



MAR IVANIOS
THE PROPHET OF ASCETIC WISDOM

George Onakkoor

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(Biography)
Originally Written in Malayalam
by

Dr. George Onakkoor

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Translated by
Prof. Babu Zachariah

First Published in July 2003

Layout : Adarsh Rio George
Cover Design : Bhattathiri
Type Setting and Printing : St. Joseph's Press Trivandrum
Published by

Rev. Mother Philomina S.I.C.
Mother General, Bethany Sisters' Generalate
Vadavathoor, Kottayam - 686 010

Rs. 250.00

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. George Onakkoor hails from Muvattupuzha, the rural heart of Kerala. After post-graduation, he joined as Lecturer in Malayalam Literature in the Mar Ivanios College, Thiruvananthapuram, later became Professor and Head of the Department. He has also rendered commendable services as Director of the State Institute of Children's Literature, the State Institute of Encyclopaedic Publications and the Kerala Literacy Council. He was the first non-official Chairman of the Kerala State Resource Centre. Now Dr. Onakkoor is member of the Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation of India .

Dr. George Onakkoor is a reputed novelist having nine novels to his credit; Illam, Oolkatal, Kamana, Kalthamara, Akale Akasam, Uzhavuchalukal, Samathalangalkkappuram etc. He has written a number of short stories, biographies, travelogues, film scripts and research articles winning awards like the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Best Novelist, Jawaharlal Nehru Award for the contributions to the field of Children's Literature, Delhi Malankara Association Bi-Decennial Literary Award, Milan (USA) Award, Darsana Cultural Award, Kesava Dev Birth-Centenary Award etc. Dr. Onakkoor has widely travelled in Asia, Africa, Europe and in the American Continent.

Address:

Dr. George Onakkoor
'Sudarsana', Nalanchira
Thiruvananthapuram- 695 015
e-mail: georgeonakkoor@rediffmail.com



The Prophet of Ascetic Wisdom

FOREWORD

We see in history off and on noble souls who enrich their lives by committing themselves to self negation and prayer. But it is only once in a blue moon that we come across lives offered entirely as a living sacrifice sweet smelling and pleasing to the Master. One such living model was Mar Ivanios Thirumeni¹ who experienced divine grace and sustenance at every stage of his life.

Born on the day which the Church celebrates as Holy Mother's nativity, Thirumeni passed away on the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Carmel (Karmala Matha). The interim was spent in total surrender to the same Holy Mother whose sustaining presence he described as the second heaven.

An ordained priest in the Malankara Syrian Church, he assigned for himself the onerous task of seeking peace in an atmosphere of disension and disunity. Being the first to gain an MA degree among the priests of the Church, he was often acclaimed as 'MA Achen'. And he tried his utmost to put an end to the prevailing air of discord and unease by establishing the Catholicate in Malankara. But it was too much to expect the seed of peace to sprout on that rocky surface.

Probably this prompted him to make up his mind to leave the cherished post of Principal of MD Seminary High School and accept Professorship at Serampore, Calcutta. And he made use of this opportunity to open up avenues for the youth both men and women to pursue higher education. He dreamt that an educated, cultured young generation might pave the way for peace and unity in the Church. It was then that he had a clear and well defined vision: the founding of an ashram seeking god-realisation through prayer and utter sacrifice. It also provided him with an answer why Christian missionary communities were not making their presence felt in the Indian backdrop. He had no doubt in his mind that only an action plan based on the 'Karma yoga' that flourished in the Indus delta would yield results. So he began to think seriously about establishing an ashram on those lines.

The young sapling that sprouted in Serampore grew big and strong on 'Mundan mala' (Dwarf Hill) in Ranni-Perinad. The Order of Bethany

1. *Thirumeni* : A word the Kerala Christians use respectfully to address the Bishops

Followers of Christ took off on the footsteps of the rishis of ancient Indian culture with the triad of Christian virtues of faith, obedience and sacrifice. Sure enough they were on the right course.

Knowing full well that women were possibly better equipped than men in winning souls through a life of dedication, he gave serious attention to their empowerment through higher education. Alongside he encouraged those, so inclined, to take up the ascetic order. But the Church leadership following the Traditions of Eastern faith refused to accept women into sisterhood. And it was left to Ivanios Thirumeni himself to ordain them into this special order in his capacity as a Metropolitan of Bethany.

The significant efforts put in by Mar Ivanios to bring to an end the power struggle that had all but engulfed the Malankara Syrian Church are too well known to merit reiteration. He had the whole hearted support of all the Church heads at the early stage. But all of them retracted their steps when the decision to reunite with the Catholic Church was finally taken. But Thirumeni wouldn't leave the truth which he found at the end of his inspired search. He would rather leave everything else to remain ensconced in the Holy Mother's lap. Mar Ivanios' achievement of Reunion would remain one of the stirring episodes in the annals of Catholic Church marked for its fortitude and sacrifice. His role in the spread of ecumenism, therefore, will also be ever acknowledged.

Mar Ivanios contributed a new spiritual vision in his capacity as the Head of the Syrian Catholic Hierarchy. By retaining the order of worship of Antioch he made sure that the faith of the past generations was in no way weakened. Instead he clothed it with a new spiritual aura true to Indian traditions.

His unique contribution to the sociocultural and political realms of Kerala while shepherding the Archdiocese of Trivandrum will remain an object lesson for generations to come. We are now in a phase of history where the lesson has renewed relevance. And mercifully, the efforts at revitalising the missionary witness of the Syrian Catholic Church are gaining strength. Steps towards church unity are gaining a new sense of direction. We should pray ceaselessly so that his mediation in the heavens bring us rich fruits. I am convinced that the great work of Dr. George Onakkoor dwelling on the life and vision of Mar Ivanios

entitled **Mar Ivanios: the Prophet of Ascetic Wisdom** will lend deep insights into these aspects.

I am very happy that Dr. George Onakkoor has attempted this delightful composition, all the more because he has grown up in the traditions of Malankara Church. His contributions as Head, Department of Malayalam in Mar Ivanios College, one of the prime institutions of higher education in the state, have been invaluable. He has made his mark as a reputed novelist, a first rate scholar and eminent cultural hero. It is highly appreciable that he has come forward to present this Blessed Church Head to the young generation. He has always been a devoted disciple of Thirumeni. I would like to reiterate that Dr. Onakkoor has been amply successful in portraying the nobility and idealism of Thirumeni in a most forceful and lucid manner. The adherence to truth of a historian and the architectonics of a true artist can be seen throughout the work. The word pictures that recur throb with life.

With a string of moving pictures Dr. Onakkoor has been able to bring to life the resplendent personality of Thirumeni and his commendable life of service to God. That Dr. Onakkoor has also found it fit to include the initial proceedings toward Beatification of Mar Ivanios deserves special mention. I am sure it would help to channelise the prayers of the whole community in this direction.

May the abundant showers of blessing from the Almighty fall on the author as well as on the Bethany Congregation of Sisters which has made the publication possible. I exhort the believers to delve deep into the blessed life and spiritual quest of this Man of God through a perusal of this exemplary work.

It gives me great joy and greater satisfaction to present this noble book to the reading public.

Most Rev. Cyril Mar Baselios
Metropolitan Archbishop, Trivandrum,
Metropolitan, Malankara Catholic Church.

'Thirusannidhi'
Trivandrum - 695 004

PREFACE

Mar Ivanios Thirumeni was indeed an object of reverence for his unique personality, rare genius and incomparable prayer life. Even at a young age, growing up in abiding faith in the Divine Mother, he had decided to lead a life of dedication. Exhibiting unusual competence in studies, he became the first clergyman, from the Orthodox fold to take an MA Degree. This gave him the familiar appellation 'MA Achen'. While he was serving as professor at Serampore he opened up avenues for higher studies to many young men and women in Travancore. While in Calcutta he was attracted to the purity of life that 'sanyaas' would offer. Inspired by ancient Indian traditions of sanyaas he wanted to establish an ascetic order based on Christian faith. Establishment of a similar order for women who were committed to a life of dedication was not far from his mind. This indeed was a rare happening in the Malankara Syrian Church. Painfully aware that the flowers of sanyaas would never bloom in the faction-ridden church, he travelled alone in search of a bower of peace.

'Bethany' is the ascetic order that was moulded by Ivanios Thirumeni. Historical records prove that he accepted his position as High priest only to ordain the Bethany followers of Christ Congregation of Sisters. The fact that all the members of this order without exception followed their master at the time of Reunion stands as a living testimony of their love of truth and steadfastness of faith.

Faith in Christ is the bedrock of Christianity. Similarly the strength of the Syrian Catholic Church is the spirituality and the resultant strength of faith that they inherited from Ivanios Thirumeni. We are bound to follow the path towards god-realisation partaking of his unshakable faith and prayer life. And this, it should be remembered, is a time when, the offering of our prayers and sacrifices should raise him to the congregation of saints. There is no better way than Dr. Onakkoor's 'Mar Ivanios the Prophet of Ascetic Wisdom' to take us to the precious depths of Mar Ivanios's noble life.

A number of articles and a few books have been written on the life and mission of Mar Ivanios. Rev. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi's 'Archbishop Mar Ivanios' takes the reader to many invaluable historical records. There are a few other volumes which deserve scholarly perusal. 'Thapovanathile Sooryan' presents the precious life of Thirumeni in an elegantly captivating style to the target group of young readers.

The Bethany Congregation of Sisters has always longed for a comprehensive rendering of Thirumeni's unique life in an endearing style with matching finesse. That remained an unfulfilled mission for long. But we hardly dreamt of a more satisfying presentation than the present one by the celebrated writer Dr. George Onakkoor. Few could have fitted the bill better than Dr. Onakkoor with his long association and unflinching loyalty to the cause and unquestionable competence in this chosen field of literary composition. We express our profound gratitude to him while praying for continued blessings of the Almighty on his ventures.

We wish and pray that this insightful work will receive whole hearted appreciation of the reading public, which it amply deserves. We are confident that it will.

The Bethany Congregation of Sisters finds pride and pleasure in being able to contribute its mite in the publication of this superb volume.

Mother Philomina SIC
Mother General
Bethany Congregation of Sisters

Bethany Sisters' Generalate
Kottayam 686 010

DEDICATION

Certain commissions in life are unavoidable. They must be fulfilled sometime or the other. Writing this book has been one such. A name as old as my memory, that was Mar Ivanios. There was a church established by him in my village. Naduviledathu N. V. Geevarghese Kathanar, one of the revered priests from my family, had told me much about this great man. He was a colleague of Thirumeni's at MD Seminary.

There was a Primary School attached to the Bethany Church. Two nuns were in sole charge of the school: Sister Dakhiya and Sister Carmel, both members of the Bethany Congregation. In spite of their unfamiliar garb they won the hearts of the village folk in no time. Later on a Bethany Convent was set up there at the instance of Ouseph Mar Severios, Metropolitan of the Thiruvalla Diocese. Mother Threseus who was the Superior at the convent used to extol Thirumeni's name. She was one of the first generation disciples of Thirumeni.

Zacharias Mar Athanasius, Head of the Thiruvalla Diocese who used to visit us at home had a profound influence on my life when young, because my own father had no mean part to play in the establishment of the School and the Convent. I was fortunate to receive much of Thirumeni's affection. I was also inspired and touched by the moving stories of courage and sacrifice of Mar Ivanios.

When I was a student in SB College Changanacherry Msgr. Francis Kalassery was its Principal. He had joined after a stint as Principal in Mar Ivanios College. The portrait of Mar Ivanios got itself etched in luminous colours through Msgr. Kalassery's words, through the description by Fr. Philipose Medayil - one of the prominent priests of Trivandrum Archdiocese- and from the writings of my revered master Dr. C. A. Abraham.

Studies over, I joined as a young lecturer in Mar Ivanios College, Nalanchira, an institution which stands as a living testimony to a glorious life which had a profound influence on my career. The very cells of my life seemed to stir with new life. I was caught up with the charm of a unique personality which derived its inspiration and sustenance from sources above and beyond mundane limits. Nalanchira Hills became my spiritual home where I have dwelt for more than thirty odd years. Varied experiences came my way. Some building up palpable tension. In the midst of it all my vision grew clearer and clearer. The vision imparted by a seer of the ancient Indian-mode gave light to my eyes, wisdom to my mind and strength to my feet: Rays of hope in trials and tribulations.

I owe everything to him, even the feel of terra firm under my feet, which lent me a sure sense of pride and confidence in myself. I have written so much about him. He gave me my vision nay he has been my vision. He has been much more than a religious leader. I bow before him as an Indian seer, a pioneer in the field of higher education, church unity and upliftment of man. His life of prayer and sacrifice has been my beacon. I remember with reverential awe how he presented himself as a harbinger of church unity even before the Second Vatican Synod envisaged it.

It has been more than a decade since the Bethany Congregation in general and its Rev. Mother General Philomina in particular have reminded me that I was duty bound to write a biography of Mar Ivanios Thuirmeni for all my long and close association with him. My tribute to his precious memory was partially paid when I brought out '**Thapovanathile Sooryan**' in my capacity as Director, Institute of Children's Literature. On reading that Benedict Mar Gregorios, Archbishop, Trivandrum told me: "He was a great and noble soul. He deserves a larger volume".

It was during my days as Professor in Mar Ivanios College that the Second volume of Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi's '**Archbishop Mar Ivanios**' came out. I had the privilege to scrutinise its MS. He too suggested that I should write a better, more comprehensive volume on Ivanios Thuirmeni. Was it the blessing of these revered men of God or the fulfilment of the wishes and prayers of the Bethany Congregation of

Sisters that enabled me to do it, I am not sure. But I am certain that this has been a wish fulfilment singularly satisfying.

It is a blessed coincidence that this book is being released on the auspicious occasion when the Beatification proceedings in respect of Mar Ivanios Thirumeni are being initiated by Most Rev. Cyril Mar Baselios, the scholarly writer Archbishop of Trivandrum and Head of the Malankara Hierarchy. I do not attempt to confine in feeble words the depth of gratitude that I owe to him for the magnificent foreword that Thirumeni has written for my humble work. I feel honoured that he has not only found time to write this but has also showered on me his blessings.

Cyril Mar Baselios Thirumeni's pastoral letter on beatification proceedings is appended to this volume.

I have found it a great experience, a unique trial penning this book. Writing a story or a novel has never been half so demanding. A burnt offering in the flames of spirituality. I feel totally transformed. The writer who started the first chapter and the one who concluded the last are hardly the same. I bow my head in humble reverence before the sacred memory of Mar Ivanios Thirumeni which kept the forge burning, purifying me of all the dross that has been sticking fast to me.

Fr. Pakomios OIC, member of the Bethany Ashram and constant companion to Thirumeni and Fr. Varghese Kilichimala the well known writer have been of immense help to me in this effort. Their enthusiasm even in old age has been infectious.

The venture would not have been completed but for the constant encouragement of the Bethany sisters who have taken care of its publication. I am deeply indebted to Rev. Mother General Philomina, Councillors and members of the Congregation.

Now, the English translation of my book is coming out. I am thankful to the reading community of Kerala for receiving whole heartedly the original Malayalam version and encouraging the publication of the English translation. Prof. Babu Zachariah the veteran educationalist and great teacher of English has gracefully accepted my request to translate the book.

Prof. Babu Zachariah, Parackal, Chengannur, retired from service as Head of the Department of English, Mar Thoma College, Thiruvalla. On retirement he served as Principal, St. Mary's Residential Public School, Thiruvalla and St. Thomas Central School Thiruvananthapuram. He is currently the Principal of St. Mary's College for Women, Thiruvalla. Prof. Babu Zachariah is on the faculty of Regional Institute of Training of Akashvani and of the Press Club, Thiruvananthapuram. Besides compiling and editing text books for English teaching in High School classes, he has translated the biography of Mar Baselios Geevarghese II, the Catholicose of the Malankara Orthodox Church. I take this opportunity to thank Prof. Babu Zachariah for having translated my book on Mar Ivanios to the satisfaction of all.

I am also thankful to Shri Cherian John of the Department of English, Mar Ivanios College, Thiruvananthapuram for helping me to edit the manuscript.

When the saintly memories of the epic person, Mar Ivanios are still ablaze in the minds of his countless followers, I present this humble offering like a prayer wafting its ethereal way to the heavens.

George Onakkoor

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EPIC PERSONA

Breakfast over, little before noon, one of the anchorites came and said: "There's just three measures of rice; how will we have our lunch?" Lest the anchorites, who have far too often experienced the pangs of hunger should be further embarrassed, he was told: "Don't-worry, make some gruel with it for the orphan children; we'll have cassava".

"There's no cassava, even that's finished" he replied.

"Then we'll fast. Consider it God's grace".

The anchorites went back, only to meet again in the chapel for noon prayer. About 12.30 when everyone came out of the chapel, I saw an old man with a fairly heavy bundle on his head at the kitchen side, "It's some loaves" he said before leaving it there.....All of us had lunch at the regular time. By evening came another man with 'pidiyari'- daily rice offering.

Nobody had to go hungry.¹

This amazing instance of God's providence was narrated by His Grace Mar Ivanios, the Metropolitan of Bethany. Bethany was a hermitage of a few who had left their hearth and home to lead a life of dedication for the glory of God. Clad in saffron and with a begging bowl Mar Ivanios and his disciples wandered from door to door in Central Travancore. Gold and silver sought they none; just their daily bread satisfied them.

God's grace enveloped them, the Lord who fed the five thousand with five loaves sustained them:

Jesus went into a boat and departed alone to a desolate place. The masses from the towns followed on foot. By the time he came

1. Girideepam Part I pp. 92-93

ashore he saw a huge multitude. He took pity on them; healed the sick among them. By evening his disciples told him: "This is a desolate place. It's getting dark. Why don't you send them to the villages to procure food for themselves?" "No, they don't have to go. You feed them" said Jesus. "There's a boy with five loaves and two fishes" they told Him. "Bring them here" he said to them. He took the bread, broke it, looked up to Heaven and blessed it: "Now ask the multitude to be seated and serve them". The disciples took the bread and served it to the crowd who were satisfied. The crumbs collected were twelve baskets full. They were, barring women and children, about five-thousand strong.²

This trust in God's eternal care made Bethany a holy shrine, a temple of peace, a hermitage in the true style of rishis of the hoary Indian past. The ever flowing grace of God was their only fountain of hope.

Take no thought for your life what you shall eat, neither for the body what you shall put on. Life is more than meat and body more than raiment. Consider the ravens, they neither sow nor reap. Nor do they have store house or barn. And God feeds them. Are you not far better than the fowls? Who among you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do this one least thing why grow anxious? Consider the lilies, how they grow! They don't toil, they don't spin. Yet I tell you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then, God so clothe the grass which is today in the field and is cast into the oven tomorrow how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith? Seek not what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor be of doubtful mind. All these things do the nations of the world seek after. Your father knows that you need all these. Rather seek thee Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourself bags which don't grow old and a treasure in the

2. St. Mathew 14:13-21.

heaven that doesn't fail. There thieves don't break in or moths eat away. Your heart will be where your treasure is.³

Total abstinence is the way of hermitage. Indian thought divides the span of life into four distinct-stages: celibacy, family life, detachment and hermitage. One reaches the stage of hermitage after crossing the other three. Bethany chose a different path. It went straight to hermitage after celibacy. Right in the thick of youth total dedication. Knowing God through abstinence, forsaking worldly thoughts and cares through abnegation. No thieves can break into those hearts, unsullied peace reigns there.

Mar Ivanios chose this path seeking divine grace for this god experience. Dressed in coarse saffron he led his life as an austere mendicant moving from place to place or living in a mean hut. Sought the deep meaning of life through the bare, hard and meagre life of a hermit wedded to 'shanti'. Such observances were alien to Christian churches in India during the early twentieth century. Western missionary societies, on the other hand, were out-doing one another in noble pomp and prosperity. The inspiration behind founding the Bethany Ashram was in no way theirs, but a backdrop entirely, and decidedly eastern. It was purely from a typical Indian atmosphere that the vow, observances and modes of meditation were drawn. Probably the greatest influence on its founding father was that of Tagore's Shanthi Nikethan. Derive strength from prayer, toil hard for the attainment of divine presence, appropriate divine peace through fasting, abstinences, care for the forsaken and meditation: this was the route charted by Bethany in accepting this call, unusual, rare, nay unique.

