task that divine providence has entrusted to him. I also make use of this opportunity to express our deepest sorrow and condolences to his brother, present here, and all the sisters and members of his family. May the Lord Jesus Christ grant eternal rest to the soul of Bishop Jonas.”

Cardinal Parecattil placed a floral crown on the head of the departed bishop symbolising the spiritual reward for a life spent in the service of God and humanity. The Cardinal then intoned on behalf of the departed soul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that day” (2 Timothy 4/7-8). The Cardinal continued, “May the Lord lead you to eternal bliss, which he has promised to his faithful servants.” This was followed by the good-bye song. The departed person bidding farewell to the altar, where he offered the sacrifice, the church where he taught the people and prayed, and finally a farewell to all his brethren.

The body was then taken to the grave inside the church of the Immaculate Conception. This church, the resting place of the mortal remains of Bishop Jonas, has a chequered history. The original church was built in 1854 by Fr. Joseph Nicolas d’Oliveira, the chaplain of Rajkot and Bhuj looking after the small Catholic community of the time of which a sizeable number were Europeans. The new larger church with its cute octagonal shape and exquisite carved door in teak was built by the CMI Congregation in 1986

taking care to retain undisturbed the burial place of Bishop Jonas appropriately marked by a tomb-stone in black marble.

The coffin was closed before it was lowered into the tomb. Each bishop in turn offered incense and flowers over the tomb. The priests followed suit and then all the assembled inside the then smaller church and outside of it, surged forward to do the final offering. A great hush fell over the church and its spacious compound.



Chapter TWELVE

RAJKOT DIOCESE TODAY

Soon after Bishop Jonas Thaliath set on his one-way trip to eternity on 7th November, 1981, a dedicated group of missionaries took charge of the day-to-day affairs of the Rajkot Diocese. In his time the Bishop used liberally to share power with those who worked with him. During his many absences on trips abroad he used to delegate enough powers to his deputies so that no important decision would be kept pending. He was the beloved slave-driver but also the democratic leader. Fr. Victorian CMI, a veteran of considerable experience, functioned as the administrator till Bishop Gregory Karotemprel was ordained to succeed Bishop Jonas on 24th April, 1983.

A landmark event in the short history of the diocese after the demise of Bishop Jonas has been the submission of a report of an Evaluation of Pastoral and Missionary Activity (EPMA) of the diocese to the bishop. The EPMA was entrusted to the CBCI Commission for Proclamation and Communication, and the initiative for taking up the survey came from Bishop Gregory Karotemprel himself. Fr. Augustine Kanjamala, Secretary of the Commission, was put in-charge of the job. The EPMA report brought to light the new viewpoints of the missionaries and provided fresh insights into the dynamics of missionary work. For example, the EPMA responses proved that the renewal spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the concerns of inculturation, such as ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue in the Indian context, have all taken deep root in the consciousness of the missionary personnel of the Rajkot Diocese as elsewhere.

The report showed that conversion was perceived and justified by the missionaries as a means to 'humanisation'. 87% of priests and 90% of nuns had expressed their belief that all religions were

legitimate means of salvation for their sincere followers. Love and devotion to Jesus as also the yearning to be part of the emancipatory process were the prime motivations for taking up mission work. 64% of the nuns and 34% of the priests admitted that they were influenced by the ideology of emancipation. The survey brought to light other interesting dispositions of mission work. Among them: the missionaries did approve agitational means relevant in certain circumstances to achieve social justice; the mission outfit was perceived as a handy instrument to render help to the poor during times of natural disasters; the missionaries believed that the very presence of the mission unit in a place gave confidence to the underclass of the area; most of the schools run by the missionaries had included in their regimen instructions and activities that encouraged awareness and practice of the concepts of social justice.

The core message of the EPMA survey for the Church and mission organisations was that the idea of converting people in the conventional - religious and institutional - sense was on the way out. The survey noted that 'the prejudice and opposition from the local population in the initial phase of mission work had vanished.' In its place has sprung up a new spirit of understanding and trust. The existing rapport between the missionaries and the local communities was surprisingly transparent and warm. The vibrant nature of the relationship was reflected in the readiness with which schools, hospitals, leprosy homes, etc., had been given over to the Church authorities and missionary personnel, to run them more efficiently. The donors of the institutions handed over to the mission included secular voluntary agencies, representatives of the old aristocracy and government departments. The EPMA survey asserts that there is clear indication of the 'recognition of the Christian charism of selfless service to all, particularly the poor and the marginalised' by the local people and their institutions.

During the last 20 years the Catholic population in the diocese had grown marginally from 4400 to 6300. The increase in the number had been more due to the migration of Catholics from other

parts of the country in search of jobs than due to conversion to Catholicism of the local population. The survey, inter-alia, noted that the Catholic population in the diocese is 'cosmopolitan, multi-lingual, floating and scattered.'

Some of the mission centres are located in places where missionary activity is limited to the presence of a few nuns running a small-size social service infra-structure. In a village with no modern physician practising in its vicinity, the presence of a trained nurse (nun) dispensing basic medicines, achieves a great humanitarian dimension. The traditional 'health care system' in Saurashtra, as elsewhere, is often crude, superstitious and problematic. There is this tradition in the villages of Saurashtra of branding babies and children with a red hot iron as an antidote to ordinary ailments like stomach ache, skin sores, etc. More often than not the branding resulted in serious infection of the skin lesion induced by the hot iron. The nuns said that many such cases are brought to their dispensaries. The nuns do not take over the treatment of serious cases but urge the patients to get treatment from a qualified person or from hospitals in the nearest town. Many lives have been saved by such prompt intervention of the nuns working in the villages.

The author accompanied Bishop Gregory Karotemprel to Lodhika, an isolated village near Rajkot. There we met Fr. Thomas Arackal, the priest-in-charge and the two sisters of the mission centre, Sr. Stephen and Sr. Tomita. Fr. Arackal, a neat energetic figure in trousers and bush shirt, was at that time, bereaved with the death of his brother. He could not go home as it usually happened to missionary personnel and had to come to terms with his grief immersing himself ever more in his work. He was recently transferred from Wankaner another mission post where he had set up a co-operative credit society for helping the marginal farmers of the area. In the short space of time he was in Lodhika he had succeeded in establishing considerable rapport with the fundamentalist political leadership of the village. Fr. Arackal lived

in a well-kept house with a small compound in which he grew Kerala vegetables. Fr. Arackal is typical of the hard-working and dedicated priests in the Rajkot Diocese.

At the little convent on the main village lane, a few yards away from Fr. Arackal's residence, we were treated with 'laddus' presented to the nuns by the villagers celebrating Janmashtami, the birth day of Lord Krishna. On our drive from Rajkot to Lodhika we had earlier noted the similarities between the modern celebration of Gokulashtami and Christmas. The crib for Baby Krishna and the glowing paper stars above his blue-painted statuettes, seemed adaptations from the Christmas tradition.

Fr. Arackal and the nuns told us how the local people especially the village politicians, looked at them with suspicion when they had first arrived to set up house in the village. Were they not up to baptizing the villagers into the Christian fold? The villagers might have asked themselves. As days passed and the group worked quietly putting up first a nursery school and then a small dispensary - the suspicions vanished. Fr. Arackal said that they were in excellent rapport with the Viswa Hindu Parishad or BJP groups in the village. Proof of good neighbourliness came when the car in which we were travelling was given the right of passage through a narrow road full of the local Jenmashtami revellers.

