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Blessed Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara

THE FIRST INDIAN SAINT



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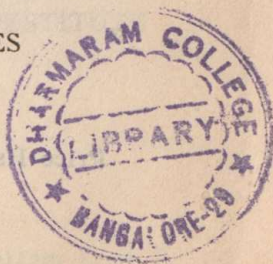
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THE GEM OF ST. THOMAS CHRISTIANS

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THE FIRST INDIAN SAINT

Fr. Valerian Plathottam C.M.I.

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BLESSED FR. KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA

❁ **FOUNDER & PRIOR GENERAL OF
THE C. M. I. CONGREGATION.**

❁ **FOUNDER OF RELIGIOUS LIFE FOR WOMEN
IN KERALA (C. M. C.)**

VICAR GENERAL OF THE SYRIANS

THE FLOWER OF MANNANAM

THE LEADER OF ST. THOMAS CHRISTIANS

THE APOSTLE OF THE EUCHARIST

THE EDUCATIONIST IN KERALA

THE PROTECTOR OF HARIJANS

**THE REDEEMER OF THE POOR & THE
DESTITUTE**

THE APOSTLE OF THE PRESS

Revised New Edition

Fr. Valerian Plathottam C. M. I.

The First Indian Saint



Blessed. Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara

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INTRODUCTION

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

Fr. Thomas Palakkal, Rector of the Seminary at Pallipuram who remained in that office even afterwards and his adviser and trusted friend Fr. Thomas Porukara also Secretary to Maurelius Stabilini the Bishop of Verapoly and Fr. Kuriakose Chavara the most brilliant student of Fr. Palakkal were three outstanding priests of the time well known and appreciated by all for their erudity, piety and leadership. They founded the first Monastery of the C. M. I. at Mannanam on May 11, 1831 dedicating themselves to prayer and the service of the people; the beginning of a religious life for the first time in India with Canonical approbation.

Today, the C. M. I. Congregation has on its rolls 1805 Priests and Seminarians. It is Constituted of nine provinces with 160 Houses. From Kerala it has spread all over India and

even abroad to Italy, Germany, United states, Canada, South America and Africa.

Fr. Kuriakose Chavara one of the founding Fathers and First Superior General of the Congregation died on January 3rd, 1871 in the odour of Sanctity leaving behind him the high reputation of a very holy monk. He has already been declared venerable and D. V. his beatification is expected some day in February 1986 when His Holiness the Pope visits Kerala.

At this Juncture it seems appropriate to write a few words as to how I was prompted to begin this laudable cause and how it was promoted in the face of contradictory views as to who is the first among the founders. But for the hand of God in every humble attempt of mine my labours in this line would have been a complete failure.

I am very much indebted to Mar Augustine Kandathil, Arch Bishop of Ernakulam, Mar James Kalacherry Bishop of Changanacherry, The Servant of God Fr. Aurelian, Rector, Pontifical Seminary Alwaye and the servant of God Fr. Zacharias Professor, for their encouragement and generous help. Fr. Zacharias was kind enough to publish a Booklet from the S. H. league which was written by me containing a short life history of Fr. Chavara. The success of this process mainly depends on Fr. Lucas Vithuvattical the present postulator,

Fr. Cajus the Vice-Postulator and Fr. Placid and Fr. Casmir who were Previous Postulators.

In 1927, when I was but a Novice I happened to read a very short life of Fr. Chavara written by Fr. Leopold O. C. D. Then onwards I felt a special devotion to him and began to pray for his intercession for a miraculous cure of my heart disease so serious that there was little hope of a recovery. Thanks to his intercession, I believe Almighty God deigned to give me complete cure and made me able to follow my studies. After that time onwards I began to speak of it and of Fr. Chavara's holiness and extra ordinary merits to my companions and complied short intercessory prayers or be said by them when any of them got sick or is in some difficulty.

I happened to hear from Fr. Aloysius the serious illness of Sr. Alphonsa then a Novice at Changanacherry. I gave Fr. Aloysius a written copy of that prayer to be handed over to the Novice sister that she may say it faithfully and devoutly. It is gratifying to say that it is by the recital of that prayer that she got her miraculous cures. Hearing of these miracles I myself visited her at Changanacherry and later at Bharananganam and got personal testification of her cures. This was really a great impetus and an encouragement for my further endeavours in the line of the promotion of this cause.

I got ordained in the year 1936 and as a preacher of retreats and of my own accord I

gave homilies of his holiness and extra ordinary merits prapagating his devotion in all the parishes of Kuttanad as a first step. As Fr. Chavara was from Kainakary, Kuttanad, my speeches were specially and widely appreciated and I got a very warm welcome everywhere I went.

In 1936, the general chapter of the congregation accepted the petition sent by me and I was authorised by the prior general in council to go through the Archives and collect the documents and publish his documentary life. After about four years of arduous labour I could publish the documentary in conformity with facts and figures.

It was before that I published from Mannanam a short life; that also in Malayalam. The first English Edition of his life was published by me in 1955. Again in 1964, I published another Book in English in connection with the Eucharistic Congress of 1964 held at Bombay blessed with the presence of His Holiness the Pope; under the title "The Apostle of the Eucharist" and was distributed among the pilgrims who attended the congress.

I greatly remember that after the process was formally initiated I was personally invited by Mar Augustine Kandathil, Archbishop of Ernakulam who deputed me to go over to Malayattur on the days of pilgrimage and conduct a continued discourse about the holiness merits and achievements of Fr. Chavara and distribute among the pilgrims prayer leaf-lets and pictures.

Thanks to the permission and authorisation granted me by the prior general in 1953 and with the help of the prior of Mannanam and with due permission from Mar James Kalacherry Bishop of Changanacherry his mortal remains were transferred to the centre of the Monastery Church. The room used by the servant of God was formally set apart and opened for the devotees.

In that year itself His Eminence Cardinal Tisserent of happy memory came to Mannanam when he paid a visit to the room used by Fr. Chavara and his tomb in the church. At lunch time when I was with the Cardinal I could speak more of his sanctity and achievements for the good of the church and salvation of souls and afterwards present a personal petition to take up his cause for canonisation. He was so magnanimous and kind to direct it to the prior—general with a special note that he should send a petition to the congregation officially for the same through the proper chanel.

Accordingly, the council discussed the case and after adopting a unanimous resolution, the prior general presented a petition to this effect to Mar Mathew Kavukattu of holy memory. He took it up earnestly and presented the case to the sacred congregation in Rome. The very next year that is in 1955 he got permission and direction from the sacred congregation to start the Diocesan process. Consequently I was asked to present the necessary witnesses to prove his heroic virtues and sanctity. I was the main witness for the

same. From the other witnesses produced five were eye witnesses and the others, contemporaries who have directly heard of him.

After this long thirty years of strict scrutiny and elaborate study and thanks to the earnest prayers of his devotees and hard labours of the vice postulators the day is going to dawn for the solemn proclamation of his raising to the honours of the Altar by His Holiness The Pope John Paul Second from the very soil of his birth and in the presence of his country men.