The tribulations that he suffered and the crises he faced towards the realisation of this divine experience measure up to epic proportions. The path he followed was yet untrodden. He didn't care to see how many or how few followed him. Honoured positions in society were spurned away without a thought. Offered himself, as it were, to a chain of crucifixions. Unfading faith in the resurrected Master was his sword and buckler.

3. St. Luke 12:22-34

To see him merely as a church dignitary is to miss much. He was an ardent architect of unity in the Indian Christian community. He devoted special care towards giving the right education to women and in building up an order for those women who had an ear for the divine call. Emancipation of the dalits was his life's mission. Newman of the East and Prester John (the priest who reigned as King according to tradition) of the orient were familiar appellations given to him.

It is difficult to prioritise the strands that lent the rare lustre to the astounding felicity that his phenomenal personality had been. A divinely inspired messenger of peace, a proponent of indianisation of Christianity, a hermit of intense sacrificial streak, an eminent educationist, a daring man of action, embodiment of human love, Thirumeni was all this and much more.

Appellations abound; to know this epic personality of an age, a moving spiritual force is in itself a rare divine experience of inexorable charm.

It was past dusk. There was a big gathering at Puthiacavu Church, Mavelikara. A high priest had come there and they wanted to meet him and get his blessings.

It was Pulikottil Mar Dionysius, head of the Malankara Jacobite Church who was the special guest.

Tradition has it that St. Thomas, the disciple of Christ had landed in Cranganore in 52 AD to spread the gospel. Many different strands of faith gained prominence during the 2000 year history of the Church in India. National and regional sentiments claimed precedence resulting in clash of ideologies. Often they resulted in internal feud of a none too peaceful kind so that denominations tended to move apart, no love lost among them. Along with the strong and widespread- in fact, spread all over the world- Catholic Church, faiths like Jacobite, Mar Thoma and others struck deep roots in Kerala. Tradition, difference in liturgy, varying views on nationalism and casteism were among the factors that led to this development. Financial stability and consequent greed for power and position, aggravated the situation. Fragmentation became thus a sad reality.

The Western powers which established trade relations with India encouraged missionaries to embark on proselytization in a big way. Their efforts yielded attractive fruit in cultural and educational spheres. The role played by missionaries in the emancipation of low castes and in the promotion of women's education has been historical. Alongside this their strict adherence to matters of faith and liturgy often attracted stiff opposition.

Those who followed Christianity led a quiet life believing in one God and maintaining excellent fraternal relationship with the other members of the society. It was with the help and patronage of the Hindu rulers that their churches were built. Absolute amity characterised by total absence of communal difference or inimical postures was the order of the day.

Ecclesiastical dignitaries from Syria used to give spiritual leadership by helping in religious rites. Trade links with Syria ensured the smooth functioning of this arrangement. The arrival of the Portuguese disrupted it. Portuguese trade interests necessitated snapping of trade links with Syria. Subsequently the Portuguese tightened their grip on religious matters also. They wanted Kerala Christians to be under the tutelage of Portuguese Church rather than Syrian.

Such pressure tactics invited severe opposition. The news that Anthullah, the Syrian Patriarch was drowned to death in the sea by the Portuguese ignited passions. They tied a strong rope on the big cross at Mattancherry and clinging on it took a vow: "We will not succumb to the 'Paulistian' (Portuguese); neither we nor our descendants." Later a section of the Kerala Christians accepted the authority of Mar Gregorios, a Jacobite Patriarch from Antioch. They called themselves Jacobites.

'Koonan Kurisu Sapatham' ('Bent Cross Vow') took place in 1653AD. Mar Dionysius of Pulikottil was the Metropolitan of this Jacobite Church which had retained an independent identity since 1653.

"How far is Vazhuvadi from here?" enquired Mar Dionysius.

"About a mile," someone replied.

"We want to see Veettinal Deacon urgently. Who will go and fetch him?" There was silence for a moment.

It was pitch dark and raining cats and dogs. No one ventured to go upto Vazhuvadi at that witching time of the night. Many of them tried to slink away. A boy of 14 or 15 came forward. He kissed Thirumeni's hand and said in a calm confident tone:

" I will go, Thirumeni".

Thirumeni took note of the boy with a bit of surprise and pleasure. "Who are you, little boy?" He asked.

"I am the son of Thoma Panicker".

"Scariah Kathanar's brother's son? Good! Your name?"

"P. T. George."

"What class are you?"

"I've passed Form IV".

"Brave boy! You're not afraid to go alone?"

"No." The boy shook his head.

"Then you may go. Take a lantern, too".

Taking a lamp and an umbrella George set off.

Mavelikara is a historical little village in central Travancore, with a strong tradition in art and culture. P. T. George was born into the reputed Panicker family in Mavelikkara.

Father Thomas Inchakalodi has dealt with the history of the Panicker family in his 'Archbishop Mar Ivanios'¹. They belonged to the Cholamandalam village on the Bay of Bengal in the former Madras Presidency. Strict adherents to traditional religious rites, they could not approve of the initiative taken by the Pallava Dynasty whose authority extended over Cholamandalam village also in spreading Buddhism. They left Cholamandalam for Kodungalloor which formed part of the kingdom of Bhaskara Ravi Varma, known as Cheraman Perumal. Proficient in the use of arms, they had no difficulty in winning royal favour. In addition to allotting them sufficient land for occupation, the King also gave them the prestigious title 'Panicker'.

Around this time (in 345 AD) a Syrian band of traders under the leadership of Knanayi Thomman landed in Kodungalloor. They were equally interested in spreading Christianity. Bhaskara Ravi Varma who was pleased with their venturesome life gave them all royal patronage. The members of the Panicker family who had by then become trusted palace aides embraced Christianity under the influence of Knanayi Thomman.

In course of time they branched out into four families; Vallikada Panicker, Karakkunnathu Panicker, Kondamangalath Panicker, and

1. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios pp. 13-14

Oorayam Karakkunnathu Panicker. They used to train young healthy lads in the use of arms for royal service. Of these four branches Karakkunnath family came and settled down in Muvattupuzha. Those who spread out from this family came down to Mavelikkara and accepted 'Kalaripanicker' position under Madathinkoor Raja. In later years Madathinkoor came under the power of the King of Venad.

The clandestine machinations of Pappu Thamby and Raman Thamby to reach the royal throne at the expense of the designated Yuvarajah(Prince), Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma, and the shady stand of 'Ettuveetil Pillamar' find a place in the history of Travancore. In trying to save his life the Yuvarajah fled northwards and stayed in Mavelikkara for a while. Itty Panicker was a prominent aide-de camp of the Yuvarajah at Mavelikara. Later when Marthanda Varma assumed the throne Itty Panicker and his band were always at hand to help out in battles. The members of his training camp were never touched by narrow considerations of caste or creed.

Such was the reputation of Itty Panicker in military training that his 'Kalari' attracted hardy youths of all religious persuasions. And Marthanda Varma Maharaja was so impressed by his prowess and loyalty that he gave him the rare title Mallitty Panicker (Math+Itty= My Ishtakaran, favourite, Panicker). In addition to the coveted royal prerogatives, a few special privileges from Puthiacavu Church were also assigned to the Panicker family.

The pastoral letter sent to Mavelikara Parish in 1903 by Mar Dionysius who was Malankara Metropolitan of the Jacobite Church from 1865 to 1909 is recorded in toto by Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi in his book:

Blessings to the Vicar of Mavelikara, Priests of the Region, Church Officers, and the Faithful Congregation!

Dearly in Our Lord,

It has been brought to my notice by Padinjare Veetil Thariathu Thariathu Panicker, the present patriarch of the family of Mallitty Panicker of that parish, that the offering of Betel leaves and money due to the family at every wedding solemnised in the church,

granted as per Royal Command and accepted and approved by Metropolitan who have preceded me is now being claimed and collected by any one or the other member of the family at will. Therefore the said offering of Betel leaves and money will henceforth be given and seen to be given only to the then presiding patriarchs of the family, as has been the tradition and practice.

May the Grace and Blessings of the Almighty be upon you and grow in you. Date: M. E. Mithunam 27, 1078 (1903 AD)

Signed: Mar Dionysius, Puthupally.

That the young boy who set out into the deep dank dark night at the instance of the same Pulikottil Thirumeni to fetch Veetinal Deacon, a member of the Puthiacavu parish, belonged to this ancient and reputed family was only natural. That rare daring was inherited. Indeed a unique heritage!

DAWN OF HOPE

It was the feast of St. Mary: September 21, 1882. The day the darling first child of Panicker Veetil Thoma Panicker and Annamma was born. Annamma was the daughter of Areepurath Mathai Asan of Pallickal, near Kayamkulam. The child was baptised in the Puthiacavu Jacobite Church under the name, Geervarghese. 'Kochukeevareechan' was the pet name.

Scariah Kathanar, brother of Thoma Panicker was a devoted priest who had embraced celibacy. He had served in most of the neighbouring Parishes around Mavelikara. The influence of this devout and astute priest must have been strong on Kochukeevareechan. His interest in church services and matters religious had been remarkable.

The infant grew in grace. Unseen hand protected the baby from many a danger. Reminiscent of Luke 2:40 the child grew strong in spirit and filled with wisdom. Here is one specific instance of divine protection. The boy was not yet four. The man in charge of the bullock cart in Panicker veedu put the boy on the front beam and started out. On the road something frightened the oxen which charged out mad. The boy fell down in the process. And the oxen stopped, with a thought as it were. And the boy was lying just in front of the wheel. Another second and the baby might have been crushed under the wheel.

It did not happen. It could'nt. The hand of God was there to protect and sustain him. He was to do great things for God!

When the boy was five he was put to school. It was in David Asan's home nursery that he picked up his first letters and figures. It was

common in villages in those days to have primary education imparted in such schools. Most of the children ended up with that- picking up a few elementary lessons in the three Rs and then pushing off to be with the elders helping them in farming activities.

Thoma Panicker's views on his boy were no different. Every father would look up to his first born for a prop in his management of domestic chores. But his mother's views were different. She wanted her son to be educated on priestly lines. An ardent devotee of Blessed Virgin Mary, she saw the boy, born on the Blessed Virgin's birthday festival, as a distinct blessing of the Mother, meant for greater things.

Whole hearted support and encouragement, from his uncle Sacria Kathanar emboldened the lady. The boy was put in the neighbouring CMS English School for further studies. That, indeed, was a decided turning point. He used to kneel down and pray at the Puthiacavu Church on his way up and down from school, every day. He turned out to be the darling of the teachers with no touch of naughtiness characteristic of boys of that age, about him.

One of those days Mar Gregorios Thirumeni of Parumala visited Puthiacavu church. The Panicker family naturally was there to be blessed by the Thirumeni. Learning that the boy was undergoing his studies in a protestant school, Thirumeni suggested that he be transferred to some Government School. Protestant schools were likely to teach slightly different lines in matters of faith, according to Thirumeni. Hence the suggestion. Devotion to Virgin Mary, mediation of saints, prayer for the dead etc. were not only disapproved by Protestant faith, but they even came in for severe stricture. Thirumeni wanted these tenets of faith not to create confusion in the young boy's mind as a result of Protestant teaching.

The boy was duly transferred to the Government School in Kottackakom, Mavelikara. He could study up to Form Four in that School. He completed his studies in that school with great distinction, having been a model student in studies as well as in cultured behaviour.

Further studies at High School level remained a mirage. It was possible only in Kottayam, a town far away. There was no bus service.

One had to travel close to thirty miles in slow moving barges. To stay in Kottayam was out of the question. It looked as though his studies were at an end.

But the mother entertained undiminished hopes. There will be a way out. God's infinite mercy will be with him, he will find refuge in his palms; she was confident.

The loving mother kept praying. Praying hard and earnestly to Mother Mary, to see that her son was not denied a chance to further his studies.

God's ways are mysterious. A gleam of light out of pitch darkness. The way opens out clear and well lit. He will not stumble on the way. Unseen hand will ensure protection.

It was at this time that Pulikottil Thirumeni visited Puthiacavu. That the boy alone volunteered to fetch Veettinal Semmassan (Deacon) was indeed according to divine design.

Thirumeni blessed the boy especially when he came back with the Deacon. New thoughts were kindled by the daring and devotion of the boy. Thirumeni called his father and uncle Scaria Kathanar the next morning and suggested that the boy be sent to prepare for divine service. He volunteered to take the boy to Kottayam and give him the necessary training to enter the church.

It was a glorious decision. A golden opportunity to continue studies which at one stage appeared doomed to fade out. Probably George was most pleased at the prospect of moulding his future the way he himself had dreamt. His mother's prayers had prepared the ground for such a seed of faith to sprout. A life devoted to God. Wish fulfilment that he should dedicate himself for service to humanity.

George was to stay in Pazhaya Seminary. (Old Seminary, Kottayam). All arrangements were made for him to pursue his studies. He joined MD Seminary High School in Form Five. It was in 1897. He gave his baptismal name Geevarghese, instead of George in the School record. It was at the instance of Pulikottil Thirumeni.

How wonderfully was the foundation laid for a glorious future! K. C. Mammen Mappilai was Head Master at MD Seminary High School.

A noble soul which had won for itself a coveted place in many a heart owing to his sincere contribution in many spheres of life, Mammen Mappilai had given equal importance to the social, cultural and educational development of the Christian Community as much as to the wider interests of the nation. The great teacher in him was always alert to scout for and nurture talents in the youth.

No wonder his eyes fell on P. T. Geervarghese. His future became a matter of deep concern for him. That marked the beginning of a cordial relationship though subsequently the two set their sights on different points of the horizon.

Geervarghese left his classmates way behind by sheer dint of hardwork. Not a day's work was put off for the next. He used to read standing on the bench, to fight off sleep. The heat and glare of the hanging lantern in the dormitory affected sleep. Nothing would deter his determination or affect his concentration.

Pulikottil Thirumeni decided to ordain him right away on his commendable performance at the Matriculation examination. The consent of the home parish was required for this. It was customary that before selecting a priest from a particular parish a certificate that he was an amply desirable candidate had to be obtained. This was a noble tradition which the Jacobite Church maintained zealously. The unanimous approval of the parish was there just for the asking. The joy of the Panicker family of Thoma Panicker and Scaria Kathanar, not to speak of the mother knew no bounds.

The loving and devout mother who had re-dedicated her child to the Holy Mother in all her daily prayers, couldn't have been more contented. Mary's 'Song of Praise' echoed in her heart and mind:

My soul doth magnify the Lord;
 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour.
 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:
 for behold, from hence forth all generations shall call me blessed.
 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;
 and holy is his name....¹

1. St. Luke 1:46-49

In humble spirit of prayer Geevarghese surrendered himself before God's will. On January 9, 1900 (ME. Dhanu 26, 1074) he was ordained a Deacon. In the joyful presence of hosts of believers, kith and kin, assisted by a good number of priests, Pulikottil Thirumeni ordained him Deacon.

Subsequently Thirumeni permitted Geevarghese Semmassan (Deacon) to continue his studies in CMS College, Kottayam as he had shown remarkable intelligence and matching perseverance. He was accommodated in Pazhaya Seminary in a room adjacent to Wattasseril Malpan's (later ordained Wattasseril Mar Dionysius). Days of intense systematic studies. Many stories have been told of Semmassan's concentration. One of them as recorded by Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi runs thus:

Small hours of the night. Semmassan is lost in his studies. Wattasseril Malpan calls from the next room. No answer. Calls louder. Still no response. Yet louder. No response still! Malpan went out of his room and looked in. The door was wide open. Semmassan is concentration personified. Repeated calls by the Malpan evoked no response. Next morning Malpan congratulated Semmassan on his concentration. I haven't seen any one so lost in concentration while at studies. Encomium indeed!²

Church leaders wanted Semmassan who had passed his F. A. (First examination in Arts) to continue his studies. So he was enrolled in Madras Christian College for his B. A. with Economics and Indian History as electives.

It was altogether a different atmosphere that Semmassan found there. Many a renowned Malayali scholar including his revered master K. C. Mammen Mappilai had come out of MCC. The influence of the Institution in instilling the spirit of freedom and sense of nationalism in them was remarkable. Geevarghese Semmassan was the first clergyman from Orthodox Jacobite Church to attend MCC. Many had apprehen-

2. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios p. 42

sion how a priest from a very different persuasion (from non Protestant faith) would cope with the tradition-questioning free atmosphere that prevailed in the college. But that created no problem for the Semmassan whose focus on studies was all consuming, hard to match. Only he shifted residence from Sullivan Hall where the priests were billeted, to the YMCA hostel.

A number of students from Kerala were pursuing their studies in MCC at that time. Philipose A. Marett who was reading for his MA was foremost among them. He took care of the interests of Semmassan in studies as well as in other needs. When he joined for MA he stayed with A. Philipose, both of them sharing a rented house. 'Were the Syrian Christians Nestorians?' was the topic he chose for his dissertation in fulfilment of his MA requirements. He ransacked the many libraries in Madras (present, Chennai) for collection of necessary data.

This minor research work kindled his innate historical sense. He sharpened his rare sense of truth which is a necessary component of a historiographer. The sincerity and confidence that he evinced in delving into religious tradition freely and truthfully and in arriving at definite conclusions were a fruitful outcome of this study.

He convincingly put to rest the strange view point that the Syrian Christians of Kerala before the 16th century were Nestorians in matters of faith. He presented an array of historical findings in his well-researched dissertation to counter this contention. With his logical arguments based on historical findings he hacked down the tentative suggestion that St. Thomas had never come to Kerala coast and that the Christian community in Kerala had a history only dating back to the 6th century.

It was the sharp observation born out of deep insight that made this dissertation a hot topic of discussion. The great expectation which the Kerala Syrian Church had on P. T. Geevarghese Semmassan is also reflected in the interest this study evoked.

Geevarghese Semmassan created history by passing his MA with distinction- the first ordained priest from the Syrian Christian fold to win the honour. The pride and joy of it was sweetly shared by the mem-

bers of the church. A host of felicitation meetings followed, each one witnessing the enthralling impact of his forceful speeches, deep and logical.

It signalled a veritable dawn of hope for the Malankara Church.

Pulikottil Thirumeni and Wattasseril Malpan had discussed and decided how the young talent of P. T. Geevarghese Semmassan could best be used. MD Seminary English-High School was then the prime institution that belonged to the Jacobite Church in Kottayam. E. M. Philipose MA, BL, the renowned author had succeeded Wattasseril Malpan as Principal of the School. He was finding it mighty hard running the school with the meagre aid that was forthcoming from the Government and the still paltry amount that came by way of fees from the students. He could't find out ways and means of raising funds for developing the school. Even to defray the salary expenses of teachers was difficult. Mercifully there was no crisis, simply because K.C. Mammen Mappilai, the HM and his band of teachers were understanding enough to put up with all the odds.

P. T. Geevarghese Semmassan was temporarily appointed HM in the vacancy of K.C. Mammen Mappilai who had gone on sick leave to Trivandrum. This gave him an opportunity to present himself as an ideal teacher with lots of leadership qualities. Semmassan left for Parumala when K.C. Mammen Mappilai returned from leave.

But that posting was temporary. Just before leaving for Antioch to be ordained Metropolitan, Wattasseril Malpan had prevailed upon Pulikottil Thirumeni to appoint his favourite disciple as Principal of MD Seminary. E. M Philipose who had expressed his desire to relinquish was not in the least bothered about it.

So the appointment was made. "The exceptionally far sighted Malpan Achen had envisioned the highly qualified Semmassan who was

so devoted to him- as a bright beacon of hope for the Jacobite Syrian Church.¹ K.C. Mammen Mappilai, who was HM (MD Seminary School) evidently took offence as he felt his nose put out of joint. It is only natural that this hasty appointment was seen as an aftermath of the none too happy relation that existed between Malpan Achen and Mammen Mappilai. His pride being hurt Mammen Mappilai did not continue in office for long. This meant that both the offices- HM & Principal -came to rest on Geevarghese Semmassan.

Semmassan tried his very best to make MD Seminary H.S. an ideal institution. No less than 20 hours a day he devoted to the School. Hardly four hours of rest. He used to teach at least one subject in each standard. Students waited eagerly for his classes. There was no let up in the matter of discipline. He used to punish the guilty without remorse. At the same time he never forgot to encourage capable and well behaved children.