We visited two more mission centres at Ribda and Wankaner. At Ribda stocky farmers in Saurashtrean salwars and flounced white shirts living in the neighbourhood of the mission centre came along to welcome the Bishop and his team to the village. The village folks had tea with the Bishop and seemed to be mightily pleased with the gesture. In the backyard we saw a two wheeler used by the nuns to visit other villages in the vicinity. The dispensary run by the centre teemed with patients. Pregnant ladies had lined up for advice from the nun-in-charge. The centre dispensed medicines for casual ailments and advised the patients in time to seek expert treatment in Rajkot. Since the majority of the ailments responded

to the standard regimen of tablets etc. the villagers had developed great trust in the nuns.

At Wankaner we met Fr. Peter Thomas, a poet and a writer and a great admirer of Bishop Jonas Thaliath. Peter Thomas is a genial priest who in his spare time tends vegetables in the small compound of his chapel-cum-residence or wrote poetry. From Fr. Peter Thomas' abode we went to the convent-cum-mission quarters of Wankaner. The sister nuns treated us with a hastily arranged rice and curry dinner. The dinner was followed by a lively 'chat session.' It was a pleasant surprise to me when the sisters enlivened the occasion with melodious solo and group songs. The songs were not devotional alone and included the more popular lyrics and parodies from Malayalam cinema. Often the tempo of the singing rose and the whole assemblage joined the singing.

The Bishop, clad in a pair of white trousers and kurta, was his informal best during the trip. Not for him the stiff, formal and awe-inspiring cassock and the red silk waist band of a bishop and golden chain with a golden cross and the pastoral gold ring. He wore a silver cross and a silver ring. No stranger could place him as a bishop. The simplicity and informality of the Bishop in the mission was in stark contrast with the pomp and formalities associated with bishops in metropolitan dioceses.

Life in the mission outposts is hard and lonesome with many a deprivation. No young man or woman in his or her right sense could choose it knowingly without a strong dose of idealism. Social intercourse that tones up the routine of life in the community is in short supply in the mission outposts. The initial period of acclimatisation for a missionary can truly be shocking. There are many who run back home. The pioneers in the various mission outposts in the Rajkot Diocese had to face much more hardships than missionaries inducted today. The experience of the pioneers forms part of the legend of each individual mission centre.

The trip to the few mission outposts was refreshing if only for the humour it generated. I was often mistaken for a new priest accompanying the Bishop. The cumbersome cassock of the conventional priest is anathema to the missionary priest and he goes about in the humble civvies. With the trouser and kurta I wore, I looked no different from a weather beaten priest. Another source of humour was the unabashed way in which Fr. Romuald questioned the nuns about their individual scores in conversion. Fr. Romuald, in his eighties, could not comprehend the radical shift in the psychology of the modern-day missionaries. The conquest of souls for Christ which he could boast of in his missionary work in the earlier era could no longer be repeated by others in the changed environment. One of the priests said that there was a definite advantage in working as a missionary in Saurashtra. Although religious fundamentalism was strong in Saurashtra, the opposition to missionaries never turned violent. The stone edict near Junagadh installed in the 3rd century BC by the Emperor Ashoka appealed to his subjects not to indulge in violence and killing. Emperor Ashoka's call to non-violence could be the influence which Saurashtra carries even today. The profound traditions of Jainism and Buddhism are very strong in Saurashtra although Jains and Buddhists form only a small minority (1.5 and 0.3 percentage of the population). It could be that the Mahatma was born in Saurashtra because non-violence as a value was treasured most in India by the people of the region. The Rani Maria type of murderous assault on the missionary in Madhya Pradesh would not happen in Saurashtra. The immigrants from other parts of India in Saurashtra confided to us that the local population was peace-loving and would avoid violence at any cost in conflicts.

The story of the Parsis who came to India from Persia to escape persecution in the 15th century is testimony to the spirit of tolerance for which the region is famous. There is this apocryphal story about the way permission was given to the Parsis to settle down in

Gujarat. The Hindu king had said that his kingdom was already populated to the very brim and there was no room in it for the people from other parts of the world to settle down. He demonstrated the truth by producing a tumbler full of milk. The king said no more milk could be poured into the glass since it was full to the brim. The Parsi added sugar to the milk as the king watched. Obviously there was no overflow of milk. The sugar had only sweetened the milk. This anecdote is perhaps applicable to the Christian presence today in Gujrat. For it is the service component that dominates missionary activity today in Saurashtra. The missionaries just sweeten the life of the people in the villages of Saurashtra.

The EPMA Survey has made a corpus of recommendations, the definition of the word 'mission' appearing in the Report: Mission consists of a series of passing over (passover) of a individual or a community of missionaries. It is a 'passing over' from self-centredness, it is a passing over from one's own culture and community to another culture and another community, it is 'passing over' from one's own institutionalised religion and spirituality to other religions and their spiritualities. The goal of missionary activities is the transformation (conversion) of individuals and communities through the power of the Word of God and His Spirit, which is first lived and experienced and communicated and shared by the agents of evangelisation with a particular people in their socio-cultural and political context." This is a far cry from the simplistic perception about missionary activity, as conversion of the poor and their westernisation.

The Survey speaks of the rapid institutionalisation of the diocese. Parishes and mission stations have increased from 13 in 1979 to 41 (1995). There has been considerable growth in the school sector, from 9 schools to 32 today. Around 40,000 students imbibe knowledge from the schools run by the diocese. Number of hospitals and dispensaries had gone up from 3 to 55, catering to the needs of around a lakh of patients.

The missionary personnel, both priests and nuns, are all drawn from Kerala. Twenty congregations, some of them with an international base, provide the nuns - the women power - required for running the various institutions. The Survey states that 53 priests and 268 nuns form the core work force in the field. In addition 70 odd seminarians are getting trained to be absorbed eventually for work in the diocese.

The nuns came in for more favourable comment than the priests in the Survey: They are the 'largest missionary force'. They seem to be 'more optimistic about the bishop, priests and about the people.' Further, the nuns 'in general reveal more liberal opinion on many issues,' as exemplified by the answers they gave to the questionnaire. The Survey does not hide the presence of a 'gender war' between the nuns and the priests, the former alleging dominant behaviour from the priests. The priests do come in for more critical comments in that many are not 'evaluated as spiritual leaders' and that there is 'much room to improve their liturgical services.'

Bishop Gregory, who was not averse to an appraisal about himself, comes out well in the Survey. He is described in endearing terms: 'fatherly', 'good pastor', 'very humble', 'very approachable', etc. The Bishop's simplicity, flexibility and non-aggressive leadership style are perceived as factors leading to the 'absence of any serious conflicts' in the diocese. He is acknowledged as an efficient administrator, but more as a spiritual leader.

A major observation of the Survey relates to the lack of knowledge of Gujarati which comes in the way of easy communication with the people. The cultural distance of the missionaries from the local people is easily noticed. It is to the credit of Bishop Gregory that action has been taken to remedy the lacunae. Those who arrive anew for mission work are now-a-days given a crash course in Gujarati. The priests are trained in the diocese itself in small seminaries located in Rajkot and elsewhere.

I met a pleasant-faced- seminarian, James from Kottayam, who had taken his post-graduate degree in Gujarati and who could give charming sermons in chaste Gujarati.

The Survey does not fail to mention the controversial nature of the institutional presence of the Church in Saurashtra today. The recurring indictments is that the advantages from the intitutions run by the church are by and large cornered by the elite of the society rather than the poor and the oppressed. Particularly this is true of the school sector. The schools and hospitals have become virtually centres of power and cash generation. Since power has a tendency to corrupt those who exercise it, it will be a miracle if every missionary person remains an exception to the rule. Some of them who are ensconced in positions of presitge, power and relative luxury in the institutions, at times show reluctance to leave them and take up the hard unstructured work in the mission stations.

