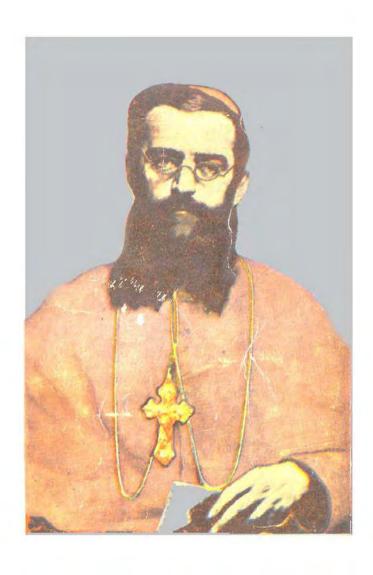
# ARCHBISHOP BENZIGER



By Rev. Fr. CYRIL MOTHA

# ARCHBISHOP BENZIGER



HOLY MISSIONARY IN INDIA 1890 - 1931

By Rev. Fr. CYRIL MOTHA

# SUCCESSORS OF ARCHBISHOP BENZIGER IN THE SEE OF QUILON



Rt. Rev. Dr. Vincent Dereere O. C. D.



Rt. Rev. Dr. Jerome M. Fernandez



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Monsignor Joseph G. Fernandez

BISHOP OF QUILON

Bishop's House, Quilon, Kerala, India.

Pin: 691007.

No. 738 / 82

July 20, 1982.

I am immensely pleased and grateful that Rev. Fr. Cyril Motha could find some time, amidst all his pastoral duties, to present to the public, through this book, Archbishop Aloysius Maria Benziger O. C. D., my illustrious predecessor, as the greatest and most zealous missionary of his time. It is indeed a fact attested to by El Monte Carmelo – Burgos, Spain, Osservatore Romano. July 31, 1931 and His Excellency The Most Rev Leo P. Kierkels, Apostolic Delegate in India, and found in the recent publication "Archbishop Benziger, Carmelite in India" by Marieli and Rita Benziger. (Cfr. pg. 477, 475 and 551 respectively).

I am happy to say that Fr. Motha's book could be considered a compendium of the voluminous book of Marieli and Rita Benziger, referred to above. It affords easy reading and reveals the spirit of the Holy Bishop in his most outstanding apostolic endeavours and in the shining example of his holiness. It calls for our response to live more fully our christian vocation, as has been well expressed by His Eminence Valerian Cardinal Gracias.

The author has taken great pains to collect authentic and documentary evidences to prove to the readers the holiness of the bishop by enumerating several miracles attributed to him.

Wholeheartedly I recommend this book to the public. God bless you all.

(Sd.)

BISHOP OF QUILON.

# Our Principal

From the palm - fringed land Kerala he hails,

A strong heart and a strong mind one finds in his ways.

Toiling and praying, at this he never fails,

Honours and praises he expects not these days.

Esteem he seldom shows to the big and the small,

Reverence he is given in spite of it, by all.

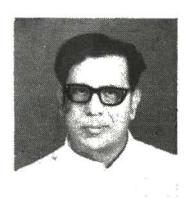
Awfully serious in the quest of reform,
Undaunted and firm which in him is inborn,
Gay at times but most often looking cold,
Uprooting in all mercilessly evil habits untold
Sociable enough yet never free,
To him nobody dare approach in glee.
Indisciplined he occasionally lifts to thoughts higher.
Never a scamp escapes his dreadful ire,
Ever on the watch is he to lift up those in mire.

Kind to innocent little smiling tots,
Always ready to supply theirs needs though lots
Charitable in thought, in word and deed,
Happinese to scatter is within his reach indeed.
Illumine enlighten, Instruct and guide he likes
Reward the desrving he rarely despises.
A conscientious worker is he, absorved in working,
Most often found at his table reading or writing
At times he walks the verandah up and down
To follow the teachers and catch their every sounds
To be able to advise correct and guide.
A!! those who may be tempted to escape and slide
May he not enjoy his work with a little pride?

Miss. Mina Magee

(ബൽഗാം സെന്റ് സേവ്യേഴ്സ് ഹൈസ്കൂളിന്റെ വാർഷിക പതിപ്പിൽ പ്രസിദ്ധീകരിച്ചത്)

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Author Rev. Fr. Cyril Motha



Assisted by Marieli and Rita Benziger



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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

#### by the Author.

- 1. My porfound thanks are due to the Benziger-Nieces Marieli and Rita, who most graciously granted permission to use any part of their Book "Archbishop Benziger Carmelite in India" for compiling this book. The first 12 Chapters, are true Extracts from the voluminous Book written and published by these two great Benziger Ladies. The Author has been scrupulously careful to be true to the historical narrations and in reproducing relevant documents from the Book of Marieli and Rita. But for them this book would have never been published.
- 3. Deeply thankful to Rev. Frs. Cyril Fernando and Josephat Maria both of the Kottar Diocese, for the documentary evidences they had collected and furnished regarding the stupendous miracle the Holy Bishop worked in those parts of Kottar. These and similar documents have helped to prove the Bishop's sanctity and power before God.
  - 4. The archives of the Holy Cross Provincial House, Quilon were opened to me, and I am perticularly thankful to the Provincial, Mother Ida for her generous cooperation.
  - The cooperation and sincere help rendered by Very Rev. Fr. Bernard Mallier and the Staff of the Catholic Press is unforgettable. For nearly two years, The Press was publishing the life-sketch scripts given by me. The press has also helped to get the scripts into the present book form.
  - P. S. 1 Neither reprint nor translation of this book is permitted except with the written permission of the Author.
    - 2 Copy of the book is available for Priests free of cost but on sending postal stamps worth Rs. 5/- for postage.

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# **FOREWORD**

"Archbishop Benziger, Holy Missionary in India," is a short account of the life and work of Aloysius Maria Benziger who was the Bishop of Quilon from 1900 to 1931. This book is a labour of love, and springs from the deep love and veneration the author has for the Archbishop.

There is a much longer account of the life and work of the illustrious Prelate in the inspiring book written by Marieli Benziger assisted by Rita Benziger. It is named "Archbishop Benziger, Carmelite in India."

The life of Archbishop cannot be written in the same manner as that of some of our Canonised Saints. His life mirrored the illustrious Saint of his Religious Order, the Great Teresa of Avila. Like her and the mystic, Saint John of the Cross, Archbishop Benziger combined in himself a life at once active and contemplative

As a young Priest, Father Benziger was the Spiritual Director and Professor in the Theological Seminary at Puthenpally (Mangalapuzha). In this assignment he found the golden opportunity for developing the natural bent of his noble soul for study and prayer. He rose to such a degree of interior life himself by guiding and teaching his proteges fear and love of God, that they soon realised a man of God was among them. But Archbishop Benziger was not to enjoy long this peace of interior life. From the contemplative life of a spiritual father, he was thrown into a milieu of active life.

The Diocese of Quilon was then not much more than a name. It needed finance; It needed Churches, Chapels, Schools. It needed reorganisation and consolidation, and all this for a vast area that sprawled over half the Kingdom of Travancore. To such a Diocese God gave Benziger as Bishop - a loving and resourceful father, a brave and far-sighted administrator. He was to be the

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instrument to bring into the true fold several thousands of non-christians and outstanding Prelates of the Jacobite Church, and thus set in motion the grouth of a flourishing Church. On the map of the then Travancore, he blazed in letters large the name of Christianity. He had to face oppositions misunderstandings and even calumny. But he knew how to win evil by good.

"Per Crucem ad Lucem" is so rhyming and also so revealing. He had walked the path of the Cross; and now he was entering into the splendour of Light uncreated. During his life Benziger was considered by many as a saintly Bishop. In his death all acclaimed that a Saint had died.

It is manifestly the desire of the Author of "Archbishop Benziger, Holy Missionary in India," that Aloysius Maria Benziger be elevated to the honours of the Altar. It is also my desire and that of all who have known him closely in life and death. Many years have passed since the Archbishop died. But his sacred memory is as green as ever in the minds and hearts of people.

Vox Populi, Vox Dei. What has to be done so that the vox populi may be confirmed by the Vox Dei? It behoves the Hierarchy of the Kerala Church in general and the Latin Hierarchy in particular to take the first steps that will eventually lead to Archbishop's beatification and canonisation.

The Monumental work published in 1977 by The Benziger Sisters, Altedena, California, is an authentic record of the life and work of Archbishop Benziger. It is an immense mine wherein is treasured all that is sublime, holy and miraculous connected with the Archbishop.

In a smaller degree, though, Father Motha's booklet attempts to portary Benziger as a holy pastor, Administrator and wonderworker. A careful reading even of this small book, will convince any one of the sanctity of the Archbishop. I have no hesitation in stating that a translation of Fr. Motha's booklet into the vernacular, will reveal to many more the holy life of the Archbishop who was always held in veneration.

Fr. Matthew Fabian, Ph D. D. D. Kottiyam, Quilon.

# INTRODUCTION

Lives of great mentall remind us We can make our lives sublime, And departing leave behind us Footsprints on the sands of time

(H. W. Longfellow)

These verses are best sung of Archbishop Benziger, who was one of the most eminent efficient zealous and holy personalities of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century. Roman Pontiffs from Leo XIII to Pius XI, Cardinals Patrick Hays, N. Y., Celso Costantini, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Progration of Faith, Eugine. Tisserant, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Oriental Churches, Cardinal Edward Mooney Apostolic Delegate of India and several contemporary Ecclesiastical dignitaries have all appraised his apostolic zeal and tremendous achievements. labours of Archbishop Benziger in India were aimed not only at the extension of the Faith but also at its preservation. behind him a rich and noble heritage of unparallelled apostolic zeal that has to inspire all his successors - Bishops and Priests, to work on the solid foundation laid by him following his foot-prints. The saintly, foresighted and resourceful Prelate laid a deep and strong foundation for the spiritual and economic development of a Diocese that embraced half of the kingdom of Travancore. Like a prudent father he provided everything for his posterity-lands all over Travancore, and money for the expansion of the house of God, after having spent huge sums collected from his family circle, and from friends all over Europe and America for building of Churches. Schools, Convents, and Monasteries as much as a human could do in 31 years. A martyr to duty, B shop Benziger worked day and night for the Diocese and his priests. He wrote thousands of letters for foreign help. He made several trips to Europe as "begging

Bishop'; yes, he begged to enrich the Diocese; he spent sleepless nights in prayer to sanctify his priests and people. He travelled the lenghth and breadth of the Diocese periodically on pastoral duty. He strengthened the new Christians with his presence, helped the poor priests and needy flock most generously and comforted them in their calamities. He worked hard for the expansion of the kingdom of God among Hindus and won over to the true Church the heads of the schismatic Jacobites of Kerala and before and along with them hundreds of Jacobite families. This wonderful aehievement is recorded in the history of the Indian Church as the most crowning success of Benziger's missionary activities. Benziger came to India as a full-fledged Carmelite. Broken in health after 31 years of indefatigable labours, permitted by Holy Father Pope Pius XI, he retired to Carmel Hill Carmelite Monastery in 1931 seeking admission as a simple Novice. The eleven years Archbishop spent there were years of deep prayer and penance - years which the annals of Carmel Hill hail as a period in which it had a living saint within its walls, until on 17th August 1942, when his holy soul flew into eternity.

The life and achievements of the great servant of God are quite unforgettable. By this little work, I humbly remind the Catholic Hierarchy of Kerala of a Great Life that is being forgotten, yet, IS A LIFE WORTHY OF A SAINT.

Fr. CYRIL MOTHA.

#### Part One

- :

#### Chapter I

## Switzerland - Benziger Family

The little Confederation of Switzerland was tremendously proud of its independence. It was the oldest democracy in the world. Now, because of this very spirit of freedom, catholic Switzerland found itself in an extremely precarious position. Religious crusaders from every part of Europe flocked to this haven of independence. Soon the happy peace - loving Swiss found themselves embroiled in religious wars.

The Benzigers of Canton Appenzel had lived there from the beginning of time. The men of that family were of granite tenacity and ardent in their faith. They were constantly fighting and there was no way for a Catholic to remain in a Protestant stronghold without suffering frightful persecution. Hence they decided on Canton Schwyzone of the first Cantons to be founded among the Urcantons. There was a famous Shrine of Our Lady in Einsiedelin. It was there they had always gone to have their babies consecrated to Our Lady after an early baptism. All the Benziger family marriages had taken place there.

The Abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Einsiedeln was one of the most powerful landlords of Europe. On 29th May 1584, the Benziger family decided to move to Einsiedeln. They had secured the approval and blessing of Father Abbot. They knew they would be safe with such a powerful lord over them.

The magnificent Abbey became an outstanding monastic school, endowed with Europe's most famous library. Foremost in the lives of the town folks, next to religion, was the creation and printing of religious books that brought hope and solace to millions upon millions of people. However with the advent of the French invasion of Switzerland in May 1798, came the wanton destruction and vicious vandalism of countless illuminated parchments —Missals and Bibles—

valuable and irreplaceable artwork that had taken centuries for the monks to achieve. Ruthless ruffians seized the Abbey's priceless printing press and senselessly burnt and ravaged all existing works produced prior to that time.

After the storm, it was the monks themselves who insisted that the Benziger men who had so long been in their employment, now to attempt and locate and rebuy the printing press, that had been sold by the revolutionary soldiers. "Bring the press back to Einsiedeln and start your own business." We are now too poor to continue the work. "All we have left is wreckage"—the Monks said. Thus it was out of the ashes of what the monks had once established, the Benzigers began their new trade as Catholic Publishers to the Holy See. In Einsiedeln millions flocked again annually to pay homage to Our Lady (whose statue was miraculously protected during the vandalism)

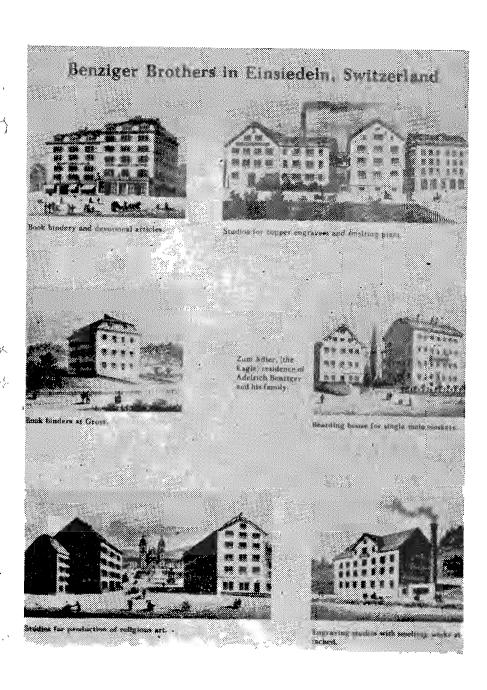
#### A Child is born

It was in this atmosphere of deep spirituality that Bishop Benziger was born on January 31st 1864 and raised in Einsiedeln as a little boy. He was the second eldest son of Governor Adelrich Benziger and Anna Marie. They had six children. Governor Benziger and his brother owned countless dwellings and every type of printing was done. They also had the finest binders of Europe. In special factories medals were minted. In every home during winter-months natives were busily occupied in producing the needed Rosaries that were sold during fair weather in the family stores.

#### Home

Benziger Home was one of the most outstanding in the community. It had existed for centuries. A large tall mansion six storeys high. Nothing obstructed its inspiring view of the Basilica. A huge semi-circular piazza with its cobblestones led right to the door of the great edifice.

For a period of time, the father of Bishop Benziger had over 2000 people in his employ as well as 200 artists. Most of these came from Germany. All in six storeys, there were book bindery and devotional articles; studios for copper engravers and melting plant; boarding house for single male-workers, studios for production for religious art; engraving studios with melting works attached; canteen



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for thousands of thousands of clients from all over the world coming for formal and informal visits. It became one of the busiest homes in the countryside. No one was ever unwelcome; there was always place and food for all his friends.

Things had gone well for Governor Benziger, the head of the firm. It was he who had been sent by his father to America in 1853 to open stores and start printing English religious books. At that time Benziger Brothers became established in New York, Cincinati and later in Chicago,

#### Chapter 2

#### Education and Technical Training

Governor Adelrich Benziger had very set ideas about the future of each of his children. At an early age he began training the boys. The eldest boy Alois most enthusiastic for any task took ill and expired most unexpectedly. So Adelrich Junior was to be trained as a financier. He would take care of business transactions for the international publishers. He excelled in both languages and figures. Young Adelrich was a tremendous success. He had a pleasing manner, and an ingratiating way with people. His teachers could not praise him enough. In the Benedictine Abbey he was blissfully happy persuing his liberal art studies. These he loved above all.

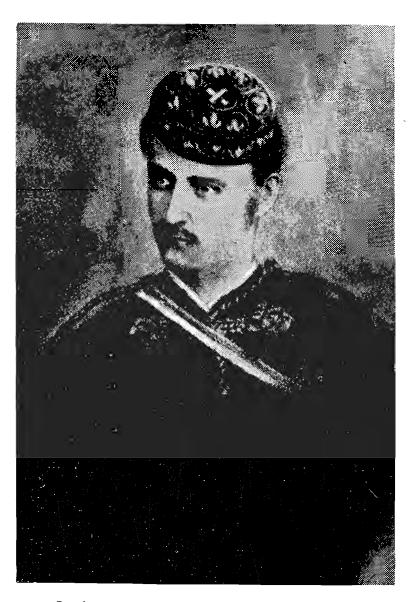
He had passed his second year of Latin with brilliant honours. He was just as successful in mathematics a subject in which he truly excelled. To the lad figures had the same appeal that poetry might hold for some one else. He was gifted with a strong and natural aptitude for languages.... He soon left for Frankfurt where his father had enrolled him – one of the most outstanding business schools in Europe. It was famed for its highly skilled technical approach to the field of business. Featured in its curriculum were such useful subjects, as sales, accounting, business techniques and the art of business correspondence in diverse languages. It was the last choice on earth that young Adelrich would personally have made for himself. He was fourteen years of age.

#### A Businessman in making

During the second week of October 1878, the young lad of fourteen looking far older than his years, accompanied his very distinguished father on a train trip that would take him away from home for the first time in his life. They were headed for the German city of Frankfurt on the main River. This was the period immediately following the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. When the Germans had thrown themselves with almost fanatical zeal into the fields of business and manufacturing, Frankfurt had mushroomed into a giant city of fantastic factories and tremendous industrial firms becoming the economic hub of all Europe. Governor Benziger had managed to get his son enrolled in the finest and most outstanding technical The two year course at the Kaufmanishe school of all Europe. Meistershule was considered one of the best in the world for technical training in the field of business. America might have something comparable to be offered. But where else in Europe was such a course to be found? The Governor had registered his son for the stiffest and most challenging business courses. Then he had found exactly the right kind of student boarding-house where the boy would receive good care and be well fed. Nothing was overlooked. Since his son was about to experience the finest training available anywhere in the technical field, the Governor now felt duty-bound that the lad's religious life was likely not to be neglected.... He realised that it was important to provide a solid religious background for the boy as well.... Together they visited Monsignor Janssen who was professor of religious history at the University and an outstanding historian in his own right. The Monsignor was one of the Governor's clients. His books on religion were published by Benziger Brothers.... "Money is no criterion when it comes to the education of my children", said Adelrich's father earnestly, "I want each of them to have the very best which is none too much when it comes to the formation of youthful minds for life' .... "My sons must know church history inside out and be able to refute all, the lies that are substituted for reality"....

#### Paternal admonitions to student Adulrich

The night before Governor Benziger left Frankfurt, he gave Adulrich a list of prominent businessmen whom he wanted his son to get to know, and gave the following memorable counsels.



Benziger, as Student in the University of Baveria

"Always remember to take notes; this is a vitally important advice which applies to the rest of your life. Keep a daily diary, which I would personally check when the term was over. Never leave anything to memory. One day it may fail you. Record all the facts. Jot down the names of all whom you meet or hear about, as well as their addresses and impressions they have made on you.......

Always try to control yourself. Then happiness will be yours. Self-denial is of utmost importance. Learn it now, it alone leads to great accomplishments and forms the spiritual within you. Remember that he who practices self-control acquires the ability to better himself.... Diligence will save you from many dangers, above all from inordinate desires. Do not permit yourself to become too sensitive or touchy.... Never repeat anything that is not useful.... Dress yourself simply. Be very tidy in your appearence, but never attract attention by what you wear.... Be a gentleman at all times.... Watch yourself with the weaker sex. When accompanying ladies, never allow yourself to become intimate. It always ends badly.... Above all never forget your morning and evening prayers.... My son, promise you will never accept money from a soul without first carefully counting what you have been given (this advice was given since Adelrich Junior did not care to count the sum of money given by Governor Benziger for personal use-just because his father stated the amount while giving it to him). Adelrich listened attentively and did not once interrupt while his father unburdened his beart and spoke at length on many serious subjects......(pages 5-6)

The parting of the father and son was difficult. The Governor's thoughtful parental advice was to remain with him always and give young Adulrich courage with which to meet his trying future. He was so conscientious in carrying out his father's wishes that by Eastertime, he had made up all his back studies missed due to late enrolment.... Adulrich's business course was by no means a waste of time. In later life he would find that the studies in Frankfurt were to prove invaluable to him in countless ways in the years that lay ahead. (page 7)

#### Chapter 3

## Man Proposes, but God Disposes

Adulrich wished to inform Governor Benziger that, although he had made good marks in his schooling and had succeeded in his efforts, he found it would be impossible to continue indefenitely in this competitive and grasping business world for which he was not at all suited. He had discovered that amidst all the luxury of this highly advanced civilisation. what he wanted most was to discontinue his business course and rerurn to the studies that were interrupted with much regret in Einsiedeln. These alone will enable him to fit into the world he now wished to embrace. In all honesty and candour he really had no intention whatsoever, of becoming a businessman or an industrialist. For the proud head of the Benziger - Firm this was very bad news, indeed. Instead of taking time to reply by mail, Governor Benziger travelled at once to Frankfurt. He was in a state of extreme agitation. The Governor went straight to see Monsignor Janssen at the University. Almost overcome with grief and shock, he revealed to the Professor this most unexpected plan on the part of his son. Then he showed him the boy's letter, "Your son is far more deeply involved than you believe or can possibly understand. If you wish Adulrich's happiness, do not contradict his wishes. He has never spoken to me about them. But I am convinced that the boy has a vocation to Priesthood". ...."I have dealt with so many youths in the past; and never once have I been wrong in judging those called by God to serve Him in this field"....

Governor Benziger was so upset and completely caught off guard by this frustrating news that he took the first train back to Einsiedein without Adulrich ever learning of his visit. The Governor was finally able to console himself with the thought that he had two other sons on whom he could depend to carry on the BENZIGER BROTHERS' NAME. though the first son had been taken from him. Above all he now wished to carry out the will of God.... He wrote much later to Adulrich and told him he was convinced that his ideas and ideals will change with the passage of time. But for the present he demanded that Adulrich's studies at Frankfurt be successfully completed. It was imperative that he finish his course,....Adulrich's father took confort in the thought that, no matter what happened in the

immediate future, his son could always turn back to the business world and find himself a post of importance and leadership at the head of it. He was far from convinced that the boy had a real vocation to the priesthood. (Page 8-9)

#### Learning Languages

Adulrich's course of studies terminated at the Kaufmanische Meisterschule early in the summer of 1880 with the arrival of the school's vacation. The youth was radiantly happy and excited beyond words. The trial of learning how to become a businessman had been a harrowing and difficult ordeal, eventhough he had been most successful in his studies and had made many friends. He fully realised the value of all these classes and saw how beneficial they would prove in later life. But that still had not eased the heavy burden of responsibility that had fallen on his youthful shoulders. He was overjoyed by the prospect of being reunited with his family at their beautiful summer-home-Gutenburg.