The four wheeled hansom on which he used to move about came to be noticed all about the town. He found time to visit neighbouring parishes and give his studied talks on spiritual topics every holiday. His aim was to create a new atmosphere of revival in the Malankara Church.

Semmassan's activities gained better focus and direction with the return of Wattasseril Malpan as Metropolitan. Wattasseril Mar Dionysius took special care to make the best use of Semmassan's talent in church affairs. The warmth of relationship of master and pupil that existed between them was indeed attractive.

Wattasseril Thirumeni was quite enthusiastic about ordaining P.T. Geevarghese Semmassan as priest. Semmassan had already been mentally prepared to serve God remaining a celibate. It is a practice in the Jacobite Church that those who want to serve the Church as priests get married while they are Deacons. Priests once anointed are normally not allowed to get married. Semmassan who had dedicated himself for divine service had no second thoughts.

1. K. C. Mammen Mappilai, Malayala Manoram Weekly Vol.1. No. 25. p.17

The decision warmed the cockles of Thirumeni's heart. He saw in him not just a capable priest in the service of the church, but a true successor to lead the church.. Wattasseril Mar Dionysius Metropolitan ordained Semmassan as Kassissah on 15, Sept, 1908 at the Parumala Seminary, in the presence of a number of priests and (almost all the) Metropolitans. The occasion brought immense joy not only to the faithful in the church but also to the enormous friends and acquaintances of Semmassan, cutting across castes and communities.

He was generally referred to as 'M.A. Achen', because he was the first among the ordained priests in the Church to have taken an MA degree. The whole Kottayam town offered him warm felicitations especially since he was Principal of MD Seminary High School. A gold medallion was awarded to him on behalf of the Church at the felicitation meeting.

'MA Achen' developed as a decisive force in the socio-cultural and religious realms. He proved himself exceptionally capable as an educationist and as an orator. Being an avid student of church history, Achen delved deep into the history, growth and position of Jacobite Syrian Church and arrived at definite conclusions. There was hardly anyone else who matched him in keenness of perception and perseverance.

A decisive phase in church history was being evolved. The visit of Abdullah Bava, the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and the subsequent crisis led to it. A few background details have to be brought to light in this context. Two Patriarchs were simultaneously claiming the position of the Supreme Head of the Jacobite church: Mar Abdullah and Mar Abded Messia. A deep controversy developed out of this. The question who between the two was the true Patriarch led to a deep tangle since the claims and counterclaims contained contradictions galore. Mar Abded Messia was ordained as Patriarch in June 1895, whereas Mar Abdullah became Patriarch only in August 1906. This was done in the wake of an order of annulment promulgated by the Sultan of Turkey on the score of alleged irregularities in the selection of Mar Abded Messia. Such steps were quite in order during times when church administration was totally under royal authority. The position of the Patriarch ordained by Priests and High Priests, if not approved by royal authority, would then be neither

here nor there. This was what happened in the case of Mar Abded Messia. Yet instead of abdicating the title he moved out and established his throne elsewhere.

It was during this interim when Mar Abdullah was reigning Patriarch under the aegis of the Sultan that Wattasseril Malpan and Pathrose Ramban met him and got themselves ordained Metropolitan.

Patriarch Mar Abdullah set off on his tour of Malankara in 1910. It was MA Achen who was deputed by Wattasseril Thirumeni to welcome and take him around when the Patriarch landed in Bombay. It wasn't spiritual, the purpose of his visit to Malankara. It appeared that the visit was designed more for the sake of ascertaining his position as Patriarch over Malankara and thereby make substantial material gains. On reaching Malankara the Patriarch went straight to Trivandrum to win an audience with the King. Returning to Kottayam he stayed in the Old Seminary, Wattasseril Thirumeni occupying an adjacent room.

Within a few days the Patriarch called all the High Priests of Jacobite Church and informed them of his wish. The crux of his mission was that his suzerainty would extend as much over material possession as over spiritual matters. Some of the Metropolitans readily signed on the dotted line. But not the laser sharp brain of Wattasseril Thirumeni. He took a firm stand that the material assets of the Malankara Church would under no circumstances be subjugated to the Patriarch. It was MA Achen who gave strength and confidence on the basis of church regulations to Wattasseril Thirumeni to take this decisive stand.

MA Achen envisaged very clearly the possible dangers the Malankara Jacobite Church would face if it succumbed to the obstinacy of the Patriarch. For one it was diametrically opposite to the tradition and practices of the Jacobite Church. No superior authority had ever before put forward such a demand of any high priest of the Malankara Church. To give authority over material assets of the church to the Patriarch would mean total surrender of all church properties. It would as well virtually mean total eclipse of matters spiritual. Surrendering temporal rights would mean loss of all freedom over the selection and ordination of priests which has always been the exclusive prerogative of the

church. In turn it would affect the spiritual integrity and life of the church. MA Achen impressed upon Wattasseril Thirumeni the far reaching consequence the church would face in case it capitulated before the self-willed Patriarch.

Dark clouds were gathering on the skies of the Malankara Church. Pitch darkness was engulfing the serenity of the blue skies. Religion was descending into a battlefield of factionism and revolt spurred by materialism. Tension mounted. Longstanding crises developed. The many who sought for practical ways to maintain the dignity and integrity of the church found a fount of solace in MA Achen, who proved the man of the hour.

TRIAL BY FIRE

It is not unusual that some intelligent people, to protect their self-interest, keep under wraps unpleasant truths from powers that be. Some speak plain untruths to win their favour. Only few, very few, can boast of the rare courage to stand up and be counted for the sake of truth, even when practical considerations militate against it. They would not stay away from the path of righteousness even in the face of extreme trials. MA Achen was clearly one among them. The critical developments that the visit of Patriarch Mar Abdulla threw up in its wake were indeed a trial by fire as far as MA Achen was concerned.

An impromptu answer to an unexpected question from a student soured the relationship between Geevarghese Achen and the Patriarch while Achen was serving MD Seminary School as its Principal. "Who has the authority to anoint a Church Head?", asked a student who was interested in church matters. The question from the boy came in the wake of an assertion from Abdulla Patriarch that he only had the authority to ordain or annul the ordination of a High Priest. Normally an ordained priest wouldn't dare give a different view from that held by the Patriarch. Predictably it would reach higher ups inviting perennial wrath.

But MA Achen had the conviction that a teacher (who was also an ordained priest) should not mislead a student whitewashing the truth as he had perceived it. Currying favour with higher ups at the cost of truth was anathema to him. He explained to the class in general in a very calm and determined voice:

The right to anoint a High Priest rests with the Synod of Metropolitans. A team of two or three Metropolitans together may anoint

a High Priest laying their hands on him on apostolic lines. This was the decision of Nikya Synod. For instance it was two or three Metropolitans from the Malankara Church together who ordained Alvarez as Metropolitan.

It did not take long before this reached the ears of the Patriarch who shook with rage. "This impudent priest should be brought to book," he blurted out. MA Achen was asked to report urgently at Old Seminary. Emboldened by the strength of knowledge and self-respect he reported before the Patriarch without flinching.

"Is it true that you taught your students that the right of anointing High Priests is not solely vested with the Patriarch and that Catholicoses and Metropolitans may also anoint Mooron(Myrrh) and ordain them"?

"I didn't speak of anointment with myrrh. But the order of ordination was indeed, given to my students as you have put it now".

"Oh! what made you teach them that way"?

"Hoodaya Canon has it recorded thus. Malankara Church which follows the same tradition naturally follows the same order. It's true that I enlightened my students on those lines".

This cool and dignified response gave the creeps to the Patriarch. All the same the logical conclusion of MA Achen could not be countered, either. But the fact remained that acceptance of that stand would sully the lustre that was associated with the Patriarch's exalted position. Knowing full well that Achen could not be silenced with logical disquisition he tried the weapon of derision.

"His ways, indeed, are too broad! What an ocean of wisdom!", Patriarch spouted sneer. He expected those present to enjoy the barb. But Ouseph Ramban who was standing by said calmly. "But he hasn't said anything against your authority". The Patriarch showed undue hurry in cutting off the dialogue. "Right; lets's not continue this conversation. We have forgiven your intemperance. Kneel down, We shall bless you," he said.

"I haven't said or taught anything wrong. Yet I need your blessing". Said Achen, kneeling down. A scene which could have got embarrassingly nasty was finally resolved.¹

1. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios pp. 99-100

But even this did not quench the Patriarch's craze for material power and authority. He tried shady means to appropriate for himself the assets which belonged to the church. He could bring round most of the High Priests except Wattasseril Thirumeni with threats or enticements. They were all billeted in the Old Seminary. The position of Wattasseril Thirumeni was hardly different from Abhimanyu caught in the maze (padma vyooham). Everyone felt trapped, as it were. But the lone ranger who ventured out in Thirumeni's defence was MA Achen.

This intemperate, high handed powercraze, unfortunately opened the floodgates of litigations between the two factions in the Malankara Orthodox Church with all its unholy ramifications. Finding that Wattasseril Thirumeni could not be roped in, he turned his efforts to excommunicate him. In 1911 a sword went through the bosom of the Church. The order of ex-communication from the Patriarch came in search of Wattasseril Thirumeni - who was staying in the adjacent room-via registered post!

That it was a Church Head who broke bread and shared the same roof, besides solemnising church rites, who took this unseemly action against a church dignitary just below him was beyond comprehension. How could such recriminations and indefensible vindictive steps fall in line with the spirituality and integrity of a spirit filled Christian Church! Authority in the Church in every respect is spiritual. Such crass materialism which kills spirituality has no place in the Church of Christ. Steps like excommunication couched in sham spirituality which engulf the sacred offerings of love and sacrifice threatened to push Malankara Church down the abyss of disintegration.

K. C. Mammen Mappilai's record of this sad day when the Patriarch's excommunication order on Wattasseril Thirumeni was served read:

It was by evening that we (in the Manorama area) came to know of this. Soon Fr. P. T. Geevarghese, M. A. Philippose MA, BL; K. V. Chacko BA, LT and myself left for the Old Seminary. Even to walk a small distance has always been a difficult thing for me. Yet we walked. The stretch between Chunkam bridge and Old

Seminary was knee deep in water or full of mud. Wading through the mire we reached the Seminary and headed straight for Wattasseril Thirumeni's suite. The frail man who bore the inexorable burden of the future of Malankara Church with a heart seared with the burning brand of excommunication met us with exceptional sangfroid. His rare fortitude and unbounded optimism were indeed astounding. We had a long discussion with the Metropolitan on the course of action for the future.²

How few were there to rally round when the Malankara Syrian Church faced a crisis! And among priests only Geevarghese Achen!

K. C. Mammen Mappilai continues his reminiscences:

The next day being Sunday. The leaders of the Bava faction including C. J. Kurian had decided to have the order of excommunication on the Metropolitan read by Bava Thirumeni himself during the course of the church service. As though anticipating some fracas, an overflowing crowd from both the factions had gathered in and outside the church. The folks from the Methran faction had an impatient explosive mien of desperados itching for trouble. They wore a defiant 'come what may' expression. The whole area looked like a seething volcano ready to explode. The Metropolitan did not attend church service that morning. He remained in the Old Seminary. The service started. Prominent priests like Konattu Malpan of the Bava faction may not have sensed the incendiary atmosphere prevailing outside since they had already been inside the 'madbahah' (holy of holies). But lay leaders like C. J. Kurian who were mingling with the unruly congregation outside felt how explosive the situation was. C. J. Kurian snatched a slip of paper and sent a brief note to Konattu Malpan through a Semmassan. Having read it then and there Konattu Malpan tore the paper into shreds and dropped them there. Probably Malpan Achen thought that nobody would take note of that action of his. But he had reckoned without P. T. Geevarghese Achen. The hawk-eyed Achen had not only seen it but picked up all the shreds because his thoughts had probably gone farther than the bounds of

2. K. C. Mammen Mappilai: 'Jeevitha Smaranakal'. MM. Weekly Oct.6, 1996 pp. 32-33

the Malankara Syrian Church. On reading the shreds of paper he understood that the note had restrained Konattu Malpan and others from reading the order of excommunication at the service. Fr. P.T. Geevarghese had kept this note written by the hand of C. J. Kurian for a long time since. One is not sure how long.

The incident stands as a glowing example of Fr. Geevarghese's keenness and far-sightedness about the vision of the Church. Premonition of an expanding thunder bolt about to strike the Church had disquieted him. But he was not willing to succumb to the Patriarch, either. He would not lose courage at any cost. He was bracing himself for an all out battle for the sake of Malankara Syrian Church, even in the face of dwindling man power and depletion of resources.

The Patriarchs who came from abroad had always been interested only in power and pelf, spiritual upliftment being farthest from their minds. They were least interested in furthering the cause of the Church's extension but only in making themselves rich on material lines. Unfortunately even Metropolitan from Malankara turned to follow this pernicious path in later years.

The deadly 'terminator seeds' of factionism were first sowed by Patriarch Mar Gregorios who came to Malankara in 1665. There was commendable sense of unity, fellowship and contentment till then among the Malankara X'ians. Soon the monolithic Church split when the Jacobite Church was born. Another Mar Gregorios from Antioch ordained Kattumangath Ramban as Mar Koorilose in 1751. That signalled the birth of Thozhiyoor Church. Patriarch Pathrose who came in 1875 annulled the ordination of Mathews Mar Athanasius as Metropolitan, leading to the evolution of Mar Thoma Church. When Patriarch Mar Abdulla who came in 1910 excommunicated Wattasseril Mar Dionysius Metropolitan, it lead to the birth of 'Metran' faction which later developed into Malankara Orthodox Church. This led to the atmosphere of the Church getting hopelessly vitiated, resulting in a spate of physical clashes and litigations which ensured that peace in the Church fold was lost for ever. War cries drowned any meaningful worship.

The mind of MA Achen was constantly weighed down with the thought of redeeming the Malankara Church from this fiery trial.

LEAD ME FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Quite a few selfish priests and lay leaders were prepared to 'sing hallelujah' to the Patriarch who unashamedly revelled in material pomp. Alongside plots were being hatched to take the life of Malankara Metropolitan and P. T. Geevarghese Achen. They were as well trying to take possession of the records relating to tradition and practices of the Church which the farsighted Achen had already transferred from Old Seminary to MD Seminary. A number of tension filled scenes had been enacted. Fr. Geevarghese records most of these events in 'Girideepam'. The bitterness that characterised the Church atmosphere at that time is reflected in those articles:

It was Sunday, Mithunam 4, 1086. It was dawn. Morning prayers were over and we were getting ready to go to the Old Seminary. Thinking that it was necessary to have some cash in hand I sent for the casket. Lo, it was not there, where it had been kept. The whole room was searched; no use. The Manager and all Deacons came soon. Mr. K. V. Chacko was staying in a neighbouring house. He was sent for. Soon enough he came. There was some money and a few important documents. We felt flustered. The watchman who was staying in the seminary compound came soon.

"Look, the casket which was in my room is missing. Some one must have filched it. Make a thorough search".

"I saw a couple of Deacons speaking below their breath early this morning behind the kitchen. And they bolted as soon as I went towards them. They didn't seem to be our inmates."

"Let's search the pit behind the kitchen, then" said some who instantly proceeded in that direction.

They found the soil loose, thereabouts. They removed the soil. Lo, the casket is there unopened. We used to keep the casket in a different place from that night onwards. And a similar looking one was kept as usual in the old place.

On another night we were sleeping comfortably in the spacious room at the northern end of the MD Seminary Bungalow. And it was our practice to have someone else accompany us at night, since the casket incident. It was Philippose Semmassan, Cheppard who was with me that night. Everybody around was in sound sleep. Not a leaf was moving. Dead silence. Four or five hired assassins stepped in removing the latch of the window. They had a good look at us from top to toe. One of them had a sharp hatchet and another a gunny bag. We were unaware of anything, fast asleep. My life was in the balance. A golden opportunity for them to hack my head off. They knew what to do in case the Semmassan sleeping beside woke up. The man with the hatchet came close to the bed. He looked at his comrades with a searching questioning expression, 'Why not finish off?' None of them moved. Their expression callous. I was sleeping, but how close to death! My eternal journey would start any moment. All of a sudden one of them checked the hatchet man. He seemed to say, 'Wait, only if he wakes up.' Others were busy transferring the books and boxes kept there. [These details were told by the enemy camp, themselves.]

Semmassan who woke up silently watched two of them standing very close to Thirumeni and the others transporting all the articles lying about the room. He closed his eyes tight shut. Probably he thought my life had ended. It is only natural that one swoons at such a scene in the witching time of the night. He lay as if dead. It was fortunate that he neither woke up nor made any noise which would have ensured the instant end of two lives. It was nothing but the infinite mercy of God that saved us from the jaws of death. When the killers had left the room Semmassan bestirred himself and shook me up. He stuttered the story out. We

moved out of the bed calling 'Manager'. The boarding steward awaked and tried to open the door to the adjacent room. Not a door could be opened. He jumped out of the window shouting 'Hold him', seeing the one who had slipped out with the box. After a few metres of hard running the assassins dropped the box which contained the books in Syriac and bolted out of sight. They still had a casket with them. They ran along the road on the northern side of MD Seminary past Nagampadam bridge. 'Thief! Hold him!' Manager kept howling and chasing. He managed to catch hold of one of them near Arthootty Bridge. He had no idea what to do when one of them was apprehended. He was shaking as bad as the apprehended assassin. Finding that the 'Manager' was no match, he threw him off and darted into the darkness around Kurissu Pally. Nobody knew where he had disappeared. The Manager returned only to find that all the doors opening out of the Seminary had been bolted tight by the assassins. We could move out of our room only when Valakuzhiyil Ouseph who was doing his term as Semmassan opened his room adjacent to ours.

The theft yielded precious little to the opponents even this time. We got back the box which contained the books. And the other box which they took away had pretty little of anything valuable in it.

Even though not much of loss was incurred, this experience of the night when our life was saved by the skin of the teeth, when God's unseen hosts protected my frail figure, has kept crossing my mind off and on. There must be some definite purpose why God has spared my life.¹

It was MA Achen who was targetted when the Patriarchal faction stopped to heinous steps like sabotage and murder to gain ascendancy in Church administration. They knew that the easiest way toward this would be to lop off the right hand of Wattasseril Thirumeni, MA Achen. Their

1. Girideepam pp. 11-19

henchmen broke into his room many a time, disrupted his journeys, hurled insults. But nothing would stop this man of action.

Peace in the Church had been totally disrupted. Old Seminary had turned into a breeding ground of machinations and violence. Hoodlums were hired by the Patriarchal top brass to wrest power. To protect the life of Wattasseril Thirumeni and the assets and properties of the Church, a defence force was organised mainly under the leadership of MA Achen and a few others.

To maintain peace and order was impossible with two such rival forces being organized and maintained. Cordiality was the biggest casualty among the factions of this Church. Attapurathu Pappy was one of my trusted aides. Called familiarly as 'Aana Pappy', he was sent to me by K. M. Mammen Mappilai on my express wish. He was totally committed to his assigned task. His appearance was not at all to the liking of the enemy strike force. They saw in him a dangerous impediment to their designs. No hulk, he was strong and hefty and one look from him often was enough to drive the fear of god into his antagonist. Naturally their relationship was strained, to say the least. It was as incendiary as potash on dry palmirah leaves in mid day sun. An explosion was possible any moment.

One day when I was sitting in MD Seminary someone said that Aana Pappy was murdered and his body was lying in the hospital. We were shocked numb. Without waiting to hear how or when it happened we rushed to the hospital. K. C. Mathew, younger brother to K.C. Mammen Mappilai was with me. Pappy wasn't really dead, but was clearly dying. Next day on Meenam 19, 1087 he passed away. His body was taken for post-mortem examination. We, along with a few others were permitted by the doctor to go to the mortuary. It was seen that his skull was cracked into thirteen pieces.

He was buried in the presence of a huge gathering. Running duels between factions, infightings, unrealistic and unholy aspirations of self seekers all these left the hallowed grounds of the Old Seminary soaked in bloody bitterness. This made us miserably sad.