A good point is made when it is observed that true mission work should release liberative forces and benefit the poor. But it has also to be understood that any such liberative action cannot be exercised in an institutional vacuum. What is important is that there should be a constant endeavour to use the surplus of resources generated by the institutions, which, so to say, serve the elite, for the improvement of the lot of the poor. It is not that the institutions should be shunned, but the tendency to render its direct and indirect benefits exclusively to the elite sections of society should be modified. In concrete terms the institutions should serve as mechanisms to transfer income and opportunities from the rich to the poor.

The CMI incumbants of the institutions, bequeathed to the new diocese by the Society of Jesus, are full of praise and gratitude to the Jesuits. The real estate value of some of these assets transferred from Jesuit control and now adminisetreby the diocese would be enormous. Such a transfer of assets between two bodies without any commercial settlement can happen only within the fold of the institutions of the Church.

The Survey had expressed the fear that religious values could decline with the onslaught of increasing 'rationalism, consumeristic culture, growth of secular and consequent decline of spiritual values.' It may be difficult to agree with this view entirely. For instance, growth of secularism in India has proved to be of great value in warding off the real effects of religious fundamentalism. The denial of the reservation of job benefits to the Dalit Christians and the support it gets from the religious fundamentalists is an alarm bell for minorities including Christians. Moreover, the rationalism of our era has begun conceding the importance of the role of the intuitive and experiential faculties of the mind. Consumerism, on the other hand, is a necessary evil that accompanies economic development. It is the supreme challenge of religion to work for shaping a world of material affluence with higher and higher levels of spiritual enrichment.

Churches can be termed the inevitable hardware necessary for starting mission work. A church is established to serve the spiritual needs of a community small or large as the case may be. The Church and the human resource organised around the Church can be used to establish mission stations in the neighbourhood. The mission stations later become the launching pads to start service activities in the surrounding areas. The churches as well as the mission stations together or separately run the schools, hospitals, health centres, mobile dispensaries, balwadies, tailoring and embroidery units for women, centres for non-formal education, industrial estates for small units, etc.

The Saurashtra region had churches from the mid-nineteenth century onward, initially established to serve the spiritual needs of British military garrisons. The oldest church in the diocese is St. Mary's Church established in Bhuj in 1836 for the benefit of the Catholics of the British Army contingent stationed there at that time. St. Mary's Church was under the care of the German and later Spanish Jesuit priests for a long time before it was transferred to the Indian Jesuits and later to the CMI Congregation.

The distinction of being the second oldest church in Saurashtra goes to the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Rajkot where the mortal remains of Bishop Jonas are interred. The Rajkot church was established in 1854 first as a sub-church of St. Mary's Church, Bhuj. The present circular structure was rebuilt in 1985.

The third oldest church of the diocese is the Sacred Heart Church built in 1871 in Jamnagar, to serve the Catholic members of the military encampment there. This church boasts of the largest parish in the diocese with the parishioners strength touching the magic figure of 2000. Even the Rajkot church has only half as much parishioners strength.

The St. Francis Church, Bhavnagar, established in 1881 to serve the needs of the civilian community there, is the fourth oldest church in Saurashtra. The church started functioning initially in the Gymnasium Hall donated by the Maharaja of Bhavnagar, Thakur Dalat Singhiji, in an era of religious tolerance and feudal largess, uncommon today. The Bhavnagar church runs five schools catering to the educational needs of upto 4000 students.

The church established in 1924 in Porbandar, the birth-place of the Mahatama, represents the munificence of a feudal lord, viz., Maharaja Rana Saheb Shri Natwarshinihji.

The last of the important churches built before independence is St. Ann's Church, Junagadh State, at the behest of its European Diwan at that time. The churches at Mithapur (Assumption Church 1949), Veraval (Stella Maris Church, 1954), Gandhidham (St. Thomas Church, 1965), Surendranagar (Dayamayi Mata Mandir, 1972), Okha (Lady of Lourdes Chapel, 1976), and Wankaner (Catholic Church, 1973) were all established after independence and prior to the time when the care of the region was passed from the Society of Jesus to the CMI Congregation. Of the above, Dayamayi Mata Mandir at Surendranagar is noted for its marvellous statue of St. Mary with child brought from Spain. Daya-mayi Matha (the Merciful Mother)

church is a noted pilgrim centre visited by not only Christians but by Hindus and Muslims.

The majority of today's mission stations, with few exceptions, like the famed Vedruna Samajik Kendra (Estd. 1969) set up by the Jesuits, have been established by the CMIs after 1974.

Bishop Jonas had a fascination for Indian style Christian sadhus and ashrams. The Rajkot Diocese has five such ashram centres. Of these, the Jyothi Mandir in the Girnar Forest in Junaghadh is the oldest. It's uniqueness is derived from the fact that its head is Prasanna Devi, a female sadhu hailing from Kerala. Prasanna Devi had a trying time working out her individual mode of salvation. The traditional convents could not satisfy her need for individualised spiritual experience. In 1976 she put up a leaf-thatched hut under a tree and started a life of penance and prayer. In the beginning people shunned a female ascetic, but with the passage of time Prasanna Devi acquired a large following. They built for her a brick hut with a tiled roof on a small stream. She developed a Francis Assisi like feeling for birds and animals and the plant life of the forest and affinity with nature. Her abode is today a noted pilgrim centre of the region.

Sr. Maria OSB of Shantinilayam Priory, Bangalore, was fascinated by the example of Prasanna Devi. After spending some time with Prasanna Devi, she set up her own hermitage titled Iswar Krupa in 1986 in Bhanvad. Sister Maria too has become a legend among the Hindu and Muslim population of the region.

Swami Subhananda, a Spanish Jesuit priest, who goes about in his saffron-coloured Indian habit, is another celebrated ascetic in the Christian ashram culture of Saurashtra. I met Swami Subhananda at the Bishop's House in Rajkot where he had come to undergo an operation. He has a flowing beard now and all silver and he smiles genially through his blue eyes at people. Subhananda's Tapovan is established in the neighbourhood of Bhandaria in Pallithana area.

In his own words, "the aim of my vocation is to give God to the people and for that purpose this is the best method and life style I can adopt when I take into account the nature and religiosity of the Indian people. Further, it will help me to project an image of the Church, which the people of Saurashtra can understand very well. The need of the day is inculturation without which the Church will be something foreign to the people of Saurashtra." The Mukteswary Mandir, built by him with its sari clad St. Mary statue and with baby Jesus in a cradle by the side, is a pilgrim centre. St. Mary is referred to by the local people affectionately as the Mukteswary Mataji. Swami Subhananda is affectionately called Baba by the people.

The last of the five ashrams in the diocese is Sachidanda Ashram established by Swami Kanji Maharaj, who was himself converted as a result of his association with Bishop Jonas. Kanji Maharaj goes around the villages singing Gujarati bhajans on Jesus, and also conducts bhajans in his ashram.

Chapter THIRTEEN

THE MAN BEHIND THE MITRE

Bishop Jonas' personality can be compared to a well-cut diamond each side emitting its own special lustre. Often, his personality traits were complementary; but there were times when the external observer would view them as contradictory. He was a conservative and a progressive, a disciplinarian and a liberal, a scholar as well as a man with the common touch; an incurable optimist as well as a realist, a man given to solitude and reflection as also a gregarious man; a man of deep religiosity as well as a man who spared no pains to attain the goals on the material plane. Above all he was a man imbued with the love of God and the love of man. His personality was many-sided, many-splendoured. It had a core of deep spirituality.