Adulrich happended to be his mother's favourite. Mrs. Benziger encouraged Adulrich in his determination to become a priest. In her son's desire to serve God and the Church, she saw her own prayers being heard.

Before the holidays came to an end, the father of the family sent for his son. He told him bluntly that he realised that he had a very poor knowledge of languages. It was therefore imperative that Adulrich now study languages. French the global language of business and diplomacy. "I have registered you for studies at Brussels. I feel this setting will be perfect for a young man who elects to become a priest. Geneva is entirely out of question. It is far too narrow minded, far too Protestant and much too near home.... I could have sent you to Paris. But it is the centre of immorality. I have found the Belgians as a race, to be good Catholics. By going to Brussels, you will make valuable friendships for life and you will not be confronted with problems posed by a people of a faith different from your own."

In L' Institute Saint Luis, Brussels, Adelrich was introduced to the Director, Rev. Fr. Van Aerzelaer, and he hoped all the classes he had previousely suggested would be available. He added that he would also like Adelrich to study English. While French was essential for the business world of the day, English would be as important in future years.... As usual, Governor Benziger in thoroughness had over-

looked nothing. He had even checked with the Brussels Academy of Music and contacted one of its professors for the purpose of enrolling his son for private piano instruction and basic music education.... Adelrich started his scholastic studies in Belgium like a veteran. business techniques he had learned in Germany were put to excellent and immediate use.... Almost at once the Director of this vast Academy of nine hundred students found himself greatly attracted to this talented and mature young man who tackled his studies with much zeal and efficiency. Adelrich confided to the priest how bitterly disappointed he was that his father had not enrolled him in any Latin classes.... Adelrich explained that he hoped one day to become a priest. had not made up his mind just where he would enter. But as Latin was an obligatory entrance requirement for any seminary, he was quite sure he would be refused admission on those grounds studied Latin for two years in Switzerland, but his father interrupted this instruction by sending him away to Frankfurt. Father Director pointed out to Adelrich's already overcrowded curriculum, and asked whether he would have a single vacant half hour a day into which he could possibly squeeze in a Latin class. The Director felt genuinely sorry for the lad's predicament. "If you are really so anxious to learn Latin," the Director said, "would you be willing to sacrifice your supper hour and give up your evening recreation for this purpose. If so, I will meet you daily from five to six o'clock and give you private lessons in my office." Father Director was astounded by the zeal Adelrich displayed in mastering the Latin language. At the end of six months, he had passed all the required tests and could read and write Latin as fluently as he did French....... After two years of French instruction in Belgium, he could converse like a native. But Adelrich was just as happy - thinking and speaking in Latin. Each day he made himself translate everything he heard into Latin, until it became his second language.... The two years spent in Belgium were far from Every moment had been put to good and full use.

When Governor Benziger's letter arrived, bearing the news that his father would soon come in person to take him to England for one year, Adelrich dreaded the thought of leaving Brussels. On August 22nd 1882, Governor Benziger met his student son in Brussels. Adelrich was ready to leave at once for England, prepared to face a new chapter in his life. They reached London the same day.

Adelrich's father wished to reward his son for his two years of hard study in Brussels. They spent a week in sight seeing and celebrating. Governor Benziger had received a letter from the Abbot

of Downside College that his old dear friend Abbot Gasquet would meet them in person with the College horse and carriage. They raced across the rolling somerset hills through the beautiful woods that led to St. Gregory's College – as Downside was known in those days. Every honour was extended to Adelrich's father who then and there made arrangements to return in July.

Adelrich was enrolled to spend the next year at Downside. He was considered to be an advanced student or a 'Philosopher' because at that time, no Catholic ever attended an English University. The period of time in Downside College enabled him in later years to feel absolutely at home with any one who spoke to him in English. He had the Swizz gift for languages and a musical ear that proved extremely useful – not only for the study of Latin but also Italian. He derived tremendous pleasure from being recruited to participate in athletics. For the first time in his life the Swiss youth was introduced to swimming. He soon grew fond of sports. He went on long hikes and joined his class - mates in all day bicycle expeditions. All of this gave him insight into a new way of life. Before leaving Downside College, Adelrich - in the presence of his father and the entire college was awarded with a silver medal for merit. (pages 9-12)

#### Chapter 4

#### The Encounter - The Governer surrenders

The trip back to Switzerland was a very happy one for both father and son. As they sat side by side on the train rushing through Belgium, Luxemburg, Alsace - Lorraine and into Switzerland, Governor Benziger broached the touchy subject...! "I see you are as determined as ever to become a Priest. Where do you plan to enter? Adelrich replied; "I have set my heart on entering the Carmelite Novitiate in Bruges".... Governor showed his immediate disapproval, "Do you mean to tell me you are not going to become a Benedictine." he said gruffly.... Adelrich shook his head slowly. "I was afraid you might not approve. But it was while I was in Belgium that I had the firm realisation that God wants me to be a Carmelite.... For two years I had the occasion to study their method of Life their rules, their

ideals. I visited the Provincial who insisted that I see all their monasteries in Belgium. Then I explained how you might disapprove, since you and all of us loved the Benedictines so much.... I even enquired whether they would be willing to accept me on my twenty first birthday as a lay brother, if you should refuse to grant me the needed permission. MY MAIN PURPOSE IN ENTERING AMONGST THE CARMELITES IS THAT I WANT TO GET AWAY FROM THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD. I HAVE THE OVERWHELMING DESIRE TO BURY MYSELF IN A PLACE OF HUMBLE PRAYER. NOT WANT TO TEACH IN SCHOOLS OR DEDICATE MYSELF TO STUDIES. I WISH TO LEAD A LIFE OF PRAYER AND MORTIFICATION AND ONE OF PENANCE.... There was very little Adelrich's father could say after such a selfless and solemn statement, "I have only myself to blame. If you had not gone to Brussels, you would never have met with these priests who have influenced your life.... God must have willed it happen this way. Therefore I shall do nothing to interfere. But I shall ask you to wait until your twentieth birthday. Then I will withdraw my objection. I have given much thought to the problem of where you might get the best possible preparation for priesthood.... In the event you do not change your present point of view, I have put out feelers and carefully look into the matter. I have signed you up to spend the next year at the University of Eichstatt in Germany" "I personally consider this University to be the most outstanding within the Church. To it come men of vast learning from every corner of the globe. Amongst the professors are men of great scholastic knowledge. And strange as it may seem, these happen to be some of my best writers and clients. I have printed all their work on theology and philosophy. will also obtain a first hand view of what real ecclesiastics are like. You will be living day by day in their midst. You will participate in their religious life, attend their classes and mingle with many of the students who come from all parts of the world." ....Adelrich's father saw to it that his son would have the advantage of picking and choosing his own curriculum and attending the classes that interested him most. He had taken much time to ascertain the subjects which Adelrich would require for Ordination....

Adelrich was thrilled by everything he heard and saw. It was so unreal. He felt like pinching himself. This was the type of world he wished to embrace. On all sides he found dedicated remarkable and outstanding ecclesiastics who were doing the very things he most longed to participate in.

#### Chapter 5

## Easter Gift for Son and Daughter

Upon his return from Eichstatt for the Easter Holidays, Adelrich was greeted by his father. The Governor congratulated him for completing his year of Theology in so short a period of time. Adelrich had fully expected to be told that he could now begin his novitiate. But his father did not broach that subject. Instead he merely handed him an envelope and then said, "I would like you to escort your sister. Anna to Rome over the Easter holidays. She has finished her school years with honours. Like my eldest daughter she has been to the Irish nuns at Le Chasotto in Frigourg. I now wish to reward her for having studied so hard and acquiring so much knowledge, also for achieving such splendid grades. Here are the railway tickets for both I have made reservations for you and your sister to travel on the new St. Gothard train. This means you will be in Rome in no time. Adelrich gasped in amazement and thanked his father. Anna and he would be on the fastest train in the world.... continued "In this cover besides your tickets you will find sufficient money for you both to go about Rome so as to see everything that is most worthwhile and of greatest importance in the Eternal City. Make the most of the trip.... You Adelrich have also worked very hard. You have faithfully carried out my every wish. I have followed your work in Belgium through the eyes of your Headmaster. that you have not wasted a moment at the very expensive institute Saint Louis. The good reports have pleased me and your mother very much. We are proud, and we want you to enjoy the Easter holidays to the fullest. I am also enclosing letters of recommendations" said "Before you enter, I want you to meet some of the the Governor. Cardinals who have been friends of mine over a period of many years. Perhaps, later on in life they may be of help to you, no matter where you are. At the Vatican there is a Swiss Secretary to His Holiness, Monsignor Maerchi, as well as Colonel of the Swiss guard. Both of these men owe me a favour for work I once did for them while they were still beginners.... Remember, Adelrich, life is a game. give and take. sometimes it is your turn; sometimes it is the turn of someone else. But do not forget this fact. Never receive without exchanging or returning at one time or another.

#### Rome - with Pope Leo XIII

Anna and Adelrich wrote home from Rome: "Easter Sunday morning, the sun was bright and the sky was sparkling clear. We rose very early and went to the Vatican, where we received Holy Communion from the hands of His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII, in the Sistine Chapel. We also kissed the ring of His Holiness. After saying His Mass the Pope knelt at the side altar. There he made His thanksgiving. We were able to see Him for another three hours. He is very aged, very pale almost as white as his soutane and his hair snow-white. Yesterday morning — Easter Monday — the Colonal of the Swiss guards took Adelrich with him to an audience with the Cardinals. There were twenty four Cardinals and Arch-bishops with the Holy Father. Adelrich was the only lay person present besides the Guards. The Pope spoke with the Cardinals at length on different matters. After the Cardinals had gone up and kissed the Papal slipper, Adelrich was asked to do the same. Monsignor Maerchi told His Holiness that Adelrich Benziger planned to become a Carmelite. The Pope held our brother's hand in His for a long time. Then He remarked "The Carmelite Order is a very strict and severe one. But the good God will give you the strength and the necessary grace to persevere." ......Next Monsignor Maerchi returned with a white leather box-sitting on a silver tray. Adelrich asked the Holy Father to bless his sick father, mother brothers and sisters; but specially the family of his married sister. It was at this moment that Monsignor Maerchi presented the silver tray to His Holiness. The white leather box bore the Papal court of arms embossed on top. Pope Leo took the box in His hands. Then he opened it and blesed it .... "HERE IS A GOLDEN LOCKET AND CHAIN", THE HOLY FATHER SAID, "IT CONTAINS THE RELIC OF THE TRUE CROSS, WHICH I WANT YOU TO GIVE YOUR FATHER IN PERSON FOR THE HOLY SEE IS VERY MUCH IN DEBT TO HIM FOR All HE HAS DONE FOR HOLY CHURCH OVER MANY PAST YEARS.... WE HAVE HEARD YOUR GOOD FATHER HAS BEEN IN HIS HOUR OF PAIN AND SUFFERING, PLEASE TAKE THIS TOKEN OF OUR AFFECTION TO HIM. Tell him we would be very happy if he would wear this precious relic of the True Cross around his neck. We hope it will bring him consolation." ....Adelrich was deeply touched by his papal audience. He felt he had seen a bit of heaven. He had been moved to tears by the Holy Father's generositry and kindness.... He knelt down and once again kissed the foot of the Holy Father — grateful that he could personally be the one to

PARENTS

OF

BISHOP BENZIGER





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#### BROTHERS AND COUSIN OF ARCHBISHOP BENZIGER



Bruno Benziger



August Benziger



Albert Benziger

carry such a priceless gift to his father.... Embossed on the front was the emblem of the cross. On the back was engraved the words "ADELRICH BENZIGER EINSIEDELN SUISSE" Adelrich and Anna quietly shared this awesome and wondrous moment in their lives.... All the time he was in the Eternal City, Adelrich had been deeply perturbed because his father had never definitely told him that his period of waiting was over or that he might now go to Bruges to enter on any specific day.... Over and over Adelrich had prayed for light and patience. His entire trip was one of prayer and petition. He had no intention of antagonising his father, who was in very bad health, by pressing for his permission. Rather he wished to cause as little trouble. But he could not settle down until this matter was brought into the open and was fully discussed.

#### Back Home - The Thrilling News

On arrival in Einsiedein, the two travellers were warmly greeted by their mother. The first thing she did was to take Adelrich to the spare room and show him a handsome suitcase and beds covered with clothings - all carefully marked with his name. Mrs. Benziger explained "Your father asked his secretary to write to Bruges in my name enquiring what preparations would be necessary for one entering at Carmel.... He requested them to let us know your number, so we could have it sewn by cross - stich on each item. We also wanted to buy everything brand new for you." Adelrich's eyes filled with tears.... This kind and thoughtful act of consideration touched him deeply. He flung his arm round his mother and lifted her off her feet embracing her in joyful appreciation. He exclaimed "I never believed anything like this would happen to me. This truly is a miracle" ....His mother said gently "You have had much to suffer by this long delay. But your father wished to make absolutely certain that you knew what you were doing by going so far away from home - to enter a strange and unknown Order. Here is the copy of the letter he wrote to Fr. Provincial. They will be expecting you in Bruges on the 18th of May. Your father has even secured the train tickets for you. So you have nothing to worry about. All arrangements have been made".... always, the Governor had taken care of every detail and anticipated every need.

That evening as Adelrich and Anna prepared to thank their father for their marvellous trip to Rome, Governor Benziger was waiting for them with a handful of papers. He remarked to Adelrich.

"Now that you have been to Rome, I have a surprise for you. Your mother tells me you have already seen what she has personally prepared for you. But here are your one-way tickets for the train and for your sleeping compartment to Belgium. I have asked your younger brother Albert who is a seasoned traveller, to accompany you to Bruges when you enter. Your tickets are for 17th........ You will arrive at Bruges next morning in time to take a hotel room, to rest and enjoy the best luncheon in the town. Albert will return home the following day. It will be best if he gives me a firsthand report of what he has seen and thinks of the Carmelite way of life...."

Adelrich who was normally undemonstrative, rushed to his father. He kissed his parent profusely-repeating over and over. "I am so very grateful.... Thank you.... Thank you...." The next day Adelrich went to see his family lawyer - to learn the legalities governing the laws of inheritance. He wished to put all his personal affairs in good order. Under no circumstances did he want any aspersion to be cast, either against himself or the Carmelites. He knew that the inheritance laws of Canton Schwyz were unbreakable. No parent could disinherit his children. Each child was entitled to inherit one third of the family Estate. Yet he also realised that, by renouncing the opportunity to become the head of the Benziger Brothers, he could not in any way expect to inherit from the Firm in future.... Adelrich hoped that by this act of becoming a religious, he would not lay a special burden on any of his brothers and sisters. According to the old Swiss law dating as far back as the years 1702, a third of the Benziger property and interests of both the father and mother could later be claimed by Adelrich and his heirs. This ancient law was all powerful and irrevocable. Of his own free will - Adelrich now chose to RENOUNCE the world and all the material rights contained therein and applying thereto. If, in future he would get any gift or legacy - it would depend entirely upon the charity of generous individuals; and by no means upon his inheritance.... (Page 15-17)

#### Chapter 6

#### In the Carmelite Novitiate

The Prior le Pere Engelbert, superior of the house, received the two brothers warmly and made them feel instantly at home. He sent for Master of Novices, Pere Thomas Michel, who showed the brothers the chapel and gardens and told them a bit about the history of the monastery. Then suddenly looking at his watch, the Master of Novices remarked abruptly they had best to take leave; that he would take Adelrich to his cell to prepare for Compline........ The brothers embraced each other and said their goodbyes, and Adelrich was conducted to his humble cell.

Adelrich went directly to the Carmelite Provincial. He presented himself as one wishing to enter the Carmelite Order as a lay – brother and later to be professed as a Father - to lead a life of prayer contemplation and self-sacrifice.... The Carmelite Provincial was a very prominent personage. He later rose to the position of the Vicar General of the Carmelites. And as a personal friend of Pope Leo XIII, he later became the Archbishop of Steyaert Ghent.

Adelrich made no mention of his family-except to state that his father wanted him to become a Benedictine; also that most unfortunately no one of his family knew anything about the Carmelites or their way of life.... Father Steyaert had often noticed the young student attending daily Mass. He had been much impressed by his deep spirit of devotion and by his exceptional reverence before the Blessed Sacrament.... Though he said but little at the time of the interview. be decided to do some private research on his own. personally knew the Director of the L'Institute Saint Luis in Brussels. he approached his friend only to hear the most ardent words of praise about the Swiss student.... Father Steyaert did not, at first, broach the subject of Priesthood. He decided to wait and see what the Novice promised to become. He too was convinced that Adelrich who had tremendous faith and devotion to Our Lady, had a real vocation to the Carmelite Order. Prayer and time alone would prove this brilliant student to have talents which could no longer be kept Only when he reached the crossroads of life could Adelrich be steered into becoming a Carmelite Priest.

Though friendly and keenly interested Adelrich had never once referred to his family or geographic background. Nor did he mention his schooling. When asked what kind of education he had received, it would have sounded most unorthodox in those days to detail a long list of international activities such as he had experienced in Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and England. ....The Benziger family, as printers to the Holy See, were totally unknown to the Belgians. The Benzigers catered to the Germans. Austrians and Americans—even to the distant Spanish. The French and Belgian people had their printers and presses. Thus the name Benziger meant nothing to any one whom he encountered....

Adelrich was most fortunate in meeting Fr. Provincial who had the uncanny ability of screening souls.... Father Steyaert had a talk with Bruges Master of Novices, Pere Thomas Michael, as well as the Prior, Pere Engelbert - the Superior of the House. In doing so he took upon his own shoulders the full responsibility for Adelrich's future. (Pages 20-21)

#### Problems for an utter foreigner in a Flemish Community

The Belgian Carmelites were backed by a very strict Rule - one of the most severe within the Church. Their priests were men who had suffered persecution and had assumed great responsibilites....... Fortunately, the Provincial was a broad-minded man of great discernment and learning. He not only had seen and met Adelrich but Father Dennis Steyaert also had personally approved of his becoming a Carmelite monk. He himself had prepared the future postulant by listing the needed letters of recommendation.

Governor Benziger wrote to enquire as to what his son might need. In the same letter Governor mentioned that since it was necessary to give the Postulant a new name, he hoped his son and namesake could bear in Religion the name of his eldest son—a boy who had died at the age of seventeen like a saint. He liked Adelrich to take the name of Brother Aloysius.... About the time Governor Benziger's letter was received, there came a letter of personal recommendation from Bishop of Chur—the Diocese in which Adelrich's family had lived for centuries. It was dated 18th April 1884.... A few days later still another important letter was delivered—dated 21st April of the same year. It was from Archbishop Pierre Goossens of Malines of Belgium.... The Archbishop was a man who knew the Benziger family well and could verify that the young

Aspirant was from a family which could be counted upon for its loyalty to the Church. Being a high ranking Belgian, his word held tremendous wieght. Both of these letters were posted in the Archives of Bruges Novitiate.

It was now high time for the Master of Novices to call the monks together for a conventual chapter to be held on May 6th at 3.30. in the afternoon.... He gathered together the Capitulants - who were the elder priests, who had the right to cast the needed votes and check upon the qualifications of any subject wishing to join the Carmelite community. Within the monastery not much had been said about the new Postulant. But quite a few of the older monks were against the unwise idea of accepting a total foreigner into their very Flemish Community. Besides here was one who had never followed any set scholastic curriculum according to the Flemish standards applicable in their country. And perhaps the most important consideration of all, it appeared a very bad thing to them that this future Postulant seemed to lack the very cultural background that was particularly needed and looked up to in Belgium. After all, had he not passed his youth in travel?.... visiting several Germanic towns before coming to Belgium?.... Then, going to London?.... And finally returning to Germany once more for theology? Was not the fact that he had visited so many countries and attended so many different schools proof enough that the young man lacked the stability so necessary for the Carmelite way of life?.... The poor Master of Novices was very much worried. It was an extremely difficult situation. The Provincial had seemed so enthusiastic. Yet, there was every reason to fear this opposition. Father Thomas Michael now petitioned that this young Aspirant be given the chance to prove After a rather prolonged Chapter, the Postulant was eventually accepted, but only half-heartedly. In the Archives of the Bruges Monastery this notation was registered "Adelrich Carolus Nicholaus Benziger was born in Einsiedeln. Diocese of Chur, Switzerland on January 31st 1864 son of John Adelrich Benziger and Anna Maria Koch of Boswil, Switzerland,... with three brothers and two sisters...."

At long last, Adelrich's enetering religious life was truly accomplished. This fact was entered in the Archives. It took only a short while for Adelrich to feel very much at home (P. 21—22)

#### Severity was Sweetness for new Aspirant

The Carmelite cells were all aproximately eleven feet long by nine feet in width. The walls are white washed. At the entrance to each cell there was a holy water font of gray terra-cotta with a blue cross.... On the white, washed wall of each cell hung a large perfectly plain black wooden cross. There were also three cardboard prints of Our Lady of Carmel, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. The picture of Our Lady of Carmel hung above the simple bed. The bed was made of two small wooden stands only one and a half feet wide. rested a plank of wood 3 ft wide. It held a folded woollen blanket and a hard woollen pillow. A second woollen blanket was provided to cover the sleeper. During the cold winter months, there was no heating of any kind in the cells. But in the middle of the Novitiate corridor stood a big pot-bellied stove. An additional stove supplied wintertime warmth in the middle of the Novices' Chapel Every morning there was frost and snow on the windows. In the common lavatory, each basin was filled with water the previous night and placed on a long large table. By morning the water turns into ice, and has to be broken before it could be used. Gas light was used in the chapel, and Oratory, supplimented by a faint light in the corridors at night. In the cells, the Novices and monks used kerosene lamps.... The world had made little progress when it came to night-time lighting. In many places only candles were used. Adelrich loved the simplicity of everyday life, He felt much attracted to his Master of Novices, pere Thomas Michael.

From the day of his enetering as a Postulant, the community of Bruges had used every chance to study the young Swiss student first-hand.... Most of them had deeply mistrusted and seriousely doubted whether he ever had a real carmelite vocation. Meanwhile, Adelrich had never once suspected that every move and action from his part was being carefully scrutinised by the others. Fortunately for him, by living personally in their presence, he created a totally different picture from the one the monks had all anticipated.... The young lad seemed to fit perfectly into this very well regulated community of elderly religious. It was as if he was specially trained to meet their requirements.

The second Conventual chapter was called by Father Thomas Michael on May 25th to decide whether or not the Aspirant was fit to take the habit and now be admitted as a Novice. In a letter written by Father Provincial on May 25th, he stated that in all probability he

would be back in time to give the new Postulant the habit. Father Master of Novices read this tetter to those assembled for the Chapter: "Your Reverence must understand how happy I would be to give the habit to Adelrich Benziger All the testimonial letters seem to be late-Please keep me informed. I will not be back in Brussels untill Wednesday. But I would like to be the one to give him the habit.... If you cannot wait so long, then do it without my presence. I am very happy about the name of Aloise. We must satisfy the wishes of a father of the Postulant...."