False pride and raging feuds had already paved the way for blood letting.²

Wattasseril Mar Dionysius was tired of this chain of clashes and legal battles. To cap it all the excommunication order from the Patriarch, Mar Abdulla. Mar Abded Messia, who was ordained Patriarch earlier than Mar Abdulla was invited to visit Malankara Church in this context. It was a step patently sad, but expedient. The fact remains that this Patriarch was never before recognised by Malankara Church since he had already been discredited by expulsion from office by the Sultan of Turkey. That Wattasseril Thirumeni was himself ordained Metropolitan by Mar Abdulla is ample proof for this. But the only way out to get round the excommunication was to have Mar Abded annul the order and thereby give a semblance of legal sanctity to the establishment of the Catholicate. Needless to say this idea was born out of the fertile brain of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese. As soon as the excommunication order was received from Mar Abdulla he informed Mar Abded Messia of the development. Naturally a comforting response emanated from him:

Dionysius and his people are blessed. The excommunication order from Mar Abdulla is null and void.³

What remained was to welcome him to Malankara, annul the order and establish the Catholicate. Steps were promptly taken on those lines ignoring the threats of Patriarch Abdulla and his followers. It was again the lot of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese to go to Bombay to receive the Patriarch.

At the behest of Wattasseril Mar Dionysius Metropolitan, other High Priests and followers, Metropolitan in charge of Kandanad, Mar Ivanios was selected to be Catholicose of the East. Arrangements for the ordination were made at Niranom. It was to be on Sunday, Chingom 31, 1088.

2. Girideepam pp. 21-23

3. Ibid. p. 19

Unfortunately new crises started cropping up. The Patriarch who was brought to Malankara for the express purpose of establishing the Catholicate suddenly refused to oblige. In spite of the earnest repeated requests and persuasions the Patriarch kept himself inaccessible inside his suite. Further, Fr. P. T. Geevarghese who heard of this went straight to his room and knocked at the door. The scene is presented thus in 'Girideepam':

The door being opened we entered the room and closed the door. "What do we hear? There can't be a greater humiliation. Do you think people will believe or accept Your Holiness' orders any more? Will they still have love and respect for Your Holiness? Haven't we been requesting the establishment of the Catholicate for long time now? Didn't we write about the urgency of it even in our first letter to Your Holiness. We have always been responding most favourably to all your subsequent orders. And the Metropolitan and myself have been insisting on it even after we came back. We can't guess why Your Holiness takes a different stand at this crucial moment after having been encouraging all the while!"

"Our beloved son, what do We do? We have no disagreement whatever on the establishment of the Catholicate. Don't misunderstand Us".

"Shall we go to the Church, then?"

"Wait, We haven't completed yet. Our people (in Antioch) would not be pleased about it at all. Don't you feel so? Thy should certainly be most unhappy. Should We not give some serious thought to it"?

"Whether they like it or not, Your Holiness should grant us our earnest request".

"We have nothing against. May We make it more plain?. Both the Rambans who have accompanied Us have different views. That has become clear to Us. They said they would throw Us out of the ship in case it went against their wish. We wish you appreciate Our predicament."

" Afraid of the Rambans? Never fear; they can't do anything".

"Do you think We can take courage from your words? Would you be able to accompany Us upto our homeland? That's what We would like to know."

"I would be with Your Holiness up to Bombay, that's for sure! I would return only after seeing Your Holiness on board. Further, if Your Holiness would insist that I join all the way, I'd be prepared for that. I'd see Your Holiness land on the shore. Won't that be enough?"

"We are afraid of the Rambans on another count also. We must say all. They might even be prepared to harm Us for some cash that We might be carrying with Us! What can We do, this old man?"

"We understand everything. Your Holiness has no business to be scared about anything of these; as long as we are living! Now that Your Holiness have come from thus far, if Your Holiness would return without fulfilling our wish that would be a big let down. It would be cause for a big disappointment, nay loss for your Holiness and the Malankara Church. Your Holiness should not even think of breaking the word. The crowd has already gathered in the church. Come, shall we proceed to the church?"

"Oh, We are ready."⁴

Thanks to the timely and discreet intervention of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese the establishment of the Catholicate went through smoothly. Even the record was set straight that the Catholicate of the East was established in Malankara. The crown of thorns in the shape of excommunication that lay on the head of Wattasseril Dionysius Metropolitan was deftly removed by his beloved disciple. The blot on Malankara Church was washed clean.

To keep his word Fr. P.T. Geevarghese accompanied the Patriarch up to Bombay. He had on him a lot of money gifted by a number of people. The Patriarch was really afraid that the Rambans who had come with him might rob him of all that. To avoid any further possibility for mischief the shrewd Fr. P. T. Geevarghese so arranged that the Patriarch

4. Girideepam pp. 27-29

was put on board a particular liner while the Rambans were put on another, less expensive ship. The Patriarch left the shores of Malankara in peace and quiet.

If only Fr. Geevarghese had not intervened! If only he had chosen to mind his own business as most others did! Wattasseril Thirumeni would then have embraced a disgraceful end and Malankara Church would, possibly, have ended in a whimper, choked by Patriarchal hegemony.

The insults heaped on Malankara Church by the pusillanimous and greedy foreign Head of Church were wiped clean by Fr. P. T. Geevarghese. Historiographers who value verity will any day acknowledge the bold forthrightness, steadfast faith and sharpness of mind which Fr. Geevarghese possessed in good measure. Faced with hare brained Patriarchs, and time serving Metropolitans who wouldn't care less for true faith, growth of the church and sustenance of flock, Fr. P. T. Geevarghese could not but take a singularly bold and decisive stand. And that reflected the rare personality which had unflinching dedication for it forte.

Never seeking restful comfort, ever pursuing his master passion of knowing God through the sure path of unswerving faith, Fr.P. T. Geevarghese shone like a bright noon sun in encircling gloom- a faithful guide for Malankara Church in its journey towards truth and perennial blessing.

Heat waves of incendiary proportions kept blowing across the Church atmosphere in spite of the establishment of the Catholicate subsequent to the annulment of excommunication order on the Metropolitan. A split appeared a distinct possibility. Court cases raged.

'Vattipanam Case' is an instance of litigation that finds repeated reference in the history of the Malankara Church. It was a certain amount set apart as fixed deposit for the training of theological students. Strangely, it was to take possession of this amount that the two factions fought a legal battle as pitched as it was protracted.

Gloom descended on the mind of MA Achen as it became clear that peace in the church was a remote possibility with the acrimonious power struggle that had been on. His peace efforts proving abortive time and time again he even thought of withdrawing from the scene. It was his deep concern for the large-hearted Wattasseril Thirumeni, his mentor, that kept him steadfast.

It was like a gleam of light at the end of the tunnel. A stream emanating from the desert. The Protestant missionary from America Dr. John R. Mott had convened an all India meeting of Christian students in Serampore to find out ways and means of possible spiritual awakening in them. To chalk out specific schemes for the propagation of Christianity in India was a major item on the agenda. Malankara Metropolitan also had an invitation to send delegates to attend the meeting. It was accompanied by MA Achen that Thirumeni attended the one-week conference.

It was a great opportunity for Geevarghese Achen to get into touch with outstanding delegates from all over the world. And he impressed whoever he met. Chief among them was Dr. Howells, Principal of Serampore College. His deep erudition and gift of the gab impressed him no end.

Once at dinner time Dr. Howells asked Achen: "Are you prepared to come away and take up Professorship at Serampore? It would be a great asset to the college".

"I am afraid I can't answer the question. Why not ask the Metropolitan"? Pointing Wattasseril Thirumeni, MA Achen responded. Dr. Howells straight away presented his wish to Thirumeni: "It is a good idea; but I find many practical difficulties. Let me see." Thirumeni replied.¹

With repeated suggestions on this line from Dr. Howells, it became a very important point of deliberation (for Thirumeni and Achen). It was a Godsend as far as Achen was concerned. A golden opportunity to associate himself with the realm of Higher education. It also meant deserting MD Seminary High School, which was close to his heart. He had already paid off the Rs. 1,844/- that the Church had spent on his education by returning Rs.3000/- But the paternal affection he had received from Wattasseril Thirumeni was too much to repay. There weren't many to stand by him in the Church which was ready to capsize any moment in the gale of legal battles. And to lead the Church in such turbulent times he needed unbounded strength.

It really made me uneasy, the decision to go or not to go to Serampore. It kept my heart weighed down. It kept me worried for days on end that I couldn't make a decision for or against. It affected not only my appetite but also my sleep. I would wake up with a start dreaming of Serampore College and its Principal. Equally strong was the image of Thirumeni and MD Seminary. My biological clock was upset. Instead of waking up at 5 am which was my wont, I would wake up much earlier, even by an hour or two. I often felt it more reassuring creeping into the adjacent chapel

1. Girideepam pp.38-39

than lie wide awake, my mind wandering crazy. I found solace in prayer and meditation. Serampore occupied prime place in my prayers in the wee hours of the night. Day by day Serampore College seemed to grow closer and closer to my heart. In a few days it became an obsession hard to get over. A bond hard to break. Whatever, I took it for God's guidance. But I couldn't really do anything about it. It was impossible that my decision could be irrevocable as long as I was deeply committed to a great leader of the Church. I had had ample occasion to see and feel for myself the childlike regard which Thirumeni had for the MD Seminary and the passion he entertained for its growth and development. And it had been destined to raise it to a unique position of pride in the Church by being its Principal. Even the faintest hint that I was entertaining some serious thought about accepting Dr. Howells' suggestion would have been sorely upsetting and unacceptable to Thirumeni. He would rip off any such distant possibility taking roots in me. To tell Thirumeni about the decision, taken entirely by me, even after serious consideration was an unthinkable proposition. It weighed me down, like never before. Like a shower of arrows they came, Dr. Howells' letters, bracing me up more and more. So without wasting any more time I went to Thirumeni armed with a few letters from Dr. Howells and a mind firmly set. After a few moments of pleasantries and some serious discussion I opened the topic and made it fairly clear what my response was to Dr. Howells' letters. Surprisingly, Thirumeni who interspersed the conversation with a few searching questions, came down with the pleasing observation: "OK, Let it be like that. We gladly approve of it."²

The more one tried, the more entangled the skein of faction fights became. No wonder, this distressed MA Achen very deeply. Court cases did little to engender peace or ensure progress. Even to develop MD Seminary on his lines was not easy. The invitation to be on the Serampore faculty could not have come at a more opportune time. It suited his aspirations on the plane of higher education to a T. That it might throw

2. Girideepam pp. 41-42

up greater openings to Malayali youth in following higher education was a pleasing prospect.

Indeed it was a historic break. To join an institution which focussed on English education and Theological studies. MA Achen took along with him the keen and well behaved Deacon K. A. Yakob who had just matriculated from MD Seminary. The blessings of Dionysius Thirumeni indeed was a shot in the arm. He was to be the first on the line of young sparks who got their urge for higher education enkindled to blazing splendour.

Fr. Geevarghese was given the position and salary commensurate with his erudition admitted only to British professors. It was indeed a mark of distinct recognition. Even though it was a Protestant Institution, facilities for holding a service on Malankara Syrian lines were granted by the authority. Fr. P. T. Geevarghese wasted no time in drawing a good number of Deacons and other eminent people to the Serampore campus.

They all did themselves and the Institution proud by walking away with a creditable BA or MA degree. Among them Deacon Alexandrios Mattackal, Deacon Mathew Paret, Deacon Pathrose Mookkancheril and Deacon Geevarghese Puthencavu rose to the position of Metropolitan in the Church in later years. About twenty students had enrolled themselves during that period in Serampore. They were housed in a two storey building nearby.

Father Geevarghese had to bestow his attention not only on the wellbeing of these students in Serampore, but also on the smooth functioning of educational endeavours in the Church. It is recorded in Girideepam thus:

We have often wondered what a fountain the Almighty had offered us then, now that we recall the huge income and expenditure that figured in our accounts during those days. Our monthly salary was substantial. Added to that was the regular remuneration we used to get as an examiner of the University. Perks and allowances earmarked for Deacons sent by Mr. Leechman and others- at the instance of Dr. Howells- constituted another source. It has to be mentioned that our salary and perks amounted to over Rs. 10,000 per mensem, if one is to have a rough idea as to how

we had managed the heavy demand on account of the establishment and upkeep of the Theological College and MD Seminary during those days. It is worth mentioning that the Metropolitan himself was so overwhelmed at the details of my stay and income and expenditure accounts at Serampore that he expressed great joy that we were getting a sum as substantial as 'vattipanam'¹³

Fr. P. T. Geevarghese took special care to see that the Deacons of Malankara were given the best training in the study of English as well as Syriac. Proficiency in Syriac was essential for students of Theology because most of the basic works on liturgy, faith and history of the Jacobite Church were in that language. He exerted considerable influence on Asutosh Mukherjee, Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University to have Syriac included as an optional item in their curriculum. Later on even Madras University followed suit. It may be remembered that Fr. P. T. Geevarghese headed the Board of Studies for Eastern Languages of the University for a long spell.

Fr. P. T. Geevarghese was as much concerned with the advancement of women as with higher education possibilities for the Malankara youth. He recognised the role of educated women in the progress of the family as well as the society. He expressed his wish to the Principal of the Diocesan College, Calcutta, Sr. Mary Victoria. This College was being run by European nuns. The Sister-Principal who appreciated this commendable suggestion soon accepted a few young women from Malankara on the College rolls. This opened up possibilities for them to train in the Convent in Barisole, East Calcutta and pursue studies in the English language simultaneously. A few young women from Kerala were regularly taken into the Convent by Mother Superior Edith, at the instance of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese.

Meanwhile a beautiful complex was being built at Thirumoolapuram, Thiruvalla as a result of the supreme enthusiasm of Kandathil Varghese Mappilai who had already made his mark as the Founder Editor of 'Malayala Manorama', social activist and language scholar. To establish a Girls School was his aim. But Varghese Mappillai

3. Girideepam pp. 45-46

passed away before his dream was realised. It fell upon Fr. P. T. Geevarghese to take up the unfulfilled dream. It was with this end in view that young ladies from Central Travancore were sent up for higher studies and training.

Once when I had come home for vacation I sought the permission of the Metropolitan (Wattasseril Mar Dionysius) to take some ladies for higher education in Calcutta since women's education was something close to my heart. And Wattasseril Thirumeni was only too pleased to grant my request on two scores. First it was a wish fulfillment for the late Varghese Mappalai. Second it opened great possibilities for women's emancipation through education within the fold of the Church. The first lady who volunteered to go with me to Calcutta to pursue higher education beyond the boundaries of the state was the daughter of (the late) E.J. John Vakeel, Mrs. John Mathai. Emulating the courage and quiet wisdom of this young girl many other girls followed suit in later years.⁴

To create an atmosphere of love and peace in Malankara, a parched land of faction fights and legal wrangles through an enlightened young generation was the dream and hope of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese. The priority he gave and the steps he took toward this goal during his fruitful tenure of service in Serampore would remain a glorious chapter in the history of nascent Kerala. Yet, probably, he would best be remembered in the history of the Church as a pioneer proponent of an ascetic order in the Syrian Church, every inch Indian.

4. Girideepam p. 59



RENAISSANCE ROUTES

India is a land steeped in spiritual fervor. A land of opportunities oozing with spiritual vitality, that is our ancient country. The prototype of a culture steeped in the hoary codified wisdom of sages is an heirloom which we only can claim. Even royal households moved under their spell.

As though by divine design it struck Fr. P. T. Geevarghese that the tradition of these rishis who had ever been proponents of eternal values, could be used in indianising Christianity. It should be remembered that quite a number of ascetic orders had taken shape from time to time in the Christian Churches of the West. They had taken care to see that a dual purpose of spiritual cleaning went hand in hand with the spread of their religious faith. But the Supreme Head of the Catholic Church, the Pope himself had to intervene off and on to check or delimit their activities when these orders showed tendencies of unholy rivalry. Fr. P. T. Geevarghese was not attracted to the style of functioning which revelled in wearing the insignia of material office rather than seeking spiritual identity. He was concerned only about the spiritual gains that accrued out of intense discipline and sacrifice. An attempt at revival of spirituality in the Malankara Church enervated by faction fights or interminable court cases and the search for a new ethos for the Christian Church in India were his major concerns.

The atmosphere in Bengal during his Serampore days was exhilarating. The dazzling lights of spirituality set ablaze by Sree Rama Krishna Param Hams and Swami Vivekananda were truly fulfilling. The Shanti Nikethan of Rabindranath Tagore was a novel experiment in every sense of the term. It expanded the horizon of sanyaas (asceticism).

His visits to Shanti Nikethan opened up rare opportunities to meet and imbibe valuable ideas from the great poet. The soul satisfying relationship that was established proved immeasurably inspiring. The dress that he designed for the members of his Ashram (Bethany) was in no small way on the lines of the Sage Poet. Achen also visited Sabarmati Ashram of Gandhiji and imbibed the spirit of patriotism with an eager mind.

To establish an ascetic order in the Malankara Syrian Church with a view to creating an atmosphere of love, service and sacrifice by leading a life of deep meditation was his dream. Father P. T. Geevarghese hoped that he could bring new life in the Church through the realization of the dream. And he was particular that this should not reflect the image of the Western ascetic orders of Christianity. He wanted it to be truly Indian in style and character with its roots going deep into the rich cultural subsoil of Mother India. The genius that he was, he was firm in his conviction that Indianization was the only sure guarantee for Christianity to gain relevance in the Indian context.

Father Geevarghese made it a definite point to apprise Wattasseril Thirumeni, the Supreme Head of the Malankara Church, of his wishes and gain his permission. Wattasseril Thirumeni was more than a spiritual mentor to MA Achen. He was a father figure and teacher extraordinaire. Their relationship was a beautiful symbol of all that was adorable in the student teacher relationship extolled in Indian tradition.

The long spells of meditation and spiritual quest that his life in Serampore offered helped him find the solitary routes to spirituality away from the bitterness that the tragic internecine feud had generated. The concept of the 'Guru' in Indian tradition gave him a new awareness. His efforts were directed towards finding room for Christian virtues in the Indian soul. While the ashrams rooted in Western traditions were failing to find an Indian horizon for Christ's message, Fr. P. T. Geevarghese was feeling his way successfully towards the same end.

Fr. Geevarghese picked up a number of young men who had not abdicated themselves to crass materialistic greed, and gave them the benefits of modern education. While some of them reached pinnacles of

glory in society, a chosen few embraced the soul satisfying rigours of sanyas.

'Bethany' became a symbol of refined culture. Christian message gained live presence in the dynamics of Indian culture. It was in 1917 when Fr. P. T. Geevarghese was still serving in Serampore that the Bethany Ashram for the followers of Christ was established. The founder believed that the ashram would in future years grow strong in Kerala soil to offer it the cool shade of lasting peace.

Where in Kerala should the Ashram be set up was his next deliberation. He decided to select an area far from the madding crowd of densely populated cities. He did not want even the distant ripples of materialism to reach the place. How to buy the land, put up necessary buildings, meet the daily need of the ashramites? The thought of finding money for all this also crossed his mind. But he never allowed himself to be weighed down by all these cares, for his faith that God will take care was strong as a rock.

He wrote about the establishment of this 'ashram' to Mr. E. J. John Elanjickal, who was a bosom friend, a true Christian, an eminent advocate and a phenomenally rich person. MA Achen received a very encouraging reply from this great friend of the community. He wrote back expressing willingness to spare some hundred acres of his at Perinad near Vadasserikara on the eastern fringe of Chengannur taluk. Immediately he wrote back saying that he would love to see the area in Perinad on his visit at the earliest.

In a few months, on his next vacation he went to Perinad accompanied by Mr. K. G. Cherian, Puthencavu and Mr. I. M. Idicula, Ranny to see for himself the facilities the place offered by Mr. E. J. John had. He walked about the inhospitable terrain and came back with rare satisfaction. Everyone agreed that there could not be a better place for an Ashram than this. On the suggestion that 'puramboke' land lying contiguous to the hundred acres offered by Mr. E. J. John could also be acquired, steps were taken in this direction. Subsequently around three hundred acres of puramboke land was also acquired with the timely influence exerted on the

government by Mr. K. C. Mammen Mappilai and Mr. K. K. Lukose. To effect this deal since he had no money on him, he took a loan of two thousand rupees from his father with the help of his brother Mathai Panicker.