The Bishop was a dreamer. He believed that dreaming was the first step in doing. There would be many greater scholars or geniuses in the Church of India than Bishop Jonas. But Bishop Jonas possessed a blend of all the qualities generating a synthesis which made him truly unique and great. His individual achievements never went to his head and he was ever loyal and faithful to his religious congregation, his community, the diocese entrusted to his care and to the Church in India. Even as he suffered rejection and mis-understanding from the Church and Congregational establishment, he remained a faithful and devoted servant of the Church and the Congregation. He could have lisped the words of St. Paul: "I have fought a good fight to the end, I have run the race to the finish, I have kept the faith, all there is to come now, is the crown of righteousness reserved for me which the Lord will give me on that day."

Jonas never spoke about his achievements, even to his close friends. P.T.Kuriakose, who was world President of Pax Romana in the late sixties and a former international civil servant [UNDP], recalls: "Brought up in a well-known patrician family of Kerala he had every opportunity to parade his ancestry. He came from a rich family. His father was Chief Justice of a High Court and yet he was an extremely humble man always ready to help the weak and the poor..."

Speaking of Jonas' legendary humility it should be stated that it was not the commonplace humility that prevented him from speaking about his accomplishments such as the endowment fund of St. John's Medical College and the great Dharmaram Seminary project, or his dynamic role in the conduct of the Church in India Seminar of 1969 or his scintillating years as an official of the CBCI. What prevented him from becoming a stale narcissist was his consciousness about the role of the divine in his undertakings, the supreme confidence he possessed as an instrument of God in carrying out the tasks he undertook, and above all his constant need to dream in order that he might translate the dreams into reality. He was like a tree interminably in bloom, a fountain that could never go dry.

Fr. Perceival Fernandez who knew him very closely in St. John's says that it was Jonas' habit to keep dreaming and there was no time for him to pause and review his own achievements. Even as he was the man of action, ever alert to the environment in which he operated, he also could be the monk in meditation who could at times be oblivious of the flow of the material world around him. On occasion he had the capacity to closet himself in the silence he created for himself even in the most crowded places. On one such occasion for several minutes he was oblivious of the presence of the rector, his superior. The rector on his part had to touch him on his shoulder to bring him back to reality.

In his congregation, Jonas was a change agent. The traditional habit of the CMI priests was a cumbersome copy from the Middle Ages of Europe. The old habit was deep dark-brown in colour. The new generation of priests wanted to simplify the habit discarding the wide collars and the superfluous frontal piece from the neck down to the feet. They also wanted to go in for white tunic instead of the dark 'foreboding' brown. Jonas was the spokesman of the progressives and in presenting the case he opposed the traditionalists. The no-change group was represented by the senior, venerable Rev. Fr. Francis Sales. Fr. Sales was flabbergasted when he saw that Jonas of all people and from whom he had wanted support for his position was indeed the main leader of the opposing group. Fr. Sales stopped talking to Jonas after the meeting in which Jonas had made a vigorous plea for change in the habit of CMI priests. After some time Jonas confronted Fr. Sales with the simple query: "Father, won't you just smile?" Fr. Sales replied that he could not bring himself to smile; rather he felt like hitting Jonas. Jonas replied without batting an eye: "Then why don't you at least hit me?"

Jonas' humility had a discrete individual flavour. His favourite prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was "Mould my heart after thine and make me meek and humble by example rather than words!" He never lost respect for his seniors and elders even after becoming a bishop. A short while before his death on a visit to Kerala he knelt before venerable Fr. Francis Sales CMI and touched his feet conceding the latter's seniority and totally forgetting the old quarrels. The bishop would not get up until the 'shell shocked' Fr. Sales blessed him. Becoming a bishop did not distance him from the common folks. Bishop Jonas also used to kneel down before Fr. Maurus who was the Superior General when Dharmaram College was constructed.

In Germany he would eat at a way-side restaurant sharing a humble hamburger with Fr. George Earathara who gave him company

rather than stand on the dignity and position of a bishop and eat formally at tables attended by a retinue. He had no hesitation to visit government officials ignoring the wide gap between his position in the community and that of the official visited. Bishop Gregory Karotemprel recalls: "Although I was his former student, he held me in much respect. He used to discuss with me all his plans for the diocese. I was fully taken into confidence and he shared with me every detail with regard to the functioning of the diocese."

Bishop Jonas, being a true child of the era of development, wished to create a sense of self-reliance and dignity in the minds of the rural poor of India. He knew that India lived in its villages and believed in the integral development of the community as a whole along with development of the poor in rural areas. There was no discrimination based on religion or region in his development plans and efforts which he meshed successfully together with his duties as an ecclesiastic. It would be wrong to say he had a rigid formula of community development. What he did in the suburbs of Bangalore was different from what he wanted to do in the arid regions of the Rajkot Diocese. If high-yielding cattle held the answer for ensuring a steady income for the rural poor in Karnataka, it was the hardy goats which would help the poor in the rainless hamlets of Saurashtra. Jonas wanted the Church, and the network of the Church-related institutions to function as a catalyst of the new forces of change germinate in the rural communities. His vision was holistic and integral.

The master-plan which he formulated and started implementing in the Diocese of Rajkot reflected his great vision. In the plan was included the establishment of a Multipurpose Training Institute (MTI) in Rajkot to help implement the development inputs in all walks of life. His successor Bishop Karotemprel, who is so proud of the legacy left by Bishop Jonas and who has taken the decision to make his 'legacy part and parcel of our life so that we can go about doing good to our fellow beings' expresses further his dedication

to the cause for which Bishop Jonas lived, in the following words: "As his successor, I know I am not worthy to step into his shoes. I will follow his policy and try to implement the master-plan he had for his diocese. The legacy he left will continue to inspire me to fulfill the task as the pastor of this diocese." Only on formal occasions he dressed formally and behaved like a bishop. At other times his favourite dress was white trousers and kurta. This ensemble has today become the standard dress of the missionary fraternity in India.

A most endearing trait of the bishop's personality was his infectious and jovial nature. The gravity of being a bishop easily melted when he was in lovable company. He himself liked group outings and picnics. He used to go with students, priests and sisters on picnics. At Rajkot once he took the Bhuj sisters to the Morbi beach. He sent the sisters for a sea bath as he waited at a distance on the beach. The sisters strayed far and went deeper into the waters. He became panicky. He showed signs beckoning the sisters to return rather than wade farther into the sea. They would not heed the request. When the flock returned, he could not contain his righteous anger and burst out at the sisters. He had a very paternal and protective streak in him.

The Bishop was aware that there was no historical evidence regarding the life and times of St. Jonas and 31st March the feast day of St. Jonas had little significance. A certain bishop once, sent greetings to Bishop Jonas on the 'dubious' feast day of St. Jonas. Bishop Jonas wrote back: "Thank you for the remembrance. I was wondering whether there is any saint by the name St. Jonas, which does not however bother me. As St. Theresa of Avila used to say, when it was brought to her attention that there was no saint by the name of Teresa, it gave her only great incentive to be a saint herself."