Remember how we are indebted to God who deigned to hear our humble prayers and how much we are obliged to thank Him and Praise Him for this singular gift. We are more happy and privileged that along with Fr. Chavara Sr. Alphonsa the fragrant flower of Bharanganam and the pride of all Indian women is also going to be raised to the honours of the Altar. I am really more happy that I had the privilege of being a witness to her cause as well in the Diocesan process.

It is a happy coincidence and quite a providential beneficence that the Beatification of Fr. Chavara and the Golden Jubilee of my sacerdotal ordination come in the same year. Blessed be the name of the good God who poured on me His graces in Profusion. Let all Praise and Glory be to him for ever and ever and may He grant us all many more favours through the intercession of both our saints.

Fr. Valerian Plathottam C. M. I.

FR. CYRIAC ELIAS CHAVARA

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

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

A reinforcement of Syrian Christians under the leadership of the "Armenian" trader Thomas of Cana colonised Kerala in

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

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

CYRIAC CHAVARA

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

The house of Fr. Cyriac is in Kainakary, on the Arabian coast, about half an hour's journey by motor-boat from Alleppey. The back waters of Kerala, interspersed with numerous island formations like Kainakary, form one of the most attractive features of the beautiful land scape.

Chavara descending from the Pakalomattam family could claim as its members many a noble son among those who shaped the fortunes of the Syrian church in this part of the world. Mar Alexander, several other Archdeacons who ruled over the church in Kerala for long periods, Bishop Mar Louis Pazheparampil, Bishop Mar Thomas Kurialacherry, all descended from this line. His Lordship the late Bishop of changanacherry, Mar James Kalacherry, was also related to the Chavara family. It is difficult to ignore Providential scheme in matters like this. It can never be accidental that Fr. Chavara, who is best remembered as the co-founder of the Carmelite congregation in Kerala should have been a scion of the Pakalomattam family.

The year 1805 those were days when even Travancore which now stands foremost in literacy had not yet developed its educational activities. Government schools were introduced for the first time about 1817, in the reign of the late Maharaja swathi Thirunal of revered memory. It was much later that schools were opened in Kainakary. So the young Cyriac had to draw his inspiration and

knowledge at the feet of the 'Country Asan', who conducted a common class in a shed for children of various ages and standards. The youngster spent about five years in this native school and picked up at the hands of his master sufficient knowledge of Malayalam and Tamil. But he was more concerned with perfecting his character and developing those virtues which marked him out for recognition in his later career. Most of this training was imparted to him by his own mother. Even as she fed him, she recited to him various prayers which she made him learn by heart. She impressed him by her many acts of devotion. Later in life he recalled memories of his mother getting up regularly at night to say the Rosary. Spurred on by the example of his mother, he developed a keen desire to offer up his whole life exclusively to the service of God. The beginnings of the desire were manifested by the enthusiasm he displayed in studying the prayers in Syriac to enable him to assist at the Holy sacrifice of the Mass. Even before he had grown physically fit enough to handle the Missal with its stand and move from one side of the altar to the other, Cyriac was ready in the service at the altar, as an ardent and zealous acolyte. It was only natural that his desire soared and he aspired to the Priesthood. The encouragement of Fr. Thomas Palakkal, Malpan in the Pallipuram Seminary, was very timely and in 1818, Cyriac was formally admitted to the seminary to undergo the training necessary for ordination.

Fr. Cyriac Eliseus of Porookara speaks about this period: that "his life in the seminary was very exemplary, is admitted by all his colleagues. His devotion, meekness, obedience and charity were all outstandingly impressive. The seminary was a new one and the discipline enforced was particularly strict. Yet throughout the rather long period of his training, there was no instance of his having been reproved for even the slightest offence. On the contrary by virtue of his character, zeal and talents, he acquired great proficiency in Syriac and other languages. Also because of the great regard and esteem in which he was held by the Ma'pan, he was sent to other places to gain more knowledge in Portuguese and Latin." Fr. Leopo'd, the celebrated foreign missionary gives corroborating testimony. "As would be endorsed by many of his colleagues still alive, Fr. Cyriac was particularly interested in the service of God. Without any consideration for worldly achievements, he zealously attended to his study. He was quite orderly and God-fearing. He was always pleased with and charitably disposed to his fellow students. He deprecated the ill-temper and impatience that open characterized youngsters". Several of his classmates have remarked that Fr. Cyriac was the youngest of the lot but easily the foremost in study, and in the practice of devotions. How admirably holy and dignified his life was can easily be summarised from the fact that his superiors had occasion only to commend his activities in a

community built up of members of different temperaments and dispositions. After a period of training and study extending over eleven years, in 1829, he was ordained priest by Monsignor Stabilini, *interim* vicar apostolic of Verapoly. He was only 24 years of age then. He celebrated his first Mass on the 26th of November, 1822, in his own parish church at Chennankary.

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

In those days Sunday sermons were not common. The effect of it was also visibly manifest then, Fr. Cyriac set about to reforming this state of affairs. He went about from Church to Church preaching sermons. The memory of the preaching he successfully conducted at Pulincunnu is cherished even to this day. But this

did not satisfy him. He had worked out for himself a new line of activities for the spiritual regeneration of Malabar. He had also the benefit of the co-operation and guidance of two other celebrated leaders, Fr. Thomas Porookara and Fr. Thomas Palakkal. The former enjoyed great popular recognition as a holy and virtuous Priest, bent upon receding as much from the world as the world chose to honour him and extol his worth. The latter, his Malpan, was at this time leading a life of asceticism and renunciation in the seminary at pallipuram. They were on terms of great intimacy and mutual regard. These were the leaders with whom Fr. Cyriac was privileged to work. The similarity of ideologies that inspired all of them was greatly responsible for the success of the organisation which was reserved for Fr. Cyriac to found officially, in its present form.

FORMATION OF THE CONGREGATION

In the history of the Syrian Carmelite Congregation—Congregation of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate—the three outstanding names are those of Rev. Fr. Thomas Palakkal, Rev. Fr. Thomas Porookara and Rev. Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara. The first conceived the idea of starting a religious society of some kind in Kerala. Father porookara entertained the idea of fleeing away from the world to the wilderness like the ascetics of old; but father Chavara, although he liked the idea of a religious society, was not in favour of a flight from the world. Hence they decided to place

the matter before Father Thomas Palakkal whom the two held in high esteem and veneration. Father Palakkal gladly accepted and heartily approved their idea of founding a religious society of some kind. The next day himself and father Porookara went to the bishop, Msgr. Maurelius Stabilini. a Calced Carmelite (O. C. D.) for help and guidance in the matter.

The bishop knew the pretty well; Father Thomas Palakkal was the chief of the diocesan consultors and Father Porookara was his Secretary. They were the most erudite and holy priests of the day. Naturally enough the bishop was rather reluctant to part with their services, both to himself and to his diocese. The bishop, who knew to draw good out of evil, patiently heard them and approved of their idea and tried to convince them that the demand of the Church at that time was that they should form themselves into a service-centred religious society, independent and indigenous, living with among and for the people. He emphatically discouraged the idea of a flight from the world.