The Governor suggested to his wife that they take Anna along with them. She was the sister who was just one year younger than Adelrich. The three would go as a family group to Bruges for the great event. With his usual fortitude, the Governor insisted that his wife. Anna and himself make the trip. He knew how much it meant to his devoted wife -- the absence of Adelrich from family in daily life of his wife.... The evening before the Profession, their son had remained But the Benzigers were met by the Prior of the Monastery in Retreat. Father Engelbert as well as by the Master of Novices, about whom they heard much. The next morning the family saw their son, Brother Aloysius for the first time as a monk, wearing his beautiful white carmelite mantle.... They watched him kneeling in the choir, and heard him read aloud in Latin the words of the simple profession. Benzigers listened emotionally white Brother Aloysius made the simple vows, which would bind him for three years-until the time of his final vows, which would then bind him till death.... The choir became a garden of glorious flowers transforming the chapel into a veritable paradise. All the floral arrangements had been sent ahead of time by Governor. He overlooked no detail; He possessed an innate sense of beauty pertaining to anything which might enhance the beauty of the House of God.

### The wording of the Profession: JESUS and MARY

"On this the 28th day of May in the year of Our Lord 1885, I, Brother Aloysius of Holy Mary, make my profession, and I promise obedience, chastity and proverty to God, to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, and to our Very Reverend Brother Jerome Mary of the Immaculate Conception Superior General of the order of the Barefooted Brothers of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, and his successors, according to the early Rule of the aforementioned order. I take this promise unto death" Furthermore, I

promise that I will never directly or indirectly, for me or for another, seek within the Corgreation any office or duty forbidden by the Constitution, and in like manner, outside the Congregation.... Neither will I, directly or indirectly, for me or for another, accept any office offered, unless it has to do with an Ordinance which can by right be received.... I will fulfil my Vows to the Lord.... before all his people in the House of the Lord."

Brother Aloysius of Holy Mary C. D.

# Chapter 7

# Simple Vows and Fourth Vow

Later when the family had a chance, they asked Brother Aloysius why it was he had taken a fourth vow of Humility. He explained how, unfortunately in certain orders, there were men who used this as a stepping stone to achieve high power within the church, to attain a Bishopric or an affluent ecclesiastical post, which no Carmelite will have the right to aspire for. A Carmelite could accept a high office only if the arrangements have been made according to the Rule within the Carmelite order itself, or at the specific request of the Holy Father....

The Governor, his wife and daughter were so delighted by the charm and friendliness of the Monks and the interesting sights sorrounding them that they remained an extra week in Bruges. It was Brother Aloysius who took his family on various fascinating tours... in the Record Book of Ghent is recorded a statement that extra permission was requested and given and signed by the newly elected provincial Father Petrus de Alcantara. The Provincial entered this fact and dated the entry as having taken place on June 5th 1885.... A copy of the Benziger Family photo is still there

Toward the end of the few months that Brother Aloysius spent in Bruges, he planned one afternoon to confer with the Novice Master. While waiting outside the cell of Father Thomas Michael, he was astonished to overhear a heated conversation taking place between the Master of Novices and the former missionary.... "I am merely

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Brother Aloysius with his parents and sister after the Simple Profession at Bruges

waiting to be relieved of the responsibilities of Master of Novices. I have already spoken to Father Prior about my resignation and willingness to accept any other position. But he reminded me that I would have to wait until Brother Aloysius was ordained since he had already submitted his name to the proper authorities in Rome". A firy voice protested. It was that of Father Alphonse... "Do you realise what you are doing? Once he is Master of Novices, he will never become a missionary. You are placing yourself in his path...." Father Thomas Michael retorted angrily. "You are always so concerned about the Missions that you forget what is happening right here in Belgium. From the moment he entered, I made up my mind that this Novice would become my successor...., "No, you are wrong, very wrong. We need him for India...." "Perhaps you are right" replied the Master of Novices coolly ... "But I feel, this is where he belongs. He posseses much tact; and we need an absolutely impartial and neutral man here in this troubled province of Flanders...." Father Alphonse's temper rose. "It is just because of this special ability of his to be a leader that I hope and pray he can go to India...." Brother Aloysius hurried to the Chapel—an extremely agitated and frightfully upset Novice. Naturally, he would never dream of letting anyone know of the distressing scene he had just witnessed. (But, almost fifty years later, when visiting his brother August at Villa Gutenburg on the lake of Lucerne, in Switzerland, the internationally famous artist and potrait painter asked the Bishop how in heaven's name, he ever came to sign up for India.) Bishop Benziger confided. "I have never before spoken of this to a soul. But since all those who were present at that time have died. I now feel free to tell you the truth......" .1 decided even before my final profession, to write to Rome to the Father General to plead my cause and tell him I wished to become a simple missionary in the far-off Indian fields.

### Chapter 8

# Final Profession Priestly Ordination and First Holy Mass

It was customary to bestow Minor Orders during the period of theological studies. On December 15th 1887, Brother Aloysius received all the Minor Orders. On May 28th 1888, Brother Aloysius

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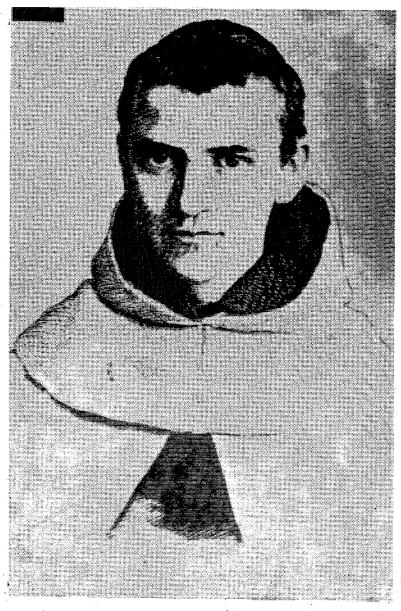
was accepted for his Solemn Profession, and his Priestly Ordination was announced to take place on 22nd December 1888 Cathedral of Ghent. Brother Aloysius was told to write this good news to his ailing father. Due to the inclement weather prevailing at that time of the year, the Provincial realised that it would not be feasible for the Benziger family to take part in the ceremony of Ordination. But if they wished, Brother Aloysius would be permitted to go home for a week, so that he might officially celebrate his First Holy Mass in the presence of his parents in the great Basilica of Our Lady of Einsetdein. Once the good news reached Einseidein, there was tremendous rejoicing by the Zum Adler Benzigers, what made the joyous occasion lovlier was the fact that their son would be the one to celebrate his first official Mass in Einsetlein - before the shrine of Our Lady of Einseidein who for generations had been the patron and mother of the Benziger family and of the entire Village and State.

Brother Aloysius was ordained in the cathedral of Ghent by the Auxiliary Bishop of Ghent Monsignor H. Lambrechts who in time became the future Bishop of Ghent. The mass a concelebrated one said with the Bishop. The Ordination and festivities were glorious. 22nd December 1888—was the most memorable day on which Brother Aloysius' 'Alter Christus' cherished dreams became true.

### First Holy Mass on Christmas Day

On 23rd December Father Aloysius rushed to the Railway station in Brussels, where he planned to take the express train to Switzerland. He had enough money to buy a third class ticket on the train. It was indeed the first time that any Benziger had journeyed in such a modest manner. In Europe it was customary to travel in a style becoming one's financial and social status. Howevet, Father Aloysius had taken the vow of poverty, and it never entered his mind to travel in any other manner. This was the way in which the poor and the peasants always travelled. And had he not taken the vow of poverty, this was one of them.

In Einseldein, the Zum Adler mansion, the Benzigers were thinking of scores of things all at the same time. Reservations were made at the Hotel Zum Pfauuen for a luncheon to serve atleast 200, guests. Governor Benziger had forgotten nothing All spare rooms in the huge home had been prepared to receive unexpected lastmoment guests.



Father Aloysius - on his Ordination 1888

Early on the morning of 24th, Governor sent for August. He told him he had ordered for "seppi" the head coachman, so as to meet Father Aloysius at the station.... The Governor had arranged for a picnic luncheon to be packed for the driver and for August. It would be at least eight O' clock at night before the three would reach home that memorable Christmas eve.

The Altar was completely lighted. Each window of the five storey mansion held a burning candle and was garlanded with holiday wreath of pine. Seppi snapped his whip and alerted the family to the glad tidings that their honoured guest was about to arrive. The greenery, bedecked front door, lit by welcoming lights swung open. Father Aloysius was joyously embraced by his loving parents and all the close members of the family. Father Aloysius stood speechless at the sight of the tremendous crowd that had gathered in front of the Altar shouting "Welcome home; Happy Christmas". All present fell on their knees and received his blessing.

Christmas morning! Before the church bells rang out for the first Mass, Father Aloysius was waiting to accompany his mother across the snowy path that led to the chapel of Our Lady. The mother and the son knelt reverently side by side. They were backlong before the rest of the household was astir.... At 7.30 the family had gathered at the front entrance of their home. About 200 of the villagers also had assembled to join the happy procession, which was led by Governor Benziger and his son.... On enetering the Basilica, Father Aloysius knelt for a moment in front of his beloved Madonna, who was clothed in her most beautiful finery. The organ in the choir was playing Christmas songs. The Basilica was fully packed with worshippers. It was Mrs, Benziger's cousin, Europe's most noted Catholic historian, who mounted the famous pulpit to preach a glorious sermon, relating how one of Einsædein's sons was destined to find a field of work for himself in distant mission lands.

Christ hanging on the Cross was the picture Fr Aloysius chose for his first Mass Souvenir, and the prayer thereon was the following: "Oh God, most powerful and Eternal, who by your Holy Spirit sanctifies and governs the heads and members of the Church hear our prayers for all Ecclesiastical Orders and give priests as well as all the faithful the neccessary graces to persevere in Your service until death...." "Help us at every moment to do and to suffer all that God wills, as He wills, solely because He wishes it Amen" At the foot

he added "Arise and be prepared for sacrifice. Let us know how to die for justice...." (Governor Benziger had thousands of these cards and prayers printed in German and distributed on the day of his son's First Holy Mass....August had treasured copies of his card and prayer until his death 65 years later.)

### Chapter 9

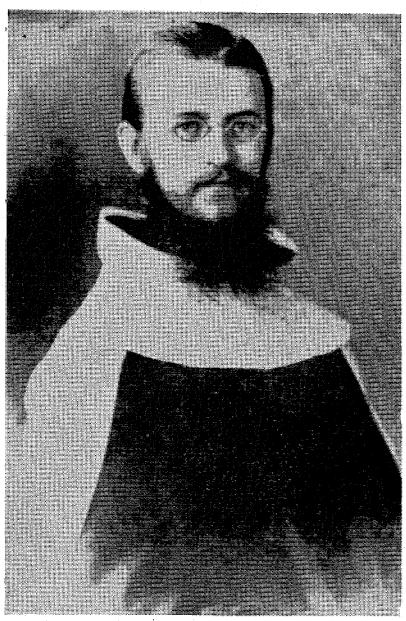
# To the Malabar Missions - Puthenpally Seminary

As a result of the repeated appeals of Fr. Aloysius to Father General of Discalced Carmelites in Rome, and with the permission of the Scared Congregation of the Propagation of Faith Fr. Aloysius secured the much desired permission to go out to far off Malabar missions which according to Fr. Alphonse O. C. D. needed his services.

On August 28th 1890 Father Aloysius left for the Malabar coast of India. Thereafter on 29th September after an uneventful journey he reached the port of Cochin and on 9th October he was named Professor and Spiritual Director of the Apostolic Seminary for the Malabar and Oriental Rite at Puthenpally, India. The Seminary of Puthenpally was located in a tiny village situated on the side of famous river Periar. It was 6 miles away from the town Emakulam and seven miles away from the sea. The seminary almost touched the residence of the Vicar Apostolic. But in future years the seminary had to be moved, as the river caused such dampness that it was considered very unhealthy for the students - and it was moved much further inland at Alwaye, in 1890. Verapoly was a mile from the Seminary and there were many neighbouring towns of vital importance. The Periar river was the only river that could be used as a means of communication to the inland towns, which had become the centre of Christendom That was how one could reach Quilon, by boat along this river

Having made his studies in England, his English was so perfect that he could teach it to the Seminarians. His unbelievable knowledge of Latin made him an ideal Professor of Theology. Thus, he taught

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Benziger - The young Carmelite Missionary
Professor in Puthenppally and
Secretary to The Apostolic Delegate

in Latin as well as in English. In no time he became the much beloved professor of the seminarians. He felt he knew and understood their ways and became all things to all of them.

### 1892. Father Benziger,

### Archbishop Zaleski's Personal Secretary

In the year 1892, The New Papal Delegate Monsignor Ladislaus Zaleski.... arrived at St. Joseph's Apostolic Seminary at Puthenpally. He stayed there long making a thorough visitation. A member of the Lithuanian nobility, born in 1852 in the ancestral Castle of Wielone, he had entered the Archepiscopal Seminary of Warsaw, Poland at the age of 22. After two years he was sent to Rome where he attended probably the most selected college in all the world. To it came noble men from all over to complete their ecclesiastical education. The College accepted only men of highest rank and noble birth. Besides his native Lithuanian, the young nobleman also spoke Polish, Russian, French, Italian and English with amazing ability.

He became a Monsignor as he left the seminary to serve as a consultor to the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda for the Oriental Rites. It had been planned that his life's work would be the Near East. But instead it came to the Far East.... He possessed the genius of a statesman.... Thereafter he had the occasion to travel with the Apostolic Delegate of India, Monsignor Agliardi, at the same time serving as his secretary. Thus his knowledge of India was amazing. He had friends and acqaintances on all sides.

When he returned to Rome, he was made a Prelate of the household of the Pope. In 1888 Pope Leo XIII sent him to London to join the Jubilee Celebrations of Queen Victoria. He had one official position after another representing the Church in different parts of the world... In 1890 he embarked to Calcutta as bearer of a secret mission of Pope Leo XIII. His Holiness wished the formation of a General Seminary for the higher education of the Indian native clergy, modelled along the lines of the College of the Gregorian University in Rome. When he left Rome, he had with him written instructions from Cardinal Rampolla dated October 31st 1890. He was to enquire as to the various ways means and possibilities for erecting such a Seminary. At that time, he was informed by Cardinal Rampolla of his appointment as the Apostolic Delegate of East Indies.

He received his Episcopal Consecration at Calcutta on May 15, 1892. Thereafter he returned to His Residence at Kandy, Ceylon, where he had settled down in order to establish the General Seminary there. By becoming Archbishop and Papal Delegate of the East Indies, he had to cover a territory greater than all of Europe, including the vast lands of Russia. It was while on visitation that the new Papal Delegate went to see how St. Joseph's Seminary at Puthenpally was being run.

During His stay at Puthenpally, he became greatly interested in the very thorough manner in which the strict Spiritual Director of the seminarians handled his duties. He was also impressed by long hours of prayer the newly ordained priest spent in the chapel, as well as the manner of his saying Mass with exceptional reverence and devotion.

Archbishop spoke to the Rector of the Seminary and asked outright if he could not let him have Father Benziger as his personal Secretary. He had been promised by Rome that a Secretary was on the way, but none had come.

It was customary to assign to the Papal Delegate a young Monsignor, specifically trained in the art of etiquette and the handling of voluminous mail, as well as the planning and arranging of ecclesiastical Congresses.... The latter were of vital importance in India, where until then there had been only a few native priests and almost no native hierarchy.

Father Benziger who was a very poor sailor and always became sea-sick on any voyage never dreamed that in a very short while his happy days at Puthenpally were to come to an end.

Archbishop Zaleski refusing to take "No" for an answer, wrote at once to the Propagation of the Faith, for it was the Propagation of the Faith that had named Father. Benziger to this Seminary. By strange coincidence, the letter from Archbishop Zaleski reached the hands of the man in charge who was none other than the former Carmelite Provincial, Archbishop Dennis Steyiert, who had received Father Aloysius into the Carmelite Order in Brussels.

There was no hesitation on the Prelate's part. Though he realised the shortage of men at Puthenpally Seminary, he wrote at once to Fr. Boniface, the Rector telling him he would have Father Benziger replaced. But Father Rector wisely protested. No one

could ever fill Fr. Aloysius' role. He seemed to have fallen right into the place and made himself indispensable. The students loved him and no task was ever too difficult or impossible for him to achieve.

Apparently the request of the Delegate Apostolic was hard.... word came to Father Benziger directly. Father Rector had seen the house guest and remarked how Father Aloysius always tried to keep in the midst of the many seminary responsibilities and the Carmelite life of prayer and penance.... "In the evening, when others have retired, he goes to the chapel late in order not to disturb any one. Then he takes his discipline. He has to struggle daily in order to get his two hours of mental prayer", explained Father Rector.

The Papal delegate was greatly impressed, by the outstanding spiritual Director, who played such an important role in the lives of more than 80 Seminarians.... Though Puthenpally seminary was dreadfully poor, the Carmelite fathers were running it as best as they could. Some were German, Italian or Belgian comprising a regular League of Nations.

Now came Archbishop Zaleski with orders to start a native seminary in Ceylon such as would and could outshine the Great Roman Universities. Father Aloysius left with Archbishop Zaleski—not for a short time—but for eight enormously busy and crowded years....

### Chapter 10

# Appeals for Bishop Ferdinand Ossi, and for Diocese of Quilon and Verapoly

Letter of Bishop Ferdinand Ossi to Fr. Aloysius July 27, 1895

My Dear Father Aloysius.

Three days ago I addressed a very long letter to His Excellency the Apostolic Delegate, with regard to the affairs of Quilon. I refer to a letter concerning the lack of necessary means with which to exist.... The Diocese does not give me a single cent.... The two properties in Tangasseri and Trivandrum are given to the respective Parishes. What is to be done?.... I find myself in a most critical situation, whether to close all the schools and institutions of higher learning, or else to leave them to people who will be better able to provide for the needs of the mission.... I believe it is better to retire nobly than remain here and always be expecting an invitation to resign. Thanking you for all steps taken in favour of my mission. I wish you the benediction of 'Bon Dieu' Ferdinand, Bishop of Quilon.

Deeply touched by the desperate letters of Bishop Ossi of Quilon, Father Aloysius uses his good offices and personal influence to sponsor the distressed Diocese and Bishop. He appealed to the Carmelite Order in Belgium, and Germany and his own uncle to come to the rescue of the Quilon Mission....

### Letter to Fr. Alphonse

....With the permission of His Excellency the Delegate, I send you the translation of these three letters. Will you not be able to use them?.... I would very much have liked to write an article for the 'Missions Catholique Françoise'—giving a few changes to the letter of the Monsignor from Quilon under the title "A Bishop in distress". But I would prefer that Your Reverence do it or have it done because of my position and present circumstances.... If I know Your Reverence would not do it, I would do it myself—one way or another Only recently His Excellency the Delegate sent an article to the Mission Catholique Françoise. This is why he does not like anyone from the Delegation to write to them. With the permission and express desire of His Excellency the Delegate, I have made a German translation which has been sent to the Director of Catholic Missions of Germany. I have sent another copy to my Uncle in America Pray for me....

### Appeal to Father General

Having learnt that the Very Reverend Father Ferdinand of Our Mother of God Convent, Paris, has been named Commissioner General of the missions in the service of the Propagation of the Faith, I would like to give him some details of the poverty and needs of our missions of Verapoly and Quilon... I happen to be very familiar with the correspondence of the missionaries But, since, I am not known to Father Ferdinand. I thought it best to address a long letter to Reverend Father Marie-Joseph of the Sacred Heart Convent at Mont-

-pellier, France. I have not sent it directly to him, but through the intervention of His Excellency the Bishop of Quilon. Before ending it I went to see Monsignor the Delegate. Without my having asked for it, His Excellency wished to add a letter (copy enclosed) which will delight your heart.... Our missionaries are worthy of the praise given them and the high regard that His Excellency reconfirms with each visit to the different missions in India. I would not say that everything is perfect in our missions in Verapoly and Quilon. But I believe that the faults that have arisen are due to the fact that our superiors in the mission lack sufficient funds on hand and our fathers have too many different tasks to perform.... Last year, south of Quilon, they converted 3000 pagans. Had they possessed the means, they could have baptised 10.000 in less than an year. But means are lacking to build schools, churches and to maintain sufficient number of catechists, as well as meet countless other needs....

Fr. Aloysius (June 13, 1896)

# Most Emphatic Defender of The Rights of Bishops in Dioceses

There happened some conflict of ideas and misunderstanding between Fr. Alovsius and Father Alphonse of Ypres, Belgium, whose guidance and counsels Father Aloysius sought as a Novice, as Religious Priest, as Professor and Spiritual Father at Puthenpally Seminary, as Secretary to His Excellency the Delegate Apostolic, Father Aloysius had written hundreds of letters to Father Alphonse who was a veteran master of Spirituality of the Order of Carmel, and procurator of the Carmelite Missionaries all over India which developed serious misunderstandings with the Bishop of Varapoly-Monsignor Bernard and Bishop of Quilon - Bishop Ferdinand Ossi-Father Alphonse commissions Father Aloysius as the Intermediary of charity to establish a cordial understanding between Monsignor Bernard and Fr. Alphonse.... Having taken upon himself this role and having studied the issue minutely, Father Aloysius writes the following letter which reveals his great zeal in upholding the authority of Bishops versus his very dear and adored master of spirituality and greatest benefactor of Indian Missions. The letter reads thus:-1898 - Kandy).... My dearly Beloved and Very Rev Fr. Alphonse.

Thank you for your venerated note of Sept. 4 and the copy of a letter to Father Policarp and for the Mass stipends....

Today eight years have passed since I arrived India. It is the Feast of St. Michel. I invoked him and implored by all that is most dear and holy, to deliver us from Satan - who for centuries has shown his wicked and damned actions in Malabar by these most unfortunate and miserable schisms. leading to so many disputes and discords. I attribute to him all the misunderstandings which exist between your Reverence and our Monsignors.... He clearly saw the immense good you were doing, and will continue to do. He works so hard, so that the least good comes of these efforts and does all he can to hamper the good.

I know your Reverence, your aspirations and your zeal for God and for our holy Order and for the salvation of souls. I also know Monsignor Bernard...... Because of this, I am firmly convinced that both of you would admire each other. You both would be best friends if only you knew each other and put aside the terrible prejudice and act with reciprocal confidence.... I have written very frankly to Monsignor Bernard, to Ferdinand Ossi and several other missionaries. I beg of your Reverence at the feet of Christ crucified, et the feet of the divine master who particularly promissed his assistance to pastors.... to reflect whether you should not have more confidence in the activities of those whom the Holy Spirit has chosen to govern the church. Those to whom. He gives the graces and the light to understand thoroughly the state of things and local circumstances.... It is certain that the Bishops of Varapoly and Quilon are men. They can make mistakes. They need counsel. They can fall into traps that Satan unceasingly places in their way. But are we not, all-the more exposed to these evils because we lack the same serious obligations and help?.... I can assure you in all truth that Monsignor Bernard and Ossi are filled with a sincere desire and have a great will for the general good and in particular the welfare of our holy order in Malabar. in fact every bit as your Reverence.... Considering this, must one not have confidence?.... Must not one believe that the times, the circumstances and divine providence itself do not permit the execution of these projects that our Bishops understand perfectly?.... Instead of pressing, straining and afflicting our Bishops - already weighed down with all worries and suffering, would it not be better to confide in God, who has promised His assistance to His works and to His ministers of good will, limiting ourselves to suggestions, counsels and prayer?.... Our duty would thus be accomplished. It would be very meritorious and certainly most efficacious....