Jonas possessed an eminently cultured mind. His 'oriental catholic upbringing' among the Syrian Catholic community as the

scion of an aristocratic household, the long years of study and learning to which he was exposed at Mangalore, Kandy, Pune, Rome and later in the United States, and the opportunities he had to work with various civil and ecclesiastic dignitaries of his day, moulded his very cultured and tolerant heart and personality. His love for art and literature, his erudite articulation of whatever he wanted to express and communicate flavoured with his unique wit and learning made him one of the more enchanting representatives of contemporary nascent India. He became a modern-day Erasmus among the Indian Church intellectual circles in which he moved.

Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry, Bishop of Kottayam, who knew Bishop Jonas from the early fifties testifies that the 'orient and the occident mingled harmoniously in him within the framework of the Catholic faith. Mar Kuriakose remembers that even on the day of their first encounter Jonas had impressed him. But unlike in the case of other flamboyant persons, the impression generated in the first encounter with Bishop Jonas was reinforced by subsequent encounters. Mar Kunnacherry had put it cryptically 'the last impression about Jonas is the best impression about him.'

Bishop Jonas' encyclopaedic knowledge and information base impressed many professionals. He used to have prolonged discussions with chartered accountants on accountancy, taxation law etc. Architecture was his passion from the time of setting up Dharmaram and he never lost an opportunity to interact with architects. Architect Ashwin Sanghvi of Rajkot once commented that he had never met another man of the same caliber of Bishop Jonas. A very top executive met Jonas while he was with the CBCI in New Delhi. It was their first meeting and it lasted hardly forty minutes. The executive commented later that he was overwhelmed by the deep knowledge and learning which Fr. Jonas exuded during their conversation.

The bishop was always on the lookout for new ideas and innovative schemes. He did not hesitate to absorb ideas from others

and give them credit for it. Whenever he found that someone had a productive concept, he would be very patient in listening to the person and encourage the person to go ahead with all he had to say. He would discover the talents hidden in those who worked for him and found joy in acting as a catalyst to pool the talent of individuals and groups for better exposure and fulfillment.

Another trait in the personality of Bishop Jonas was his habit of implicitly trusting people. This, on occasion, resulted in minor tragedies, but on the whole the trust eased and speeded up the work at hand. He believed that to trust people and suffer occasionally was better than not trusting people and procrastinating action and its consummation. Fr. George Nettikkatt remembers how the bishop would delegate powers to him while the latter was on tour abroad so that the affairs of the diocese should move fast.

The usually gentle and considerate Jonas could also be curt and dismissive when an occasion demanded it. In the early days of the Dharmaram work, a rapacious land owner quoted a very high price for his land. Jonas ended his meeting with him brusquely and came out without doing any bargain on the price. This infuriated the man. Defeated at his own game he got published in the local newspaper a report to the effect that the CMI priests were printing currency notes in their press. Jonas was not amused. He put up an old printing press at the Dharmaram compound and mockingly told that was the press in which the currency notes were being printed. The police rushed to Dharmaram only to be convinced that the allegations were outrageous and misplaced.

Bishop Jonas had the Thaliath family's good looks and was physically well-built. He had a charismatic physical presence and an irresistible personal charm. These, combined with his extraordinary power to articulate his ideas, made him an unbeatable adversary in deals, negotiations, discussions and presentations of briefs to donors of financial assistance for projects while abroad. His vision matched his physical size and shape. Whatever he

planned he planned big, whatever he dreamed of, he dreamed big and with great aesthetic appeal. Once Jonas told Fr. Percival Fernandez that, "We can do, if we dream." Whether it was the theological institute, a dairy farm, a farm house or a church, he could dream them up and then make his dreams happen. There were those who scoffed at the idea of instituting a standing fund for defraying the expenses of running the medicare facilities in St. John's Medical College from the interest generated by the fund. Many advised him to plan for a much smaller corpus of funding from indigenous sources. But Jonas by his persistent and bolt-out-of-the-blue initiatives accomplished what was perceived as impossible by others. His uncanny ability to formulate a project at short notice when there was an opportunity to tap funds made his foreign trips extra-productive. He could circle a spot on the map of the diocesan area, conceive a project useful for the people of the region and draw up a project with costs of creation of the physical assets in a jiffy. He knew all the thumb rules to make a convincing presentation before potential donors. Sometimes this ability worked wonders.

One of his friends compared the 'grabbing' of funds by him from USAID sources to the feat of Bhageeratha, a character from Indian mythology who brought down the naughty river Ganga from the crest of Lord Siva.

Jonas had plans of large contingents of Indian missionaries fanning out into the African countries and to Latin America to spread the message of Jesus. He even registered a society by the name CMI Mission Guild, but nothing came out of this because he had to bid good-bye to the world early and abruptly. One wisp of an idea which fluttered on the horizon of his mind was the installation of a giant Christ statue on the shore of Saurashtra everlooking the Arabian Sea, comparable to the Christ Statue of Brazil or Statue of Liberty of New York. Had he lived longer he would have translated into reality most of these unfulfilled and mind-bogging projects.

Jonas was aware that he was a hard-to-please boss, one who insisted on doing things perfectly. He used to tell his people in Rajkot: "I am a perfectionist, I want things to be done efficiently and quickly in an excellent and perfect manner." This made it difficult for some people to work with him. He would get angry with the person, but this was only superficial. His passion for excellence and perfection and the strong personality he possessed could not allow him to 'tolerate nonsense' and he had 'obviously some enemies.' According to Bishop Gregory Karotemprel: "... he had to suffer rejection just as Christ... who was rejected by his own people and was finally crucified. As one who knew Bishop Jonas closely, I know very well how much he was rejected. Once he narrated to me the rejections he had to face during his priestly life. But he faced the situations in a Christian spirit and went so far as to help those who engineered such rejections."

During the Dharmaram days there was the case of Fr. George in charge of construction works who was the butt of his anger whenever there was a deviation from the agreed plan in the execution of the buildings. But he loved Fr. George and when there was an occasion to help him, he did so. At the time when Fr. George went to the United States to study, it was Jonas who went to Bombay twice for arranging accommodation for him.

The Bishop had a keen awareness of his early death. One of the reasons why he appeared to be a man in a hurry was his realisation that his time on the terra firma was limited. At Rajkot he used to say that he had only 10 years left to live. He wanted that the show must go on after him and was particular that every bit of information was shared with his lieutenants. Bishop Gregory Karotemprel, his successor, recalls: "Between 1978 and 80 at least a dozen times he told me, 'I have only four or five years left. Please give me more priests so that I can do something for the diocese and go.'" In 1980 Bishop Jonas had told Fr. Gregory: "You must come to Rajkot and I like you to be my successor."

Bishop Jonas was an engaging correspondent. When he was on a foreign tour, he always found time to send notes, letters, and picture postcards to his large circle of friends. Once during one of his foreign visits Fr. Cyriac CMI, of Manappuram Monastery received a letter from Jonas, which made him feel elated. He wondered how a person of Fr. Jonas, stature could find time to write to so junior a priest as Fr. Cyriac considered himself. His office staff and the children of his friends to whom he was a delightful uncle came in for this special treatment. It seems he became very close to the illustrious Cardinal Ratzinger of Munich, a powerful figure in the College of Cardinals. Bishop Jonas had also the delightful habit of presenting something to everyone he met. It could be sweets, flowers, book or even fish. The Bishop used to take fish from Veraval where it was cheap and distribute it on the way to mission stations where he stopped.