The place called 'Mundan mala' lay a little east of the confluence of the Pamba and Kakkat rivers. A fairly tall hill dense with thickets. It was such an enchanting site that one felt like thanking God for the breathtaking scenic beauty it offered. Some fifty years before the place was totally inhospitable for human occupation, being infested with wild animals. The soil and the climate made it ideal for coffee, tea, rubber and pepper cultivation. Some famous estates like Perumon, Laha, Chittar, Kurangali and Carmel lay around the place. It was through the foot of these that pilgrims to Sabarimala trudged towards 'Sannidhanam', the royal presence of Lord Ayyappa.

With an express wish to acquiring a few acres of adjacent land Achen's brother Mathai Panicker and his friend Kileeleth Chacko wrote to Serampore. This is what the reply read:

"Not a cent of land should be owned by you anywhere near the proposed land. The whole place should be registered in the name of the Ashram. God will take good care of him and his household, whoever sets off on a divine mission." ¹

Forsaking his Professor's post Fr. P. T. Geevarghese returned to his native land in 1919, his mind set on ashram life. Incessant hard work was required to clear the land and make it hospitable enough for an ashram with an atmosphere of peace free from the fear of marauding wild animals. Kalappurackal Yakob Semmassan and Mattackal Alexander Semmassan were directly involved in this hazardous venture. Sooranatt Oommen Vaadhyar (teacher), Kileeleth Chacko and Achen's own brother Mathai Panicker who expressed their desire to join the Ashram put their shoulder to the wheel with utmost dedication. A good many people gave themselves and their money as though on a definite divine design, to clear Mundan mala of the scary atmosphere it possessed, what with the

1. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios pp. 145-46

threat of wild animals and of malaria, to one of peace and quiet suited for an ashram. It may be remembered in this context that one Sir Daniel Hamilton, an American missionary lent Rs. 7000/- to this project at the instance of Mr. J.H. Howler, another missionary friend of Fr. Geevarghese's in Serampore.

Miracles unfolded when men joined hands in the fullness of divine love. Small grass-thatched huts rose up. Doors, windows and even make shift walls were made of splintered bamboo. Repeated coats of cowdung smear gave the floor its finishing touches. Cassava, elephant's foot yam and grams were cultivated for food in the clearings. Saplings of coconut palms, arecanut palms, mango, jackfruit and plantains were planted.

A special regimen was followed by the ashramites. They used to get up with the bell at 5.00 am. Morning ablutions including a bath in the nearby stream over they would assemble in the ashram chapel for prayers. Holy Qurbana would continue till 7.00 am. They broke their fast at 8.30 am. 9.00 to 9.30 it was cleaning time. Classes on scripture, training for priesthood and different lessons on tenets of faith upheld by the Church and on ashram life were handled by Aba (father) P. T. Geevarghese and Abuna (Asst. Superior) Fr. Alexios and Novice Master Fr. Yakob. 12 to 12.30 it was time for noon-prayer and intercession. At 12.30 gruel for noon meal. Meal over, till 3.00 pm it was time for self-study. Evening tea and prayer followed, after which ashramites turned farmhands. Between five and six they would wash themselves and get ready for vespers. From six to nine in the evening it is supper and discussion, debates, newspaper reading, jokes and discourses. 8.30 till 9.00 pm reading and meditation. At 9.00 after 'suthara' (bed time prayer) it was spell of silence when one could engage in serious reading and study. Lights off, lamps off rather at 10.00 pm.

Earthen pots and cups only were used for food and drink. Jack tree leaves served for spoons. Food was purely vegetarian with milk and egg permitted during non-lent period. Since dairy and poultry were tended, egg, milk and butter were never in short-

supply. Palm-leaf umbrellas were used during rainy season and in workfield headgear made of palm frond. Single mat served for bed. White clothes dipped in saffron were the regular wear. Nobody owned anything in the ashram. Everything was common property. Big or small, clergy or laity, there was no distinction whatever among the ashramites. Holy penury was a basic requisite for all ashramites. A hermit is one who dies to the world. Material honour and popularity were no concern for an ashramite. He was to find joy and contentment in nothing except total abstinence from everything material before God. In surrendering himself as a sanyasin he weds penury.²

He must be prepared to offer himself as a burning sacrifice. He shares the same altar of sacrifice where Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. It is a living sacrifice, till the last breath.

The founding of the Bethany Ashram signalled an overwhelming experience, a faint gleam of peace in the dark atmosphere marked by selfish ends and greed for power. Faction fights and legal battles had made it darker still. The Bethany order attempted to dispel this darkness by concentrating on prayer, meditation and hence a God-experience. On the instructions of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese, ashramites used to go out and organise meditation sessions for the spiritual sustenance of the members of the Church apart from leading regular church services. The throb of renaissance was being felt. The first sparks of a renewal was being experienced. Though a sudden change was not noticed, the spirit of renaissance was palpably felt.

2. Fr. Kuriakose OIC : Malamadakkile Kedavilakku pp. 34-35

IN SEARCH OF SPIRITUAL FULFILMENT

The progressive steps Fr. P. T. Geevarghese initiated towards the cause of women's education opened up a new chapter of light in the history of the Malankara Church. It was he who exposed the world beyond the Sahya ranges and the varied cultures that obtained there to the Kerala girls who had but limited prospects in education.

Offering the youth of Malankara prospects of higher education and spiritual development was not just satisfactory enough to Fr. P. T. Geevarghese during his Serampore days. He was deeply aware that women's education was a necessary concomitant of the development of his country.

Fr. P. T. Geevarghese served in Serampore from 1913 to 1919. During those days Diocesan College run by the European Sisters of the Anglican Church, was a prominent educational institution in Calcutta. It was Achamma, daughter of E. J. John Vakil Elanjickal, who first enrolled herself in that institution from this part of the country. Saramma, daughter of Varghese Koodathumuriyil, Vennikulam was admitted in Diocesan High School in 1915.

Sisters who belonged to the Order of Oxford Mission of Epiphany had been giving pioneering lead in educational activities in Barisole, 350 miles from Calcutta. Fr. P. T. Geevarghese happened to meet Sr. Edith who headed this Order at a meeting in Calcutta. The far-sighted MA Achen felt that the establishment of a similar Order in Malankara would definitely go a long way in furthering the spiritual development of the Syrian Christian ladies. It was indeed a refreshing brainwave. A prophetic mission. Fr. P. T. Geevarghese was finding his place among

saints sent by God in the founding of a missionary order for women strictly on the lines of Indian ascetic tradition. Bethany Community remains a unique monument to his vision and foresight.

Mother Edith would not accept the suggestions of Fr. P.T. Geevarghese to start a mission like hers in Kerala, which she felt was beyond her designated sphere of action. Yet she prized the sincerity of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese and offered to admit a few committed seekers in Barisole for necessary training.

Barisole is a small town on the confluence of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Only timber and bamboo had gone into the structure of the Mutt. The atmosphere was suffused with typical Indian way of life. Mother Edith was all motherly tenderness. Sr.Helen was her trusted companion. Together they opened the doors of the Ashram for the young women of Kerala.

The first girl who volunteered to join for missionary training there was Mariamma, the daughter of Kuttiyil Kuriakose Achen, who was uncle to Deacon Koshy. [Deacon Koshy was one of Geevarghese Achen's favourite students in Serampore]. Kunjamma, a niece of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese and daughter of Kallarackal Eapen, and Annamma, daughter of Puthenpurackal Philipose also belonged to the group that left for Barisole in 1915. Mother Edith welcomed them most warmly.

Fr. P. T. Geevarghese used to give devotional addresses in different churches during his mid-summer vacation. In 1916 he visited Thripunithura on one such tour. It was on the invitation of Dr. M. P. Peter, Mookkancheril, one of his friends. Kunjilachi of Mookkancheril padinjare veetil was already widowed at the age of nine. She had been given in marriage a few months earlier and had lost her husband owing to typhoid, a killer disease at that time. Child marriage, it may be noted, was the prevalent custom of the time. Disinclined to lead a married life she started spending her time in prayer, fasting and meditation. She showed keenness to join the sanyasini order which was dear to Fr. P. T. Geevarghese's heart. Her younger brother M. P. Peter (Jr), familiarly called Kochupillai, was no less keen to join in. Later on, in spite of stiff opposition from the older members of the family Peter entered the Church. The others who joined Kunjilachi (M. P. Sosamma) on the 1917

batch of young ladies to Barisole on missionary training were Achamma, daughter of Idichandy Ponvanibhom, Kayamkulam and P. T. Annamma, daughter of Cherian Tharakan, Anniyil, Kattanam.

An unmistakable spiritual revival among women resulted from the opportunity for higher education and spiritual training at Calcutta and Barisole that was made available for intelligent young ladies by Fr. P. T. Geevarghese. Hindrances were many that Fr. Geevarghese had to overcome in laying a path of self-surrender to God through sanyasa which some of these young ladies chose for themselves. It may be remembered that the founding of the order of sanyasa for women preceded that of the one for men- the Bethany Congregation. In February 1918 at Barisole, thanks to the encouragement and blessing of Mother Edith and Sr. Helen it became a reality. But it could not drive its roots down in Malankara in spite of the yearlong waiting in prayer by these dedicated women.

Wattasseril Thirumeni was against it.

This saddened Fr. Geevarghese deeply. He wanted to make use of committed women with the right vision to give the desired leadership in educational activities. The building complex which Kandathil Varghese Mappillai had completed lay idle. Fr. Geevarghese had dreamt of starting a school there, even while he was in Serampore. He had even roped in two capable English ladies with the help of Mother Edith to take up the responsibility. They were Miss Holmes and Miss Brooke-smith, both Oxford graduates. They stayed in Thirumoolapuram and Balikatom School had had its birth. Fr. P. T. Geevarghese with his astute leadership acquired more land in the area and a boarding for children, a chapel and a Mutt (Convent) were established.

The school started functioning in 1920; Fr. P. T. Geevarghese being the live wire. Everything concerned with the running of the school was undertaken under his instructions and supervision.

He was a father to every child admitted to the boarding away from his/her parents. With the children he moved with the untrammelled freedom of a child. It can be safely surmised that Balikatom would not have developed into a High School but for the services of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese.¹

1. Mother Sulga: Early Days of Reunion p. 52

The founder father used to visit the sisters at Thirumoolapuram and give them spiritual guidance from time to time. But the right to ordain them rested with the Metropolitan, as per the traditions of the Church of the East. And Wattasseril Thirumeni, as has already been mentioned, was not inclined to found an order for the women. But like the importunate widow [Luke 18:3-6] these dedicated women kept on praying in tears for a release from this impasse.

Wattasseril Thirumeni was always interested in ordaining Fr. P. T. Geevarghese a Metropolitan. He wanted him to be his trusted aide whenever he found himself embroiled in legal tangles. But the same miserable plight of the Church stood in the way of Fr. Geevarghese making up his mind. His was a quest after divine bliss sought through ascetic orders- living in mud huts, sticking to the strict regimen set for themselves by the ashramites, eating out of earthen bowls, steps toward penury and self negation. Imagine the reputed Principal of MD Seminary High School, the renowned Professor of Serampore Theological College, the unparalleled orator choosing for himself the path of sacrifice and self negation!

Yet he could not resist being ordained Metropolitan, the high point of shepherding ministry. So without accepting charge of any Diocese, he bowed himself before the will of God to be ordained Metropolitan of the Bethany Congregation. The acceptance speech he made after being consecrated Metropolitan at the hallowed Niranom Church on May 1st, 1925 bears ample testimony to the reluctance with which he accepted the Office:

The desire to lead the life of an anchorite grew in my mind even at the tender age of eight or ten. From then through different vicissitudes I have come to this position, all by the Grace of the Holy Spirit. To reach the fulness of spiritual growth through the path of ascetic pursuits was the ideal that lay embedded in the depth of my soul all these years. This ideal has only got more deeply ingrained even when I have been associating myself in the cause of the Church during the turbulent time we have been experiencing over the last few years. This ideal got deeply set during my days in Serampore after I had left MD Seminary High School.

And I got ample opportunities to try them out in different ways during that period. I got confirmed in my belief that many a young man among the students and acquaintances had been heeding to a similar call as I myself had heard beckoning us to move along the path of renunciation. This led to an inescapable conclusion that establishing a Sanyasashram would do us a world of good in our spiritual growth as well as to those whom we were associating ourselves with. This was how we started working towards the founding of Bethany Ashram.

For around ten years we kept praying about identifying a saint who loved and followed our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, the Son of God for our patron saint. And we chose Saint John because he was the youngest and best loved of by his Master. There was no one else who loved our Lord longer and deeper, so much so that Christ entrusted him with the care of his mother from the cross. And his letters exhort his readers always to love, which is the crux of his message. And I am humbly delighted that the same name of Bethany's Patron Saint has been given me by the Church Fathers now that I am ordained Episcopa. It has been the tradition in ancient Syrian Churches for the people chosen to be Church Heads to take the name of their role model from among saintly Church Fathers. Even though I have taken the name of this apostle who was a messenger of peace and love, to live up to his name would require the blessings of these Church Fathers and prayers from everyone of you. I would, therefore, crave once again for their blessings and your prayers to accompany me in my future mission.²

It must have been the answer to the tear drenched prayer of those ladies who chose to accept the ascetic order of Bethany Ashram. Mar Ivanios was God's choice to effect their ordination into this special ministry. He accepted the office of Episcopa, exclusively in charge of Bethany, with the express desire of initiating them into this order. "Dear children, I accept this cross only for your sake," he told them choked with emotion.³

2. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi : Archbishop Mar Ivanios pp.169-70

3. Mother Sulga: Early Days of Reunion p. 96

It was this historical assignment that he first took upon himself on becoming Episcopa. On September 21, 1925 the day of remembrance of Blessed Virgin Mary and his own birthday, at an auspicious moment, the first three nuns of Bethany gave themselves up as a divine offering. Thus in Malankara Church the first order of women Sanyasins (nuns) was established.

Mookkancherry M. P. Sosamma was the first member of this 'Bethany Congregation'. She was given the name 'Saina' when she accepted the divine weeds and took the pledge of renunciation. Saina is a Syriac word which means peace. It was truly symbolic. Mar Ivanios, thereby, was letting into the dark gloomy sky of Malankara Church viti-ated by the rumbles of faction fights a white dove of peace. He expected this dove and the others that would join it to coo a charm of divine peace harmony and which he expected, would sink all discord and disharmony. Their prayer would waft about over the seven seas in divine contentment.⁴

That marked a historic beginning. A good number of young women joined their rank in holy surrender, even though there was no tradition to back it. It was the word and witness of the founder that provided them the necessary inspiration. The letter that Mar Ivanios wrote to the members of the order on assuming the office of Episcopa is cherished by them as a veritable creed: It reads:

Dear Children,

We know in Our mind and spirit that in being ordained Episcopa We have been admitted to the privileged company of saintly apostles and that We have been made partaker of the Grace of the Holy Spirit which the Good Lord imparted to his chosen apostles on Pentecost day and therefore to experience the inestimable joy of being close to the secrets of the Lord and to revel in it. We would request you, the apple of Our eye, to pray for Us. God demands more of those to whom he has given more. He has given Us ten talents. We have to work on it to make another ten more.

4. Rabindranath Tagor: Gitanjali-Sonnet II

We have no idea how this can be accomplished. We grope about Our way not knowing what to expect. But one thing. God holds Our hand in His. The blind man is sure to reach his goal safely because his guide can see. The Lord and Saviour has led Us hithertofore. He has kept Us in his light.

My dear Children, We would request you to pray for Us and for yourselves so that His name is glorified. Pray that We and you are led to grow unto Christ the Head and that we are led to His glory so that His glory is made perfect and complete. We celebrated Qurbana today all for this. We are not sure where to go, how else to work for His glory, what else to do.

We have another thing to tell you. You should try more than ever to find Christ and love Him in the sisters who live with you. We have great joy about you, in Christ. Yet sometimes We feel grieved about you. We only wish to find that you really work hard. We would only be contented to see everyone of you in the glorious company of saints, in all fulness of glory, holiness, humility and purity. Dear children, love God. And for His sake love everyone around you. We don't write this suspecting any dissension among you. But We would earnestly desire that you enjoy the loving God's infinite Grace.⁵

His message was his life, a life that craved for peace, melted in human love and sought unceasingly that God-experience through abject surrender of self. The members of the Bethany Congregation of Sisters remain committed to a life of self- surrender for the glory of God.

5. Mother Sulga: Early days of Reunion pp. 96-98

THE EPISCOPA OF BETHANY

Mar Ivanios was a saintly soul that sought the ways of God, trusted in His grace and listened intently to His call. Many were the tribulations that he underwent towards finding peace in the Malankara Church, its progress and unity. The beloved disciple of Mar Dionysius, the Metropolitan of Malankara Church, was duty bound to do it. He heeded the call of God to renew the church spiritually without getting enamoured of materialistic charms. That was why he embraced the path of self-negation that characterised his Sanyas concept, rather than waste himself in the atmosphere of dissension. His sole concern was to show the right path to the young men and women of Malankara Church and to show them the light of knowledge. The Bethany Sanyas Order in Imitation of Christ gave a new vista to the Indian Sanyas concept.

But the trouble mongers of the Malankara Church were not prepared to glorify God in peace and unity in the new found glow of sacrifice. They were swamped by pomp and pride in material possession. Finding that his new gained God experience was not enriching the Church, he turned his attention to making the Bethany Order independent of the Church and continue his quest after God, the eternal truth.

Even then Church leadership was inviting him to take up the top position of pastoral ministry, the rank of Metropolitan. Meanwhile Wattasseril Mar Dionysius who was heading the Orthodox Church- which had already established an independent identity from the Jacobite Church- was disqualified by Patriarch Mar Adbulla. This made him unacceptable(as a Church Head) to the Jacobite faction. And all those who stood

by him also were virtually excommunicated. Mar Abbed Messiah, Patriarch, meanwhile, annulled the excommunication order promulgated by Mar Abdulla and ordained the Catholicose with autonomous power over the Orthodox Church in Malankara, on September 25, 1912. It was Mar Ivanios of Kandanad Diocese who was ordained the first Catholicose with the name of Paulose Mar Baselios.

It was in this background that Wattasseril Thirumeni and other Heads of different Dioceses wanted Bethany Episcopa to be elevated Metropolitan. They were keen on making the best use of Bethany gainspiritual development through purification and self-negation for the betterment of the Church. Moreover, it was twelve years since the first Catholicose had passed away. It was high time a second Catholicose was ordained and consecrated.

In keeping with this, Mar Philexinos, Metropolitan of Vakathanam was ordained Second Catholicose on April 30, 1925 at Niranom Church. And on the next day, May 1st Bethany Episcopa was elevated Metropolitan with the name Mar Ivanios.

The consecration of Mar Ivanios as Metropolitan was unique in many ways. The recently ordained Catholicose and Mar Gregorios of Kandanad solemnised the ceremony. Mar Dionysius who was staying in Parumala Seminary, just three miles away, did not show up on both the days of the function. Those were days when the famous 'Vattipanam Case' was being heard in the court. He had deposed in court that he was ruling over the Malankara Church under the overlordship of the Patriarch of Antioch. He was advised by legal experts that his attending either the ordination of the Catholicose or of the Metropolitan which was not authorised by the Patriarch would weaken his case. So he stayed away from both the functions even though it was a painful decision.

The speech that Mar Ivanios made on being made Metropolitan was a powerful exhortation for church unity. With great spiritual insight, without indentifying himself with either faction openly, he said:

We would like you to know the background of the annulment of office of Metropolitan by Patriarch Mar Abdulla. It was solely because the Metropolitan of Malankara declined to enter into a

legal contract conceding the temporal rights over the Church which the Patriarch demanded. But this was not explicitly mentioned in the order of annulment. Instead; it was only a few weak arguments that were preferred. We should feel sad that a Supreme Head of a Church should act in this manner. We are convinced that the reasons attributed, except possibly that his hand used to shake involuntarily, were patently baseless. And the Patriarch and his advisers were well aware of it. During those days of trouble between the factions, in keeping with Our moral convictions, We have tried conscientiously to stand by the Metropolitan of the Malankara Church and to work for its development. But We felt convinced that more than these efforts which probably ensured progress for our church, what was more desirable for our church as well as for the whole Christian community in Kerala was true faith in God. So We determined that Our primary duty was in trying to build up, in our people a stronger faith in God.