Suppose that by using force and pressure, these Bishops give in to us, that is to say, they did exactly what we wanted - not by conviction but because of the obstacles placed in their way of progress of good, would our Lord bless us for this?.... I am convinced that your Reverence would be the first to regret, not only our insistence but also this act on the part of the Bishops.... You would be the first to call this a 'weakness', and to praise the opposition of the Bishops as an act of 'apostolic firmness'....... Monsignor Bernard is a very humble man of great firmness, and would rather lose everything than see himself forced against his conscience, his inner light and his knowledge of places and people. These he feels he must defend....... I have spoken in the plural of 'Our Bishops', because Bishop Ferdinand also suffers from this discord. When he learnt that I was going to Tuticorin, and then to Mulagumood, he immediately wrote to me. "Is it not possible for you to come to Quilon?.... How happy I would be to see you, and how many things I would like to tell you and explain. In particular, things pertaining to my relations with Father Alphonse. I believe your presence here in Quilon even for one day would do much good - especially for the missions. Please do all you can to make the visit possible and come to us here. This invitation to Quilon prevented me from going to Mulagumood and to visit the establishments of Trichinopoly.... I felt I could not offend Bishop Ferdinand by roaming about from ten to fifteen days. returning here I wrote a long letter to Bishop Ferdinand - praising you, showing him your great zeal and your work and advising him to be deeply grateful for your liberty of action... However your letter is not a happy one. I fear it will merely reaffirm the misunderstanding. Your letter begins touching on the delicate questions of nationality, and on Italians - even by saying that Diocese's interference was 'plundering the order of its revenues ....... Permit me to merely mention that the Order by accepting this responsibility, has a certain duty to make sacrifices. Without this Bishops (unable to find help in the Diocese) would be forced to address themselves to other Congregations or Orders. Many things have been yielded with the consent and tacit approval of the superior Generals.... (P. 147-148)

# Plans to reorganise the Carmelite Order and to have Indian Novices in the Malabar Novitiates

In a letter to Father General: Dear Very Rev. Father General....

Today I am about to be given my liberty by the Apostolic Delegate, who will free me from His services. So, I think it is the right moment

for me to ask Your Reverence of this grace.... Every one knows there is a great need of an organisation such as of our Holy Order in Malabar in conformity with our Rule. Every one senses the need of missionaries to replenish their energies—centres that would rebuild the morally of each missionary...... I promise to make serious efforts to make myself worthy of such an enterprise. And I hope that God will give me the grace, and that He will not refuse me this opportunity.... How insufficient our numbers are, as a consequence of which it is impossible to form a centre of Regular observance. But the difficulty would disappear by opening a Noviceship in forming Native Carmelites - not as Tertiaries or as inferiors, but as members and brothers with the Europeans. This need is greatly felt in India, where we do not give Indians the possible religious life in Orders, approved by the Holy Church. We do not even give them the occasion to know what real religious life is. On seeing that the Religious of Europe do not recognise them, the natives of India will wish to found their own Order. If the Orders of the Holy Church are not accessible to any but Europeans, this becomes a very grave danger for the Catholic Church in these countries.... The representative of the Holy See to India would specially like to see the Carmelites open their Noviceship. Not long ago he wrote to Father Alphonse of Ypres: "Much good would be done - particularly in Malabar - if the Carmelite priests would open regular convents with the Regular Rule and would accept native novices ..." This recomendation came in the report sent to His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect in 1895. His Excellency the Apostolic Delegate has more than once given great praise to these young natives. It can be read in the book he wrote on the subject. This proves, one can achieve great things from these young people of India. Experience has shown that the native members of the Religious Orders win only praise from those who know them well. applies to the native clergy. They are well trained and their spirit is excellent.... Each nation has its own characteristics, its own peculiarities, its own traditions. In India it is the same. It is necessary to understand that one can not make a European out of an Indian - just as a European will never become an Indian, since India will always remain India.... A Negro or a black person cannot help being just as agreable in the sight of God as a white man. A religious in the service of Mary can be as holy as a European.... Our holy Rule can be observed far more easily among the Indians than the Europeans. The great

majority of Indians – above all the superior class—never eat meat. The Indian is sober. Bare feet are natural for them.... Our Carmelite sisters of Mangalore, Pondichery, Karikal, and convents of Indochina and China, have shown us how perfect observance is possible – even in these far off countries.... It is in honour of Our Lady, Mother and Queen, that this letter has been written."

The love and appreciation Benziger cherished and expressed most sincerely about the Native Clergy before and after he was Bishop of Quilon, is possibly the reason why he courted the displeasure of European missionaries of other nationalities, which resulted in an utter indifference from their part to acknowledge publicly the greatness of his outlooks and sanctity after his death. (These are the views of this author)

## Chapter 11

# Nomination as Co-Adjutor Bishop of Quilon

After working with consummate skill and devotion as Secretary to His Excellency the Delegate Apostolic, in July of 1900, he was nominated Titular Bishop of Tabe and Coadjutor Bishop with right of succession to the Rt. Reverend Dr. Ferdinand Ossi, Bishop of Quilon. In November of that year, his consecration took place in Kandy, Ceylon, in the presence of His Excellency the Delegate Apostolic, and of Bishops of Kandy and Quilon,

### Appeals to The Holy Father The Pope

for cancellation of Nomination (Aug. 22, 1900)

Very Rev Father General,

Yesterday I received through the intermediary of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of Faith and from His Excellency the Apostolic Delegate my nomination as Bishop and Coadjutor with the right of succession. What can I say to your Reverence? I am sure, that you at least will have compassion for me and the Diocese of Quilon. I am so happy to have made the vow of refusing all dignities. This now guides and reassures my conscience.... I am enclosing a letter to Our Holy Father the Pope, and I beg of Your Reverence after having acquainted yourself with its contents, to please enclose it and address it and have it delivered to His Holiness the Pope I have not exaggerated the reasons which I have exposed.... As to my health, I hope never to fear when necessary to expose it after having consecrated my life to the service of Our Lord. But much depends on the health of a Bishop.... As the nomination has been divulged in the press, and as the uncertainty is not for me alone, but also for His Excellency the Apostolic Delegate and for His Grace the Bishop of Quilon, I would be grateful if this affair could be terminated without delay.

....Your Unworthy Servant and Son, Fr. Aloysius of Santa Maria.

#### Father General's Letter

Rome, Sept. 23, 1900.

I have received your honoured letter. It is true that Father Aloysius returned the Papal Bull by which he was named Co-Adjutor to Monsignor the Bishop of Quilon, with right of succession, and it is also correct that he has begged me to arrange the procedure with the Holy Father so as to be able to enter a convent which our province has planned to establish in our Indian Missions. But I have been advised that our Holy Order must let this affair run its own course without interfering, for the following reasons.

- I. I am told that the Holy Father does not like to reconsider an affair which He regards as final....
- 2. Reverend Father Benziger is the kind of person whom they have named as Co-Adjutor without questioning Our Order because they look on this Father as an individual who reunites in his person all the qualities required in a Bishop. What could I say to contradict the knowledge they have of this Father and about the information given by the people who know him much better than I do?....

I pray to the Lord, and leave the entire matter to His hands that are always providential....

Fr. Bernadine of St. Terese

Father Aloysius accepts the final decision from the Holy Father and writes to Father General in Rome (Oct. 16, 1900)

Venerated Father General,

In reply to my letter to His Holiness, His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of Faith has given me notice on the 22nd of Sept.... "His Holiness does not believe that He can dispense you from accepting the nomination of Co-adjutor Bishop of Quilon. On the contrary this is the expess wish of the Holy Father that you who hasten to be so docile and happy to carry out His wishes, are to accept at once without further argument the nomination for which you have been called."

After having recommended all to Our Lord, I replied by the same post to His Eminence. The desire of the Holy Father can only be an Order for me. Nevertheless I feel that the sacrifice is great, the greatest that has been asked of me. But aided by the grace of Our Lord, I accept and I try to accept as Our Holy Father desires with joy confiding myself to the Holy Spirit. I beg of Your Eminence to be agreeable to it and to dispose at the feet of His Holiness this act of submission as well as my humble promise that I will try to fulfil faithfully and bravely my new duties....'

His Grace the Bishop of Quilon desires that I should be cosecrated at Kandy on the 18th of November. God willing I will thus be consecrated by his Excellency the Apostolic Delegate, assisted by their Lordships the Bishop of Quilon and Kandy.

Your Reverence's Humble Servant and Son,

Fr. Aloysius.

### Being Consecrated Bishop -

(18th November 1900)

Bishop Benziger was nominated Coadjutor to Mgr. Ferdinand Ossi O. C. D. Bishop of Quilon. He was considered by far the most illustrious and dominating figure among all the Carmelite missionaries who had worked in India ...... Ferdinand Maria Ossi O. C. D. was very old and the burden of administration was very heavy for him. So he requested the Holy See for a Coadjutor. Mgr. Zaleski had to find out the right person. With the concurrence of Bishop Ferdinand Ossi, the Delegate Apostolic recommended Father Aloysius to the Holy See. The Papal Bull nominating Father Aloysius Coadjutor Bishop of Quilon

was received and the consecration took place at Kandy on 18th of November 1900. Bishop Benziger chose for his motto "PER CRUCEM AD LUCEM" (through the Cross to the light).... It was for the love of the Cross that he renounced this world and embraced the life of a poor Carmelite and through the Cross he intended to win thousands of Indians for Our Crucified Lord.

What first Mgr. Benziger noticed on his arrival at Quilon was the shortage of Priests and finance. He wanted to build up a strong and well-disciplined indigenous clergy, and for this purpose, started a Preparatory Seminary in 1902 (ST. RAPHAEL'S SEMINARY), and undertook a begging tour to Europe for replenishing the depleted coffers of the Diocese.

# Part Two Chapter 12

### Seminaries & Schools

### St. Raphael's Seminary

St. Raphael's Seminary saw the light of day on Nov. 23, 1902. The Seminary diary has the following entry. "November 23rd 1902— The opening of St. Raphael's Seminary at Tangasseri. There was High Mass at Pro-Cathedral Church at Tangasseri at 8.30 a.m. the celebrant being Very Rev. Fr. Dominic O. C. D. M. Ap, Rector of St. Teresa's Seminary at Tuet. Assisted by Very Rev Fr. John Netto, Director of the Seminary and Rev. Fr. Gratian Pereira...... After the Mass, a Procession of the Priests and clerics headed by Bishop Ossi started from the Pro-Cathedral singing 'Te Deum' came to the Convent of Monks next to the Cathedral, which was to be the Seminary for the time being. His Lordship blessed the rooms, imparted blessing to the new candidates and declared that St. Raphael's Seminary was opened.... Though it was Bishop Ferdinand Ossi O. C. D. who opened the Seminary, its real Architect, Originator and power behind was Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger O C. D. who was then only Co-Adjutor and Vicar General of Bishop Ossi. At the time of the Formal Opening Bishop Benziger was away in Europe collecting funds for the poverty-stricken Diocese. Ever since his arrival in 1900, with his intuitive and penetrating mind he perceived that the vast Diocese

of Quilon comprising the present Quilon, Trivandrum and Kottar Dioceses, could not be properly manned and its opportunities for large scale conversions and expansion could not be successfully availed of, unless there was a Native Clergy equal to the need, properly educated and efficiently trained and unless there was a steady flow of Priests. For an uninterrupted flow of fitting recruits for St. Teresa's Theological Seminary, he saw that there should be yet another reservoir where the Diocese-wide vocations could be collected and trained along modern lines and needs ... With this appraisement of the situation, he firmly set his mind on the scheme of founding a Small Seminary, where boys of tender age who seemed to have a call for priesty life could be chosen and given a preliminary education that would enable them to prosecute the higher clerical studies in the major seminary. Feeling the matter one of greatest importance, Benziger wrote his first circular regarding the preparatory Seminary on July 30th 1902. To house the students selected a provisory place was found in the old Tangasseri Convent (of monks) building adjoining the Pro-Cathedral, which is now transformed into the Infant Jesus English High School.... A set of Rules for the Seminary was drawn up by Bishop Benziger and was signed by Bishop Ossi on Sept. 1st 1902. Very Rev. Fr. John Netto was appointed the first Director... The first batch of students selected were: I Bros. Richard Rozario, who as it were formed the connecting link between St. Teresa'a and St. Raphael's, since he had stayed for a time in St. Teresa's Seminary at Tuet; 2. Bernard Benjamin Fernandez; 3. Thomas Pillard; 4. Bernard Jackson; 5. Simon Gonzaga; 6. Paul Stephen Fernandez; 7. Chrisostom Fernandez; 8. John Fernandez; 9. Raymond Rodrigues.

From Tangasseri the students had to trudge their way to St. Aloysius High School. Hence the Seminary in Benziger's vision had to be in the proximity of the school. So a property opposite to St Aloysius High School was acquired. The laying of the foundation stone took place on June 27th 1903. The ceremony was performed by Bishop Ossi assisted by Bishop Benziger, Diocesan Priests, clerics of St. Teresa's Seminary and Laity representing all the Parishes were winnesses of the great event. The function opened with a stirring address by Bishop Benziger. The text of the address came out in full in the issue of "The Travancore Times" .... The construction of the building progressed rapidly and the blessing of the building and transfer of students took place on March 17, 1904. Bishop Ossi celebrated the Mass and Bishop Benziger made an inspiring exhortation.

One could find many mystical and spiritual reasons for naming the Seminary "St. Raphael's". However, Bishop Benziger named it so also in gratitude to a Swiss Priest who was a companion of his youth, and who contributed the entire amount (Rs. 15000) for the construction of the Seminary, and whose name was **Raphael**. It is not a mere matter of conjecture, since an annual Mass is being said for a Raphael from 1904 onwards.

### St. Aloysius English High School

From 1885 and until 1900, the present St. Aloysius English High School was called "Mission High School" ....In 1900 itself Bishop Benziger started constructing the present school along with the St. Raphael's Seminary Mr. Stephen Joseph of Eravipuram, a prominent Catholic and a Government Contractor of the time, was commissioned to construct the Seminary and the new school. The thatched building situated on the north east side of the present St. Aloysius English High School, is the central portion of the "Mission High School" of the Diocese that existed before 1900. Its temporary side extensions have been demolished with the construction of the new school structure. 'A Normal School' for primary education, ie, from first to fourth classes served as a feeder school for the "Mission High School and was existing in the site where the Trinity Lyceum Boarding is now being conducted. This building was originally built by the Irish Christian Brothers as their residence while they were given the Management of the High School. The Irish Christian Brothers expanded the High School building by extending the eastern wing of the main school building in two storyes and also the side school hall on the western side of the central structure. In 1978, His Lordship Bishop Jerome made a further extension of the western side school hall.

Besides the Government English High School, St. Aloysius English High School was the only school of its standard in Quilon. The Government English High School was open only to high caste Hindus such as Brahmins and Nairs. Therefore St. Aloysius E. H. School was the sole refuge for students of the Muslim and Eazhava Community. Before the proclamation of the "Temple-entry" in Travancore and abolition of untouchability, the destinies of progressing communities such as Eazhavas,, were given life and shape in this leading institution under eminent masters Sree C. Kesavan, once the Chief Minister of Travancore, Sri. Justus Daniel Superintendent of Police. Many Advocates, Magistrates and top-Government servants of the Eazhava

Community would never have risen to heights of glory but for the welcome they were accorded to the Mission English High School and later to St. Aloysius E. H. School. Though the primary motive in establishing the institution was to facilitate and enhance the education of the Seminarians, Bishop Benziger meant also to afford facilities for all Catholic, Christian and Hindu students of Quilon and suburbs to avail of the great opportunity for men of higher education and pavethe way for advancement of communities. He did the same for Trivandrum and Nagercoil, by establishing St. Joseph's and Carmel Institute High Schools.

### St. Teresa's Major Seminary

St. Raphael's Seminary informally opened at Tangasseri, and later shifted to the present Seminary buildings, was merely a Nursery to prepare boys with spiritual training and secondary education for St. Teresa's Seminary. The Major Seminary had but half a dozen Clerics, and they were housed in the building adjoining the Parochial House of Tuet. Benziger who was determined to form a strong native Clergy, recruited more candidates for St. Raphael's Minor Seminary. Foreseeing the necessity of separate and bigger building for the Clerics for their theological studies, he despatched several appeals for funds to his foreign friends and be factors. The results were providentially marvellous.

By the year 1914 Benziger could begin the construction. That year was one of God's providence. Bishop Benziger's cordial relationship with Sree Mulam Thirunal, King of Travancore was known to most people of the country. The good king venerated Benziger as a saint and sage. His Highness had often wanted the Bishop to give up his bullock cart and use a car which His Highness was prepared to give. Bishop Benziger who was a lover of poverty most politely refused this luxuary. One day Benziger had an urgent call from the Royal Family. The Bishop at once hastened to Trivandrum and interviewed His Highness. The King was quite disturbed in mind and compelled Bishop Benziger to accept the new car His Highness had bought for the Royal Family, since he would not retain it any longer. The reason was that in the very first drive, the car ran over a man and killed him. It was a bad omen, and His Highness would not use it any longer. Archbishop accepted the gift on the condition that His Highness would allow him to do anything with the gift. His Highness agreed and with great relief and satisfaction he parted with the carArchbishop Benziger had the car driven to St. Joshph's Church Trivandrum and sold it on auction. The proceeds of the sale (being known as the Royal Car) was much more than the actual cost. This amount was the capital with which Benziger began the construction of the St. Teresa's Seminary at Varuvail–Quilon in the year 1914

The main structure was completed and it was inaugurated, on January 11th 1916. This cost the Blshop Rs. 25000. On 9th of March 1928, Bishop received a handsome gift of U. S. Dollars 5000 from his cousins, with which he extended the Seminary building 35 feet on the east, and another 45 feet on the west.

This Seminary has been the dear Alma Mater for hundreds of Priests for the Dioceses of Quilon, Kottar and Trivandrum. It was made a Regional Seminary in 1937, and after ten years, in 1947, the Seminary was closed down, in accordance with the policy and Council of Rome to train Seminarians in Pontifical Seminaries, where better training, better staff and more facilities for clerical formation were provided.

By a happy coincidence, the St. Teresa's Seminary buildings could serve to house the first batches of students for the Fatima Mata National College, the next dearest institution of the Diocese, which is the greatest achievement and contribution of Bishop Jerome Fernandez not only for the Catholics but also for the public of Quilon, By this great venture, Bishop Jerome has adaquately answered the question that was asked long after Archbishop Benziger's term of Episcopate why he did not start a College during his government, though he had wonderful resources and influence with the Government of Travancore. Whereas the problem of a college was quite inopportune and least beneficial to the generation of that time when there were only a handful of high school passed catholic students, he never overlooked the need but had set apart sufficient funds and provided sufficient lands to meet the needs of the times by his successors. The Seminary itself providentially could be a part of the huge College buildings.

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## Chapter 13

# Bishop Benziger - The Missionary

The Diocese of Quilon is without doubt the oldest Latin Diocese in all India. There is a copy of the Bulla of Pope John XXII dated August 9, 1329 in which Quilon is elevated to the rank of a city and the Rev. Monsignor Hierdano Catalani O. P. was the first Bishop....Quilon is one of the oldest cities in India. From time immemorial it was a flourishing centre of commerce. Sulaiman an Arab merchant and chronicler of the ninteeth century refers to Quilon as Kulam Male—a port frequented by Arabs, Chinese and Egyptians.

St. Thomas the Apostle came to India in 52 A, D. One of the seven churches he built was in Quilon and of the two Bishops he consecrated, one had his see at Quilon. From 1900 to 1931, this historic Diocese was ruled by a holy and illustrious Prelate, Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger O. C. D. One would be making a feeble attempt to unfold the heroic life and activities of this great missionary.

Quilon Diocese was a part of Cochin under the Portugese Prelates. As a result of very sad circumstances, the Holy See was forced to seperate Quilon from Cochin in 1853 and erect it as Apostolic Vicariate.... Quilon is not like Verapoly. In Verapoly there are a great number of Syrian churches and Syrian Priests. Their churches were erected side by side with the Latin churches. Quilon is as spread out as Verapoly. But here we are alone with just the Latins. In south Travancore every missionary priest was in charge of 5 to 17 chaples or little churches. The shortage of priests was felt quite alarming by Benziger, and the expected harvest from the Seminary he started would take years. He therefore made most pressing appeals to Very Rev. Fr. Provincial of Flanters - President of the Missionary Commission to the Mission of Malabar, for seding as many missionaries as possible. He also begged for necessary financial aid to support the priests, catechists and the Seminary and schools. A few priests were sent to Quilon on March 10 of 1901. During the spring of 1902, Bishop saw things going from bad to worse. He contacted the Papal Delegate, who suggested that Benziger should go at once to Europe and stop in Belgium to awaken the generosity of those who once had been eager to help. After his pastoral duties he spent 14 to 18 hours daily writing letters that were to precede his European trip.

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### The Train Accident

The first begging tour to Europe was made in 1902. It was on this trip that he met with a most frightful train accident in which he had almost lost his life. The appaling accident took place, when at early dawn on 13th of September 1902 the Madras—Bombay Express crashed while rushing at full speed and fell into the Mangapatnum river, with the bridge that gave way due to the storms and water current of the monsoon.

Archbishop Bernard of Varapoly, two Carmelite Priests, Fathers Leon and Bernard, and Mother Teresa, founder of St. Teresa's Congregation of Ernakulam, were co-travellers with Bishop Benziger. Exactly at the time of wishing every one "Godspeed", a violent tropical storm broke out. Thunder and lightning took over the country side. The season was at the very height of the northeast monsoon. But there was nothing to fear, for they could not be in a safer place than on the Bombay Express.... Bishop Benziger had fallen sound asleep. He was awakened by the sound of a tremendous thunder. Seeing that no one else stirred, he pulled out his watch to look at the time. In the dim gas lit surroundings, he saw it was nearly midnight. He made his customary ejaculations, which he did at the beginning of each day. Then with a smile of pleasure he remembered it was September 13th, the feast day of his beloved Mother of Einsedeinmother of his native village ever since 800.... What actually happened then, he would never know. Was he unconscious? .... Had he been struck on his head? ....All was blank. He could not breathe.... He could not see.... His mouth was filled with water. Then suddenly, he found himself floundering in a whirlpool of water. He could hear nothing but the roar of rushing water. He could see nothing but Water was thundering across the ears.... He tried to swim; but was constantly thrown off-course badly beaten by heavy objects. Thorns jabbed into his sides. He was fighting to swim and keep above water; but soon this became impossible. Once again he was struck, and he did all he could to catch whatever had hit him. This time it was a life-belt. He clung to it with all his energy At last an hour on end, he felt he had a life preserver and could relax a bit.... Later this protecting pillow was savagely snatched away from him, and he was hit strongly by a huge piece of wood, and he felt he would be cut in half. He was about to sink and thought to himself.

How strange at so early a stage of his missionary life, God was going to end everything. He prepared himself with the thought that

in a little while he would be facing his Lord and Master. But.... instead of sinking, - he made a heroic effort to catch this large piece of wood, which he found later to be a door from one of the rail-compartments. Dawn broke... Again he remembered it was the 13th of September the feast day of our Lady of Einseldein. He prayed to her, offered her his life, if she would spare him now, that he would build an Orphanage in her honour, that he would struggle and fight for his beloved India as he struggled to save his life.... At that very moment, his bare foot touched pebbles and rocks. He realised that he had reached solid ground. Little by little he managed to reach the shore. He climbed up, then he lay flat exhausted, always worrying about the fact how he had fallen into water.... where his companions were.... He cried aloud for help. His clothings were in shreds and legs were severely wounded. From the rail-road some people saw him. Two natives came to his rescue. Each of them put an arm around him and led him to a very little poor hut.... There he was given a dry saree, and hot milk was brought for his drink. From their excited talk, he could understand that there was a terrific train accident and that it was five miles away from there. He wanted to get to that place and know about the fate of his companions.... The villagers assisted him back to the scene of the accident, where he saw what had happened. He rushed to the station and asked where the other missionaries could be. They knew not, but directed him to the other side of the river where the dead were laid in line, and also where those disabled and seriously wounded were made to stay. Broken hearted at the sight, he knelt and cried bitterely for his lost friends. Before he knew, and to his utter amazement he heard his name shouted out with a cry of joy. It was Archbishop Bernard. Fathers Louis and Bernard also were there.