Bishop Jonas enjoyed the company of little children and found pleasure in playing with them. P.T. Kuriakose remembers: "I first met Bishop Jonas in 1968 when he was rector of Dharmaram College and was immediately impressed by him. Over the years the initial acquaintance developed into a fairly close personal friendship. His shifting to Delhi enabled him to be a frequent visitor to my house where he felt, as we believed, absolutely at home. There were days when he would telephone me and ask whether he could come home in the evening for a meal and relax. He was very fond of fish curry (Kerala style) which my wife prepared. Sometimes he would go to the children's bedroom, sit with them on the floor and play with them. There were days when my wife and I were out of town and he would come home to spend time with our children so that they did not feel our absence..." Yet amid the grown-ups and scholars he was one of them. He could hold his own with men of every station and profession and contribute significantly on any topic during discussions.

Bishop Jonas loved music and the arts. He used to play on the guitar. He also made attempts at oil-painting. He appreciated

outstanding works of art. The buildings he planned and constructed are a testimony to his sense of beauty, elegance, simplicity, economy and utility. He was an enthusiastic photographer. He would get fascinated by a scenery and would shoot it on impulse and later show the result proudly to his friends. Once the drawing teachers of Nirmala Convent School had done a painting on the 'Nativity' theme. Bishop Jonas, fascinated by the painting, photographed it and used the photograph on Xmas and New Year cards sent that year from the Bishop's House, Rajkot. Bishop Jonas loved nature and was fascinated by the miracle of plants, flowers, gardens and birds.

The Bishop liked humour and was a brilliant raconteur of stories, jokes and anecdotes. Even as he conducted himself with economy and simplicity in everything he did, he enjoyed good food and approved 'befitting' and beautiful dress. His spirituality did not prevent him from loving the good things of life, which he considered were the gifts of God. Jonas also liked gardening and he laid out a lovely garden in Dharmaram. He even made an attempt to bring in the Gurukula concept of residential education in the hermitage of the Guru in Dharmaram. A 'Kannuashrama' - the hermitage of the sage Kannua - with birds, trees, waterpond, deer etc., was set up as part of the garden complex of Dharmaram. To this day there is crocodile in the rock pool, some deer, lovebirds etc. in the Dharmaram compound. He cultivated an exquisite garden at Rajkot and upgraded the one in the CBCI compound in New Delhi. In 1974 the garden tended under the care of Jonas got an award in the flower-show of the year conducted by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi:

Jonas possessed an enviable collection of taped music. He had a fascination for old songs. He knew Puthen-pana - the New Song - the story of Christ in Malayalam verse written by Arnos Pathiri, the German priest - by heart and used to sing it with relish. He enjoyed singing Malayalam songs while travelling by car or in

friends company. On the day of his death it is said that Jonas had asked for playing a tape of a Ravisankar bhajan.

His filial love was exceptional. Climbing the ladder of eminence did not distance him from his family members. His attachment to his parents made him find time to visit them even when he was pressed for time with his numerous involvements. When his colleague in the CBCI, Fr. Patrick D'Souza, was made Bishop of Varanasi, Fr. Jonas advised him to go over to Mangalore to see his aged parents before his consecration as bishop took place. Just as great as the filial love was the love of Bishop Jonas for his mother congregation. Bishop Gregory Karotemprel states : "He was a committed religious who loved his mother congregation beyond our imagination ... I had the privilege of knowing him for the last quarter of a century or so. And as provincial of the Sacred Heart Province I knew him very closely since 1978. He belonged to the Sacred Heart Province ... Many an occasion he shared with me his experiences in the congregation and his expectations for the congregation."

Jonas' anger was famous among his close associates. Many of his colleagues have testified that he lost his temper easily. Some of his assistants also found it difficult to work with him. During the construction phase of Dharmaram, he used to get angry with old Fr. Kurian. But Fr. Kurian was none other than the father confessor of Jonas. The issue of Jonas losing his temper on Fr. Kurian was taken to the Prior General. When queried Jonas answered: After all I confess to him and this is what I confess to him. Jonas never kept anything in his mind. His anger was momentary and it used to disappear with the speed with which it materialised. Even when there was a difference of view with the adversary, he had the ability to keep the differences aside and be friendly with him.

Some of Jonas' plans looked grandiose, unworkable and unrealistic to others. He did not fully succeed in taking into account the quality of the human resources available for implementation

of the projects he had planned. He also failed to realise that other men were not necessarily as resourceful as himself mainly because they were from a less exalted social background and did not have the benefit of the ideal upbringing he had.

Usually men are used up by time. Bishop used time to reach his goals. His sense of discipline was not for mere imposition on the persons who worked for and under him. His daily routine reflected the inner discipline which he carried within himself. The old adage, "work while you work and play while you play" got a unique and very productive lease in the life of Jonas. A usual day of Bishop Jonas started at 6.30 a.m. He would have yoga exercise before bath. After the bath there was meditation. Sometimes the meditation was with the accompaniment of bhajan music, say, that of Ravi Shankar. He said Mass at 8.00 a.m. and had breakfast by 8.45. By 9 a.m. he was in the chair in his office. He was dynamic in the literal and the more than literal sense.

Jonas had a mercurial side to his character. In January of 1977 Bishop Abraham of Dimapur had sent Jonas a set of Naga dress. Jonas liked it and wrote back: "This fits me like a glove. But I need a Naga shawl when I come to Nagaland."

There were strong resemblances in the personality traits of Blessed Chavara Kuriakose, the founder of the CMI order, and Bishop Jonas, the modern day exponent of the CMI spirit. Both were religious, and spiritual in the core of their being; but both refused to reduce themselves to be ascetics bent on individual salvation. Both sought their self actualization and salvation through working hard for the betterment of the world around them.

The co-founders of the CMI order, Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukkara in the early part of the 19th century, had wanted in the first instance to establish a monastic congregation in which people would go and spend their time in contemplation of God. It was Fr. Chavara Kuriakose who prevailed upon his elderly

companions to strive for establishing a monastic order whose members would work among the people to help them prosper in the spiritual and material plane. The perception that truly spiritual work had a material component and that an authentic sense of material well-being would have a spiritual component to it, is often forgotten by those who pursue religious goals in their lives. Both Blessed Chavara Kuriakose and Bishop Jonas represented in themselves an ideal blend of spirituality with the right degree of material concerns.

Both dreamed of their life's mission while they were young aspirants to the priesthood. The advent of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century had exposed the Christian Church in Kerala to western expressions of Christianity which included the spirit of evangelism and the pooling of religious energy in monastic congregations. Those were the times when the Dominican, Jesuit, Carmelite Congregations inspired young men and women to join them for leading a life of devotion to God. Young Chavara records that his ambition to establish a monastic order of indigenous origin had sprouted in him even on the day of his ordination as priest in 1829. On the day of his first Mass at Artungal Kurakose Chavara had prayed for the fulfillment of his dream. Similar was the strong spiritual motivation which worked in Fr. Jonas even while he was a student of philosophy in Kandy and later in Rome. He wanted to establish in India a centre of learning comparable to the Pontifical Seminary in Kandy and the Lateran University in Rome. The dream born in him was nursed by himself with ardent care till a time came to physically translate the dream into reality.

If an indigenous monastic order was his life's mission for Chavara Kuriakose, the establishment of a house of learning for priests in India under the banner of the CMI congregation was the life mission of Bishop Jonas.

Both had strong rooting in Indian culture and traditions. Blessed Chavara was a scholar in Sanskrit and was keen on the retention of the traditions of the Syrian Catholic Church in Kerala. At a time

when education was looked down upon as of dubious value in the inculcation of spiritual life because of the possible genesis of schism and materialistic outlook in educated people, Blessed Chavara went all out for promoting education among the community. Similar was the commitment of Bishop Jonas in establishing Dharmaram College. The very name of Dharmaram was indicative of the spirit of indigenisation and inculturation which have gained subsequently greater acceptance in the Church in India.