The fathers were convinced of the necessity of such a religious society and agreed to the proposal of the bishop. Thereupon the bishop asked them to draw up a petition, rather an episcopal circular delineating therein the nature and scope of the religious community they had envisaged and exhorting the faithful to reach out financial aid for the same. They lost no time in drawing up such a petition-

circular—and submitting it to the bishop. Immensely pleased with it, the bishop sealed it with his hearty approbation and headed the subscription list with a good amount. (This circular is considered an official, episcopal approbation in as much as it contained also the nature and scope of the society.)

No sooner did they obtain the much desired official, episcopal approbation than Father Porookara started on his fund-raising tours of the country. With sufficient funds at their command, the pioneers and other well-wishers started in different directions seeking for a spot suitable to build their temporary 'Monastery' whence to start their activities. At long last Fr. Porookara and Fr. Chavara hit upon the hillock at Mannanam as the best suited one. The natural setting of the country side was so appealing that all his colleagues applauded the discovery and arrangements were forth with set a foot for the construction of the temporary shed and for the laying of the foundation stone of the first house of the first independent and indigeneous religious society in modern India.

On May 11, 1831, Father Thomas Porookara in the presence of the bishop, Msgr. Maurelius Stablini, Father Thomas Palakkal, Father Chavara, over fifty priests and hundreds of lay people laid the foundation stone for the first religious house. It is indeed the red-letter day in the annals of the congregation. Here it must be mentioned that it was his

ill-health that prevented the bishop from laying the foundation stone himself.

Immediately after, on Dec. 8, 1831, Msgr. Stabilini sent for the new community his official-episcopal-ecclesiastical-approbation together with a rule of life and work consisting of ten articles. It was given under his own hand, signed and sealed and the fathers of the new religious community began their life and work according to them.

Ten years after, in 1841, Fr. Thomas Palakkal was called away to his eternal reward and five years hence, in 1846, Father Porookara followed him. Thus it fell to the lot of Father Chavara the task of completing the work they had begun together. No doubt it was a difficult one for him to handle alone. But relying on divine providence, he rose equal to the occasion and threw himself heart and soul in to the work.

In the wake of the Portuguese there had come to Kerala several religious orders such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites. The founding fathers had learned of them and were quite familiar with those of their times. From them they had come to know that their Orders were approved by the Holy See either as Pontifical or exempt. Naturally enough Father Chavara desired to obtain for his congregation such an approbation from Rome.

To this end Father Chavara approached the successors of Stabilini, one after another. They

were Msgr. Francis Xavier, Msgr. Ludovic and Msgr. Bernardine. The first two, simple and saintly as they were, desired nothing but the good of the new religious society. They desired very much that this community should grow up independant and indigenous; they assured father Chavara that they would certainly help him to realise his long-cherished dream and to this end, they carried on numerous correspondence with the Holy See. But before they could realise the *desideratum* both were called away, one to his eternal reward in 1844 and the other to Rome in 1853.

Least discouraged by these unhappy turn of events, father Chavara approached Msgr. Bernardine who was not so very favourable as his immediate predecessors. He requested him to obtain for his religious congregation the approbation of the Holy See. But he was not easily moved. He put father Chavara and the little community to several very serious tests as if to try their constancy. They stood them all with the utmost submissiveness and patience. At last Msgr. Bernardine, instead of obtaining for them the approbation of the Holy See, sent them the **REGULAE & CONSTITUTIONS** of the first Order of Carmel with instructions to note down the changes desired and return it.

Now the small community at Mannanam had swelled to over thirty including priests, clerics in minor orders and aspirants. Least suspecting any other motive in the bi-hop, the Servant of God assembled the community, read out the

instructions of the bishop and, in consultation with them, noted down the changes to suit to those in a torrid zone and the needs and demands of the times, the church and country and returned to the bishop. But utterly regardless of their suggestions, Msgr. Bernardine sent back the constitutions of the first order with such changes as he thought fit. This plunged the whole community into utter despair. The strict law of enclosure, too many fasts, too many community exercises etc. were all such as to defeat the very purpose for which they had formed themselves into a community of religious. Father Chavara on behalf of himself and of the whole community wrote that the Constitutions would defeat the very end of the community and that they were too exacting. But the bishop was inexorable. He persisted in his stand that they should accept them and that those unwilling might quit. He further noted that father Marcel (missionary) would be sent to preach the retreat preparatory to the profession of vows and that the rules of the constitutions would be enforced from the very commencement of the retreat. Here it will not be out of place to quote Father Varkey parappuram, the chronicler. He wrote, "The members of the community felt aggrieved, discouraged and disappointed at them; humbly they protested against the imposition of the new constitutions; but it was of no avail: Msgr. Bernardine was inexorable; he persisted that those unwilling might go away.....".

The paternal heart of the Servant of God throbbed with sorrow. He could not bear the idea

of parting with those who had first come to join the community and till that day had lived together observing the rules they first got from Msgr. Stabilini; all these years they had lived together, dined together, prayed and worked together for the glory of God and the extension of His kingdom. It was indeed a great shock. Hence entirely throwing himself into the hands of God, father Chavara, persuaded his confreres to go into the retreat and there in to make their final decision.

The master preacher, Fr. Marcel O. C. D. (a missionary) reached in time and commenced the retreat together with the enforcement of the new rules.

The retreat over, the day dawned for the profession of vows of those that chose to abide with them. We might say it was a cloudy day, a day of throbbing of hearts and shedding of tears, for, the chronicler adds, "..... half the number of the community held away.....". The others relying on divine providence made their vows feeling aggrieved at the fate of those that were compelled to withdraw. What did they ask for, What did they get instead, Did they ask for bread and were they offered a serpent? Do the baneful effects of this imposition still linger on?

On December 8, 1855, early in the morning before mass, father Chavara read aloud before father Marcel O. C. D., the representative of the bishop, Msgr. Bernardine, the words of profession

of the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. This over, after mass, father Chavara in the capacity of the supreme head of the community received the vows of the other ten that remained. Father Chavara was till his death in 1871, the prior or prior general of the new religious community. Besides the mother house at Mannanam, he founded also the houses at Coonammavu, Vazhakulam, Elthuruthu, Pulincunnu, Ambazhakad and Mutholi.

SEMINARIES

St. Thomas himself had ordained and appointed local men to be priests of the church in this part of the world. providentially, there has never been a shortage of priests here so far. That was primarily responsible for the unbroken continuity and progress of the church in Malabar. This sufficiency was brought about by a few seminaries in different places. To start with, they were small institutions. Later on major seminaries were established in noted centres like Cranganore, Vaipicot, Sampallor, Angamali, Alangat, Kaduthuruthy and Verapoly, by missionaries. Many of these disappeared in course of time and only the one at Verapoly continued to function during the 19th century.