They embraced each other in blissful joy, exchanged each one's, experiences, and their miraculous escape. Only mother Teresa was lost. The rest of the mission gang were saved. They combed both sides of the river. Three days later they found the body of dear Mother Teresa five miles down the river.... Her body and those of the other identified Christians, were given a solemn burial near the Mangapatnam Railway station with large wooden crosses with names inscribed on them, and placed over the graves:

Back to Madras, Archbishop Colgan gave them a very warm welcome, looked after the prelates and priests with all care, and after they had fully recouped, the Archbishop of Madras provided both Bishops with everything needed to resume their journey to Bombay

and thence abroad. On reaching Rome, where prayers of thanksgiving were offered. Benziger recommended for prayers good Mother Teresa and all poor victims who had perished in the terrific accident, the very day he was saved by a miracle.

(ARCHBISHOP BENZIGER IS INVOKED AS A PATRON OF TRAVELLERS)

### Return From Europe

The entire catholic population of the town of Quilon of the neighbouring villages preceded by the Clergy gathered and formed a procession as Bishop Benziger was expected back from Europe by water—they were waiting for him in the large lagoon on the outskirts of Quilon. 14 large boats with cabins, crowded with well-wishers and over 25 small barks-all lighted up as for festivities. The boat that carried the Bishop and His retinue disembarked and he was taken to a carriage sent by the Dewan of Travancore who had come to participate in the most enthusiastic reception arranged. The Bishop was taken along the town streets entwined with garlands of flowers and lighted torches amidst the acclamations of thousands. On reaching the episcopal residence, the Choir broke out into a chant of joy - The Magnificat. While thanking his priests, flock and the public, he narrated the munificences of several benefactors, and especially of Holy Father the Rope, and imparted his paternal benediction.

### Chapter 14

# The Big Harvest Conversions and Reunion of Jacobites

Bishop Benziger was essentially a Missionary.... The enormous alms he collected were mainly expended on the missions. The Catholics of this Diocese who experienced their backwardness in the sphere of higher education, and consequent economical and social drawbacks feel a regret, and are tempted to ask why Bishop Benziger did not employ his immense resources and his enormous influence with the

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ruling Prince, the Governmet and the Public, also in the field of higher education. We are the more inclined to ask this question, as we realise the almost insuperable difficulties we had to encounter and the extremely large sums of money we had and yet have to bury for our college at Quilon. Our regret seems greater when we imagine the comparative case and inexpensiveness with which Bishop Benziger could have established also a few more High Schools in the mofussils, during his 30 years of regime,

Leaving aside the question as to now many of our Catholics would have at that time profited by a College and more High Schools in Quilon-, the figures of St. Aloysius High Schools were not very reassuring—, one thing stood in the way of Bishop Benziger's launching into large-scale expenses on higher English education. It was his **Mission Mindedness**......

#### Kottar

In the presence of wonderful and providential opportunities for mass-conversions in the districts south and north of Quilon, he could never bring himself divert his attention nor think himself justified in utilising the funds he had on founding Colleges and High Schools.

From the year 1901 to 1930 and even later till 1937 there was a steady flow of Belgian, Italian and Spanish missionaries to the Diocese of Quilon. The majority of them were working in the districts of Trivandrum and south Travancore, while a few were given charge of the Mission centres of the north and east districts of Quilon. Benziger launched a real campaign for the conquest of souls opening mission stations to all the existing parishes of Trivandrum and Nagercoil districts. Out of 32 foreign missionaries, seven worked in the - Diocesan chancery and in the major Seminary. Twenty of them worked in the missions of South Travancore, and only five were in charge of the Chengannoor and Pathanapuram districts. Quilon had many zealous Indian missionaries who did wonderful work for the conversion of Harijans and reunion of Jacobites in the districts of Punalur and Charummood Their activities and acheivements will be described at length in the latter part of this chapter.

13 Mission stations and chapels were opened in the Forane Vicariate of Kottar. At Manivliakam 6 mission parishes and 3 chapels were opened for full mission work alone.

#### Trivandrum

Eleven mission parishes and a convent were looked after by the Parish Priest of Puthenkovalam: Parish Priest of Mullanganavila cared for 8 mission stations. Kallikavila had 10 mission stations Parish Priest and his Assistant had 3 parishes and 3 mission stations, which later developed to 15 new missions, with 2 more priests to substitute the Parish Priest in the intensive work among Nadars. The districts of Nedumangad and Nevvatinkara were the chief centres of conversion, and Bishop Benziger, with great foresight purchased properties in different places, put up chapels whereever he had a harvest of souls. He had planned earlier the division of the Diocese, and therefore he acquired sites in the heart of the city where now the imposing Episcopal Residence and Catholic Hostel and similar edifices add to the beauty and grandeur of the city. Many of the churches of granite seen along the Trivandrum Nagercoil high way churches of uniform architecture and beauty, were constructed by Benziger for the benefit of the families he could bring to the fold of Christ ...

### Quilon. Punalur District

In the vast mission district of Punalur, Fr. John Mary, a most zealous and self sacrificing missionary and the right hand of Bishop Benziger, worked day and night in Punalur, and its suburbs, Anchal, Ayoor, Meenkulam, and Kottarakara spreading a real web-work to gain Jacobite priests and people to the true church. With incredible patience and pain he traversed these areas 16 and 24 miles round Punalur on foot and cycle in hot summer and cold winter, extended his activities as far as the forlorn jungles of Kadakal. This strange missionary attracted the attention of all who saw him. A question was left in the minds of all why this rich European clad in brown soutane and carrying a brown bag over his shoulders should be wandering in their villages so very frequently. He was simple in his ways, sweet in manners, whenever his purse was full, generous to the needy, good to honest, but a terror to the dishonest. He made a splendid harvest in Anchal, Ayoor, Meenkulam, Kottarakara and Pathanamthitta. He brought to the Catholic Church priests and people of the ancient and illustrious Jacobite families in all these places. Father Geevarghese of Peedikavil, Pathanamthitta, Mr. P. A. Joshua, his brother and family who proved to be a great lay apostle in Punalur; Fr. Thomas Pathalil of Elanthur and family; Fr. Zacharias Thekedathu,

Kottarakara and his relatives; Fr. C. K. Mathai, Chankaramppallil, his brother C. K. Chacko, Anchal, Kandathil Mr. Mathew Mappilla and entire family and all relations; Ayoor Mr. Koikalazhikathu Cherian his family and relations; Mr. T. D. Samuel - a famous catechist of Meenkulam, are all the most prominent personalities among the 60 families and over 540 members of the Jacobite community won over in and about the Punalur district. Special mention about Fr. C. K. Mathai Changarampallil is to be made in this connection. Among all priests mentioned above, he was the most zealous and apostolic minded priest. A most trusted coworker with Fr. John Mary O. C. D, Fr. C K. Mathai was entrusted with the charge of the missions of Anchal, Meenkulam, Ayoor, Eroor and Kulathupuzha. duties to a large family, he was always on fire with the interest of his converts. Most charitable to the poor, he took delight in giving away whatever he had to the needy converts. His rich relatives deserted him. Yet he sought relief and confort at the feet of Our Lord and the Little Flower in whose name Bishop Benziger had built a church for his flock. He worked hard till the end, and to succeed him he gave God his son now Fr. C. M. George for his service. Fr. C. M. George is one of the most educated and renowned priests of the Syro-Malankara Rite, Professor in Mar Ivanios College, Trivandrum. It is most consoling to note that Fr. C. K. Mathai and his Reverend son Fr. C. M. George M. A. and that entire family have been ever grateful to Bishop Benziger and the Diocese of Quilon for the great gift of faith and other favours they had received from and through the Latin Diocese of 'Quilon....

# Conversion and Reunion Campaign in Charummood and Shuranad Districts

While Benziger started measures for the conservation of old Catholics down from Capecomerin, and reinforced conversion works through Carmelite missionaries in the districts of Nagercoil, Trivandrum, Neyyatinkara and Nedumangad, camps were pitched in the northern regions of the Diocese for conversion of Hindus and reunion of schismatic Syrians. Under the able and zealous leadership of Father Lawrence Pereira - later elevated first Bishop of the newly erected Episcopal See of Kottar in the year 1930, hundreds of Harijan and a very few high caste families embraced the Christian faith.

Though illitterate and poor, the Hindu Harijans who were under the yoke of high caste Hindus, and who were not even considered members of the Hindu religion, but as mere slaves, could easily understand the loving teachings of Jesus Christ, and could hope in the brotherhood and protection that Christian religion offered.

From about the year 1910 till 1931, twenty conversion centres were opened with Charummude and Shuranad as residential head-quarters of the Missionaries. Two beautiful churches residential bungalows, and elementary schools were put up in the head-quarters, and chapels and solid sheds were provided in a dozen stations round about Charummude and Shuranad. There was great enthusiasm among the converts, as more and more people were attracted to the fold. No doubt there were oppositions also. By 1930 there were 23 mission stations and as many chapels.

In Kattanam, Charummoode, Peringanad, some ancient Jacobite families came up for reunion with the Catholic Church. Fathers Ninan, Abraham Tharakarı, Jacob Kodasanad, Geevarghese Pedikayil of Pathanamthitta and Fr Thomas Pathalil hail from the said reunited Jacobite families. These Priests and their families helped our Missionaries in their work for further reunion of Jacobites and conversion of Harijans and other Hindus. By 1930 over 700 families were received into the Church in the districts of Charummoode and Shuranad. Our hard-working and zealous Indian Missionaries were second to no foreign Missionary, so much so, Bishop Benziger who was impartial in his judgements, used to point out how our Indian Missionaries were models for all in missionary zeal, self-sacrifice, inspite of financial handicaps.

Bishop Beziger's frequent visits to the mission districts to see his flock and its shepherds, were a real encouragement to them and an occasion for knowing the needs and difficulties of the people and pastors.

Our generation has to hold in admiration those Indian Missionaries who did wonderful work with admirable results, though they lived at a time when not even bicycles were in use for covering miles to move from one station to another. On foot and in bullock-carts, they travelled camped in stations, taught people, fought the battles of life with the people and won glorious victories for the Lord's Kingdom.



Bishop Benziger just before his retirement

# Chapter 15

# His Greatest Achivement - The Reunion of Archbishop Mar Ivanios, Mar Theophilos and Jacobite leaders

Father John Rebeiro who was well conversant with the functioning of the Sacred Offices of the Holy See, drafted letters for transmission to the Catholic Patriarch of Antioch expressing sincere desire of Mar Ivanios to embrace the Catholic Church, and requesting the Patriarch to arrange his reception into the Catholic Church. Since there was no response to the letters of Mar Ivanios from the part of the Patriach, Father John Rebeiro broached the matter to Archbishop Benziger, who in turn started correspondence with the Holy See, and received approval for preparations for and subsequent reception of the Jacobite prelates and priests and laymen into the Catholic Fold. Thereafter, in the silence and solitude of St-Mary's Summer Villa, Olikara, Mar Ivanios and Archbishop Benziger held several conferences in the company of Benziger's most trusted co-workers Father Lawrence Pereira and Father John Mary O. C. D. who were deputed by Benziger to discuss all minute details of the reunion. Great privacy was maintained to ward off violent reaction and revolution from the part of Jacobites opposed to the union with the Catholic Church.

### Fr. John Mary O. C. D. on Re-union

Archbishop Benziger did a tremendous amount of work for the reunion of Jacobites By the time Mar Ivanios returned to the true Church, missionaries had been assigned by the Bishop in the districts of Punalur, Kattanam and Mavelikara. They were working there very hard for the reunion of Jacobites. The Bishop's men were very capable priests whom he could count on to carry out his orders.......

There were dissident Jacobites especially in the districts of Charummood and Punalur. Bishop Benziger created small and isolated conters where it was easy for the dissidents to come back to the fold. This bold policy was beneficial to several well-meant and sincere Jacobite families who were not hampered by material indigence or caste influence to embrace the true mother church. Thus before 1930, far back from 1923, about 80 families with 560 members of the well-

to-do Jacobites had joined the Catholic Church. Father John Mary "before the Reunion of Mar Ivanios, flow of Jacobites to the Catholic Church had begun in the Diocese of Quilon, and I have all documents in the 'Reveus' of our Carmelite Order of 1924 to 1930. Here it is good to note that Bishop Benziger in his modesty spoke but very little of the missionaries in those parts.... This work and enterprise can be laid entirely at the feet of Bishop Benziger, who step by step directed this movement from the start...... in my possession an unknown document all directly transcribed by Bishop Benziger and myself.... an excellent study including also a section that had its aim "the return of Jacobites to the Church." We were penetrating with the least bit of publicity; yet it is worthy of mentioning that already then, before return of Mar Ivanios, these first converts who had been under the personal direction of Bishop Benziger passed on to the jurisdiction of Mar Ivanios. They are noble men whom later Mar Ivanios hardly ever mentioned... Later after his reunion with the Catholic Church, I received ample powers from Archbishop Mar Ivanios to see that I could draw close to the Jacobites (ref. Dec. 29, 1930 — in the Carmelitanes Etudes, page 227/228) There is also another Official Document from the Congrgation of the Propaganda Oct. 15th 1931 addressed to Bishop Benziger with the following words." I am very happy that before resigning from your pastoral Office, which was entrusted to you by the Lord, you have succeeded to bring to the fold of the true church Archbishop Mar Ivanios and Bishop Mar Theophilos. (see minutes of the Carmelite Order, Vol. VI. Page 204/205) How is it that Jacobites hardly mention Bishop Benziger and his years of tremendous efforts in their conversion?

# An Historical Monument Reunion of Jacobites into the Catholic Church

September 20th 1930 gave birth to a new Era for the Malankara Syrian Church. The most historical event of the formal Reunion of the Heads of the Jacobite Church, namely that of Mar Ivanios, Mar Theophilos, Father John O. I. C., Brother Alexius other Clerics and several Laymen took place on that day in the Chapel annexed to the Quilon Latin Bishop's House. Authorised by Pope Pius XI. and the Holy See Archbishop Aloysius Maria Benziger received them into the Catholic Church. This historical event is recorded on a marble slab placed by Bishop Jerome on the inner wall of the Chapel. It reads as follows.

#### J. M. J.

In the year of Our Lord 1930 on September 20 in this Episcopal Chapel
His Grace Archbishop Mar Ivanios O. I. C. MA
His Lordship Bishop Mar Theophilus O. I. C.
Rev. Father John O. I. C., Brother Alexius Cleric

and

Sri. Chacko Kilileyath, laymen
All Members of the Jacobite Church of Kerala
Were received into the Catholic Church

by
His Lordship Aloysius Maria Benziger O. C. D.
Bishop of Quilon,

whom the Archbishop approached for help, and whom
The Holy See deputed to perform the Reception.
Immediately followed the very First Holy Mass
in the Catholic Syro Antiochian Rite

This great event - The Reunion of Jacobite Prelates, a Priest and people, written in letters of gold in the annals of the Church of Malabar, was not achieved overnight. Archbishop Benziger had to work for its successful issue silently, prudently and patiently for over several years, maintaing utmost secrecy and modesty. Father John Rebeiro D. D. of Mavelikara, an intellectual giant of the time and a co-country man of Archbishop Mar Ivanios, was approached by an equally great intellectual, Mar Ivanios, for guidance and counsel for union with the mother church. Fr. John Rebeiro was sent for higher Ecclesiastical studies to the Roman Pontifical college in 1885 by Bishop Don Joss Gomes, Bishop of Cochin, for which he was ordained and for which he was working After returning from Rome he worked in the Diocese of Cochin till 1920, he retired to his native place, Mavelikara. He bequeathed to the Diocese of Quilon 16 acres of land and paddy field, where the Missionary Sisters of the Little Flower are now working....

The return of Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilos to the Catholic Church, is the most unforgetful event in the history of the Church in India. The Syro - Malankara Church is steadily progressing and flourishing now all over Kerala. In December 1980, the Golden Jubillee of the Reunion was celebrated with great pomp at Kottayam. It has to be remarked with surprise, that neither Mar Gregorios nor any of the eminent speakers hardly made any reference to Archbishop Benziger, the real architect who silently but most effectively worked

out the return of the first Prelates and leaders of Jacobite Church to the Catholic Unity. Rev. Fr. Placid C. M. I. an eminent Priest of the Syro-Malabar Church, and Rev. Fr. C. M. George M. A. were the only ones who were true to history in their literary contributions to the Jubillee Souvenir. The concelebrated thanksgiving Mass that initiated the Jubillee Celebrations in the Latin Bishop's Chapel in Quilon where Mar Evanios and Mar Theophilos and leaders of the Jacobite Church were officially received into the Catholic Fold, was indeed a gesture of genuine sentiments from the part of a few noble minded Priests of the Syro-Malankara Church.

#### Pre-Reunion

Going back to the Pre-Reunion years, one would not do justice were he to ignore the first heroes who sacrificed positions, community and family bonds and were made victims of enmity and hatred for the sake of following the true light of Faith that was made to shine before them by Benziger and his zealous missionaries, Fr. John Mary O. C. D., Fr. Lawrence Pereira, Pantheleon Periera, John Rebeiro D. D. and others.

With determination and a spirit of detachment many Jacobite priests, families and individuals boldly responded to the clarion call of the Divine Master. Among them the following persons were most prominent. Between 1914 and 1916 with the reunion of Fr. Ninan of Anniyil Jacobite family of Charummood. In and round about Kattanam, namely in Vallikunnam 17 families returned to Church. By 1921 twelve families from Charummood, and a few families under the leadership of Fr. Jacob Mullapatempil of Kodasanad followed suit and again from Kottampallil 5 more families of Jacobites joined the true church. Churches big and small were built in these centres immediately after a few families came over.

Father Abraham Tharakan of Anniyil family of Charummood was picked up by Bishop Benziger during one of his visits to the place in 1916 and he was ordained Priest in 1921, by His Lordship himself. Father V. T. Thomas of Mavelikara, was a student of Mar Ivanios in the Jacobite Seminary of Serampur. He secured B. D. degree from the above Seminary and worked as a teacher of religion in the Kottayam old Church Seminary. As a result of his contacts with Rev. Fr. John Rebeiro D. D, and at his instance Fr. V. T. Thomas interviewed Bishop Benziger who admitted him in St. Teresa's Theological

seminary, Quilon, and was ordained Priest in 1929. Father Abraham Tharakan and V. T. Thomas were the first celibate priests from the Jacobite Church. In 1929 itself one Fr. Varghese O. I. C. of Perinad Bethny Monastery escaped from there and took refuge in the Bishop's House, Quilon, and requested to be accepted to the Catholic Church. He was received as desired after due preparations.

To sum up the history of the Pre-Reunion before 1930, it would be of interest to advert to the Decree of 1955. The sacred Congregation for Oriental Rites ordered all Jacobites reunited before 1930 and afterwards through efforts of the Diocese of Quilon, to go under the jurisdiction of The Malankara Rite. According to that Decree, there were 10,000 reunited jacobites, and 9 Priests to be handed over to the Malankara Rite by the Diocese of Quilon.

# Chapter 14

# Appraisal and triumph of the humble servant of God

Archbishop Benziger who always desired his works to remain uncounted and unapplauded, was greatly disturbed by letters of praise and appreciation flowing from top Ecclesiastical dignitaries and placing him in the high lime-light of fame as the greatest of missionaries in India who brought back to the Catholic Fold the most ancient and strongest dissidents the Jacobite Church.

## Cardinal Edward Mooney

former Delegate Apostolic of India from 1926-1931 wrote:

"As I was not well informed regarding the Jacobites... I turned to Bishop Benziger, who, from his long experience in Travancore, knew their situation very well. In fact it was through him that my long and confidential correspondance with Mar Ivanios was conducted. Thus he was my constant adviser and guide throughout the long and complicated series of events that led to the return to Catholic unity of Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilos in the summer of 1930, and the establishment of what now is the Syro-Malankara Hierarchy, and

ecclesiastical province.... This historic event in which Bishop Benziger played such an important part must have brought deep consolation to him as it did to me in the years that followed. For the Reunion movement initiated by Mar Ivanios made many converts from the very beginning and to-date the number counts Bishops, over hundred priests and more than one hundred thousand faithful..." (Letter of H. E. Cardinal Edward Mooney dated Aug 23, 1957)

## Vatican City - Cardinal Fumosoni Biondi

Wrote in 1958. His reflections on Archbishop Benziger:-

"I arrived India as Apostolic Delegate on May 6. 1917. I had the pleasure of being with Bishop Benziger on two ocassions in 1917 and 1918. It was during one of these visits that I came to know one of his self-imposed mortifications. The Good Bishop lived frugally, and always slept on the bare pavement. To accommodate me for the night, since he had no bed in his house, he prepared the bier which was used for funerals in the church, covered it with blankets and arranged it in a room in the campanile of the church. There I passed the night in a degree of confort which the Bishop would not allow for himself.

To my knowledge, Bishop Benziger was always in accord with the Malabar Bishops of Oriental Rites, and did all in his power to promote good relations between the Latin and Oriental clergy. On his advise I counselled the Malabar Oriental hierarchy to translate the Missal and the Pontifical into the Malabar language for their services."

(From His letter to Marieli Benziger, cfr. Page 317)

# 6. Cardinal Van Rosum - Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, Rome, Oct. 13, 1931.

Your Excellency,

....I am happy that you were able, prior to laying down the charge of work that the Lord had entrusted to you, to receive into the bosom of the true church Archbishop Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilos formerly members of the Jacobite sect.

I rejoice as well on the vast number of pagans who also this year have received the sacred waters of Baptismal regeneration and have turned from the worship of the demons to the devoted knoweldge and recognition of the true God.

With these magnificent and monumental documentations and records of the above conversions, which will be remembered for ever, Your Pastoral Ministry has so excellently ended.

May the Good and Great God grant you a reward commensurate to your lobours, and may He keep and prosper you for a long time to come.

G. M. Cardinal Van Rosum, Prefect.

## 7. Bombay Examiner Reports

On the death of Monsignor Benziger, Archbishop Kierkels the then Apostolic Delegate wrote that Archbishop Benziger was an outstanding Ecclesiastical figure, not only in Malabar, but also in the entire Appostolic Delegation, while Monsignor Zaleski described him in the notes he left for his successor, as 'undoubtedly the most distinguished. Prelate in all India....'

# 8. His Highness Sreemulam Thirunal - Maharaja of Travancore (cfr. Page 28)

In 1911, Bishop Benziger interviewed His Highness accompanied by Fr. Lukas. Benziger went to His Highness to present his reasons against the unreasonable threats of the Director of Public Instruction that he would withdraw the recognition of St Aloysius High School. The Maharaja not only justified the position of the Bishop, but also encouraged him to continue boldly his works in the field of education and for the elevation of the depressed classes. As a souvenir of this interview, His Highness presented Bishop with a photograph of His Highness on which was written "I consider you by far the **Holiest Man** in my realm." (Reported by Fr. Lukas O. C. D.)