The strong bent and yearning towards sanyasa which We had in Us from boyhood was strengthened by the Grace of God. So We started leaving social ventures and concentrating on matters of faith through Bethany Ashram. This, We believe, was made possible only because of God's guidance.

And Thirumeni concluded his long address on this note:

If the Christian Church is compared to the human body 'Sanyasashram' is its heart. Theological experts hold the view that the part played by the heart in human body is the same as a God-centred sanyas order for the Christian Church. Bethany is a Sanyas ashram. Even though the Diocese of Bethany Episcopa is so limited, the ideal it holds is indeed very big. We firmly believe that what we lack most is love of God. There is no point in finding fault with other communities. We must identify our faults. The supreme end of our life as a community is to know God, love Him and for His sake love our fellowman and serve them. Our Church and the whole Christian community in Kerala must accept an ideal more deep in love, more sacrificial and more pure than any we have so far followed.

We believe that Bethany Ashram will in course of time be able to attract our Church and all other Churches in Kerala to the supreme ideal that the loving life of our Lord and Master exemplifies. We bank on God's infinite mercy for this. Though we, the members of the Ashram, may lack in education, capability and faith, we are fortified in our strong desire that we should love our Master and Saviour more than anything else. This, we are sure, is a gift from God. And we are also convinced that we would not reach this end that we have in our dream for Bethany if we don't get the continual guidance and assistance from the Holy Spirit. We do not depend on our own strength or merit. We believe that our gracious and kind God will shower on us blessings more than we deserve if we are earnest in our prayers.

So the God who called us, unworthy as we are, to this Holy ashram life will, in addition to blessing us abundantly, also use us as means of grace for our community, all Christian communities, nay for all the communities in our country. God's grace never dries up. We offer our sincere gratitude to the Revered Church Head who found it fit to call us to this high office and instal us as the Episcopa in charge solely of Bethany.¹

If we carefully analyse this expression of thanks we will be able to find out a cardinal truth couched in these words, that Mar Ivanios did not accept this office as Episcopa to cater to or protect the interests of either faction in the Malankara Church. Disgusted with this intensification of rivalry totally oblivious of divine will or guidance, he never thought of making personal gains by sticking to either party, even though at one stage he had been an ardent advocate of the seat of Catholicose. Instead he was committed to killing the self by accepting the arduous ascetic life of a sanyasin. He wanted to witness through his life that it was not he, but God in him, who lived. He would not want the Bethany that he established to be aligned to any particular fold, but would rather keep it an independent order exhorting all Malankara Christians to the ideal of 'One Shepherd One Fold'. So even when accepting the invitation of the Orthodox faction to be an Episcopa, he had a definite vision

1. Fr. Thomas Inchakalody: Archbishop Mar Ivanios pp. 177-182

that he was not going to administer a particular diocese under the Church but confine himself solely to winning souls as Episcopa of Bethany. Naturally he expected the position of Episcopa to raise the image of Bethany's identity. Incidentally it also offered him the privilege of solemnising the dedication of the Bethany Order of Nuns in his capacity as Episcopa. Certainly it was the express will of God, since the Metropolitan of the Malankara Church had been clearly disinclined to such a step.

In fact both the factions could very well seize this opportunity offered by Mar Ivanios through Bethany, by using it as a forum for open discussions towards Church unity. Instead under the instigation of Mar Julius and other Metropolitans of the Patriarchal faction, the Patriarch of Antioch promulgated an order, distinctly offensive and indecent in tone and tenor, expelling the Catholicose and Mar Ivanios from their respective offices. A close look at the whole text will reveal the lack of taste and decorum with which the Supreme Head and others of the Patriarchal faction reacted:

In the name of the Omniscient, Omnipotent and Eternal God, Ignatius Patriarch, Elias III of Antioch:

To our beloved Metropolitan Mar Sleeba Osthathios, Mar Paulose Athanasius, Mar Geevarghese Severios and Mar Elias Julius,

May the Blessings of the Lord, Our God be upon you and those you lead. That through the mediation of our Blessed Virgin Mary, Amen. We are sending our Peace to your love. We are in receipt of year letter dated Mithunam 21, 1925. From that We understand that Geevarghese Ramban of Vakathanam has been designated Catholicose by his cursed and excommunicated followers and that Geevarghese Kassissah MA who has been spiritually cursed by Our Predecessor the late Abdulla Patriarch is called Episcopa by his followers. The three who were robbed by the excommunicated Mar Abded Messia, therefore, remain vain and excommunicated. This is because Abded Messia has no spiritual authority in our Holy Church to ordain anyone. His action and orders are null and void. As it is impossible for anyone to receive any position of authority from one who is dead, it is impossible for the deposed and therefore dead- from the position of Patriarch- Abded Messia to confer any spiritual authority to anyone. We reaffirm, as We

have done before, that those who acknowledge and receive the excommunicated Geevarghese and Abded Messia (who has been) bereft of the blessings of this Holy Spirit, cease to be members of the body of the Church. They remain opposed to our faith. We wrote to you on Chingam 12, 1924 to this effect. Therefore that man from Vakathanam and the other 'MA fellow' hold no authority. Not only do they have no spiritual authority but no place of authority in the Church either. We trust that you understand the position clearly now. Therefore, We command your love that you should be aware of the fact that those who follow Geevarghese are driven by the spirit of the devil and that they are guided by self- will, trying to establish a Catholicate in Malankara in defence of the see of Antioch, thereby bringing ignominy to the position of Patriarch. You should not forget those who stood against Moses. Nor should you forget Jonis or Jonabaris. These men are no different. You should remember Our Lord cursing the figtree.: "Let no one ever find any fruit on you", causing it to wither instantly. In the same way they also will wither. They will not yield any fruits. God did not grant them the spirit of repentance, so that they remain outside the fold of the Church. We warn you to keep off lest you should be caught in the snare of their sinful ways. You should not give them peace because the prophet has said that sinners will have no peace. May the God of Israel keep you from all evil. This is for public announcement: Grace and Blessings be upon those who are obedient.

Dated 28 Chingam, 1925. From Dayara of the Throne.²

All this made Mar Ivanios doubly committed to his pastoral calling and hence to develop Bethany as a centre of prayer and meditation without getting caught in the skein of factionalism. Even though he was ordained and blessed by Metropolitan of the Catholicate faction, he did not approve of the authority of the Metropolitan of Malankara or declare loyalty to the Catholicate. He did not sign any Omologia- pledge of obedience. Later development in the Church proved that his was the calculated step of a farsighted person.

2. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios pp. 184-86

Mar Ivanios who assumed office as Episcopa of Bethany with head quarters at Thiruvalla did not fall in line with the other Bishops of either the Patriarchal or Catholicose faction. He kept himself apart both in his attire and style of work. His robe and headgear were saffron and his crook made of wood, in keeping with his Sanyas ideals. He did not take up diocese administration or attend synod of the Metropolitans. His aim was to enlighten Malankara Church along the lines of Sanyas. He strengthened Bethany Sanyas Ashram and regularised the order of Bethany Sanyasinis. He made serious efforts to raise Balikamatom to a model School. He organised Bethany Mission and with government sanction built churches in many places. Mar Ivanios tried hard to take care of the whole society. A refreshing new life was being felt all over Malankara as a result of the services initiated by Mar Ivanios, which were as inspiring as they were inspired.

During this period in 1928 Catholicose II passed away and in his place Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Niranom Diocese was ordained Catholicose III.

Along with it Mar Ivanios was elevated as Metropolitan in independent charge of Bethany and a Bethany member Yakob Ramban was ordained Episcopa with the name Mar Theophilus. This proved a shot in the arm for the Bethany Mission which energised the evangelistic approach of the Churches.

Hindrances were many in accepting Dalits who embraced Christianity. Doors of love were opened for them by Bethany Churches. More Churches were established in the hilly regions by the Bethany mission.

Sunday School Movement, Youth Movement, Women's Fellowship, Prayer Meetings and Convention gatherings gained great impetus under Bethany mission.

Yet it remained a sad experience that the prayerful steps of Bethany did not yield the expected fruits in the reformation of Malankara Church. It looked impossible for the Malankara Syrian Church to experience a spiritual revival, the soul of the Church stifled by the incessant faction feuds. In this background a strong feeling that associating itself with some ancient church of saintly origin was the only way out for the continued existence of the Malankara Church and its spiritual growth, took deep roots in Mar Ivanios' mind. Discussions and details, overt and covert, held at different planes only strengthened this view. The excommunication order of Patriarch Abdulla and the establishment of the Catholicate by Patriarch Mar Abded Messia came in for sharp scrutiny. Rejoining a church of saintly origin appeared a Hobson's choice.

That it was MA Achen who stood as a pillar of strength behind Wattasseril Thirumeni during the days of 'Vattipanam case' which got the two factions embroiled in bitter controversy, remains an incontrovertible fact in Church history. His unique role in inviting Mar Abded Messia and prevailing upon him in establishing the Catholicate, thereby revalidating the office of Catholicose can never be overestimated. This being the case why should one question the fact that it was the same MA Achen who was deputed by Wattasseril Thirumeni and other Metropolitans who were on his side to seek and find lasting peace in the Church? One should not close one's eyes against facts of history.

His reply to felicitations on his ordination as Metropolitan in Niranom has already been given in full. In it he had exhorted all the members of the Church and their spiritual leader to heed the scriptural call to be 'One Church under One Shepherd'. He reminded them that in the matter of social customs, political responsibilities, past history, spoken language and Church language all Syrian Christians stood as one. They are truly one community. But divided, unfortunately, only in religious matters! He expected Church leaders to give the right leadership so that all Syrian Christians indeed were made One Church.

I know those interested in faction fights will scold me roundly. Yet in the face of it if I can remain humble, patient and steadfast in faith it would redound to the glory of God and serve as model for the believers. I want you to pray for one. We should on no account allow Syrian Christian Community to split in our generation. We should do all that we can to avoid such a split and try hard to augment love. We should try our utmost to be patient and forgiving. We should strengthen the hand of our Bava Thirumeni in his attempts at bringing in peace and unity.

We should make wholehearted efforts to bring back the Mar Thoma Church, who finding us fall innocent victims to the machinations of the foreigners, broke away from us some fifty years ago. [It is a pity that we have amongst us people who even now welcome and put up comfortably with such machinations.] It remains sad that they had to break away. But we who made them leave are sadder still and more guilty in the eyes of God. We should not forget that the way we treated them was as unchristian as unloving and our statements often baseless and untrue. If they left us, it was only because we failed to witness with our lives the cardinal truth which was given to us to reflect in our day to day lives. We have failed miserably to present ourselves as living models.

We should not be satisfied just by restoring unity in the Malankara Church or reuniting ourselves on a Catholic basis with the Mar Thoma Church. The big majority of Syrian Christians in Kerala belong to the Roman Catholic Church which is spread almost all over the world. They too are flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones. A union between this old guard of the majority and the new guard of the rest of the believers of Syrian tradition in Kerala is a necessity. Even the many who took pride in the community on its rising social and political superiority wanted a union of all Syrian Christian believers. But I don't say this with my eye on social or political ends. 'Father, as we are one, may this our church be also one' prayed our Lord and Master as you are all aware. Do you think a greater blessing can descend on us, the whole Syrian Christian Community, than the fulfilment of this prayer with the concerted efforts and prayers of Bava Thirumeni and all the rest

of us? The one unfortunate force that was at work in the Church over the last hundred years was a force of disintegration that has left the Church in splinters. I believe that this fact is now known to well-meaning and discerning Christians all over the world. The one deep-seated concern that Church leaders all over the world now share is the reunion of all believers. It is heartening to note that all the mainline churches including Roman Catholic Church, Greek Church and Anglican Church, besides lesser entities are all intent on effecting a reunion with a healthy spirit and compromise except on matters of cardinal faith. This spirit of reunion which is pervading the Universal Christian Church is being felt very strongly in the Christian Church in Kerala. My strong belief is that Bava Thirumeni and others will not let this opportunity slip by. Wouldn't it be the biggest blessing if Bava Thirumeni and the Heads of other Churches in Malankara could come round and discuss with an open mind in a spirit of give and take and prompted by love, and mutual respect?¹

It cannot be ruled out that Wattasseril Thirumeni and others entertained hopes of support from Ancient Churches, in the background of the loss of 'Wattipanam case' and possible threat of excommunication from the Patriarchal faction. Thirumeni (Wattasseril) was distinctly disturbed at the excommunication ordered by Mar Abdullah Patriarch. It was left with Mar Ivanios to find a way out of this impasse. And he was all the while dreaming about a possible reunion and resultant peace in the whole Church.

His first plan was to get in touch with Aprem II Rahmani, Syrian Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and prepare the ground for a lasting reunion. He embarked on this only after consultation with Catholicose II and Mar Gregorios of Niranom Diocese who was later elevated Catholicose III. To quote from Fr. Inchakalodi's book on the Patriarch of Antioch, may be worthwhile:

Agnatese Giarve, Patriarch of Jacobite Church in Antioch with his followers embraced Catholic Church in the second half of the

1. Bethany Magazine June Issue, 1925

eighteenth century. Subsequently the Pope sanctioned a new hierarchy for the reunited 'Patriarch of Antioch'. There are six Patriarchs in the name of Patriarch of Antioch at the moment. Four of them (Latin, Syrian, Maronya & Malchya) are Catholic Patriarchs under the Pope while the other two are Jacobite.

The Syrian Catholics owing allegiance to Antioch use a modified version of the Jacobite liturgy. In addition to Syriac, for the sake of easier comprehension by the congregation Arabic also is used in their liturgy especially for Holy Qurbana, prayers and other sacraments. Antiochal Syrian Catholic priests and bishops hardly showed any difference either in their 'vestments' or in their observances. The throne of the Patriarch is established in Beirut.²

A stream of letters followed seeking restoration of peace under the spiritual leadership of Aprem II Rahmani, the Syrian Catholic Patriarch of Antioch acknowledging the supremacy of the Pope. "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity", the words of David (Psalm 133:1) were chanted by the Church fathers in unison. These letters were sent to the Syrian Catholic Church of Antioch, by Mar Ivanios in his capacity as Synod Secretary, only with the silent assent of Mar Dionysius Wattasseril and the overt approval of Catholicose II and of Mar Gregorios Metropolitan. The 'Thaksa' and other related volumes were collected from the Patriarch of Antioch and studied scrupulously by the Synod which found it totally in agreement with the faith and order of worship of the Malankara Syrian Church. The atmosphere in Malankara proved conducive to the wish of Patriarch Rahmani to reunite with the Syrian Church of Antioch.

Probably it might have happened thus. But God willed it otherwise. The aim of the Catholicate faction originally was only to align itself with some ancient church of saintly traditions without compromising on matters of faith and order of worship. The letter written by Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Kundara Diocese- later Catholicose III-

2. Fr. Thomas Inachakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios pp. 275-276

to Mar Ivanios, as quoted by Fr. Inchakalodi in his book 'Archbishop Mar Ivanios' bears witness to this:

The Orthodox Syrian Church of Malabar

To Mar Ivanios, the Episcopa of Bethany. May your prayers be with us.

We are in receipt of what you have sent. We celebrated Qurbana in the new church on 17th last. We are in doubt about the renovation of the old church. A lot of money is required. May God's will prevail. I read in Bava (Catholicose)'s letter that a union with some ancient Church was desired. We are of the same view too. Whatever is best as you all decide will have our consent. No more. Mar Gregorios Metropolitan (sd)

Kundara Aramana

Chingam 15, 1102[1916]

It was a time when there was general agreement that the union should be effected acknowledging the spiritual authority of Aprem II Rahmani, Patriarch of Syrian Catholic Church. Mar Ivanios informed E.J. John Vakil, Elanjickal, who was a friend of Bethany and a prominent spokesman of the Catholicose faction, of this stand.

His reaction was totally unexpected. He opined that things may not be any different if a new Head is accepted in place of the Patriarch of Antioch. He preferred being directly under the Pope retaining the faith and order of Malankara Church. Most other prominent people who conferred with Mar Ivanios held a similar view. It was becoming evident that progress of Malankara Church depended only on an independent identity under a central leadership. A divine route was being charted out to establish peace and progress under the guidance of a Church of saintly traditions which was not interested in the power and possessions of the Malankara Church.

There still was a lingering doubt when it was decided to stop correspondence with Patriarch Rahmani and forward a representation to the Pope on seeking union with the Roman Church. The Pope had a representative in India. Was the communication to be routed through him? Mar Ivanios approached Bishop Kalassery of Changanacherry to

clear this doubt. Letters from the Head of the Catholic Church had to be through that representative. But a Jacobite bishop not being under Papal authority could as well write straight to Rome; Bishop Kalassery clarified.

Accordingly a representation was presented by Mar Ivanios to Rome. Fr. Rabeira who had his theological studies in Rome was at the moment in Mavelikara, relaxing in old age. The first letter to Rome was sent through him. That a Christian community which followed the faith and traditions established by St. Thomas in India with all their members, lay and clergy, would like to join the Catholic Church was its main content. Expectation was a divine experience of being one with the Catholic Church under the supremacy of the Pope, maintaining the faith traditions and order of worship of the Malankara Church.

A few queries and clarifications from Rome sent through the Apostolic delegate were duly answered. While reiterating the staunch faith and adherence to traditions of the Malankara Church, Mar Ivanios expressed the strong wish that days of unification were not far off. The first memorandum to Rome was sent in November 1926. It was the joint decision of Mar Gregorios, Kundara Diocese. Mar Ivanios and Catholicose II. A second memorandum on the same line was sent in 1927.

A few unexpected developments took place during this period. Hopes were being kindled in the Catholicose faction in the wake of the victory in legal battles. This made the Metropolitan of Malankara and his associates withdraw from the Reunion efforts. But Mar Ivanios and Auxiliary Bishop Mar Theophilus would not look back after putting their hands on the plough. They went steadfast forward.³

Reunification efforts which were begun by the Church Heads of Catholicate faction together, started showing chinks by September 1929. It was only natural that the Roman throne was disliked by it. The Church Heads and prominent laymen of the Catholicate faction who were excited by the success of the 'Vattipanam case' wanted only to press for their rights maintaining status quo. Mar Ivanios was cruelly isolated.

3. Fr. Philip C. Pantholil: Mar Ivanios Ente Smaranayil p. 36

They branded him selfish in his going ahead with the reunion efforts. This sort of propaganda was not confined to Malankara. Letters flowed to Rome. Most of them running down or finding fault with Mar Ivanios. How deleterious they were can be gauged from the letter of Apostolic delegate Edward Muiny from Bangalore dated October 11, 1929 to Mar Ivanios.

Revered Thirumeni,

Thank you for your letter dated 17th Sept. I feel happy about your decision and that of Mar Theophilus and pray God to bless your efforts to establish the Church of Christ in Malankara and make them yield rich fruits.

Let me first tell you that it is rather difficult to let the Throne of Rome know the facts that you wanted to bring to its attention. I would like to write to you in brotherly love that it is difficult to write to Rome again till the response of those Metropolitans- who were signatories of your first letter to Rome sent in November 1926- to the reply received from Rome is ascertained and conveyed. I strongly feel that the present posture of those signatories might stand in the way of further communication with Rome.

I am confident that you will not misunderstand me writing in this vein. So I would require of you that a definite reply from all those Metropolitans who were signatories, to the statement made by the Holy Roman Throne dated August 5, in clear-cut terms and with paternal care, be made available to me at the earliest. I believe that any well-meaning church head who gives serious thoughts to this spiritual and vitally important matter cannot but analyse and make definite conclusions on the underlying issues of this problem. Any negative response to this crucial proposition is bound not only to cause considerable time lapse but also to bring in serious calumny on you and me from the concerned Metropolitan.

May the Holy Ghost - the spirit of unity, strength and light which our Lord promised to the Church- help us to fulfil His Holy end through us.