At the time the religious house was founded at Mannanam, there was a crying need for a major theological seminary. Naturally the farseeing promoters of the Congregation were not blind to it and a new seminary was started.

at Mannanam in 1833. There was also the seminary at Pallipuram. The success of the seminary at Mannanam was appreciated very much by the Arch bishop Msgr. Francis Xavier, who encouraged it in every possible way. Soon after the death of Fr. Palakal he promoted Fr. Chavara as the Malpan. The order issued by the Archbishop is still preserved at Mannanam. It reads as follows:

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

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

After the death of Fr. Porockara Fr. Chavara was solely in charge of the affairs of the seminary. He found that the building at Mannanam was not sufficient to serve the needs of a growing community. He ambitiously planned to start a central seminary on a grand scale. He drew up a scheme for the purpose and made a public appeal seeking the co-operation of all the parishes in the diocese. In it he pointed out to the parents necessity and responsibility of giving proper

education to the children and suggested the raising of two big establishments in a central place chosen by the bishop. In one of the two boys were to be taught Tamil, English, Latin, and Syriac. The second was for those who completed the course there and are found desirous or pursuing theological studies worthy of Holy Orders. All that meant money which had to come from the different parishes. Each parish was called upon to contribute a portion-say a tenth of its annual net income.

There was considerable delay in executing a suggestion such as this and the pressing need for priests did not leave much time for it. So under instructions from the Archbishop two other seminaries were opened one at Vazhakulam and the other at Elthuruthu in 1866 and 1868 respectively. A bigger seminary was however started at Verapoly in 1866 and in course of time it absorbed all the others and became a common central one. In 1887, the Carmelite Congregation was taken under the direct control of the Holy See and was relieved from Verapoly. This led to the diminution in the strength of the Carmelite Seminary. The common seminary at Mannanam functioned as such only till 1894. Afterwards all aspirants for priesthood had to go to the seminary at Puthenpally. The Verapoly seminary was transferred to Puthenpally - (This has now been transferred to Mangalapuzha, Alwaye). Catholic Malabar has all along enjoyed the fruits of the loyal and steady service of Fr. Chavara in preparing labourers for the vineyard.

of our Lord. The service the Carmelite Seminaries have rendered to the church in Malabar, is gratefully appreciated and remembered to this day. It may be recalled that Msgr. Charles Lavigne, S. J. Vicar Apostolic of Kottayam sent a note to Mannanam thanking the congregation for its memorable work in the seminaries.

PRESS APOSTOLATE

Fr. Chavara was dreaming of a printing and publishing institute ever since he set foot in Mannanam with the idea of a Monastery. But the financial implications were far too much for his resources and he could have done but little for long. But his conviction of what a printing press meant for the causes so dear to his heart kept him always working for it.

It is said that the first printing press in India was set up in Goa by the Portuguese in 1556. Subsequently they established two more one at Cranganore, and the other at Vaipikot. Some say that printing in Malayalam was undertaken for the first time at the latter place. At the time of Fr. Chavara founding his monastery at Mannanam, there were only two printing concerns in Travancore, the Government Press at Trivandrum and the C. M. S. Press at Kottayam. He was so keen that he even thought of fabricating an wooden press to start with. He went to see the working of the press at Kottayam. But he was not allowed even to see it. So he went to Trivandrum, saw how the

printing was done in the Government press. He went back and made models of the press and got a working Press made by local carpenters. That is the first press which set the present Mannanam St. Joseph's Press working. A smith of the C. M. S. Press, Kottayam at that time, cast the metal types for Fr. Chavara's first wooden press. A certain Mr. Kurian, formerly of the Government Press, Trivandrum, was engaged on the printing section and a Jew from Cochin who had some training in binding at Bombay for the binding section. But there was considerable difficulty in securing paper and ink. As one suggestion failed he tried another, till finally he got a supply much in excess of his requirements and he and his agents found it difficult to pay in full for it. It led his agents into very humiliating bargains, but ultimately a portion of the supply was returned to the suppliers themselves and he got over the embarrassment.

At that time permission was needed to publish books. This he secured from the palace through the influence of the then Resident, General Cullen. Thus after several set backs and trials he finally succeeded in publishing the first book from Mannanam "Ganapiyoosham" (Spiritual Nectar) in Malayalam. Printing of the kind was far from paying in those days. He was driven to very severe straits. He found it impossible to pay even the workmen's wages. He was almost driven to the verge of despair. One day as he was coming out after an importunate prayer

to St. Joseph to help him, in his dire need a strange visitor from a place about 12 miles distant, called upon him and offered him five hundred chs. (Rs. 17½) and promised him more help. It was thought to be a positive gift inspired by St. Joseph the patron of this Press and Monastery.

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

HIS SCHOLARSHIP

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

Fr. Palakal had noticed the literary talents of Cyriac when a boy and sent him to Verapoly to gain further porficiency in Latin. But owing to some unexpected circumstances, he had to return from there. He then went to Thanki and there he learned Latin at the hands of the missionary priest, Fr. Main. A teacher was brought down from Trichur to instruct him in Sanskrit. The mastery he had over the language is well reflected in the many poems and other writings he had left to posterity. He is one among the most talented Catholic writers since the days of Fr. Governador Paremmakkal. Some 100 years ago, there were very few authors who could claim anything like the achievement of Fr. Chavara in this line. His work "Nalagamam" written in two volumes, spread out over the period, 1829 to 1870, is a true historical picture of the church in Malabar. His history of the Rocos Schism is also a valuable authoritative document. The poem "Atmanuthapam" is mostly and truly autobiographical. The "Lamentations of the Repentant Soul", "Parting Advice of a Dying Parent", and some other minor works are the most devotional among his writings.

Fr. Chavara was not among those who had the benefit of higher university education. Even in the seminaries there were not such advanced courses of instruction in Theology and Morals as there is today. The Bible was the main subject of study then. It is no exaggeration to say that he knew the Bible almost by heart. He had studied its implications so well, that he could have held his ground on Theology and Morals even against those foreign missionaries who had special instruction in these subjects. They marvelled at his great wisdom. It cannot be said that his wisdom and knowledge were all the outcome of any special study. It is difficult to account for it, except against the background of the traditions of a church which holds up for our veneration. St. Teresa of Avila (who had not even seen the portals of a University) as one of the great Doctors of the church, and St. Catherine of Sienna, who (herself illiterate) could dictate notes and letters that held Kings and Popes, spell-bound and enthralled by their literary perfection.

There were only few Syrian Churches, if any at all, in Malabar which Fr. Chavara had not visited in his capacity as the "Vicar General" of the Syrians. He invariably preached in all the churches he visited. His winning eloquence, ringing voice and special talents in driving home certain favourite ideas of his are still remembered and recounted in high esteem. He was ever willing and ready to preach to any congregation. Even when speaking at short notice, he

never failed to impress. Several instance of his impressive extempore sermons are popularly talked about to this day. The panegyrics he preached at the funeral service of Archbishops Bernardine and Francis Xavier, are often quoted as outstanding examples of his great talents in this direction.

EDUCATIONIST

In addition to his being a brilliant scholar in literature and the sciences Fr. Cyriac Elias was a great educationist. Till his time, the church in Malabar had not advanced much in the field of Education. But proficient, as we have seen, in different world languages, he became a powerful influence in the cause of Catholic Education.