In a letter from the Kaudiar Palace dated at Trivandrum July 18, 1961, the then ruling Maharaja wrote to me (Marieli Benziger) I have heard how His Grace Bishop Benziger and my Uncle and Predecessor, Sreemulam Thirunal Maharaja, had great mutual regard and respect and they used to meet often. My mother—Maharani Sedu Parvati Bayi and Lused to meet the Archbishop occasionally when I was a young boy. By the time I became grown up, your uncle had given up voluntarily his position as Archbishop and settled down in the Monastery of Trivandrum as a Priest. We continued to meet him when he used to accompany the Bishop of Trivandrum..... It was the Predecessor

of this Maharaja who had unassumingly and unhesitatingly said Archbishop Benziger is the holiest man in my Realm.' Such words are not glibly spoken, in an India, which reveres a 'Holy Man.'

Marieli Benziger - Page IX, of the Dedicatory Preface of Archbishop Benziger - Carmelite in India.

# INCEDIBLE-YET TRUE Bishop's Hand-written Letters

(from Protocol Numbers)

Besides the 'ad limina' visits to Rome, Bishop Benziger made 'several tours to Europe and America and His own motherland in quest of funds to consolidate the economic position of the Diocese and to enrich and with missionary priests, and Religious Congregation of menand women. With dynamic-energy, untiring zeal and mysterious power he wrote thousands of letters of different categories. Besides a huge correspondence to countless benefactors in Belgium, Switzerland, France, Germany, and America, according to documentary collections recorded in the "ARCHBISHOP BENZIGER - CARMELITE IN INDIA"-from 1900 to 1931, Bishop is seen to have written (all handwritten) 10982 Pastoral Letters; 12526 Circulars; 6709 confidential and personal letters to his Clergy, and 10236 appeals to his Carmelite Superiors and to the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith.... This work would look quite superhuman and impossible, especially when we realise that all the thousands of letters were handwritten, and written amidst the multifarious pastoral, apostolic and administrative duties. Without prejudice to his personal spiritual excercises, and regardless of ill-health especially of an hernia trouble that was his life-companion, Benziger sanctified each moment of his life as a martyr to duty, until broken down with hard labour he tendered his resignation to Pope Pius XI in 1931

#### The Harvest

Great was the financial stability and material welfare Benziger achieved for the Diocese. Greater was the development of spiritual like in the various Parishes and Mission Centres. The appended catalous of properties bought with great foresight, the number of Churche Chapels, Schools and Convents, crectod and the thousands of coversions made so as to raise the Diocese to the first grades in the

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field of Missionary activity in india, will throw light on the prodigious spiritual harvest the Diocese had during his time and during the ministry of his successors.

# 10. Fr. Jerome Fernandez - Editor, Catholic Action (Page 551 – 52)

It is a well known fact that the Diocese of Quilon at the time Bishop Benziger took over the administration was financially shaky, nay, immersed in debts. The progress the Diocese has achieved and the works accomplished by Bishop Benziger all speak volumes of the wonderful resources he was able to tap, single handed, to meet the growing needs of the Diocese. To collect liberal alms he had to make several trips to Europe and America. It can not be denied that his appeals met with desired effects chiefly due to his personal influence with the people abroad. To determine the exact amount he brought in during his career as Bishop, the writer lacks official records. ever, it can be gauged from the number of churches, chapels, schools and convents he erected, and the extensive sites he bought, the funds provided for Seminaries, and several other institutions, the salary of Catechists etc.... for a period of 31 years.... These he could not have done with anything less than Rs, fifty lakhs. This fabulous sum he collected not with printed letters, but with hand-written appeals,...

The remarkable thing in this connection is, that with all massive resources before him, he led the life of a **Real Mendicant**. He denied himselt even the meagre conforts which as a Bishop, he was expected to enjoy.

His deep humility and indifference to human recognition was noted by thousands assembled for the Episcopal Consecration of Bishop Dereere in 1936, when in reply to a public address he quoted in pathetic accents Our Lord's words to Apostles "When you have done all these things that are commanded of you, say: We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which we ought to do" (Luke 17 / 19)

The one who was least conscious of the marvels of his success was Bishop Benziger.

Catholic Action. (Page 40; Number Oct.—Nov. 1940)

# Here are a few figures which show the growth of the Diocese of Quilon, 1900 to 1931.

		1900	1 <b>9</b> 31
1.	Total population of the Diocese	1,450,000	2 <b>,15</b> 40 <b>0</b> 0
2.	Total Catholic population	8 <b>9</b> ,000	226,665
3.	Conversions	415	96,615
4.	Churches	150	213
5.	Chapels	19	<sup>-</sup> 62

From the above one can see that the general increase in the total population from 1900 to 1931 was 49%.... The growth of the Catholics rose to 155%; where, in 1900, the number of Catholics in the Diocese stood at 6, in every 100 - in 1930, it rose to 11 per 100. The average conversions every year (taking the total for 30 years) came to 3200.

The total number of	conversions in	30 years may be	classified
thus	Hindus	87,444	
	Protestants	9,989	
in the first of the second of	Jacobites	2,132	

The growth of Catholics in India from 1900 to 1930 was 56%.... While during the same period, in the Diocese of Quilon, it was 155%. The one who was least conscious of these marvels of success was Bishop Benziger. In pathetic accents he recalled the words of Our Lord to His Apostles in the answer made to the address given him on the ocasion of the Consecration of Bishop Dereere. "When you have done all these things that are cammanded of you, say": We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which we ought to do (Luke: 17/10).......

# The followings are to be appended to the figures given in The Catholic Action:-

		1980	1931
1.	Priests (Indians 82; foreign Carmelities 28)	32	100
2.	Seminarians (St. Raphel's 36, St. Teresa's 38)	7	<b>7</b> 4
3.	Boys' High School	. 1	3
4.	Girls' High Schools	2	5
5.	Primary Schools	24	112
6.	Training School	nil	1
7.	Seminaries	1	2
8.	Religious congregation of women	1	5

9.	European Missionary Sisters	e was part to the	3	82
10.	Industrial School		nil	1
11.	Centres for reunion of Jacobites		nil	7
12.	Financial Assets	del	ots	50. Lakhs
		de	bt	(savings)

In 1900, There were only two properties in Tangasseri and Trivandrum in 1931, from Quilon Summer Villa down to Capecomerin and he acquired eastward to Shenkotta nearly 1000 acres in 320 sites.

It is to be recorded with gratitude and pride, that on the vast and strong foundation laid by Bishop Benziger, his successor Bishop Jerome Fernandez has raised Colleges hundreds of Schools of various grades, built Churches and Chaples, and allowed different Religious Congregations establish their convents and monasteries and work for the spiritual and social development of the Diocese and progress of its people.

# Status Quo of the Diocese in 1981 (According to The Catholic Directory India)

,81117
98
26
6
15
48
4
12
7
62
1
2
2
8
4
3 <b>0</b>
2
7
3
1
98
1
14

# Chapter 17

# Religious Nuns in the Mission Field

Bishop Benziger was an amazing organiser. His work was greatly enhanced by spiritual impulse and development such as had never been seen before.

His acheivements in the field of conversion were marvellous. The "begging Bishop" had amassed huge sums of money from Europe and America for the conservation of his flock. A chapel, a school, a parochial and a convent for each mission parish was his motto. Indian women and girls of conservative culture needed special attention and training. It is here that Benziger strove to embellish the Diocese with Nuns of religio-social missionary spirit. The Religious Nuns increased from 22 in 1900 to 300 in 1930, and they were running four high-schools many grade-schools, a dozen orphanages and four hospitals.

In his travels with the Papal Delegate, he had met the Belgian Nuns — the Canonesses of St. Augustine — whose aim was to train girls in useful trades. Later at his insistence they opened an industrial school at Mulagummood which became world-famous. For, there the girls were taught a priceless Belgian craft—that of making exquisite Brussels—lace of matchless beauty. In course of time, many more schools of this type were opened.

#### Sisters of the Third Order Apostolic of Carmel:

Bishop Ossi was instrumental in bringing to Tuet these Nuns. They later opened a convent in Trivandrum and still later in Tangassery. Bishop Benziger was so pleased with their progress, that on the 18th of December 1908, he united them into one congregation under the title of Third Order Apostolic of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. He not only gave the Congregation its Rules, but also a Constitution that he himself drew up according to Canon Law. These Nuns were put in charge of High schools for girls. Thousands of remarkable young women profited by these institutions. They had learnt how to stand on their own feet, and make a place for themselves in a world where women, until then, had been looked down upon.

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St. Joseph's Girls' High School of Tuet, Holy Angels' Girls' High School, Trivandrum, Mount Carmel Girls High School, Tangassery and the All Saints Women's College, are the best and outstanding educational institutions conducted by the Carmelite Nuns of Mount Carmel. These institutions are so accredited for instruction and discipline that even atheist and Marxist Ministers of Kerala State preferred these Schools and College for educating their children.

Vatican II has opened wide the Carmelite cloisters, and has exhorted these and similar congregations to go out and work among the ignorant and socially handicapped sections of the Christian community, never belittling the contemplative life enjoined by rules of the Order. Thus the Carmelite Nuns have already moved out to parishes, evangelising, teaching and counselling families and especially women in the true Christian way of life.

#### Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

The Order was founded by a French Priest Rev. Louis Dupuis, and had a branch in Pondicherry. They were brought to Quilon by Bishop Benziger who opened two Schools and Convents for them, the first one being in Kanjiracode, Kundara. The religious profession of the Order was teaching.

## The Growth of the Order

From modest beginnings, the Order has by now grown into the largest Diocesan Religious Congregation, having houses in two countries - India and Germany. They have 28 Convents in Kerala; one in Tamil Nadu; one in Bangalore; one in Bihar; one in Orissa and another in Madhya Pradesh. Very soon, the congregation will be raised to the status of an Apostolic Order.

# **Educationalists**

The Sisters are engaged in teaching in several schools of the Diocese, while four High Schools, four Upper-primary and twelve Lower Primary Schools are entrusted to their care by the Bishop. The Vimala Hridaya Girls' High School, Quilon, is one of the two leading Girls' High Schools of the Quilon District and under the able Headmistress Rev. Sr. Immaculate Mary, the school and the Headmistress were honoured with the Indian President's National Award in the year 1981.

#### **Medical Mission**

They run three major Hospitals and two Dispensaries in Kerala, and six smaller ones outside the State. Bishop Jerome Fernandez, very thoughfully opened a First Grade Hospital and dedicated it to the Memory of Archbishop Benziger-THE BENZIGER MEMORIAL HOSPITAL. It has a school of Nursing attached to, and is one of leading Hospitals of the Quilon town. The Sisters manage this institution very efficiently. The Ozanam Eye Centre erected by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is also looked after by the Sisters.

The Diocese and the public owe a great debt of gratitude to Bishop Jerome Fernandez who was instrumental to the growth of the Order, its expansion throughout the State and outside, and also for helping the Order for its advancement and present glorious status. The Sisters number 357; Novices 8; Postulants 23 and Aspirants 20.

## **Holy Cross Congregation**

Even as Vicar General of the Diocese, Bishop Benziger did not wait to write to Switserland requesting the Mother General of the Holy Cross Nuns of Menzingen to set aside at least a dozen nuns who could be put in charge of Indian Hospitals. Nurses were urgently needed. At the head of the State of Travancore, they had a king H. H. Sri Mulam Thirunal who was not only most charitable, but who had pleaded that nuns be brought to his State Hospitals to care for the sick and dying. He himself volunteered to finance all expenses. He would build guarters attached to the hospitals where the nuns could have their convent life, as well as a private chapel for themselves. Bishop Benziger pleaded the Maharaja of Travancore, and His Highness guaranteed that they would be looked on as Angels of Mercy.... Benziger resolved to wait for the first chance he had to visit Europe. During the winter of 1906, He had his brother to drive him to Menzingen. He met the Mother General and pleaded discussing the future of the Swiss missionaries in India... Many who never wanted to go to India or become missionaries, changed their minds and signed up. He stopped others who by-passed him and told them "Oh, you may not now be ready to come; but I will be waiting for you. You will be in India before you know it" .... He was prophetic; and invariably those very ones, who at first, ran away from him, later found themselves in Quilon.

Bishop Benziger had not only wanted nurses, he wanted nurses who could teach.

# Mensingen Archives

(1909) Mother Paula relates:

"Our King The Maharaja cares for the churches like a great father. He also maintains numerous hospitals. The King is very good to the Catholics. On the feast of the Pope, which we all celebrated, he sent his own horses and carriage as well as his personal military band" (1927, June 17) A short exhortation to Holy Cross nums by Benziger:

"Every morning when the bell calls us to rise, lift up your hearts and say" Dear God, You want me to get up; Alright. But now you must do something for me as well; give me a soull! And so throughout the entire day, learn to bargain with God. God is really a father — a Good Father, and He will help us to gain souls for eternity."

# Benziger's last Message to Mensingen

Aug. 3, 1931

Dear Mother General, It has pleased Our Heavenly Father's divine providence, to give me during the past many years the required health. But since last year, as you know, my health has been failing. Fearing that I could not without prejudice to the welfare of this dear Diocese continue in the Episcopal charge, I submitted some months ago my request to the Holy See. His Holiness the Pope has deigned to relieve me of my charge and has by letters of July 3rd through the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda fide" appointed an Administrator Apostolic, the Right Rev. Father Bernadine of S. Teresa, who as Vicar General for many years devotedly shared my labours....From my whole heart I thank you all for the filial submission you have so religiously shown to me and which has merited God's fatherly blessings.... I sincerely ask pardon for the pain I may have sometimes caused you. Do kindly remember me in your holy prayers, and be assured that I shall ever affectionately remember you before Our Lord.

The Holy Cross Nuns in India have confined their ministry only to medical Apostolate. No doubt they have social welfare programmes around all their convents and hospitals, projecting the love and mercy of Christ to the poor and afflicted.

After the age of kingship in Travancore and with the advent of democratic rule, the government started imposing intolerable

restrictions impairing the official positions the nursing Nuns held. It was rightly forseen that they would slowly be unwanted by the government, except in the State-owned leper asylums where no Minister of State would ever be bribed or influenced by doctors or nurses for appointment or transfer. On full realisation that the noble objectives of service could never be achieved in the Government Hospitals the Nuns established themselves firmly in Kottiyam and opened a First Grade Hospital there now a haven of hope for the whole of Kerala. They have further established their houses and hospitals in different parts of Kerala and India, Mangalore, Bangalore and Bombay.

Mother House of the Holy Cross Congregation is in Menzingen, Switzerland, and the Generalate - supreme most governing authority is in Rorschach, Switzerland. The Constitution of the Order is framed by the Generalate Chapter in which Provincials from all parts of the world assemble. The Constitution is to be approved by the Pope - or rather the Sacred Congregation for Religious Orders. Amendments and changes in the Constitution are also subject to the approval of the Pope.

The first batch of 10 Holy Gross Nuns, arrived in Quilon in the year 1906. Patronised by the Bishop and protected and aided by the King and his Government, they started work in the General Hospital of Trivandrum and District Hospital of Quilon. As more Nuns came, they extended their services in more hospitals of the State.

As referred to in the previous chapter, after the period of the reign of Maharajas, the Dewan of the State and later the democratic Governments started harassing the Congregation and its ministry in the Govt. Hospitals. They wisely decided to establish themselves and carry out their work by putting up their own hospitals, not abandoning the few posts from which they were not expelled. The withdrawal of the nuns from the Govt. Hospitals was a great blow for the public who enjoyed selfless service and care from these angels of mercy. The incident reported hereunder is a manifestation of the great esteem even anti-catholics had for the excellent services of the Nuns. Sir C. P. Rama Swamy Aiyar, Dewan of Travancore was the first to declare a cold was against the Hospital Nuns. Yet, when by an irony of fate he was ambushed one night and just escaped by his strength a well-planned attempt of murder, losing only a bit of his big nose instead of his head, amidst painful groans and nightmares, he

called up not his eminent doctors, but the Holy Cross Nurses to nurse and attend on him, in whom alone he put his trust, inspite of his well known antagonism against Christianity.

In these days of uncertainity and search for a suitable site to establish themselves with a Provincial House and major hospital, Bishop Jerome generously made them proprietors of 15 acres of land in Kottiyam (ten more acres were donated later) on Nov 2nd 1951.

Due to the broad vision and farsightedness of Archbishop Benziger, he had acquired over 300 acres of land in Kottiyam alone, for the future development of the mission. The Church of Our Lady, the Elementary, Basic and Training schools and the Orphanage for boys were the first institutions Bishop Benziger started in Kottiyam. Though there were Directors for the institutions, the Holy Cross Nuns, beginning with Mother Paulina of loving memory, looked after the boys of the orphanage and established a weaving institute and boarding for them. The elder boys were trained in the industry so as to make them useful for their future life.

With the advent of the Holy Cross Hospital, the once jackal-ridden unheard of village slowly transformed into a net-work of religious institutions, a centre of industries and a health resort. It is now one of the busiest towns. In 1952 the Holy Cross Hospital and in 1953 the Holy Cross Convent were solemnly blessed. Over Rs. 50 lakhs had to be spent for bringing up the Hospital to the present size and resplendant form. The Congregation and the public owe a tribute of deep gratitude to the skill and dedicated services of a holy and valiant daughter of the Order **Mother Seraphica** who spent herself and all her energy in the construction of this mighty edifice and several filial structures which shelter thousands and thousands of patients, highly qualified and skilled Doctors, smart and efficient nurses and hundreds of well-paid and contended employees.

# Financing Agencies

Charitable Foundations such as the Caritas, the Misereor and the German and Swiss Governments and the Mother House in Menzingen were the sole agencies that helped the construction of the hospital and the Convent.

## **Growth** - **Expansion**

By 1982, (The Congregation that has branches all over Europe and America) in India and Ceylon alone, there are two Provincial Houses, Ceylon Province owing its origin to the Province of Quilon, India.

The Quilon Provincial House has under it 17 Houses and Hospitals in Kerala (Quilon-7) In Tamil Nadu 2, In Karnataka 6, In Maharashtra 2, and in Uthar Pradesh 2, and a School of Nursing.

In India, there are 343 Nuns, 27 Novices and 150 Aspirants.

#### Their Mission

The Holy Cross Nuns work mainly in the Medical line, as Doctors and Nurses. They have as their own one Leper Colony, one T. B. Hospital two Foundling homes for babies and one Weaving Institute,

Those of the Congregation who are incapacitated by ill-health or overage, have the programme of Prayer and sacrifice in their Houses for the suffering and sick in their hospitals in particular, and for all the afflicted in the world.

## The Spirit of the Order

'Charity and Service' is the motto of the Order. It is to be admitted that the Congregation has made itself worthy of its name, by their ministry of charity and service for the past 76 years in India.

The Holy Cross Hospital in Kottiyam and their smaller hospitals numbering 17, are not business firms, but Charitable Institutions. One has to asses not only the income from medical bills, but also the heavy expenses entalled such as: the salary of Doctors, Staff Nurses, purchase of medicines, maintenance of the hospital buildings and the salary of the L. G. employees etc,

Sympathetic consideration is shown to really poor patients by giving free treatment, medecine, food and bed, which comes annually to a fabulous amount. For relief works among the poor and needy around all hospitals and convents donating food and first aid medicines, and also for extra-ordinary donations in times of famine and disaster, the congregation is always ready to cooperate with the Government and public bodies.

In a spirit of christian modesty, the authorities of the Order are far from the craze of advertising their works of mercy. However, it is good that the public is kept aware of the tremendous good the congregation does for the community.

In concluding this chapter on the Religious Congregations Bishop Benziger initiated in the Diocese, one must not ignore the wonderful services of other religious bodies of women, such as the Congregations of the "Queen of Apostles, the Missionary Sisters of St. Teresa, the Salesian Sisters, and others whom Bishop Jerome Fernandez brought to the Diocese. Bishop Jerome has verily tried his best to fulfil Bishop Benziger's desire to have a Convent for each Parish or Mission. There are now over 14 Congregations and about fourty Convents all over the Diocese.

The Congregations of the Holy Cross and Immaculate Heart of Mary their medical and educational institutions are so covetably large and flourishing, that the greed of political monopoly and snares of communal colonialism could possibly endanger their very existence and ideals dearer than their lives. The spirit of people and Clergy of the Diocese of Quilon who have always valiantly protected their dear institutions in times of danger, will surely be on the alert against the above said hidden dangers and guard and protect the dear institutions as the very pupil of their eye, deeply integrated as they are with the Diocese and people of Quilon forming a vital part of mystical body the of Christ.

# Part Three Chapter 18

# Ill-health and Resignation

# Benziger decides to lay down his Episcopal office

By Easter of 1930, Benziger's physical indispositions aggravated. His constant headache became unbearable; his eye-sight became poorer; his energy rapidly ran down, and he started fearing that his time had come for the end,

Out of three great ambitions he could see two fulfilled. On 20th Sept. 1930, he could bring Archbishop Mar Ivanios and his

suffragan Mar Theophilos and others to the Catholic Church. On 28th September 1930, the erection of Kottar Diocese was effected. Benziger's prayer for an Indian Bishop as his Successor for Quilon, and for his resignation, were delayed for some time more. However Benziger could no more comply with his responsible duties. Hence, he urged his appeals with the Holy Father and the Carmelite Generalate for being relieved from office. On 28th August 1931, he completed 41 years in India.

# The Holy See accepts Benzigers' Resignation

(Through Father General)

The undersigned Secretary of The Sacred Congregation of the Faith, has the great pleasure of announcing to your paernity that His Holiness the Pepe – because of the outstanding merits shown by His Excellency Bishop Aloysius Benziger, who has asked to be relieved of the Diocese of Quilon has now promoted him to the dignity of Archbishop with the title of Antinoe. In the course of many years spent, as missionary, he has manifested great apostolic zeal unto abundant fruit in his long and tireless pastoral ministrations. The Holy See has accepted the resignation of His Excellency Monsignor Aloysius Maria Benziger. With this resignation, one of the greatest apostles of all India leaves the active service in the Diocese of Quilon. (Page 477)

Letters of acceptence of Bishop's resignation and appointment of Rt. Rev. Father Bernadine O. C. D. as administrator of the Diocese dated July 27th 1931, were received. Bishop was ready to hand over charge of the Diocese he governed for full 30 years. Within 2 weeks after receipt of orders from Rome, He makes the official announcement.

# Bishop Benziger's Resignation

(August 10, 1931)

On August 10th, 1931 — Bishp Benziger called together the Members of his Council. His read before them the letter from Rome (dated July 27th 1931). Then said to them:

"I am no more your Blshop. Monsignor Bernardine is your Administrator."

This was a terrible shock to the Councillors. These did not quite know what to say. But, before they could recover from the shock, Bishop Benziger had left them.



Then Sishop Benziger reached Carmel Hill Monastery and pleaded to rotice there, he came with only a mail well patched bug which he bisself had mended. All he carried were his worldly goods: his few revisaries, his personal articles of penance, and that was all. This had been his constant companion nring his rountiess pasters! visits.

his time he immediately requested to be permitted to wear the brown Carmeline habit. He hid from ow his pectoral cross, mever showing it again unless specifically requested to do so by Father Pring, he bushing he had were at Pontifical Mass were made of the same material and color as were the vess-sents. Anything of this sort could not be beught untaide of Rome. He asked the native mass to make the some, They were most primitive, gold braid, and so thin he was bound to have sore feet.

The small patched bag with articles of penance -Rosary and sandals - the only earthly possessions he took to Carmel Hill on retirement On the next day (August 11th), after asking father—Alexander fare for his train trip to Trivandrum — Bishop Benziger was gone from their midst.

#### **Arrival at Carmel Hill**

Fearing that he might go back to Belgium, the faithful of Quilon begged him to stay with them. Bishop Benziger replied that, after all "The Mission cannot spend money on the transportation of a skeleton to Europe."

He had decided to remain in Travancore "among the people of his heart." He added: "These dear people are my pride and crown." He chose the Novitlate of Carmel Hill in Trivandrum as his Last Retreat.