With respectful regards,

Yours faithfully Edward Muiny (sd)

Mar Ivanios had to strive manfully to weather this storm. It was Bishop Kalassery of Changanacherry who stood by him as a source of strength in this. The withdrawal of the Catholicose (Bava) from unification efforts dealt a serious blow on the inclination of Rome to establish a Catholicate in Malankara. The doubts that lingered on Mar Abded Messia's steps could have been finally nailed. But the golden chance was wasted. Hopes of lasting peace in Malankara receded. Yet the Pope who was convinced of the sincerity of purpose on the part of Mar Ivanios and his followers finally gave his letter of approval to the Syrian order of service and to the Reunification process on August 30, 1930.

BEFORE THE FINAL FAREWELL

That was a new dawn. Bethany Metropolitan had made an irrevocable decision to move forward in the path of truth. He never wavered even when his trusted aides deserted. He was leaving his own home, on his sure way to God's temple. He had to leave behind his own people. But it was no escape, only a fulfilment of divine design.

By tradition Malankara Syrian Church is under the spiritual authority of the Patriarch of Antioch. But selfishness, materialism and bitter personal relationships made a rift inevitable. One faction succeeded in getting Mar Dionysius Wattasseril, Metropolitan of Malankara, declared excommunicated at the instance of Mar Abdulla Patriarch. Catholicose faction fought back by bringing in the already excommunicated Mar Abded Messia and with his help revoking the order of annulment and establishing the Catholicate. That the existence of the Patriarch of Antioch was purely dependent on the whim of the Sultan of Turkey remained an unpalatable truth.

How the farsighted MA Achen saved himself from the establishment at the time of acute faction fights by serving his term at Serampore, how he established the Bethany Order, how he got ordained as Metropolitan of Bethany, how he established Bethany Churches to keep his proselytized masses with spiritual sustenance- all this has been dealt with in some detail earlier on.

Mar Ivanios was only one among the many Church Heads who attempted to find an identity for the Catholicose faction by aligning itself with another Patriarch of Antioch.

It was in this context that he started corresponding with Rahmani Aprem II, Catholic Patriarch of Antioch. It was under instruction from the Bishop's synod. But wiser counsel prevailed on him and his confidants in their decision to reunite with the parent Church in Rome under the Supremacy of the Pope.

Bethany Churches and other institutions were solely under the Bethany Metropolitan. No wonder other Metropolitans in charge of the dioceses were uneasy about it. They even tried to scuttle efforts at establishing more Bethany Churches and in that process get it stalled by the Malankara Metropolitan. The synod which met at Kundara on February 25, 1930 promulgated a ban order against establishing Bethany Churches in areas under the jurisdiction of Malankara Syrian Church.¹ They got it published in the newspaper. This was an insult too much to swallow for a man of Mar Ivanios' calibre, commitment and dynamism. His attempt thereafter was to see that the image of Bethany grew brighter with more committed activity by the Bethany mission.

It was indeed painful for Mar Ivanios to clash with the interests of his mentor Wattasseril Thirumeni. He tried his best to sort out differences and convince him of the rationale behind his decision to stick with the reunion process. The allegation that it was the huge financial backing of Rome and the offer of leadership of the 'Rite' movement that attracted him was baseless.²

The reluctance of the Malankara Syrian Church to join the Roman Catholic Church under the supremacy of the Pope was only natural. They had not forgotten the heinous steps taken by Portuguese Metropolitans to destroy their identity by thrusting their order of worship on the Malankara Church. The Diamper Synod was convened all for this. Members of the Malankara Church took a solemn pledge that neither they nor their descendants would have anything whatever to do with the Portuguese. They bound themselves to it by holding on to the rope tied to the bent cross at Mattancherry. So if they saw the new move to rejoin the Catholic Church as the reemergence of the same old ploy of the

1. Fr. Kuriakose OIC : Malamadakkile Kedavil-ikku p. 60

2. Ibid. p. 55

Portuguese it couldn't be faulted. But when one understands that the 'Bent Cross Pledge' was directed chiefly against the Latinization of worship order and that the present move to reunite themselves with the Catholic Church did not in anyway alter the basic tenets of faith, the meaninglessness of the negative stand taken by the Malankara Church would be exposed. The order of sanction from Rome had explicitly ensured continuation of the faith traditions of the Malankara Church.

But the Malankara Metropolitan, the Catholicose (Bava) and the Synod did not accept the unification attempts with an open mind nor did they come forward to make any serious efforts at bringing peace in the Church. So the step taken by Mar Ivanios was naturally misunderstood and violently resisted. The sense of sadness at the loss of his dear spiritual son now turned into rage. The whole community felt consternation when the hope and pride of Malankara Church, Mar Ivanios embraced Catholic faith.

Wattasseril Thirumeni tried to dissuade Mar Ivanios at different stages through letters or through special messengers. He even expressed desire to meet him in person. But Mar Ivanios avoided a meeting though he often tried to explain his position through letters. But not all their acquaintances would understand him. Developments had taken them too far apart to meet anymore.

Before leaving the Bethany Hills to embrace the Catholic faith, Mar Ivanios saw to it that the movable and immovable assets of his establishment were properly taken care of. His thoughts took three different lines:

one: to remain in Bethany Hills, even after embracing the new faith, and continue the ascetic order concentrating on spiritual and humanitarian activities;

two: to give away the legal rights of Bethany Hills either to the Catholicose (Bava) or to the Metropolitan of the Malankara Church, move out and then embrace the Catholic faith;

three: to leave the assets of Bethany under the care of a Trust and then embrace the new faith. After careful deliberations he chose the third alternative. It was undoubtedly the will of God. Leaving Bethany

for an undecided destination was indeed a harrowing spiritual experience. Had he chosen to stay on in Bethany what a lot of conflicts and legal battles might have ensued! Even in the capacity of the Metropolitan of Bethany he had no authority to give away his rights either to Catholicose (Bava) or to the Metropolitan of Malankara. Because Bethany had already been established as an independent entity, such a step would have only destroyed the integrity of the Institutions.

On taking this decisive step he convened a meeting of all prominent contributors to Bethany. The major agenda was to select the Trustees and Governing Body to keep and administer the assets and to strengthen humanitarian activities. The Guest House in Bethany Ashram in Perinad, near Ranni was the venue. Many who had contributed to the capital of Bethany establishment including Mar Theophilus Episcopa and the members of the Ashram attended the meeting.

The Presidential address of Mar Ivanios at the meeting deserves a vital place in the history of the Church. It threw light on his vision about the establishment, development and witness of the movement.³

Beloved Brethren,

It was during Our Serampore days, as professor that We thought of establishing Bethany Ashram. We firmly believe that it was a divinely inspired step. We did not leave Principalship of MD Seminary for this purpose. We were very clear in Our view that the multifarious growth and development of the Malankara Church depended entirely on the training of its clergy. Mar Theophilus Episcopa who is sitting beside Us now had been with Us on Our Serampore trip. We have taken many for training in Serampore during Our Professor days. Like now, even then We never used to write personal accounts. We used to entrust all the money that came by way of salary or others with the Deacons who were staying with Us as Theology students. We trust that you won't take it as self praise. We felt really happy and proud that many of the Deacons came out with flying colours. We were always wondering how best We could make use of them. We were not too happy

3. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios pp. 358-363

at the thought of establishing schools back home. Why not go out as missionaries to spread the gospel, was another thought. After long prayerful deliberations We came to the conclusion that the best option would be to take up an ascetic order which discarded all human and material bond and appropriated God for all Our wealth and saving.

We are confirmed in Our view that this is the choicest way to serve God by serving fellow men. That was why instead of exhorting students of Theology being trained for pastoral work We Ourselves went into it and served as a model. So cherishing a nascent dream we gathered a few people together and started living as a self-denying community. We were seeking to find out where to go and what to do. "Why not establish an ashram in Punjab and lead an ascetic life among the poor and needy and spread the gospel"? We thought: We wrote to E. J. John Vakil mooted this idea. We did not find him happy about this suggestion. Instead We had a letter from him suggesting setting up a similar ashram somewhere in some farflung area in Kerala and leading a life of penury and self-negation. He even offered a lot of his land in Ranni, Perinad for this. We gladly accepted the offer. Next time, coming home on vacation, We visited his place in Perinad and expressed a wish to acquire some more of land in the neighbourhood. But where was the money? Many sources we envisaged dried up. We knew that touching a few Europeans would do good. But We were not happy about it. Finally We took a loan from Our father and went ahead with the proposal. The present Bethany ashram on Bethany Hills was built up like that. Since then We have received assistance in the form of money and land from many of Our friends.

Many of you will remember that We went to Serampore in those days of acute acrimony and dissension following the visit of Patriarch Mar Abdulla to Malankara. Since there was no hope of any rapprochement in the near future- in fact the position only threatened to grow worse- We decided to keep off all such re-priminations and to set off possible evil effects by establishing an ashram. This thought got rooted in Our mind as early as fourteen

years ago. Even the name Bethany was decided upon while in Serampore. Many who showed interest in joining the ashram had subsequently warned Us that Bethany would have come to grief had We not steered a lonely furrow as We did.

To have acquired some four hundred acres in Perinad did not mean that Bethany was established. It was essential that We had to do some intense cultivation to keep Us going in addition to building up the necessary infrastructure. The money We had on Us was far from sufficient. So We arranged a loan of Rs. 7000/- on very low interest from a European friend in Serampore. We had apprised John Vakil of it: He even gave Us consent to mortgage the vast acreage that he had given Us. But instead of mortgaging that portion We mortgaged the land We bought out of Our parental contribution. The debt remains as such; only a few more have accumulated since then.

The land was cleared and a few buildings put up so that We could feel some satisfaction of having established the ashram. The prospect of cultivation did not take off. Expenses for the daily life of the ashramites had to be managed otherwise. Moreover, whatever money had been left with Us was spent up on the establishment of the hospital, orphanage and on agricultural expenses. It was then that We embarked on a collection campaign. And We had informed you that the money collected from our own people and many other friends and acquaintances of all castes and creed was earmarked for the establishment of the Bethany Ashram. And We prepared a will naming a few of the ashramites to make sure that the assets, movable and immovable, of Bethany passed on to those members, not by any chance, to the members of Our family. This would ensure the smooth running of the establishment in case something happened to Our person.

We had gone about collecting money from others only after this was registered. Probably most of you are unaware of that will. We have gone about the collection campaign to places far and wide. We remember with gratitude the encouragement We received by your generous donations and that from many other friends and

acquaintances. Evidently they were moved as well by the credibility of the project as by their appreciation of Our ideals. Members of the Malankara Church, Catholic Church, Marthomites, Anglicans, Hindus, Muslims all have contributed liberally to the working capital of Bethany as well as for its day to day expenses. A look at the Statement of Accounts that you have with you will give a true and complete picture of the money recovered, spent and left as balance. This Statement of Accounts on a monthly basis will be made available shortly. And you know that We have not been personally involved in fund raising for the last five or six years. Yet the Almighty has been, in His loving care, upholding Bethany in all its need. Bethany is an independent entity. When its spiritual activities, in keeping with its ideals required the services of a full time high priest by God's grace We became ordained an Episcopa. We see it purely as divine will that We could steer clear of all legal tangles which might have got Us involved one way or another with either of the factions or with the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch. The same grace abounded when We got ordained Episcopa, and Metropolitan in charge of Bethany in succession and Our associate in Bethany Yakob Ramban as Episcopa.

Our Episcopa, members of the Ashram and Ourselves share the unspeakable joy of meeting you at this gathering of all who have contributed Rs. 100/- or more towards the shared capital of Bethany. We have heard of many statements from different sources insinuating misuse of the Bethany Capital which We have collected from you. They imply Our diverting the amount for the establishment of other ventures directly contravening the professed aims and objectives of Bethany. This would be tantamount to cheating all the contributors. We have always been determined to act in the most fair and transparent manner possible as regards Bethany and its assets as with everything else that We have been associated with. All of this is placed before you; you are totally free to decide on its future. Even though We would wish to have a board of trustees and a governing body constituted for the administration of Bethany, We would on no account insist on it. Whatever

decision you make would be binding on Us. We are prepared to sign any legal document according to your considered decision concerning the properties, though most of it has been registered in Our name. You may draft any document. We are prepared to sign it. We trust that you all know that the day- to- day expenses of Bethany have been met for the last six or seven months, since We have stopped any sort of fund raising, purely on offertory and the meagre 'pidiyari' collection. Even though hush-hush propaganda decrying Our working vis-a-vis Bethany has affected our finances, this has not affected its working substantially, barring a missed meal or two once in a while on the part of ashramites. Such trials could hardly affect our morale.

We have nothing to say except that you have been called upon to deliberate in depth on how to administer and augment the assets of Bethany in keeping with the declared aims and objectives of the Movement. We have to adhere for ever to the pledge We have taken with the Almighty to abide by Our professed ideals of service. You are free to take any decision whatsoever as long as it is guided by superior wisdom.⁴

The meeting resolved to make Bethany an independent Trust. Board of Trustees as well as Governing Board members were selected. Then abruptly Thirumeni let the congregation into the depths of his heart-into the inexorable plunge he was about to make:

Finally We have to tell you about the rumblings you hear too often about Our considered view on reunion with the Catholic Church. Christ the Lord Almighty established the church to save mankind. It grew strong and prospered. At Calcidon Synod, where Bishops of all World Churches met in AD 451, the first signs of a split were recorded. Ancient church historians unanimously record that it was caused by a sense of false pride on the part of a few minority churches which found their views not given due respect by the others. The dissenters formed another Church. Difference of opinion born mainly out of the search for independent stature ensured further splits. Jacobite Church was one of those Churches

4. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios pp 365-369

so formed. We have to acknowledge that the history of Kerala churches is no different. It goes without saying that the Kerala Church had its origin from the visit of the prominent disciple of Christ, St. Thomas. All the believers in Kerala continued to be one big family with one aim till the seventeenth century. Then based on a very flimsy ground, on the basis of a baseless rumour rather, the first split took place. We have to remember that it was not occasioned by any difference on the matter of faith. Those who left were called the 'new sect' and others the 'old sect'. (പുത്തൻ കുറ്റുകാർ & പഴയ കുറ്റുകാർ). The Supreme Head of the Old sect was the Pope, the unquestioned head of all church heads. The New sect started feeling the pinch in the absence of an undisputed head. It was in this background that the Patriarch of the Jacobite Church was invited to Kerala paving the way for its birth.

A study of the history of this New sect would reveal a sordid tale of continued bickerings, faction fights and legal wrangles. The first few to separate called themselves Thozhiyoor Church (Anjoor Church). Later some joined the Anglican Church. After a prolonged spell of legal fight a sizeable section broke away and called themselves 'Mar Thoma Church'. In another fifty years the protracted dissension which unfortunately continues to this day, gave rise 'Bava' group and 'Methran' group. Mighty phalanxes that they are, they are in no mood to relent, as yet.

It was Our active involvement with 'Methran faction' which made Us plumb its depths, that compelled Us to leave for Serampore where a start was made for the Bethany Movement untrammelled by the Church. This, We are sure, is a background known to you all in every detail. So, We are confident, that you will not misunderstand Our aligning with the Universal Catholic Church. It is only like a weary traveller who comes across a safe trodden path leading to his destination leaving the one he had been trudging along full of stones and thorns. If the duty of a Christian is to follow Christ's teachings, then he is committed to ignoring the obstacles on the way and head for his goal. The Holy Church should not be swayed by the whims and fancies or preference and prejudice of a few people at the top. If Christians had had the

right insights the umpteen divisions that the Church now sports would not have been there. If one truly understands that Christ never gave contradictory principles for his followers, then the disgraceful birth of all these divisions-which they call denominations- would come shockingly open.

The body of the Church is the Universal Catholic Church. No branch can live apart from the tree. The branches bear fruit only when they are on the vine. It is only more than true of the Christian Church. We are convinced that other denominations claim separate existence from the Universal Catholic Church only as a result of ignorance, false pride or libertarianism-undue love for uncontrolled freedom. We would like to confess that We have had definite insight into this truth. Some of you may know that a few others who had their roots in Jacobite Church have also shared the same insights. We have clearly known how impatiently anxious the Second Catholicose was on this point. We feel that the present Catholicose also shares the view that permanent peace will descend on the Church only on this ground. We would like to make it clear that letters to this effect have quite often been exchanged among the three of us. In fact we started the correspondence with such sanguine expectation that the Malankara Metropolitan would find it as a proposition pleasing and acceptable to God. We expected permission from the Pope for us to remain as a special entity of the Universal Catholic Church, under the suzerainty of the Pope, with right to maintain the religious traditions, practices and sacraments hitherto followed by the Malankara Church. The replies We received for all such letters clearly prove that those letters were written by Us only in a representative capacity after due deliberation among the three of us. It may also be remembered that the Spiritual Heads of the Malankara Jacobite Church have at times tried for reunion with the Universal Catholic Church, even before. It may not be out of place if We mention a few of those names. The history of the Malankara Jacobite Church clearly reveals that Pulikottil Joseph Mar Dionysius who passed away in 1909, Cheppat Mar Dionysius who was Metropolitan of Malankara even thirty or forty years before, Mar Thoma

VI who was often referred to as 'Mar Dionysius', his predecessor Mar Thoma V, all of them had their role to play in this long-standing venture. When their efforts have been honoured and respected, We have no reason to doubt that Our efforts on those lines will also be acknowledged for their purity of intent. You must have known that there has been inherent relationship between the Jacobite Church and Catholic Church. Their Spiritual Heads are mutually acknowledged and respected and their order of worship accepted. Since the Jacobites broke away from the Catholic Church in the fifth century they have been considered schismatic and accorded no communion whatever. We have always hoped and prayed for 'one shepherd and one flock', with the (break away) Jacobite, Orthodox, Greek and Armenian Churches to be merged into one before joining with the Holy Catholic Church under one common shepherd. We still hope for such a happy state for world Christians. That was why We started corresponding with Moran Mar Ignatius Rahmani, Patriarch of Beirut who is the Patriarch of Antioch of the Roman Catholic Church.

We would like our friends in the Jacobite Church who are present here to know a few things concerning reunion. In their canonical writings there is an entry like this: There must be four patriarchs in the four regions of the world. The Patriarch of Rome should be their head and leader. The Patriarch of Alexandria and the Patriarch of Constantinople should accept the Patriarch of Rome (The Pope) as leader and head. The Liturgy/Common Prayer Book testifies that St. Peter had died in Rome and that the Patriarch of Rome, i.e, the Pope is his true descendent. A study of the prayer given as part of the Holy Qurbana in the Jacobite Church for the leaders of the Church in the four corners of the world also serves to underline the unity of the four patriarchs. In this background the efforts made by either the Catholicate or Ourselves in the capacity of the Metropolitan of Bethany towards reunion with the Catholic Church will not be construed wrong or sinful by our Jacobite brethren.

The entry of Mar Ivanios to the Catholic Church, therefore, was the result of careful deliberation, of an open mind with a clear con-

science to back. The timely revelation of details shows a clear mind at work. Before leaving Bethany Hills he wrote in person explaining his clear stand to Wattasseril Thirumeni and a number of prominent leaders of the Malankara Syrian Church.

All preparations had been completed. The time to bid farewell had arrived.

STAY IN PEACE,
BETHANY HILLS

Time arrived to say farewell. All wanted to move out together. But it was not possible. Courage failed some of them. Bonds tended to grow only stronger. Difficult to cut loose. Waiting might prove costlier- many more might dither. Reactions were surfacing here and there. That might sully the image of Mar Ivanios. Close friends reminded him of that. Fr. Geevarghese Peedikayil wrote from Pathanamthitta: 18-1-1920.

Don't wait another moment. Like the rising sun bold and bright move out and bless us who thirst for your presence. Not just as one of the sons of our Blessed Mother of the Church, but as one of its presiding heads! The Catholics here look up to you as the faithful ones did in the West upon Cardinal Newman. Even the most respected Kollam Bishop appreciates your step. Even if the majority of Jacobites may be against us at the moment, in course of time, even in your own lifetime your boldstep will turn out to be the leaven working ever so strongly on them.¹

Alone or in small groups many Jacobites had started moving towards the Cathlic Church before the formal reunion was effected by Mar Ivanios. They were working under the Latin Hierarchy of the Kollam Bishop. But they were looking forward to Mar Ivanios stepping in restoring to them their order of worship.