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

As Vicar General of the Syrians, he took a very bold step, for which the country at large should be grateful to him. He issued a mandate, calling upon all parish churches under his jurisdiction to raise schools attached to each of them. He was too persistent for its execution. How he executed these directions through the monasteries he founded is well known. He had planned a central college for Catholics. But it did not materialize owing to various unfavourable circumstances. If today the Catholics of Malabar are literate to a high degree, it is largely because of the farsighted policy of Fr Cyriac Elias, in the establishment of a school for each parish. The Syrian Catholics who were thus guided and led by him, have now to their credit 9 colleges, 23 high schools, 18 industrial schools, 134 elementary schools 58 middle schools, a Sanskrit college and a commercial school. He was anxious for spreading English education. The first English High school of Syrian Catholics was founded in 1885 at Mannanam.

The educational activities of the Carmelite Congregation have won the esteem and recognition of both political and ecclesiastical authorities. Members of the royal family have condescended to be patrons of their institutions or otherwise co-operated with their activities. Msgr. Zaleski, a former Delegate Apostolic to India in an official report, has commended the congregation for its special work in the field of education saying "among your modern activities, the schools and boarding houses and hostels form

the most important ones always. You have already demonstrated your special talents in this line”.

THE ROCOS SCHISM

For nearly three centuries the church which St. Thomas founded in Malabar was ruled over by native bishops ordained by the Apostle himself and the—irlegitimate successors. But since the fourth century, the administration was through foreign bishops ordained and sent to Malabar by the Patriarch of Babylon. Though foreigners by nationality, they had the same Syrian Rite and they got along fairly well with the people here. But in the sixteenth century after the Synod of Diamper, the administration of the native church passed on through Don Menesis, the Archbishop of Goa, to Latin bishops. The Portuguese rulers were not familiar with the Syrian Rites and social connections. Further they were lacking in a spirit of accommodation. All this ultimately led to the deterioration of the Syrian Church in many respects.

Leaders of the community in Malabar proud of their ancestry and noble traditions, resented to his trend of affairs and organized themselves to safeguard their interests. They solicited of the authorities in Rome and Portugal to appoint Syrian bishops to Malabar to preserve and promote their social and cultural integrity. But such requests did not meet with favour or success. This led to further alienation between the

foreign rulers and the members of the old rite, The more adventurous among the latter volunteered to go in person to the western countries concerned and fight for their recognition Fr. Antony Kudakkachira and Fr. Antony Thondanad led a party of young men to Babylon. The former unfortunately died there. But the latter, while staying at Moussal finally succeeded in persuading patriarch Joseph Audo, to send a bishop to study the condition of the Syrians in Malabar. Accordingly the Patriarch sent bishop Thomas Rocos to Malabar. The news of a Syrian bishop coming to Malabar was hailed heartily by the Syrians. But Rocos was not designated as a bishop of Malabar. Even the commission he held from the Patriarch was without the sanction of the Holy see. But the impostors pretended that his appointment was effected with the permission of Rome. Efforts to the Latin Bishops to vindicate the hollowness of their claims were mostly ineffective. Fr. Chavara was aware of the dangerous situation and forthwith he issued from Mannanam a statement under his hand and seal explaining the position.

On 9th May 1861, Rocos landed in Cochin. He was received and led in procession to Thykkattuchery encouraged and directed by parayil Tharakan. Fr. Antony Thondanad, as secretary to the bishop wrote to all the churches intimating them the arrival of the bishop and requesting their recognition and homage. Fr. Elias Chavara too was informed. A great many rushed

to the new bishop and paid him their respects and compliments and received his 'blessing'. They planned to secure the monasteries at Mannanam and Elthuruth as residences for him. Fr. Elias aware of these demonstrations had hastened to contact the bishop and ask him his credentials. But the satellites of the bishop saw to it that their trick was not easily revealed. They refused Fr. Elias permission to see or speak with the bishop. They even tried to humiliate and molest him.

Fr. Elias and his Congregation tried their best to prevent the schism from spreading. Several prominent laymen were on his side. When he found that the schismatics were unruly and interfering with his fold he reported the matter to the Travancore and Cochin Governments. The strict measures adopted by the Government of Cochin soon brought them some what under control. But the schism was spreading. A large portion of the faithful aligned themselves with the new Syrian Bishop and their strength grew. Of the 155 Syrian churches then existing, 86 unconditionally accepted Rocos and 30 gave him partial recognition. The position was very grave and fraught with dire consequences. Archbishop Bernardine could think of no other alternative to fight the schism than giving a legitimate Syrian bishop. His first choice was undoubtedly Fr. Chavara. But he with his heroic spirit of renunciation declined to accept such an honour but the responsibility. So he was appointed as their Vicar General, with wide and unusual powers over his faithful. This was in June 1861, just a month

after Bishop Rocos had landed. The decree appointing the Vicar General ran as follows, after the usual formula of salutation and blessing.

“For the information of Very Rev. Fr. Chavara, the beloved prior of Mannanam and other monasteries: considering the difficulties of looking after the needs of all the Christians who have been under our jurisdiction for long considering our advancing years and consequent weakness and dislocations, and realizing that from our control of their affairs, the clergy and laity are not profiting spiritually, and because of the present happenings, as allowed and directed by the Council of Trent to appoint a Vicar General. When necessary, convinced of your courage, skill, knowledge and saintliness. I do hereby appoint you as the Vicar General of the Syrians in Malabar, to look after their spiritual needs and to govern both the clergy and the laity, with such powers as are generally given by us in the accompanying note. I pray God to give you the grace to minister to the spiritual needs of the faithful attending all our Syrian Churches.”

Once officially appointed as the Vicar General, he strenuously and authoritatively worked to establish order and tranquility in the church. His first concern was to expose the pretensions of Rocos. For this he formally addressed a letter to His Holiness Pius IX requesting information. This was on 19th June 1861. He received an early reply on 7th October duly informing him that Rocos was not legally

sent by the Pope. A detailed communication from the Pope was also promised in it. The confirmatory communication under the hand and seal of His Holiness himself was despatched to Fr. Chavara on September 5th of the same year.

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

They came out in the open and indulged in severe attacks on Fr. Chavara and his followers. Their propaganda led to serious developments in Places like Aranattukara, Trichur and Ollur. They openly accused Fr. Chavara and other Carmelites of false propaganda. Defying all charges and criticisms Fr. Chavara and his colleagues in religion travelled widely in Malabar, proclaiming the justice of their position with respect to the schism. This led to the reclamation of several parishes from the schism and the re-establishment of several centres in the faith. It is also mostly due to the work and activities of Fr. Chavara that at least a few churches were preserved intact throughout, without ever falling into schism at all. History records that the churches at Muttam, Pallipuram, Vaikom, Parur, Ampallur, Kumpalam, Kodavechoor, Muhamma, Tattarampally, Chennankary, Champakulam, Edathua, Pulincunoo, Thuruthy, Thottakad, Vaipur, Manimala, Nedumkunnam, Kanjirappally, Areethara,

Kurumpanadam, Kudamaloor and Kaipuzha never accepted Rocos. A few families under the jurisdiction of Arnattukara, Ollur, Kandasamkadavu, Parappur and Chittattoor churches also are seen to have been loyal to the lawful authority during all these troubled years.

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

not forthwith quit Malabar. The Patriarch of Babylon also renewed his order recalling him.