He went there with a small, well-patched satchel (These repairs he had made himself) It was no longer than 14 inches and had accompanied him on all his many years of visitation of the Parishes.

#### From the Throne to the cell of Carmel Hill

Bishop Benziger Named Titular Archbishop of Antinoe by Rome:

Carmel Hill, August 26, 1931

On August 26th, 1931, a letter reached Carmel Hill which was turned over by Bishop Benziger without being read. He went to the cell of Father Prior and left the letter there.

Father Constantine realized what a great honour had come to the entire Diocese of Quilon. He waited until after Vespers had been said. Then assembled the entire household—reading aloud the letter that had come from the Pope in Rome

The letter clearly and carefully informed all of the fact that Bishop Benziger's resignation had been accepted. In gratitude for his years of service in the Diocese of Quilon and all the magnificent work done in India, the Holy Father had honoured him by raising him to the title of Titular Archbishop of Antinoe.

Father Prior, who thought he was doing an honour to Bishop Benziger, raised his eyes from the paper that had come from Rome after he had finished reading. To his amazement, he found His Excellency prostrate — lying at his feet.

Everyone was completely astonishad. Here was the oldest member of the community, who had fallen to his knees and then prostrated himself on the floor.

Father Lucas, the Master for Novices, was the first to come over to the Bishop. Father Prior quickly joined him. They instinctively seized the arms of the old Bishop and raised him from the floor to his feet. Tears streamed down his cheeks, as the Archbishop said humbly:

"Does not the Manual for Novices, say that religious must prostrate themselves on the ground when they are praised by their Superiors?"

No one could have been more amazed or astonished by this conduct than Father Prior.

id migrati en tomas. (Il teris blens ital y 18 denam marces distributor estati las italias.

# 'Vox Populi'

The Year 1932

A Carmel Hill lay brother's vivid, eyewitness account of Bishop Benziger's life in retirement—as simple Carmelite monk unfolds as follows:

Memories of Bishop Benziger (1935 — 1942)

If you climb the staircase at Carmel Hill Monarstery, you will come to the second floor, the third cell to the left is the Bishop's cell.

The Novitiate Chapel is at the end of this corridor. The Novice Master's cell is next to the Chapel. Usually the Bishop said his Mass here. The Chapel is not very roomy. It is one of the cells.

The sisters of Holy Angels gave beautiful Altar cloths, hangings and flowers for its adornment. Bishop Benziger was their Confessor, and they were very happy to send lovely things for his feasts.

I have only witnessed the Bishop saying Holy Mass two or three times. As soon as he was dressed with sacerdotal vestments, he seemed to me to be another person.

While saying mass his appearance was dignified and striking. His voice vibrated energy and strength of soul. He was once again young. 'Ad Deum oui laetificat juventutem meam.' It is no exaggeration to state that he was transfigured.

When he said his Domine non sum Dignus, one felt how unworthy he was to receive Jesus in his heart. He was so convinced

of his nothingness and sinfulness and the words came out so pregnantly. When he turned to give Holy Communion, his countenance shone with majesty and sweetness.

I entered the Monastery on a Saturday morning in the year 1935. After praying before the Altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Father Constantine (the then Prior and Delegate Vicar Provincial) introduced me to Monsignor Benziger. His very first impression made me aware of his holiness.

The door to Monsignor's cell was always kept ajar during the day. According to the Carmelite Rule, no one should enter another's cell. But through the door left ajar, I could see everything.

# Words from the Abundance of a holy soul:

Bishop Benziger to Father Lucas while at Carmel Hill

We can do a lot for God by putting up with our own incapacity. Every saint is despised by those who know him or her. It is the will of God.... These are the instruments a favoured soul is chiselled with, to perfection by the divine Sculptor. Saints may fail. Many have done so. Not all have persevered who have been called to the highest place by Jesus. The esteem of the world has found a split in their armour. We can do a lot for God by putting up with or enduring lovingly the defects of our neighbours. If I am God's child, then my neighbour is also God's child. If I love the Father, will I not love the child for the sake of the Father?....

We should have great devotion to the Holy Ghost, and we must never forget that at every moment. He draws us closer and closer to the union with God if we respond to His inspirations.

The Blessed Sacrament: This little particle is a permanent miracle of the love of God for men. It unites so many millions of men all over the world. What love. This same particle has given extraordinary strength to the martyrs, courage to the Confessors and Doctors and zeal to the missionaries.

The way of the cross is the safest and shortest way to heaven. Without our heavenly Mother we can do nothing. Respect and obedience to both Ecclesiastical and civil authorities is the golden rule for all Christians. One who is not with the Bishop is not with Christ and one who is not with the church is not with Christ. The practice of poverty has great influence in the work of evangelisation. It must not be forgotten that the people of India are much edified by material poverty in men consecrated to God."

(Bishop Benziger's advice to Father Lucas - Master of Novices and Father Confessor to Bishop Benziger for 11 years while in Carmel Hill)

#### Report from Fr. John O. I. C.

(One of the first group reunited along with Mar Evanios - Fr. John is still alive and over 90 years old.)

His Excellency was always firm in adhering to ideals and principles. The same spirit of firmness was maintained in his dealings with the clergy also. That might have caused some of the Clergy to dislike him.... His Excellency's austerities were continued even in his retirement in Carmel Hill.... Consequently we can understand that it was from pure love of Jesus crucified that his Excellency led such an austere life....

His Excellency's mastery over self seemed to be the outstanding feature of his character. His lively faith and love expressed in his manner of saying the Mass impressed me most. His never failing regularity of life and zeal in speaking of spiritual things also impressed me deeply. His loftiness of spirit attracted me. He understood all my personal problems.... He was most devoted to the Holy Eucharist and to The Blessed Mother of God. Immediately after receiving us in the Catholic Church, he bestowed the brown scapular on each of us.... Detachment of self, personal love of God, love of prayer and sacrifice were the chief virtues. His Excellency stressed most.... He seemed to be praying always. Preparation for Mass was only a more recollected prayer.....

I met His Excellency last in Carmel Hill in 1933. He used to hear the confessions of the Novices. I was one among them for one year. In the confessional he appeared to be another Good Shepherd. At Mass he seemed to be actually speaking to the Lord face to face.... (Fr. John O. I. C. Bethany Asram, Nalamchira, Trivandrum.)

#### Memoris of Fr. Luke O. C. D. Novice Master - Carmel Hill

As Bishop, his great and ardent zeal for the betterment of Catholics and the conversion of pagans, whom he considered his subjects to be evangelized, especially shone in His Excellency.

His noble and affable manners were of particular note....whether with the clergy, the religious, the faithful or the pagans. I learned much from dealing with His Excellency.

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Very Reverend Father Silverio de Santa Teresa, the late General of our Order, told me once that Monsignor Benziger was one of the most distinguished persons whom he ever met in his journeys throughout Europe and America.

His dress was poor, but always clean, as St Teresa wanted her sons to be. Indeed, His Excellency was a perfect Teresian model.

As has been said; his manners were most affable. Therefore there was no reason not to approach him with confidence.

As head of the Seminary of Quilon, I had many occasions to deal with Monsignor Benziger. And I must say, In all truth, that I always found him to be courteous and pleasant.... even in matters in which our opinions differed.

But I must note, especially, that I came to know His Excellency from very close proximity in the Novitiate, where we lived side by side for eleven years. In addition to the common recreations, I often used to have private and rather intimate conversations with His Excellency.

I can say, in all truth, that I found him as charitable and affable as ever. These talks were real pleasure for me. His Excellency had the gift of being agreeable in his dealings and knew how to speak of things useful to the persons whom he addressed.

Only those who had reasons to reproach themselves had need to fear approaching his Excellency. I repeat, I learned very much from him—both personally, as well as how to deal with others.

The novices, too, owed much to his Excellency. They were edified by his example and doctrine, for, he often gave them spiritual exercises.

For many years, Monsignor Benziger said Mass at the Chapel of the Novitiate, which I used to call "Our Bishop's Cathedral." He was confessor to the novices and students.

Occasionally, he even joined them in recreation — making himself young with the young. I some times had to remind them not to forget that they were dealing with a Bishop. For they would tend to take too much liberty with His Excellency.

But His Excellency never took it badly. It was edifying to see such a venerable person, enjoying the little jokes of the young people.

If Monsignor were "cruel, unsocial or unsympathetic", one does not understand how so many people could deal with him with so much familiarity.

vê Garas

In short, from my dealings with Monsignor Benziger — from 1912 until his saintly death — I can safely say; Monsignor Benziger was a perfect Carmelite after the heart of St. Teresa of Jesus.

I observed the Bishop keenly because I knew he was a saintly soul. His bed was simple made of planks covered with blankets and a pillow - This was the royal confort he had enjoyed for 30 years of his Episcopate.... He disliked ostentation. He disliked being addressed 'Bishop.' He used his Episcopal ring only when he celebrated Holy Mass or when he went to visit a Bishop or other dignitaries.... He followed the most minute details of the Carmelite life, using the wooden cross studded with nails bracelet with irons—one girdle for his waist and another for his thigh. These mortifications were the means to bind himself to the Crucified Christ....

His severe austerity toward himself can be easily explained, taking into account the character of Monsignor Benziger, who would not admit to halfways, but would go straight to the most perfect

On the other hand, the training of the Carmelite novitiates, too. taught him the same things, for as it is wellknown, their great importance is attached to mortification and self-abnegation in order to reach the summit of perfection as required by the Carmelite profession.

But Teresa of Jesus used to say that life of prayer and comfort do not go together. St. John of the Cross was also of the same opinion. Our good Bishop wanted to be a worthy son of these two great Masters of spiritual life.

Moreover, Bishop Benziger knew very well that he needed God's grace to fulfil all his serious obligations of a pastor of a Diocese. These graces he thought to draw down by his prayer and penitential life. If we can judge things from the progress the Diocese made under his leadership, God was very pleased with the life his faithful servent led.

Monsignor used to say: "God has entrusted to me the souls.... not only of Christians.... but also those of pagans, Mohammedans and others"

From his austerity and severity, one can also imagine to what a high degree of union of God he reached. I remember, too, that the Bishop.... having once seen the Holy **Pontiff Pius X** when he was Cardinal Patriarch of Venice.... was very much impressed by his poor way of life This evidently had an influence in making Father Benziger

(as he was known at that time) ever more generous in his spirit of mortification and poverty.

Both the love of his Carmelite life (which he appreciated so much) and the love of the poor (whom he loved with all his heart) lay at the bottom of his austerities. His goodness and charity would not allow himself to be in comfort while others remained in misery.

His outstanding characteristics were his right-mindedness and determination to carry forward what he thought to be his duty and conducive to the glory of God. Great was his charity and kindness toward all.... especially toward the sick and the guilty ones, who repented sincerely of their faults

# Chapter 19

# The Sun - set of a Noble life

It was the year of his eternal reward; the year in which Bishop Benziger was escorted by angels before the throne of the Most High to hear his Divine Master's words of benediction: Euge serve Bone et Fidelis' - Welcome good and faithful servant', the year in which all who had known him mourned over the demise of a holy pastor, Saintly prelate, great missionary, and a benefactor of the Church and the state, and the year of a holy man's liberation from the chains of the world and from bodily sufferings.

The cluches of death lay cruelly on the life of Bishop Benziger from 1938. For the first time He was compelled to subject himself for an operation for hernia ihat was torturing him for years. He proved himself to be an excellent good and submissive patient in the pay ward of the Trivandrum General Hospital. Though the operation was successful and he returned to the Monastery, by 1942, he had to succumb to the final grip of death. Toward the end of February 1942 the old and ailing Bishop was returned to the same hospital sick and paralised. He suffered from a bad bedsore. Very R. V. Fr. Prior and Fr. Lucas, master of Novices had too great an esteem for the Bishop. But the Bishop in his deep humility and not to give trouble to the Brothers, did not like being nursed. In the hospital, he was laid in a special wing reserved for Nursing Sisters.

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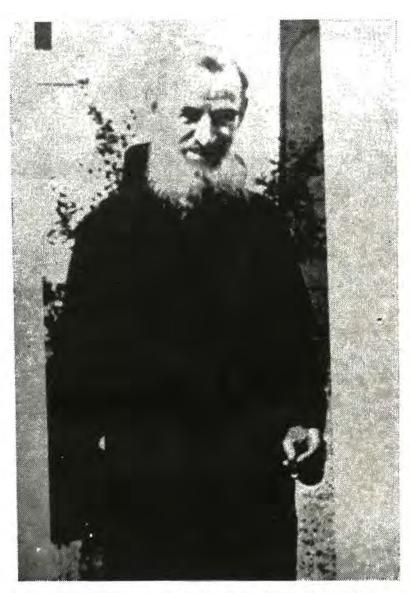
The impressions of the staff and of Sr. Theresa Heglin are worthy of note. Later she wrote:-

I was first allowed to nurse Bishop Benziger as a grace from Divine Providence. I nursed His Excellency for the last three months on earth. A good kind and humble patient - I often begged for his prayers as of a loving Father. Throughout his long and fervant missionary life, the Bishop had gained hundreds of souls for Jesus. No crosses or humiliations were too big, As in his healthy and active life, so it was on his sick bed. He was spared no humiliation during his long sickness. As a nursing sister I noticed on his back black marks of oval shape spaced at regular intervals-resembling burn wounds that have healed. I asked myself then; could the Bishop have somebody burn him like that? Or, was it from taking stronger discipline than others that he had these marks? I have never let this be known to my younger nursing Sister companions. Our dear Mother Emeritta knew from Priests and told us that Bishop Benziger lived a very autere and holy life in every way, but was very solicitous of others....

# Deadly strokes

Twice he suffered paraltic attack from head to foot on the left side until his saintly death six months later. His face was swollen and he suffered loss of movement.... He experienced great difficulty in eating, any even swallowing any food solid or liquid.... On March 2nd, His Excellency was given Extreme Unction. But he soon recovered. However our Rev. Sister Superior, Very Rev. Fr. Prior and Fr. Lucas wanted the patient to remain in the hospital so that he might get better nursing and care.... On the Feast of St. Joseph's Patronage Bishop begged permission to say Mass. This he did and it was the last Mass he could ever celebrate. Very soon afterwards he had a relapse from which he never did recover.

The Bishop needed better food than the ordinary light fare, But no amount of pleading from his superiors could avail, since in a spirit of poverty and mortification he refused such rich foods. Bishop did not like too many visitors since the consolation from such visits was not permitted by the Holy Rules. Only with the order of Very Rev. Fr. Prior poor woman whose son suffered from serious mental troubles, was allowed to visit the Bishop and get his fatherly blessing.



In the monastery his happiness knew no bounds

Many Ecclesiastical dignitaries and Bishops visited him. When able, the sisters would bring him to the verandah. Later when he was too weak, he greeted callers from his bed.... He was very grateful for the lovely lilies roses and other flowers provided in the sick room. When well, he had enjoyed seeing the lilies growing in the garden as he passed by on his way for the instruction and confession of the sisters—or while waiting to be taken to the chapel........ Once, he was heard to remark: "The number of sisters must increase just as the lilies grow, and spread all over India."

He was growing very weak and suffered much pain. But he did his fervant and holy prayers and persevered with his ejaculations, his rosary passing through trembling fingers. When frequently asked to get through his prayers, he would say with a smile. "Trust in God.... Oh, the intinite love and mercy of God...."

Through repeated strokes of paralysis, be grew a little senile, with loss of will - power during which his thinking was not clear for some time. He would then refuse his medicine or food. He would look indifferent and unconcerned about visitors, being quite powerless to compose himself to surroundings. However, only in this disturbed state was he ever troublesome. As soon as his mind was clear, he was very kind and loving....

Very often he spoke these words: "Trust in God, trust in His infinite mercy; Leave all to the infinite love of Divine Providence...." In the evening after supper, as long as it was permitted, Rev. Mother Superior and the sisters would slip into his room to receive his blessing. On special days, such as the Feast of St. Aloysius, Mount Carmel and the Swiss National Holiday, we sang a hymn and recited some poetry. The patient showed great delight in all these. On the feast of St. Aloysius, Sister Superior wishing to give His Excellency the pleasure of seeing those who were near and dear to him, had invited from Quilon Fr. Bernadine, Fr. Alexander, Bishop Dereere, Fr. Lucas and Fr. Prior. They all came and held a tea-party in Bishop's room and in his honour. The patient could only sip little tea with great difficulty. But he was most solicitous that his guests had everything they needed and enjoy the party.

#### **Eternal Home**

On July 27th a cablegram came from the Vatican signed by Cardinal Maglione, stating that Pope Pius XII sent His paternal

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Apostolic Benediction and prayed that divine assistance would fortify and console Bishop in his illness.

The Bishop's state of health grew worse and from time to time the patient lapsed into unconsciousness. Then once he returned to himself, he said the Confiteor and other prayers. On August 16th at 10 a.m., the anniversary day when he had taken possession of the See of Quilon, the Bishop remembered the day very well. He as well remembered that the end was coming very fast.

As the end approached, all the Indian Fathers and Brothers and all the Priests and Novices of the Convent wished to say a final fare-well and receive the Bishop's blessing. There was nothing morose or sad about these meets. The visits were genial and sincere. The young ones wanted the Bishop to know of their lasting gratitude—the elderly, that he could count on them.... They too were grateful for his inspiration, and his years of patience:

He was a saintly man who had counselled all for many years. The venerable Father had encouraged very many and helped them to hold fast when life seemed to have abandoned them.

The Bishop kept repeating the word of a Sacred Heart Superior, Rev. Mother Janet Eraskine Stuart: "I know that when the strain has grown too strong, Thou wilt be there; I know that when the waiting seems so long Thou answereth prayer; I know that life and death and all are Thine Eternally...."

At 9 p. m. 16th August, the Reverend Mother of the hospital advised the priests to go to St. Joseph's High School, and that she would call them if the turn would come for the worse....Sister Josepha had been nursing the Bishop for quite a long while, and one part of his body was fully paralysed. He seemed to have a premonition that he would 'die soon. He spoke only a word at a time. He awaited death with dignity and joy.... Bishop Dereere, Bishop of Trivandrum said to him "Prepare yourself It will not be long before you will be called to face your maker and master. Offer all you have done and all you have suffered to God for others .... You have nothing to fear when approaching the throne of God. The number of Catholics when you took over the Diocese of Quilon was a mere 87000 Today there are 2,85000. They all know, love and bless your name. have been a good and loyal servant to your Master...." Benziger made a feeble attempt to reply to the prayers said in Latin.... He nodded his head in gratitude as the Bishop of Trivandrum left his room. In his feeble hand he clenched his Rosary and Crucifix He

looked up and saw Sister Josepha near his bedside. With a kind smile he looked up to her and said in his native dialect "Come close and kneel at my bedside where I can see you. She did as desired and he said in a slow and clear voice." With all my heart I bless you Sister Josepha for time and for all eternity.... and all, all the dear sisters of the Holy Cross.... He then closed his eyes, and there was great silence....

Only two Nurses remained in the room to begin their night watch. Sister Josepha was one of them. She knelt from where she could see Bishop's face, and in her hand she held a lighted candle. His eyes were closed. Once in a while he opened them. She noticed that his lips and fingers were getting blue. She signalled to her companion nurse and whispered to her to call Mother Provincial. The night had been very painful, but the patience of the Patient was admirable. His prayers had been unceasing. He kept repeating "My God's most holy will be dome at every moment of my life" .....His lips ceased moving. She knew that the end had come..... It was August 17th five in the morning, as his soul slipped into eternity.

# Chapter 20

# The End - Magnificent Tributes A Hidden Gem Brought to Light

According to the wishes of Archbishop Benziger expressed during life, his remains were removed to Carmel Hill Church. Once the body had been taken there, Priests and Nuns kept an unbroken prayerful watch throughout the early hours of the day. When the townfloks heard of the Bishop's demise, they flocked to the church Before 6 a m., a dozen Holy Masses were said for him.

The Dewan of Travancore, very high Government officials and Bishops and Archbishops from all over the country—hundreds of miles away—participated in the triumphant Funeral Procession. The entire Clergy and the Bishop of Quilon who were in Clergy Retreat left for Trivandrum by train, buses and cars to have a last glimpse of their beloved. Pastor and Founder of the Mother Diocese of Quilon. Ylong with the millions overcrowding the city of Trivandrum, they

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paid their tearful homage to the one they all beleived as a living Saint, whose body now lay bright and serene – diffusing the halo of holiness that his holy soul had merited.

Twenty Bishops and over 300 priests participated in the Holy Mass and Office for the dead, and a tremendous crowd of the faithful took active part in the obsequious ceremonies. No doubt, all the participants prayed fervently for his soul, and at the same time prayed to him also.

As the body was lifted for internment in the crypt inside the Monastery reserved for Prelates and dignitaries of the Carmelite Order, the choir broke out in the beautiful song. "I am the ressurection and life; he who believes in Me, shall live even if he is dead" ....and there was a great lamentation in the crowd for quite a long time. The body of Benziger lies there awaiting its glorification in the time and the day the good and just God will deign to grant.

(Pages 549 and 551)

## Archbishop Benziger - Holy Missionary

Archbishop Benziger was hailed a holy servant of God by contemporary Cardinals, Apostolic Delegates, Bishops and the King of the country.

A few authentic Letters are reproduced in these pages.

1. The Apostolic Delegate's official letter of Condolence addressed to Father Prior of Carmel Hill Monastery, Trivandrum.

Vatican City, Rome, Italy, August 28, 1942.

Most Rev. Father,

With deep sorrow and most vivid pain have we learned of the death of the "Missionary Bishop - that Model of Missionary Bishops - the poor and dear Monsignor Benziger.

His name will be held in veneration in the Diocese he governed for so many years with wisdom and prudence only equalled by his zeal. For four years I was witness to his really edifying zeal while visiting in his company, the vast Diocese Divine Providence had confided to his paternal heart. I always turned to him with unlimited trust in the difficulties met within my office.

He was an Angel of purity, a model of Penance, master in the art of making himself all to all - going personally to join the most

forsaken and disheartened, so numberless in this desolate country of our mission.

Offering my poor prayers for the peace of his soul, I recommend myself to his intercession as to a heavenly protector.

A Necrology will be published in the official writings of the Order, as well as a commemoration. Would you be so kind as to send me a copy.

If I am in Rome, I will be pleased to be present at the religious ceremonies which are to be celebrated for his soul.

P. Pisani Archbishop of Costanza Apostolic Delegate of West Indies.

 Archbishop Leo P. Kierkels, Apostolic Delegate, 17 Palace Road, Bangalore, India.

< 3

Sept. 1, 1942,

The memory of Archbishop Benziger deserves indeed the veneration in which it is and will be held. For many years he was an outstanding Ecclesiastical figure, not only in Malabar, but the entire Apostolic Delegation.

In the notes left for his successors, the former Apostolic Delegate Monsignor Zaleski states that Mgr. Benziger who for many years had been the secretary for the Apostolic Delegate is undoubtedly the most distinguished Prelate in all of India. He knows perfectly the conditions prevaling in this Apostolic Delegation. He knows all the Bishops and many missionaries and he will be the best adviser of a new Apostolic Delegate during the initial stage of his office.