The pioneering work undertaken by Blessed Chavara in the 19th Century in establishing the printing unit at Mannanam is comparable to the enterprise of Bishop Jonas in enriching the cattle wealth of the country by importing good breeds from abroad and in establishing dairy farms at Dharmaram as a centre to radiate similar economic activity amongst the poor. The import of French goats for equipping the poor of the arid Rajkot region was part of this innovative concern for the poor.

A reference was made in the beginning part of this biography that when the young Chakkappan topped the Secondary School Leaving examination in the Cochin State and was awarded the gold medal doubts arose as to his continuing his studies to become a priest. Many friends of his father thought that in the secular life the boy could be a great success, and making him a priest was a loss to the family if not to the Syrian Catholic community.

What Bishop Jonas would have become if he had not become a priest is a question raised several times over by persons who were struck by the brilliance of his personality. According to venerable Fr. Canisius, who was the Prior General of the CMI - to which position Bishop Jonas was not elevated - and who was a long time colleague of Jonas in the seminaries at Kandy, Pune and Rome, Jonas would have risen to be even the Prime Minister of our country. This evidently is the innocent remark of a person of nobility who is not in touch with the work-a-day-world of latter-day politics. For at least in the post-Nehruvian era it is not the most deserving brilliant

and moral individual who becomes either the Prime Minister or the President of the country. More often than not the person who attains eminence in politics is a compromise candidate who has qualities other than intellectual brilliance and moral character. Politics has become, in the India of our day, a game played by amoral men of average or a little more than average ability. An individual with the secular version of Bishop Jonas' charismatic presence, world vision and intellectual brilliance would have still missed exalted political positions because of the moral compromise and ruthless game playing required for such jobs. Yet the remark by the former Superior General and friend should be taken to mean the extent of the profound impression which Bishop Jonas could make on those who moved close to him.

J.R Victor Karunan makes this statement in his reminiscence about Bishop Jonas: "... Had he not opted for religious life, he would certainly have become India's most outstanding jurist and even elevated to the position of Chief Justice of India or the Solicitor General of India..." According to P.T. Kuriakose, Bishop Jonas, had he missed his vocation "would have made a tremendously successful business executive or an ICS officer." Bishop Jonas invoked as many estimates about his potential talents and personal abilities as the men with whom he had occasion to interact.

Beyond doubt, Bishop Jonas was a man of God, a great ecclesiastic with a great vision. He was truly the representative of the nascent nation and the nascent Church. But for the contributions of Bishop Jonas, the CMI Congregation would have remained very different from what it is today. Bishop Gregory Karotemprel is right when he says that "Bishop Jonas is the greatest son of the CMI congregation." Many Church leaders feel that in terms of contribution to its growth and vitality the position of Bishop Jonas in the Church in India is only second to that of Cardinal Gracias himself. Through the institutions he founded and nurtured he contributed to the spiritual and material development of the Indian

nation. Bishop Jonas also served the world and human-kind because whatever he dreamed and whatsoever he did were integral parts of his spiritual quest and world vision.

THE MISSION LEGACY OF BISHOP JONAS

According to Bishop Gregory Karotempel, the present bishop of Rajkot Diocese, the mission legacy of his predecessor deserves special attention and acknowledgement. Here is what Bishop Karotempel has to say:

" The contribution of Bishop Jonas to the Church in India is incalculable. Bishop Jonas left his mark in ways that are difficult to measure by the standards normally applied to the work of missionary leaders of a generation. He is remembered as a great evangelist, a leader with charisma, a fund-raiser for and builder of institutions, a man of prayer, and an advocate of peace and amity among the groups in which he functioned. He was an indefatigable traveller in search of the results he sought. His friends saw him as a great planner, a keen organizer and a zealous promoter of missionary activities. Perhaps the unique feature of his genius was the unusual blend of spiritual insight and leadership quality with hard-headed administrative ability."

" The missionary task as seen by Bishop Jonas is marked not by an attempt at maintaining a balance between the message of personal salvation and of social renewal but by the acknowledgement that very presence of mission in a community had social implications. He was, so to say, the herald of social transformation in Saurashtra and Kutch. Although he was primarily interested in the salvation of souls as an evangelist, he opened schools and hospitals to serve the people. He believed that even if the mission were to prove a failure in terms of converts, the efforts would still be worthwhile in the light of the Saviour's command to preach the gospel to all nations."

"Bishop Jonas was fully conscious of the urgency and vastness of the task that the Church face in Saurashtra and Kutch. He was in charge of the Secretariat of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India in New Delhi for well over seven years before his nomination and as such he had many opportunities to study and review missionary methods followed in North India. The Light of Christ for Saurashtra and Kutch was the blue print of action which the Bishop had in mind for the diocese. The plan was drafted with the intention that all those who worked in the diocese must know clearly what they were collectively aiming to achieve.

"Bishop Jonas had a clear perception about the field of apostolic pre-occupaton of a mission with its interface with the general public, the inner circle of catechumens and neo-Christians and the persons born and brought up as Catholics. According to him the main weakness of missionary activity in North India was the failure to stress the most important aspect of Indian reliogious heritage, namely, the realization of the soul's desire for union with God. We are now mainly engaged in social and economics uplift, education and health care, with nothing really comparable in the spiritual field. Christianity which has within it the God-Emmanuel has the key to satisfy this yearning of the Hindu soul; but up to now our mission methodology has not satisfctorily or sufficiently emphasized this essential and important aspect.

"So the first mission priority in the planning has been the founding of many small houses of prayer in the diocese. The inmates would not ordinarily engage themselves in social work. Their role is primarily to be living symbols of divine presence for the outside world and also for the members of the Church. Their life-style will set the tone for the whole diocese. Bishop Jonas wanted that the ashrams of religious men and women living in intense prayer life and in communion with the people should become a distinctive feature in the diocese."

"Bishop Jonas believed that the socio-economic work in which the Church in North India is engaging itself more and more is generally undertaken without proper planning or adequate preparation. So, in the field of socio-economic development Bishop Jonas chalked out a well-thought-out plan. In planning, his first concern was to aim at an integral development of rural areas, and in a more limited way, of the entire territory of the Rajkot Diocese".

"The main thrust of the effort of the Diocese will be to bring to the rural areas a sense of self-reliance and dignity and the benefits of modern industrial and technical development. For a small diocese such as a new missionary diocese, it is a great challenge to take up the task of helping people in the villages. We know that many ambitious programmes launched even by the Government of India have failed. Nevertheless, it is felt that a diocese with all its other weaknesses can be a catalyst in this area. All the projects are planned right from the beginning to give the maximum scope for the initiative and participation of people.

"The second principle that should underline our planning", according to Bishop Jonas, "is the fact that true rural development is possible only when development activities are directed towards the integral and total development of the village".

"With the intention of spreading the message of the Gospel beyond the present limited circle of harijans, backward classes and aboriginals, to the middle class people and the intellectuals of the area, he felt it imperative that a Mass Communication Media Centre be established in the diocese. Such a centre would have among its functions, preparation of material with special nuances required for the area, and distribution and follow up. Besides a media-centre there is also the need for a dialogue-centre where religious experience, particularly the prayer life of the people belonging to different religions may be respectfully shared.

"Bishop Jonas may be best remembered for the above highlights of his ministry. He was a dispensationist who promoted quick

missionary training. The scientifically placed programme for the evangelization of the area was the most important part of Bishop Jonas' legacy.