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

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

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

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

The persistent fight against this schism, with its triumphant conclusion was a major achievement of Fr. Chavara. Several times even his life was threatened. But he did not flinch or waver. In recognition of the great service he thus rendered to the church, the Holy Father Pope Pius IX sent an acknowledgement written and signed by himself.

CARMELITE CONVENTS

C. M. C.

The Carmelite convents in Malabar are as much to be appreciated as the Congregation of

Carmelite priests and lay brothers, considering the great influence they both exerted and continue to exert on the church. Fr. Chavara is the founder of this congregation of sisters. Fr. Leopold, who was also equally interested in the formation of religious houses for women considerably helped Fr. Chavara. The Archbishop of Verapoly gladly approved it. Fr. Leopold and the successor of Fr. Chavara, Fr. Kuriakose Porukara Prior General of the Congregation, have both paid unqualified tribute to the great interest, zeal and wisdom, with which Fr. Chavara organized the convents as centres from where Christian Education and culture were to spread among the women of the community. He had envisaged them also as enclosures for those women who wished to dedicate their lives to prayer, mortification and service of souls.

You may wonder to hear that Fr. Chavara founded the first convent with capital of rupees 18 of which Rs. 40 were collected from the churches at Gnarakal and Alleppey and the balance was a donation from his monasteries. The enclosure that he put up for the convent at Coonammavu was mostly of bamboo mats and coconut fittings. He had built a common prayer hall refectory and three single rooms for the nuns, all walled in from the outside. The first members of this new Congregation were the widow Elisba, her daughter Anna Thresia of the Karuthedath Parish and Elizabeth of Puthenangady Vaikom. They came to live in the new convent on February 13th, 1866.

Two days after, four postulants were received and they were given the hair-woven scapular.

He was not satisfied with such a temporary shed for the 'nuns'. He toured the southern districts to raise funds to put up a permanent house for them and a school building and boarding house for girl students. In the course of eight months the fund grew to Rs. 8000. The amount was sufficient for him to complete the building for which the foundation was laid in June 1866 and completed early in March 1867. On the 27th of March the four postulants were transferred to the new house, on the same day they were vested with the habit of the religious and awarded Constitution and Rules designating them as the "Third Order of Carmelites". Aspirants to the new Order arrived from even distant places and in a short time the necessity for establishing sister-houses in other places were made urgent. Branch houses were founded at Mutholy (1888), Verapoly (1890), Ampazhakatt (1897), Karukutty (1899), Parur (1910), Ernakulam (1915), Gnarakal (1925), and subsequently in several other places.

The year 1887 was a turning point in the Kerala Church history. The ecclesiastical administration of St. Thomas Syrian Christians, who claim to be the Apostolic Church in India, was brought under Trichur and Kottayam Dioceses. This division had its impact in the indigenous religious Congregations too. Consequently those sisters of the Latin Rite were trans-

ferred to Varapuzha in 1889 and this branch Congregation, then known as T. O. C. D., is now known as C. T. C. Those of the Syrian Rite, then known as T. O. C. D., is now known as C. M. C.

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

SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

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

First, ofcourse, he had to start with the clergy. He saw to it that the seminaries under him specially tried to enforce the greatest discipline among the students. He effected the

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

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

Not satisfied with concentrating on the education of the well-to-do-, he interested himself in the re-habilitation of the under-privileged both materially and morally. He started missionary activities and tried to spread secular as well as religious education among them. The far-reaching effects of the uplift work he started among the down trodden are now too well known for further comments. The home for the destitute he put up at Kainakary stands forth as a monument to his charity and consideration for those in want.

He introduced several reforms in the administration of the churches. Those who have studied the reforms he brought about in the

church, have compared him with Sir. T. Madhava Rao and his administrative reforms in Travancore.

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

Another of his memorable contributions to the Syrian Liturgy is the preparation of the Breviary. The prayers for different days and seasons were all scattered over four different books, Hudra, Kaskol, Gaza and Kala. It was not easy to refer to all these and recite the prayers proper for each day. Even as a cleric

he had already realised this difficulty and compiled a compositive volume including all the prayers for the different occasions. With the permission of the Holy See Archbishop Leonard commissioned him to arrange the prayers of the Breviary which he did in due time.

SAINTLY LIFE

Fr. Chavara endeared himself to all, more by virtue of his saintly life than by his grand achievements in practical life. All those who have come in contact with him including the foreign missionaries have unequivocally complimented him in this respect. Archbishop Bernardine and Fr. Marceline have on several occasions given expression to their high respect and appreciation of his sanctity in personal life and of the exemplary conduct of the religious under his guidance. Reviewing his predecessor his immediate successor observed; "By his quiet and perfectly disciplined life in the monastery, by his charity, humility, obedience and love of God, he soared in the highest planes of sanctity and encouraged others to such high perfection by advice and example." Fr. Leopold, his spiritual director and confessor says: "It is more proper to say about Fr. Chavara that he did these virtuous things more by his sanctity and good example than by his advice and authority. He commanded the obedience and respect of others by himself being humble, charitable and obedient to his superiors". One of his own students Fr. Aloysius, who had stayed with him

for long at Manjummel recalls the memory of his revered master in the following words: He was very keen on observing the spirit of obedience, love of God and devotion to the vows of the congregation. He spent the whole time of meditation in the evening on his knees, in tears and overpowered by emotion. He had to be reminded by those near by that the allotted time was over. Other priests held him in high esteem as a superman. "The Prior General appears as an angel they used to say". Even non Catholics respected Fr. Chavara as a saintly man. He easily created the impression that he was a man specially sent by God to fulfil some special mission on earth.

APOSTLE OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

The central theme of the devotional life of Fr. Chavara was the Holy Eucharist. Saints have reached great heights of intimate union with our Lord on earth through this marvellous sacrament of love. "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood lives in Me and I in him" said our Lord. Fr. Chavara believed it and found his heaven on earth before the tabernacle. A major part of his life was lived literally in front of this heavenly abode.

Even as a boy, Fr. Chavara was impressed by this august sacrament. His desire to serve at Mass was a clear indication of this. His life in the seminary gave his colleagues further examples of his ardent love of Christ in this

sacrament. His career as a priest was unceasingly utilised in propagating this devotion all over Malabar. The grace and charm that adorned his face while he was lost in meditation in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament have been noted by many of his colleagues and friends who could only describe it as "Angelic". The great attention and care he bestowed on the cleanliness and order of the church and precincts also arose from his devotion to the Holy Eucharist.

He preached devotion to this sacrament as a means for the growth and reformation of the church in Malabar. He recorded specific instructions on this devotion in the document he has bequeathed as his will and testament to his people. "Exhortations of a good dying parent."

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

The Fourty Hours' Adoration, first started in 1866 has now become an annual feature of all important parishes in Malabar and these days have also become a period of general repentance and communion for the faithful.

Considering the surprisingly large number of communions made during these seasons every year, this one activity alone will be ever hailed as a lasting monument to him.

Devotion to the Mother of God is co-existent with devotion to Christ. It transcends all the veneration we give to the other saints of God. In fact the apostles themselves preached Marian devotion, wherever they went, as an almost necessary complementary counterpart of affection to her Son. Even non-catholics accord great respect to Mary.