The successors of Mgr. Zaleski, among them myself, have shared those views, and I am sure to voice the common sentiment of all in applying to him the words of Holy Scripture "His name liveth unto generation and generation, and the church declares his praise." (Eccles: XLIV, 14, 15)

The Diocese of Quilon has special reason to do so, since he was its beloved Bishop and Pastor for many years

3. Valerian Cardinal Gracias, Bombay, India Archbishop's House Bombay

24. October 1971.

(At whose request his Secretary Msgr. S. Lobo turned over a long article to the Bombay Catholic Weekly on the wonderful life and ministry of Archbishop Aloysius Maria Benziger. The concluding parah reads as follows)

"....And finally, there is the man himself under whose inspiring influence one is drawn and held captive. Even as Bishop he retains the Carmelite ideal of poverty and simplicity, monastic austerity and deep devotion to Jesus and Mary. On his retirement in 1931, he sought and was given admission in a Carmelite monastery in Kerala, where he was a model of religious life to all, seeking no privilege except that of service. There is something inspiring in his total selflessness in the service of God's people; There is greatness in the hard life he led on his journeys (including the unbelievable accident when the train he was travelling in was washed in torrential rains off a bridge and the Bishop was swept ashore in ragged condition five miles downstream). There is a shining example of his life that calls forth in each one of us a response to live more fully."

Report by Sister Josephine Perrond Holy Cross Nun

I knew Bishop Benziger from 1933. He was our Confessor and Spiritual Director for several years. His direction was firm, kindly. above all charitable. He insisted on an absolute submission to God's will, absolute obedience to superiors and to our confessor. His direction, kindness, all helped me very much to advance spiritually and to persevere in the service of my divine Master. I remember sometimes when discouraged he would say to me "My dear Sister, my dear child, the good God has given you choice graces, and He desires you for His Spouse. I realise that you must suffer much; but even if this is the case, that you suffer daily and were to die from these sufferings, oh, even then remain faithful to your religious life. You must have great, very great confidence in Him ...."

His spirit of prayer was such that he really lived it, and he was consumed by the spirit of God. His preparation for Mass so intense that he was lost in prayer. He came into our chapel and knelt on the bricks.... In concentrated prayer, he would say the Holy Mass distinctly and with great fervour and intensity.

(Page 541 - Archbishop Benziger - Carmelite in India)

Rev. Fr. Celestine O. C. D. Pushpa Ashram, 34 Mosur Road, Arokonam, Madras.

December 1980

Dear Marieli and Rita Benziger,

.......You give in it (Book – Archbishop Benziger, Carmelite in India) a wonderful picture of the Archbishop – his person and works. He has not only enriched the Church here in India, but he has enriched in every way our old Order of Carmelites, alas, his own knowing not that he was such a treasure and such a great saint.... Why do they not try and work for his canonisation? If he was not a saint, who else is going to be one? He lived and died a saint. Is there no one to take up his cause and work for it.... For proof, no miracles are needed, his letters - those wonderful letters filled with ardent spirit of faith and zeal for souls are enough. I don't know how I can thank you for sending that book to me....

God bless you and your works Fr. Celestine O. C. D.

Casa Generalizia Carmelitani Scalzi Corso D'Italia — Roma

30th June 1979.

In a letter to Benziger Nieces, among other matters:

"The name of Archbishop Benziger will remain a glorious one in our Teresian Carmel, and as years pass, the greatness of his spirit and heart, the vastness of his apostolic works and influence he exercised in the Church in India, will become clearer and clearer."

Fr. Charles Newwell, Procurator General.

Casa Generalizia Carmelitani Scalzi Corso D'Italia 38 – 0019E - Roma

12th May 1981

(In a letter to Marieli Benziger, and Rita Benziger, Superior General of the Carmelite Order wrote while acknowledging receipt of some of the Benziger publications)

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Dear Miss. Benziger,

.......You will be glad to hear that I was on pastoral visitation to India for three months and have returned.

In that way, I was able to see for myself all your revered and Saintly uncle did for the Church in India. He is remembered with veneration and deep gratitude,

Yours very devotedly

Father Philip Sainz de Barando
Superior General O. C. D.

# Chapter 21

# Miracles Attributed to Holy Bishop Benziger

# Miracles and prophesy are the criteria of the true church of Christ and also of the sanctity of true servants of God

In the process of the Beatification and Canonisation of persons of extra-ordinary sanctity, the church investigates into the miracles attributed to such persons. After minute study of the historical or traditional authenticity and superhuman nature of these works normally impossible for human power to perform, the Church decides most carefully whether such works are miracles or not.

There are a few historical facts, attributed to Bishop Benziger, and attested to by contemporaries even now alive and traditionally believed and narrated by people who were witnesses to these happenings.

I mention a few of them as heard directly from those who have had the favours, and recorded same in the life history of the holy Bishop. The writer appeals to the readers to judge whether the incidents he quotes have any miraculous character. In case the readers find reason to approve them as works of divine power, then, it is their duty to pray to Almighty, and also to ecclesiastical authorities to take up the cause of this holy servant of God for Beatification and subsequent Canonisation.

 (From the Biography and Documentary Chronicle on Archbishop Benziger — Carmelite in India by Marieli Benziger & Rita Benziger)

Related by Fr. Abraham Tharakan — and written by him for publication in book Page 289—290 Parah 17 onwards

"....The same year (1914) Bishop (Benziger) sent a letter asking me to be ready to go to the Seminary. But my father requested that I wait one year longer, as I was motherless and I loved my father dearly. In 1916 I entered the Minor Seminary. His Lordship met all my expenses during the years of study in the Minor Seminary, and even when I moved into the Major Seminary as a student of theology etc:- It was while I was a seminarian that I had an attack of typhoid, and spent more than 75 days in the Government Hospital, where the Sisters of the Holy Cross nursed me.... For 60 days I was delirious. It was said that on a particular day, I would pass away. The fever was far too high. In all the convents, Minor and Major Seminaries, prayers were asked for me. They were sure that as the fever was so high, I could not go on living.

Word had gone out to Archbishop Benziger that I would pass away before midnight of the same day. No sooner the Archbishop was given this information than he ordered his bullock-cart and started from his episcopal house.... He reached me in the hospital at 8 p. m.

News had been sent ahead to the hospital Doctor that Bishop Benziger was coming.... When he reached the hospital, great was his surprise to find that I was not in bed, but instead was lying on the floor. The Archbishop asked way I was not on the bed, He was informed that it was customary in the hospitals that before a patient died he be removed from the bed and put on the floor....

At that moment the doctor arrived. He stood next to the Bishop. Immediately the Doctor requested that nuns place me in the bed. The Bishop smiled and remarked: "Dear sister, the brother will Not die I want him as a priest. I am positive that I will ordain him as one..."

Two of my brothers were standing near my bed weeping. The Bishop turned to them. "Do not weep. Your brother will not die. I need him too much" ....He then gave his blessing. After a while he left asking the sisters to be sure to nurse me very well.

Once the Bishop left the room, the doctor told the nuns "If the patient does not die before midnight, be sure to call me." A very short time after the Bishop had gone my fever began to fall. Before midnight the temerature was normal.... The Doctor was informed. He came and examined me. Then he told the nuns: "This is a miracle. Your Bishop is a Holy man. Through a mere blessing the patient is no longer sick; but cured through a Miracle."

After a few days I was dismissed from the hospital, and went home to take rest....... To make matters short, I wrote my examination, and was sixth in rank among the 34 theological students. All of this was, to me, a great miracle ...

(Father Abraham Tharakan, a Priest of the Diocese of Quilon was a native of Charummood (Kattanam). The above statement is a true copy of his own letter subscribed to the book Archbishop Benziger — Carmelite in India The writer has heard directly from him the story of his miraculous cure)

#### 2. Fires and Sea obeyed him

It was Christmas season of 1928. The sandy sea shores of Vaddy and Tangasseri (Quilon) were emitting heat, waves at noon time. Students of St. Aloysius High School, Quilon were enjoying the noon Suddenly, some of them saw clouds of smoke soaring high in the air to the south. The attention of thousands of students was attracted. In one voice they all cried out: "There is fire in the sea side." I was an eye-witness of the huge dark clouds of smoke spreading all over the sky and moving to the west. The students of the villages of Vaddy and Tangasseri ran to their houses. Alarmed and frightened my Seminary mates and myself (I was a student of Form four) returned to the Seminary. The fire swept fast over hundreds of big and small houses, burnt to charcoal hundreds of fishing boats and nets, several babies asleep were suffocated to death, and the poor people could only stand aghast and helpless before the unapproachable 'gehenna' of fire.... As the merciless flames blew fast westward, the people of Tangasseri coast, ran in numbers to the Bishop's House, and with loud lamentations cried out for help Bishop Benziger was coming out of his chapel Surprised, he rushed down, heard their doleful story, and without hesitating for a moment he rushed with the people and very near the devastating fires he stood facing the flames in tearful prayer. Then he made signs of the cross and threw his Carmelite Scapular saying aloud "Go back, Go back" .... It is the living report of direct witnesses who live even to this day, that the wind started blowing backward, and that the flames advanced no more.

This is no fable, but a part of the history of the sea side of Vaddy and Tangasseri. People in their sixties and above even today gratefully commemorate and narrate the miraculous power of their once saintly Pastor (Rev Fr. Cyril Motha)

During the twenty two years of research the authors of the book "Archbishop Benziger, Carmelite Missionary in India" once visited Quilon, and particularly the above mentioned sea side for information. Their interpreter was Mr. Eric Joseph, son of Bishop Benziger's architect Mr. Joseph Puthenveedan. They walked along the beach and as found on page VII in the Dedicatory Preface of the book they wrote "We wanted to walk along the Quilon beach, where on Christmas morning, all the fishing fleet lay grounded on the sand, There we saw thousands of children suffering from malnutrition, babies in the arms of their mothers. When these women approached Eric Joseph and asked "Why is the lady photographing our miserable shacks and our naked children?" Eric replied "This is Bishop Benziger's niece: She is writing life of her uncle, and she wants to meet his people" ....They flocked around us like bees, and told us how the Bishop saved their homes by making a huge sign of the cross commanding the winds to cease their wanton destruction of their fishing village "The wind turned and our thatched huts and lives were saved" .... The same thing happened right here, when the strong high waves dragged into the sea our Church, our homes and people. One of the men ran to the Bishop's House and called for help. The agile Bishop ran with him, and seeing the fury of the storm, knelt down upon the sand, made a great sign of the cross, and then the next waves that would have enquifed us. miraculously turned back into the wild sea",... (the present church built in 1910, replaces the one washed off in 1906)

Read: Archbishop Benziger's Circular Letter No. 9655 dated 7th January 1929 to the Parish Priests and faithful, appeals for generous help for the victims of the disastrous fires along the coasts of Vaddy, Tangasseri and Thope. He states that in Vaddy alone over 1200 people were homeless.... (Cfr. Page 438 of Archbishop Benziger, Carmelite in India)

## 3. During the last trip to Europe with Bishop Dereere.

Little did Bishop Benziger foresee that 1938 would become a most eventful year of his life. He was convinced that he had come to Carmel Hill to retire and live as a recluse.

He had a mission in Goa. On return to Carmel Hill, it seemed as if Divine Providence had another mission, and this one was as demanding as had been the first.... When he heard what was demanded of him, he first rebelled. Had he not come to live a life of retirement? and now why should he be returning to Europe? Once again to call on all those who for the past years had pleaded to him to come back again, so that one and all could say a final goodbye....

Knowing how frail and old the Bishop had become, it was all the more amazing that any one would request of him any more favours. Bishop Dereere knowing what conditions were like, had really no alternative but to seek help from Bishop Benziger. Over the years he had made friends. Once he had retired, the chancery had note of that without his letters, people abroad ceased sending helps. In the meanwhile, Bishop Dereere, who had just taken over the See of Trivandrum found himself very much at a loss. He had no connections in Europe, and his funds were limited to what Bishop Benziger had divided between the Sees of Kottar and Trivandrum.

Poor Bishop Dereere found but very little left to start his Diocesan See. He started even without a residence. One had to be rented. The funds that Bishop Benziger had left for the Quilon Diocese had to be divided into three and had to be withdrawn in order to establish that reunited Jacobite Archbishop and his many projects.... Bishop Dereere wrote to the Father General, in Rome, asking him to insist that Bishop Benziger carry out his wishes and help him with his European connections.... As soon as Bishop Dereere received a favourable reply from Rome, he immediately notified to Bishop Benziger, who in turn discussed the matter with Father Prior.

They sailed on March 12, 1938. Bishop Benziger's cousin Bruno climbed aboard with the pilot as soon as the ship came into the port. He surprised Bishop Benziger with a huge hug and embrace. Daily Bruno arrived with his car and driver to take them here and there. It made the begging expedition easier. .....After they had covered Belgium, plans were laid to go as far south as Lisieux in France. There Bishop Benziger went to the Carmelite convent where he had spent hours of prayer and petition to the Little Flower. He felt he owed her all his success, and that the tremendous work done in the Diocese of Quilon, had been blessed and guided by this simple and child-like Carmelite nun from heaven.

## Through her Bishop Benziger worked a Miracle for his brother

August and Bruno were absolutely necessary for his begging expedition in America and Europe.

August and his wife Getrude had maps and note books ready in order to plan the two week trip, here and there and everywhere in Switzerland, leaving out nothing, nor forgetting anyone who would be glad to see uncle Bishop. Getrude telephoned ahead of time, preparing one and all with word that the two Bishops needed most generous contributions

At 7.30, the following morning, Getrude not hearing any noice, went to call her husband. She found him white as a sheet, and groaning with pain. He had a relaspe to a former serious kidney infection. She took the temperature and was about to telephone to the doctor, when August remarked "I am laid up; I am afraid I am far too ill even to move" .... His temperature had soared, and Gertrude was greatly worried. Her husband was not one to complain so easily to give up unless something was seriously wrong.

Deeply concerned, she went downstairs to telephone to the doctor, when the two Bishops greeted her. They had said Mass and had their break-fast.... Gertrude admitted "I am extremely worried. August is very sick. He seems to have a recurrence of a kidney ailment he had an year ago" ....Bishop Benziger remarked quietly 'Before you phone the doctor, take me to him first and let me talk to him.' ....When the Bishop entered his room, August apologised "I am sorry to have to call off everything," The Bishop felt his brother's head and took his pulse. He observed "Yes August is very ill.... let us pray" ....He stood motionless in the middle of the room. Then put his hands together, closed his eyas and said aloud at least five times "Little flower.... in this hour.... show thy power...." Afterwards he quietly Gertrude accompanied him downstairs. left the room. excitement of taking her brother-inlaw (Bishop) upstairs, Gertrude had mislaid the telephone book she needed to call the doctor. went up again and tip-toed to her husband's room. On opening the door to her utter surprise she found the patient was up, half dressed and colour restored to his face.... She could scarcely believe her eyes, until she again took his temperature. miraculousely dropped from 104 to normal. The invalid had fully recovered... A few minutes later, August personally greeted the Bishops and announced "....Have your things ready We will leave as planned, by 9o'clock" ...That two-week trip had been most successful. In Zug, they met many relatives who were sincerely interested in the Bishop's ventures...

(cfr. Pages 532-33-34 & 535 of Archbishop Benziger)

#### 4. Disastrous Epidemic arrested and three villages saved

In his five-yearly report submitted to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the propagation of faith, Rome, Bishop Benziger makes a very modest and unassuming reference to the Catholic population of the undivided Diocese, and states that a horrible epidemic carried away more than 2000 souls, but for which the Catholic population would have exceeded 208000 (1928)

From the year 1927 it has been and is still beleived that the holy man Archbishop worked a stupendous miracle in arresting a prolonged epidemic that robbed the lives of hundreds in the villages of Puthenthurai, Kesavan-Puthenthurai, and Pozhikara. The writer had a vague knowledge of this incident. To make sure of the truth of this traditional belief, the writer, corresponded with the Parish Priests of the said village parishes, and is happy to quote the report received from Rev. Fr. Cyril Fernando, who was Parish Priest of the above villages from 1949 to 1959, and again from the year 1972 to 1980.

#### The Rev. Father writes:

"I have been the Parish Priest of Puthenthural from December 1949 to 1959, nearly ten years. Then there were three villages in the same Parish, namely, Puthenthurai, Kesayan-Puthenthurai Pozhikarai. This was the first time. Second time again I have been Parish Priest in the same Parish, excluding Puthenthurai, from June 1972 to July 1980. All these years, the anniversary Requiem functions for our beloved Bishop Benziger were regularly conducted in all these places, the day of demise in Puthenthurai and the day of burial in Kesavan-Puthenthurai and Pozhikarai - Thence solemn functions from the year of his death until today.... In 1927, when late Father Jeremias D'cruz, was parish priest of these places, the deadly plague occured, and Benziger visited the place, and stayed in the Parish house. One night, at about midnight, he rose from his bed and went to the cemetary and remained there in prayer, and blessed the cemetary with holy water. Early before dawn Bishop left the house. Rev Fr. Ambrose Balden's elder brother Mr. Silva Baldens, who remained in the Parochial to assist the Bishop, narrated this incident to me He was our church muscician After this blessing, all those who were afflicted by the plague were cured, and no one was attacked afresh. The people of all these villages (the old parish of Puthenthurai) consider this as a real miracle and gratefully remember our holy Bishop. At Kesavan-Puthenthurai, flowers are blessed and distributed to every house in honour of Bishop Benziger on the anniversary day (August 17th)

(sd) Fr. Cyril Fernando

# Another letter from Rev. Fr. Josephat Maria

(The present Parish Priest of Puthenthurai)

Dear Rev. Father,

The incident referred to here below happened in Puthenthurai in the year 1927 when Rev. Fr. Jeremias D'Cruz was the parish priest.

The parish church of Puthenthurai was blessed in 1909 by bishop Benziger, and it was the first church blessing that he performed after his episcopal ordination. Bishop Benziger also presented the church with a set of Way of the Cross paintings that he got down from Europe. These big size Way of the Cross pictures are still in the church in all their pristine beauty. The people of this village were always having a great veneration for their Bishop.

In the year 1927 an epidemic started raging in the village. It was a sudden swelling of the whole body. Doctors were not able to diagnose the nature of the sickness and the victims invariably died within 3 weeks of the attack. The epidemic was claiming an average of atleast two lives in a week and was raging for nearly 3 months, taking a toll of about 125 lives. The terrified people approached the bishop and entreated him for his intervention. The saintly bishop comforted them and asked them to return to their village in peace. Unaware of the people, the bishop started for Puthenthurai and arrived there late in the night. Around midnight, with a Crucifix in hand and accompanied by the parish priest, bishop Benziger went round the streets blessing the village. About 170 people already affected by the sickness miraculously recovered, and no fresh case was reported from that date. Ever since that time to this day the village has been free from the attack of epidemics, even when cholera or other epidemics have been raging in other coastal villages.

In grateful remembrance of this signal blessing through the intercession of bishop Benziger, his death anniversary is commemorated in the village on the 16th of August every year. On that day the

people abstain from fishing, and the whole village attends the solemn functions in the church in memory of bishop Benziger. The same practice is observed also in the neighbouring villages of Kesavan-Puthenthurai and Pozhikarai which then formed part of Puthenthurai parish.

(The above information is obtained from the elders of Puthenthural and confirmed by senior priests who were once parish priests of the same village)

> With best wishes and season's greetings, Your humble servant, Rev. Fr. Josephat Maria Parish Priest K. Puthenthurai-629506 Kanyakumari Dist.

(The original letter of Fr. X. with name & address is preserved. Reason for not disclosing the name will be obvious)

#### Fr. X. Considers his cure as Miraculous

Dear Fr. Cyril Motha,

I have been seeing your appeal. I am glad to record gratefully a favour — nay a miracle holy Bishop Benziger worked for me while he was alive. .... I was victim of a persisting skin decease for 18 long years. All treatments were of no avail.

On April 1st 1942, Bishop sent for me while he was in his sick bed in General Hospital Trivandrum. I was working in a neighbouring parish. I hastened up. I was struck with great surprise when he asked me with fatherly love whether I was still having the old skin trouble. of which he had known years ago. I was further struck with wonder, how the good Bishop could think of me and think of my sickness, while he himself was in the bed of paralytic sufferings. I replied that I still had the trouble. He looked at me in all sympathy called me near him, held my hand gently and said in a prayerful tone "Poor Father X, believe, you won't have the trouble any more." Then he blessed me I kissed his hand gratefully and returned home. From then the sense of irritation left me, and on the following day, I noted that even the scars disappeared from my body.

Both as student in the Minor and Major Seminaries and as priest working under him for several years I was convinced of his

extra-ordinary sanctity, and believed that he was a living saint. With this miracle he worked for me, I need no further proof for his saintliness. Mine is not a hearsay, but a personal experience of the divine power of the holy Bishop's intercession.

26-3-1982,

Fr. X. (Sd/-)

#### Conclusion

This compendium of "Archbishop Benziger, Carmelite in India", by Marieli Benziger assisted by Rita Benziger, makes easy reading of the life of a great missionary Bishop, a most faithful son of Carmel, a wise and prudent father of a vast Diocese, whose achievments through prayer and penance were stupendous and through whom God worked several miracles for the sick and afflicted. It is not the author's narrative, but the several inspiring letters, reports and reminscenses, all of which help to lime the holy man's character, and describe his achievements. This compilation is not in the least a work of art or literature. However, one who is interested in the subject or in the missionary world of India in the years 1890–1942, will not tire of reading these pages. They fill out the image of a Saint, and a Saint is never tiresome.

Bishop Benziger's life acclaims two very important achievments. The establishment of Seminaries to form a strong army of Indian novices in the Novitiates of foreign Carmelites giving equal status as the Europeans. His earnest plea and emphatic reasoning are clearly brought out in Chapter X. His programme for the native Clergy and Sisterhood was vindicated in 1947, when the departing English left behind a strong and loyal Church with roots in India. The other great achievment was the return to Catholic Unity of the ancient community of Jacobites under Mar Ivanios. These and many other materials and spiritual progress based on his prayer-life amidst ceaseless occupations, present the life of a Saint, a Bishop who was hard to himself but not on others, who slept on the floor and lived on black bread and soup who obviously attained a state of intimate union with God.

You go through carefully the narrative of miracles worked by the holy Archbishop. One thing above all strikes you his great confidence in God He implicitly relied on the power of prayer and in the saying of Our Lord "Ask, and you shall receive."

With such a trust he told the Nurses, Doctor and the weeping brothers of Brother Abraham who was on the brink of death "Weep not, the brother will not die. I want him to be Priest" and Bro. Abraham was healed in hours, and became a priest ....To poor Father X. suffering from a teasing skin decease for years he said "Poor Fr. X. Believe, you are not going to have the trouble any longer"—And the Father's skin was made clean.... "Little Flower, in this hour show thy power" was his fervent prayer over August, his sick brother. Instantaneously August was healed.... Bishop goes unseen to the plague—stricken village of Puthenthurai and blesses all the houses at the dead of night. During holy Mass he assures the people that the plague will have no more sway over them, and the horror-striken people were saved.... He ordered the ravaging fires to stop throwing his scapular toward the fire, and ordered the furious waves to roll back. Both the fires and the sea obeyed him....

The mystery remains: What was the power in him that worked these and similar miracles? In a word, it was **the power of his intimate Union with God**-a union brought about by emptying self to be filled with faith in Him and His promise. I tell you, have faith and have no doubts, say to these mountains "Be lifted from your place and be hurled into the sea. It will be done as you have commanded" (Mt. 21/21, Mk 11/24)

# An Appeal to Readers

Advised by the Postulator General in Rome and by the Vice-Postulator in India, preliminary steps are being taken for the Beatification of Archbishop Aloysius Maria Benziger. Readers and contemporaries are earnestly requested to furnish to His Lordship the Bishop of Quilon or to this Author their impressions about the heroic virtues of the Archbishop and report in writing all favours or miraculous helps received through his intercession before and after his holy death.

Rev. Fr. Cyril Motha