"In sum, in addition to the inspirational value of Bishop Jonas' life, his legacy in the areas of evangelization, social development, education, inculturation, scholarship in the mission methods, warrants him a place of honour in the mission annals. His life and work anticipated the evolution of the more exemplary aspects of missionary endeavour that followed his own premature death.

"Bishop Jonas' legacy as a missionary may be summed up in what he considered to be St. Paul's insight as best expressed in Ephesians: "It was he who "gave gifts to mankind; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4/11 - 12)".

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76 Fr Stanislaus CMI	Calicut
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84 Rev Sisters Carmelite Missionaries	Junagadh
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ANNEXE

(a) NOTE ON CMI CONGREGATION

The CMI (Carmelites of Mary Immaculate) is the first monastic order of Indian origin among catholics. It was founded by three Kerala Catholic Priests of exceptional spirituality: Fr. Thomas Palackal, Fr. Thomas Porukara, and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara. This was in the year 1831.

Of the three founders, Fr. Palackal and Fr. Porukara were senior Priests advanced in age where as Fr. Chavara was relatively in his youth when the monastic order was founded. It therefore fell to the lot of Fr. Chavara to build it up during the years into a strong spiritual brotherhood of religious ascetics. Fr. Chavara became Vicar General and dominated the ecclesiastic and social scene of his time. Through him the CMI Congregation contributed significantly to the spread of religious piety, literacy, education and printing and publishing activities in Malayalam. The congregation grew steadily during the 19th century and much faster in the first half of the 20th century. It attracted the best among the youth of the Syrian Catholic community in Kerala.

Today it has over 2000 members active in mission work, education, rural development, care of the poor, the old and the mentally-retarded and in fields as varied as inter-religious dialogue, inculturation and inter-cultural promotion. It has perhaps the largest pool of highly educated priests active in different parts of India and also globally. The proceedings for the beatification of Fr. Chavara are under way and the first stage of conferring Blessed-hood is over.

**(b) BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE OF BISHOP
GREGORY KAROTEMPREL CMI**

Bishop Gregory Karotemprel hails from Kerala as Bishop Jonas did, but more specifically from Chemmamattam, a picturesque village in the Meenachil taluk of Kottayam District in Kerala. With its lush coconut and rubber plantations, Chemmamattam is a typical west-coast village which can be described as a slice of tropical paradise. It had been for long the abode of hard working cultivators who believed in the adage: no work no money, no bee no honey. Joseph, the future bishop, was born to Devassy of Karotemprel family and Rosamma of Koratiyil family on the 6th of May, 1933. Devassy and Rosamma were orthodox, devout and ardent St. Thomas Christians. They brought up their children as committed Christians and responsible members of the community.

Joseph was the third among the Karotemprel siblings; three brothers and one sister. The eldest brother Thomas married and settled down in the 'tharawad' with his parents. The other brother of Joseph, Fr. Sebastian, SDB (Society of Don Bosco) is today a noted author. He had been working in the Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, and later with the faculty of the Urban College in Rome. The lone sister became a nun and is, as of this writing, the Provincial in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh.

Young Joseph was endearingly called Pappachan. Pappachan dreamt of becoming a missionary priest. After schooling in his village, Pappachan did the intermediate - two year pre-degree course - from the renowned Sacred Heart College, Thevara, run by the CMI Congregation. He made his first religious commitment on 8th December, 1955, and joined the CMI Congregation. He was given the name Gregory and had his ecclesiastical studies in the Dharmaram College, Bangalore. He was ordained a priest on the 17th of May, 1963. Young Fr. Gregory had somewhat indifferent health. His hardy spirit and great inner energy were, so to say, masked by his slim and rather frail looking frame. The young

priest, one day, approached Msgr. Januarius, the Eparch of the Chanda Mission Diocese, to take him as a missionary in the Chanda Mission. Msgr. Januarius was touched by the request, but dissuaded Fr. Gregory and told him rather bluntly that missionary work was tough and demanded more robust health than Fr. Gregory appeared to possess. This was a great disappointment for the young priest. But the passion for missionary work was to remain with him and gain momentum as he took up new responsibilities, assigned to him by his Congregation.

Fr. Gregory was appointed the Rector of Rajagiri English Medium School established by the CMI Congregation in Kalamassery, a hub of industries, in the neighbourhood of Cochin. He had to build up the institution from scratch. Soon Rajagiri became a synonym for the best run residential school in Kerala. Students from all parts of the State sought admission in the school. The school produced excellent results in the public examinations year after year. Fr. Gregory earned the regard and love from thousands of parents and children and also the teaching fraternity. To this day when Bishop Gregory makes a visit to Kerala, he is accosted by scores of adoring young men in the prime of their career and life, who were his students in Rajagiri.

Fr. Gregory was elected the Provincial of the Sacred Heart Province by the CMI Congregation in 1978. Prior to that he had functioned as the secretary for missions attached to the provincial for about six years. The Rajkot mission was looked after by the Sacred Heart Province. During the period of his secretaryship and provincialship, Fr. Gregory had a close encounter with the problems of the Rajkot diocese. He played a key role in the growth of the diocese and visited the diocese every year and, as requested by Bishop Jonas, gave guidance to the young priests working in the mission posts. He was at hand to share the burden of the relief work during the Morbi flood disaster. He became a trusted friend and confidant of Bishop Jonas Thaliath. Bishop Jonas made it a

habit to share with Fr. Gregory, the provincial, his problems and seek his views on all important matters.

The fulfillment of his childhood dreams to become a missionary came when Fr. Gregory was selected to succeed Bishop Jonas as the second shepherd of Rajkot Diocese.



Newly Ordained Priest with family members



Dharmaram the Dream



The first visit of Bishop elect to the Diocese



Episcopal Ordination in Mannanam



Bishop Charles Gomes hands over the authority to new Bishop



With a newly baptized family



With the Holy Father Pope John Paul I



Getting the blessing of Fr. Placid CMI.



They are comfortable



With the then Prior General Fr. Theobald CMI and priests of the
new diocese



Journey to Eternity

NOTES

Chapter 1

- Vayattatti : Traditional midwife
Kayal : backwaters
Kinai : brass vessel with spout

Chapter 2

Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer : Autocratic Divan of the state of Travancore, Diwan was the Chief Executive of administration owing allegiance to the Maharaja.

Chapter 3

Cochin State : One of the two princely states during the British rule. The other was Travancore with contiguous territory.

Chapter 4

Eda Chakkappa : Usual way of addressing a younger brother with name Chakkappan, in Malayalam.

Chapter 5

Diamper : Western form of Udayamperoor, the venue of the 'Synod' organised by Archbishop Menezes.

Chapter 6

Kandy : Srilankan city where the Seminary in Pune, India was located earlier.

Chapter 8

'Be Indian, buy Indian' : Soon after Independence (1947) much value was placed on Indians buying Indian products. Indian industry was in its infancy then.

Chapter 9

Syro-Malankara Rite : The Syro-Malabar Church under Portugese rule split in 1653 and eventually gave rise to the Orthodox Syrian (Jacobite) Church. In 1930 two bishops of the Orthodox Syrian Church and followers rejoined the Catholic Church retaining the liturgical practices of their church but giving allegiance to the Pope. This gave rise to the Syro-Malankara Rite.

Chapter 11

Fr. Romuald Chakkunkal : As of this writing Fr. Romuald is hale and hearty and is staying in Provincial House, Rajkot

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