Particularly in Malabar, Marian devotion had a very great hold on the people. It is popularly recognised even abroad. His Holiness the Pope, in the encyclical connected with the institution of the Syrian Hierarchy in Malabar refers to the prevalence of this devotion here to a high degree. No wonder then. Fr. Cyriac Chavara the accredited leader of the community, was ardently devoted to the Blessed Mother of God.

He was taught this devotion by his own mother. Even as a child, he was taken by her to the Church of our Lady at Vechoor and was dedicated to her cure. She continued to advise and direct him, on this meritorious devotion. She woke him up at night and encouraged him to kneel down with her and say the Rosary and other prayers in honour of the Blessed Virgin. The deep impression such insistent

advise and practice made on him is visible in the innumerable references he makes to them in his autobiographical poem the "Atmanuthapam".

The great love he had for the Mother of God fulfilled itself in many ways. When his parents and an only brother passed away leaving him the sole male heir to the partrimonial possession, he offered himself to Mary as her spiritual Child and thus ensured his vocation for priesthood. He propagated this devotion among his colleagues in the Seminary. He enjoyed explaining to almost everybody he met, the beauties of this profitable devotion.

His assiduous efforts in pushing this devotion to the forefront, secured for him the choicest blessings of Mary. The privilege of officially establishing the Carmelite Congregation in Malabar ranks foremost among them.

The part, the Congregation of Carmelites has played in popularising Marian devotion in Malabar is not small. The popularity of the scapular prevailing in the country is to a large extent due to the Carmelites. Many other expressions of devotion to the Mother of God under various appellations have now sprung up and all of these Fr. Chavara could legitimately claim to have originated.

Gratefully enough the Blessed Virgin remained with him throughout his life till on his death-bed, he could say confidently that through

the generous mediation of Mary. he was given the rare grace of preserving inviolate his baptismal innocence till death.

CHARITY

Fr. Chavara was ever alive to the one 'new' commandment, our Lord himself had enjoined on us; 'Love one another as I loved you'. An overwhelming charity was his characteristic Christian trait. He never grew tired of exhorting others to be extremely desirous of being more loved than feared by others and to count those days as empty which were not filled with charitable services to others. True to his own advice, he saw to it, that his days were spent charitably in works of social uplift, restoration of faith and salvation of souls.

Ever since his days in the seminary his charitable disposition had enough scope to manifest itself. As a priest the opportunities for selfless service were many. He would hasten to the dying even if they were stricken by the most deadly and contagious diseases. In spite of all opposition and threats during the days of the schism he went about trying to do good even to those who opposed him. As already mentioned he was the first to organise a home for the destitute and the poor at Kainakary and also to establish a "Confraternity For Happy Death". His contributions along these lines shine with redoubled splendour when it is

remembered that such organisations were conceived by him for the first time in this country.

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

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

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

PRAYER LIFE

Even as the prophet Elias, the founder of the Carmel, was wedded to a life of prayer, so was Fr. Chavara the saintly founder of Carmelites in Malabar, devoted to prayer. Love fulfills itself in frequent and intimate colloquy with the beloved. The great love Fr. Chavara always cherished for his Maker, found expression in his intimate and loving colloquies with his Lord and Master. His tried to fill his whole life with prayer. He made a complete dedication of all his conscious and unconscious efforts to the service of God. Very often he was found lost in prayer, either alone in his room, or before the Blessed Sacrament. Sometimes during the 'one hour meditation' usual in the congregation, he fell into a celestial trance and had

to be waked up to normal consciousness and feeling. The yearning to win more souls for Christ spurred him on. Constant prayer and mediation, even foregoing sleep and rest at times, marked him out as a man of prayer. The sacrifice of the Mass he offered at the Altar, impressed the faithful as exceptionally devotional.

His prayer evinced his great faith in it. He had learned to look at God and His saints in a very personal way. Among the prayers he has written, in the private notes he kept, are many revealing passages:— in which he supplicate of God, quite confidently, all that he felt in need of. When schisms threatened his institutions and all his well wishers advised him to seek Government protection he resisted and merely resorted to prayer; and his institutions were left Intact! Eye-witnesses have narrated the story of how Fr. Chavara and his assistant were once way-laid by a huge venomous serpent against which they both knelt down in prayer, till help from the neighbourhood reached them and the serpent was killed. There are instances of his having received great financial help in immediate response to prayer under straitend circumstances. How the meagar capital of Rs. 58 with which he started the convent at Coonammave swelled into Rs. 8000 in a short time can be accounted for only in terms of his confident prayer. Even spirits dared not resist the strength of his prayers. The members of a family in Kuttanad were put to very

serious inconveniences by the parading of evil spirits in the house. They tried various means to get rid of this haunting of spirits. But all were of no avail. When they approached Fr. Chavara seeking his intercession and prayers, he gave them a written Prayer, which they were instructed to recite and stick them on the walls of the house. They were over-joyed to find that this frightened the devil who let them alone ever after.

FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

“The just man believes in God. He sees God in all creation. He lives, works and hopes to die for and in Him”. These thoughts were always before Fr. Chavara. His life was fashioned in absolute conformity with them. Nothing severed him from the path of serving God. Early in life when he made the first choice of a religious life, the other make successor in his family died and this was an inducement for him to return to the world. But his faith in the glory of his mission and his conviction of the transitoriness of all things created kept him to his vocation. He had learned the art of rising to his Creator by using creatures as mere footstools. The many poems he had composed after meditating on these things while at Coonammavu show the strong uncompromising nature of his faith in and regard for the supernatural.

This faith also gave him a feeling of strong,

unquestioning loyalty to the visible representatives of God on earth. The papacy and the other high ranks in the ecclesiastical hierarchy drew forth his great veneration and respect. The fervour of the fight he put up against the schism engineered by Mar Thomas Rocos was only one of the manifestations of his belief in the integrity of the Catholic Church. Fr. Leopold O. C. D. has commented on the great anxiety Fr. Chavara displayed for the welfare of the Church Militant on earth, -how solicitous he was to further her cause and how expectantly he wanted to see her in glory! what else could explain the courage and daring that animated Fr. Chavara in his insistent fight against the schism.

The capital from which he drew endlessly to execute many of his schemes was nothing but his faith, which gave him as its necessary counterpart hope. We have seen how he started some of his biggest institutions with little more than a few rupees in hand and yet how easily he was able to complete the works, several of which have grown to dazzling proportions to-day. He has himself expressed surprise, at all that has come to pass and acknowledged the continuous providential protection he always enjoyed. "How have these things come to pass: who called me out of my house; how was the congregation formed; how was I called Prior; how this and this and all this do I deserve these Hardly any- except that God has made me work thus: that his will, will be

fulfilled" Such realization of his absolute dependence on God, was more than amply rewarded. "My soul hath hoped in the Lord; I shall not be confounded" the Psalmist had sung and Fr. Chavara had lived by its charm.

Such faith and hope could not but have endowed him with a great personal Love of God which was manifested in all his works. He had resolved to live a life of Prayer and devotion, whether others observed him or not. He had grown into an ardent apostle of love, living and preaching the message of love. His contemporaries, both elders and juniors, have unanimously acclaimed the zealous devotion for which his sermons were known. He reformed the faithful entrusted to his care by Exhortations' by example, by reproof and by granting the pardon of God in the confessional. He was also what his Master wished and promised. His first disciples to be, — one among the "fishers of men". Some of his sermons are quoted even today as classics' like those on the Passion and Death of our Lord, usually given on Good Fridays.

He adhered to his devotion to the spiritual life till the very end. In his sick bed, visitors were not allowed to talk on anything other than spiritual matters. A written notice posted in his room demanded such restraint from all Conversation on spiritual matters was his most welcome relief when in pain.

His was an active Love which sought fulfilment in achieving much for the Beloved. Despite the manifold and varied opposition, he succeeded in *doing* much. The formation of the Third Order of Carmelites, the many acts of social progress, the fight against the schism, the founding of the convents for the nuns, these and many other deeds of his were achieved at great cost. But he believed in St. Paul who said: "Charity is patient; is kind charity feels no envy; charity is never perverse or proud, never insolent, does not claim its rights, does not brood over injury, takes no pleasure in wrong doing, but rejoices at the victory of truth — sustains, believes, hopes, endures to the last." Much ahead of his time as he was in intelligence and knowledge in general, he always submitted to his spiritual directors and ecclesiastical superiors like a child

Busy about material achievements which he believed would help the spiritual progress of thousands of his countrymen, he was never averse to mortification and penance. He used to fast on all Fridays and Saturdays, taking only a little milk in the morning. The suffering on his death bed was endured with the most heroic spirit of Joy and resignation to the will of God.

EXEMPLARY RELIGIOUS

The Founders of all Religious Orders have been specially inspired by the Holy Ghost

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

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

the strict adherence of the members to their declared Constitution and objectives. From the very beginning till the very end Fr. Chavara subjected himself to the Order with the interest and enthusiasm of a novice. He regarded the Order in such esteem as though it were his own mother. It was to him, his paradise on earth and he encouraged his disciples to hold it in similar high esteem. He would never willingly absolve any one—including himself—of the responsibility of conforming to the Order. Tedious travels, old age, weakness and even infirmity hardly succeeded in making him relax much. He would relax when absolutely necessary, but after asking permission from his spiritual director. He was ever anxious to have his meals with the community; frugal and austere as they were. Even while sick and laid up, he tried to manage with the common meals.

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

The advise he gave to his fellow-monks was often very touching: "dearly beloved brethren" he would say. "The strength of these monastic houses is not in the bricks and stones where-with they are built, but in you, your devotion and your virtues. We have not come in here, seeking a living, having had no other alternative in the outside world. The joys of the world were ours had we cared to accept them. But we voluntarily gave up our wealth and our relations for the sake of our Lord. And now, if we by our lethargy and indifference, give up our Lord, what a folly, what a fancy! Many other examples of his advise and instructions could be quoted to show how much he laboured to permeate his religious with the idea that the real greatness of the order lay not in material acquisition but in their charity, humility and sanctity. He demanded that each religious should look up to his superior as he would to Christ and thus to regulate his relationship with him. He was himself their first superior, and he was ever careful to see that the members of his Congregation never had any unbecoming example from him. He tried to imitate our Lord and thus win the esteem and confidence of the subordinates. He did not wait for his monks to go to him for their necessities, but he volunteered to find them out himself and give them the needed. He was even willing to forego his own necessities to a very large extent. Luxury was far from him, but at times he mixed with others participating in their expeditions and other recreations. This

was mainly to know the individuals personally and then treat them with the sympathy and consideration each one deserved.

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

DEATH

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

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

Pacifying them he said why should you grieve, after all? All men must die some time or other, who or whatever they may be! My hour is come. By the grace of God, I constantly had the vision of this hour before me and I was preparing for it. My parents always kept me mindful of the Holy Family, which was ever my protection and I am confident of it. I dedicate you all and this humble congregation to the same Holy Family. Rely on it. Let the Holy Family reign over your hearts. Do not be worried or upset for I am dieing. Willngly submit yourselves to the ways of Providence. God is all powerful and infinitely merciful. He will give you a new Prior, who can do much more good for you and our Congregation. Stand fast in the observance of all the rules of our elders, our Congregation and the Church. Love

our Lord Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament with all your heart, Draw from that fountain the waters of eternal life. You members of the order and particularly elders and Priors among you, love one another — be truly charitable. Thus will God be glorified through the Congregation which will also grow extensively". This rather long farewell, merged into a blessing to them all and a request for Extreme Unction. The Last Sacraments were soon administered to him. He received them with great calm and resignation, repeating the words of the prayers with the priest. Lapses followed at intervals. But whenever he woke up he was murmuring to himself ejaculations of love. Once during the night there was a serious development but he survived till the next morning. On the third of January, 1871 by about half past seven while the priests stood around praying God for absolving and blessing him, he breathed his last. He had completed a sojourn here which lasted sixty five years, ten months and twenty five days.

THE END

News of his death soon spread all over Malabar. The bishop was close by on parochial visit to S. Parur. He was prompt to come and officiate the services for the dead. People who heard of his death came in crowds to Coonammavu. The sanctity of Fr. Chavara was so well known that the next morning an unprecedented large crowd collected around his mortal remains.

The body was dressed in priestly robes and brought to the Church for the people to have a last look and pay their homage. Later, the dress was changed into the simple habit of a religious more becoming a member of an ascetic order.

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

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

The remains of Fr. Chavara were transferred from Coonammavu to Mannanam, with the special permission of the Delegate Apostolic, when the C. M. I. house at Coonammavu was appropriated by the latinites on the strength of the order of Rome. They were reinterred with proper honors at Mannanam in 1889. Where a marble slab was laid on 2nd July 1929. In 1953 again it was reinterred to the grave in the

middle of the Church where the precious remains of the Saintly Carmelite await the day of the glorious resurrection.

I shall conclude this treatise with the English translation of the appreciation written by Fr. Leopold in Italian on 3-1-1871.

"Today January 3, 1871, Tuesday at 7. 15 in the morning, Fr. Cyriac Elias of the Holy Family, the first Prior, died after a life of great innocence. He could declare before his death that he had never lost the baptismal innocence. He was exercising himself in the practice of all virtues, especially in the simplicity of heart, living faith, tender obedience, and devotion to the most Blessed Sacrament, to the Bl. Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. He has undergone immense hardships for the good of the christians of Malabar, especially during the time of the schism of Rochos, when he, being appointed the Vicar General of the Syrians, showed his extraordinary devotion to the Holy See. He fought day and night to arrest the spread of the schism, from which he could save not less than 40 parishes. On this account, the Holy Father Pope Pius IX sent him a letter expressing his great satisfaction. He was the founder and the first Prior of the Third Order Carmelites of Malabar. He founded also the convent of nuns after undergoing many hardships. On account of his endearing virtues, learning, and profound knowledge of the Syriac language he enjoyed great influence on the Syrians of Malabar.

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

On holy and beautiful soul, pray for me.

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

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