1. Fr.Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios pp. 413-414

Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger of Kollam Diocese who used to welcome those who rejoined the Catholic Church with open arms also encouraged Mar Ivanios thus:

Imagine that all of you following a leader on a long journey fell unexpectedly into a deep pit. Your leader desperately wants to help you all out. But then, how will he help you out himself remaining in the pit? He will have to get himself out first if he was to help his men out with the help of some rope or ladder. So my request to your Lordship is to come out of Bethany Hills with all the Ashramites and embrace the Catholic Church. I firmly believe that you will then be able to attract all non-Catholics to the fold with the grace of God.²

Thus Mar Ivanios made himself ready to face the fierce trial feeling convinced that wasting any more time would be against his own conscience and God. He firmly believed that all his Bethany associates would follow him. But to his great surprise his own right hand man Fr. Alexios took a very different stand. He refused to follow the Metropolitan of Bethany under the influence of his paternal uncle Fr. Alexandrios and Wattasseril Thirumeni. This was too much for not only Mar Ivanios, but all the Ashramites to accept. Fr. Alexios had won the heart of everyone with his winsome personality and willingness to work hard. Everyone referred to him endearingly as 'Kochupithavu'. They were but one mind in two bodies. They were to follow different paths. It hurt Mar Ivanios no end. His voice choked, his heart melted. It was no different, the experience of Fr. Alexios.

The scene of parting is graphically recorded by Fr. Barsleeba in his 'History of Bethany' (Manuscript copy).

At last it arrived- the day when the founder father of Bethany Ashram in Mundan mala in Perinad, Mar Ivanios Thirumeni and his followers were to say good-bye to Fr. Alexios and the rest of the ashramites. 'Take only whatever is essential for your daily lives, leave everything else there' was the suggestion. As the followers of Thirumeni were moving out with their bare essentials, Fr. Berskeepa and Fr. Barsleeba appeared there unexpectedly. They

2. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios p. 415

were staying in the adjacent Bethany Chapel. They too helped us in packing. Mar Ivanios had decided to take the youngest of the orphans also with them. All the effects were transported to the river downhill when a small country craft was kept prepared. What remained was for Thirumeni and his followers to say farewell. That too followed. It was on Wednesday August 20, 1930.

'Let's go to the Chapel' Thirumeni said. The good shepherd led his men to the chapel; hearts overflowing, eyes brimming with tears. Their broken hearts soaked in profuse tears were offered as pleasing sacrifice to the Master. Tremulous voice reflected the anguish in his heart. "Let's all rise up. We came here with nothing in our hand and empty handed we go". Snapping heart strings sought solace through a wail, loud and deep. It rained tears. Gush of emotion, thick, protracted and disconsolate. A scene too much to paint. 'Let's all go out', he commanded, gaining some control over his own emotion. Sobs, heartrending punctuated the silence. They took a few humble paces back. They would not turn their back on their loving master whose figure seemed to fade in the altar only to reappear, by and by in sharper outline and more impelling tone in some Catholic Holy of Holies. He went straight to Fr. Alexios' Chamber. Fr. Alexios and a few others were keeping themselves aloof. A twelve year relationship thick with love and amity was instantly being snapped. It was too much for Fr. Alexios to bear.

For their deep consternation, Ivanios Thirumeni and his followers found Fr. Alexios in mortal agony at the inevitability of parting. He was sweating profusely, limbs numb, face expressionless, rolling in his bed from side to side. Thirumeni and his men set about attending the sick Fr. Alexios with great concern. They massaged his limbs, mopped his brow and fanned him vigorously. Everyone knew it was the physique failing to cope with the intense agony of the mind. After a while Thirumeni called him by name. He opened his eyes and quickly looked at each of them. With his head between his palms Thirumeni prayed. Fr. Alexios appeared at peace with himself. Thirumeni took his costly wrist watch and presented it to Fr. Alexios: " My last gift, please accept

it." Not a word else was spoken. Nobody could. The silence was oppressive. After instructing Fr. Joshua to attend on him till he was well they left one by one scrip and scrappage. On reaching the gate Thirumeni signalled them to drop their baggage so that they could resume after prayer. Everyone repeated the prayer after Thirumeni.³

The pilgrims, about twenty strong, saffron clad, were trudging down Mundan mala. Mind was so heavy with tension. Their destination was set. But obstacles on the way appeared too many and too hard. The search for identity appeared daunting.

Fr. Alexios relieved his memories, even back to Serampore days and before. It was Mar Ivanios who had made it all possible. They were 'Padre' and 'Junior Padre' respectively. However the golden thread of love and concern had snapped! It was too heavy for that simple soul.

Church historians have not done justice to Mar Ivanios in painting him selfish, power hungry and opportunistic. They should have known that it was sheer moral courage to follow what he found as the truth in the matter of faith that fired his idealism. He never encouraged or tempted anyone to join him. Only the sanyasins who had heard the call from above followed him.

Fr. Alexios who refused to join Mar Ivanios on the path of reunion also, in turn, had been turned the butt of ridicule by the proponents of this movement. An equally reprehensible reaction. Mar Ivanios found the truth and followed it steadfastly. He was prepared to go it alone, which Fr. Alexios could not. The past clung too close to him, customs and traditions of the Church too fast and relationships too thick. But the fact that he kept himself aloof at this vital point left the Bethany people really distressed. Most of them followed Mar Ivanios with conviction. Not one of the Bethany Order of Sisters entertained any doubts.

On the road with Bethany Hills behind them, one of his followers, asked him like Abraham, father of the faithful was asked in days of yore: "Father, where are we headed for?"

"That's God's look out", came the unflinching reply.

3. Fr. Bersleeba: Bethany Charithram (Manuscript) pp 109-111

On they walked and came to Madathummoozhy on the Pampa, the sacred lifeline of Central Travancore. A few 'valloms'- country crafts-were ready there. After the luggage was loaded, the ashramites, the orphan children, a few friends and relations who had come from Vennikulam and finally Thirumeni boarded the valloms. Down the boulder-dotted Kakkat river they punted till they reached Vadasserikara ferry.

A big 'Kettuvallom' was kept ready for Thirumeni and his entourage at Vadasserikara. It was sent there by Panachimmoottil Mani, a bosom friend of Thirumeni. Down they plied. Their original plan was to reach Thiruvalla via Kozhenchery. But Fr. Berskeepa had some apprehensions. Will the rented building in Thiruvalla be convenient enough to house some twenty people? Moreover, the people there are hardly inclined to the idea of reunion. Why not at Vennikulam? We have a school and the church. Moreover, the cooperation of the people. Why not?

Ivanios Thirumeni was pleased with the suggestion. So they broke their journey at Ranny and continued by bus to Vennikulam. They found their accommodation at Memala Primary School. That Thirumeni with the ashramites had left Mundan mala to stay in Vennikulam became big news. People started streaming in, willing to send any help which their adorable Thirumeni required. That came from the whole society cutting across barriers of caste, creed or status. They were concerned about finding a suitable accommodation. A generous friend Kanjirathummoottil Kutty volunteered to shift, offering his residence for the use of the sanyasins. Thirumeni stayed in Thiruvalla, but took care of the ashramites in Vennikulam with his regular visits.

It continued like this for a month. To sort out differences in terms of the reunion process posed problems at different stages. Even meeting day -to- day expenses was proving pretty difficult with the steady flow of financial help from churches and well-wishers drying up. Church leaders kept trying their best to wean away at least a few of the ashramites back to the Malankara Syrian fold. But they remained safe under divine care. It came in the person of Kalekkattil Thomas Achen, one of the Malankara Syrian priests who was a trusted friend and munificent well-wisher of Bethany. He wrote:

Reverend Father,

Do not get upset at the threats of Wattasseril Metropolitan. Send a bullock cart to my house when you find any shortage of rice or provisions, either in the ashram or in the convent. I will replenish your store. So also let me know when you are short of money. I will make good. Do not be distressed on any account.⁴

Generous ones queued up; most memorable being Varikkanna mala Narayanan Vaidyan, from an ancient family in Pullad near Vennikulam. His special interest in Bethany made him advance the whole amount to clinch a deal for a 4½ acre plot for their accommodation.

Then the big day arrived. The message from the Pope granting the High Priests of Malankara Syrian Church who sought reunion with the Catholic Church the same position of authority held by them and permitting continued use of the order of worship and rites followed by the Antioch Church. The order which was conveyed to Bishop Benziger of Kollam also authorised him to accept all those who were prepared to join the Catholic Church along with Ivanios Thirumeni. It was the devout wish of Ivanios Thirumeni to solemnize Holy Qurbana as a member of the Catholic Church on September 21 (Kanni 8), the Holy Mother's Day. [That happened to be his birthday too.] To facilitate this it was decided to administer the oath of office in accepting him into the Church on September 20 at the Cathedral Chapel in Kollam.

When he returned to Thirumoolapuram on Saturday August 23, after finalising all arrangements, a great personage was awaiting him. His mission? To meet his dear disciple and try to win him back to the fold for the last time. It was none other than Wattasseril Mar Dionysius, his mentor. They talked for a long while when Mar Ivanios tried his best to clarify his stand and clear misunderstanding. He knelt before his mentor and kissed his feet. They hugged each other. The sad end of a long deep bond. This added poignancy to the Qurbana which he was to solemnise.

Mar Ivanios Metropolitan, Mar Theophilus Episcopa, members of the Bethany ashram, John Achen, Kuzhimeppurath, Omalloor, Dea-

4. Fr.Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios p. 428

con Alexander, Cherialummoottil, Venmony and Manager of Bethany Institutions Kileeleth Chacko set off to Bishop's House at Kollam on September 18, 1930. They wanted to pick up Philipose Ramban of Cheppad en route.

There was another person who was prepared to rejoin along with Cheppad Ramban. Pulikottil Ouseph Ramban who was at Vennikulam. He gave word that he would join the Catholic Church as soon as Mar Ivanios and his followers returned to Vennikulam after joining the Church.

Mar Ivanios and others went on a two-day retreat in Kollam Cathedral Chapel. At 7.30 am on Saturday 20, September Bishop Benziger accepted the Architect of Reunion of the Malankara Syrian Church Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilus as members of the Catholic Church.

While relaxing on the beach that afternoon a new thought came to Ivanios Thirumeni. The two priests and a layman who were with him should also be accepted as members of the Church on the same auspicious day. It would be solemnly symbolic- the birth of a new church with believers, priests and High priests! Before dusk John Achen, Alexander Semmassan and Kileeleth Chacko also took the oath and reunited themselves in faith.

The reunion of Mar Ivanios remains an unforgettable event in Church history. The lovely rose of the ascetic order planted on Malankara soil found itself transplanted to a more fertile soil. The boat being tossed about on threatening breakers of faction rivalry had been finally berthed. The birth of an era heralding peace and unity in the Church was a dream come true.

The period of crises was not over. Breaking away from a community where one was born and brought up is like wrenching heart strings apart. Even when the satisfaction of listening to and following the truth was comforting enough the shadow boxing unleashed by opponents continued to nag. Criticisms, allegations, even attempts on life were the order of the day.

Stream of blessings continued as well. Even foreign journals lauded this bold decision. "A most notable event in Modern Ecclesiastical history is the re-union of Mar Ivanios, Archbishop of Bethany": 'Sign', Sept. 1930. His Reunion movement was compared to the Oxford Movement, started by Henry Newman, Professor of Oxford in the sixteenth century. He became famous as Newman of India.

As he wished he offered Holy Qurbana at the Metropolitan Chapel, Kollam on Sept. 21. In his Thubden read in the Holy Qurbana he acknowledged total allegiance to Pope Pius, XI reigning on St. Peter's throne. Benziger Thirumeni also partook of this sacrifice. The service in Malayalam surprised him. How should one who rejoined the Church from the Malankara Syrian Church offer this Qurbana in Malayalam? Should it be permitted? Doubts started welling up in the mind of Bishop Benziger, a Swiss national.

Mar Ivanios Thirumeni left for Mavelikara immediately after the Holy sacrifice was offered. He wanted his father and mother to reunite themselves with the Catholic Church. Thirumeni prayed at the altar of Bethany Church, Mavelikara with an open Bible in front of candles lit. His parents repeated after him the pledge he read out to them.

Then he left for Thirumoolapuram. Pulikottil Ramban and Cheppad Ramban were waiting for him there. They too took the pledge with beaming pride. There were twenty four members in the Bethany ascetic order. Nineteen of them followed Thirumeni. But the reunion of the Bethany Sisters pleased him more. He probably didn't know then that he was planting a tree of life in the Malankara Church when he took up the cross of Metropolitanship of Bethany to ordain them sisters. Seven immaculate flowers had already blossomed on it. Three more were waiting on the wings. Everyone belonged to reputed Jacobite Orthodox families. Many of them had priests and prominent leaders of society for close relations. But none of these could dissuade them. It is often the so called weaker sex that throws up dauntless pioneers with unflinching determination. Here again the Sanyasinis strengthened the Reunion Movement, joining it 'en bloc'. But they had to endure the unbearable pain of leaving Balikamatom school where they had all been committed teachers. They had also to take leave of Sr. Helen, who imparted training to the inmates in Bethany Matom (convent). They took the pain, the loss in their stride. They were headed for the shore of peace through the route of divine love and tolerance.

The first two years after reunion had been one of fierce trials by fire. Day -to- day expenses of Bethany Ashram and Mutt were being met by contribution from members of the Syrian Church. But this came to an abrupt end with the Reunion. A command from the Catholicose strictly banned any truck with those who embraced Catholic belief. But his life was meant for facing and conquering crises. New doors opened when old ones were being banged shut. New doors of unexpected blessings. The new ashram came up on the 4½ acre plot in Vennikulam. Three temporary houses were put up first. One for the sanyasins, one for the aspirants and another for the noviciates. Each house had seven rooms. The structures built up with raw uncut stones had a distinct ascetic aura. The roof thatched and the floors wathed in cowdung paste.

The visitors' room and chapel were also built on those lines. A rivulet ran close by. Idyllic atmosphere for a Sanyas ashram. Because the Sanyasinis had embraced Catholic faith enb loc they did not have to leave Thirumoolapuram Matom. Yet they had to fend for themselves for daily living. They had stopped teaching at Balikamatom. The disappointment of the Sisters who were as committed as they were competent in teaching was too heavy to be ignored. It was with this end in view that the Bethany Balikamatom School was started in Nangiarkulangara and a Convent set up there. Cheppard Philipose Ramban gave the lead in its establishment. The Supervision of building construction was taken up by Thirumeni's brother Mathai Panicker. On the same model and in the same name of Balikamatom, the School in Nangiarkulangara was set up in 1931.

Mar Ivanios kept writing letters explaining his stand and attracting seekers after truth to his line of thinking. He had to face allegations galore. Both the Metropolitan of Malankara and the Catholicose (Bava) excommunicated him. News and articles denouncing Reunion Movement appeared regularly in church publications. Patriarch of Antioch Elias III visited Malankara in person to discourage the trend of Jacobites leaving the Church for Catholicism. He spoke running down the Reunion Movement from different church centres. But his passing away at Manjanikara, near Pathanamthitta, was most unexpected.

His opponents never wasted a chance to get him entangled in court cases. Contentions on the churches established under the independent Bethany mission cropped up. Those Churches had evangelization for their sole rationale. Many saw the truth and followed the course towards peace and godliness. The Catholicose faction raked up pressure tactics to grab authority over those churches under the claim that they were established solely with the men and material provided by their churches. Court cases swelled up.

Management of schools was another bone of contention. MA Achen (Mar Ivanios Thirumeni) was appointed by Wattasseril Thirumeni as Manager of Schools which belonged to the Syrian Church in 1923. This was done on the ground that no one else in the Church had half the experience or competence which MA Achen had acquired in his capac-

ity of Principal of MD Seminary School and Professor of Serampore. The institutions which were just dragging on with heavy limitations were pulled up by the bootstrings, as it were, by Thirumeni with rare diligence and expertise. It was only natural that the Malankara Church authorities tried their best to take possession of those institutions which had grown purely under the careful nurture of Thirumeni. It was natural enough that they found the opposition equally tough and determined not to yield. It was unfortunate that the future growth of those institutions was to a large extent impeded by the protracted legal battles that ensued. Letters flowed to the Apostolic Delegate and even to the Pope levelling baseless charges against Ivanios Thirumeni. But they had no effect whatsoever on the Reunion Movement, nor on his impeccable personality. Only he was deeply distressed over the development.

But time had healed many an acrimonious recrimination that had arisen out of rush of blood and vengefulness. Possibly it was the reluctance to accept the fact that the Thirumeni on whom all the hopes of the Church were pinned had left the fold that led to the emotionally charged developments of those times. "A wolf in sheep's clothing has strayed out of the Bethany Hills to swallow the innocent sheep of the Syrian Church"; they used to thunder from platforms. Even despicable efforts to turn the car or vallom turtle with him inside, were said to have been made by the opponents.

It is said that somebody had offered Rs. 500/- to the Muslim driver of his car to see him come to grief. "Not if you give me five thousand instead"; he retorted. Thirumeni who happened to hear of this said: "What a pity! Our life is so cheap? They price it only at Rs. 500/-"¹

The intensity of opposition only grew day by day. They would raise black flags on his routes and shout 'Archbishop Go Back' An incident that took place in a central Travancore church was so inhuman that it attracted divine retribution. Those who came to scoff and jeer wept and confessed.

This was how it happened. The Church bells pealed. The ring of death knell. People started gathering. Four persons were carrying a

1. Fr.Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios Vol. II pp. 43-44

coffin on which was inscribed" Archbishop Mar Ivanios". A few of them who formed the cortege were singing: "Karuna niranjavane puna-ruddhanathil...." Some of the gathering who found it interesting enquired "What is in it?" "Only the stem of a plantain- five foot long," someone replied with utmost levity.

Thirumeni was expected to attend a felicitation meeting there the same day. On hearing of this he took a different route and attended the meeting. The disappointed organisers of the show left the coffin on the road and disappeared tails between their legs. Not much later a rift developed between the chief organiser and another member of the gang which ended in the death of the former by stabbing. His cortege took the same route which witnessed the inhuman charade the previous evening. In a week's time Thirumeni visited the bereaved family and comforted them, his wife and children. He even offered them substantial financial help. This enhanced his image considerably and many stopped questioning his integrity.

Emotional torture apart, what stood in the way of the progress of the movement was financial constraints and governmental hindrances. Those who left Jacobite and Orthodox Churches and joined the Catholic Church had to establish churches and cemeteries of their own. All this needed money and, of course governmental sanction- both of which appeared insurmountable at one stage. Those who had clout with the government tried to stall the growth of this movement secretly and sometimes even openly. Applications for the establishment of churches and cemeteries were rejected. Using private buildings for worship, and burial of the dead in private properties attracted penal proceedings. Priests who were with the Reunion Movement found little time of their own away from police station or court verandahs.

This created tension. Just one instance to prove the dramatic intensity of a burial scene. It was two days after death. To keep the body from putrefying was proving impossible. The grave was dug in a newly bought land. The neighbouring people who belonged to the opposite faction would not allow the funeral to take place. They had the backing of the powers that be. Ready to face any eventuality, after the crantz (prayers) were sung the priest led the body to the graveyard. The faith-

fuls followed. Prayers were said to sanctify the grave. Hardly had the prayer been over when somebody jumped into the grave and spread himself comfortably there. Everyone was taken aback. But not the priest who immediately disrobed himself, took the shovel and started throwing in the loose soil in heaps on the man lying there. "Only after he is buried alive!" he shouted. The whole atmosphere shook. "Oh, don't kill me" cried the man who with difficulty was helped out by someone standing by. There was no scent of them anywhere near. In spite of the occasion people guffawed. The whole incident passed off peacefully.

This was not an isolated instance. Many were the experiences that the priests and the laymen had to suffer during the early days of Reunion. And to remember that they had forsaken the comforts, convenience and privileges in their old churches! They bravely followed what they found was right. They chose to follow an intrepid shepherd whose faith was unshakeable. They set their eyes not on worldly possessions or positions. No bungalows, cars, estates, why, not even a place to worship! A time to lose, a time to rededicate themselves!

The Lamp of Reunion was made radiant by the sheer ebullience of paternal love, indomitable courage, awesome personality, life of prayer and sense of rectitude. Teething troubles over, a start from scratch. A life dedicated to the establishment of heaven on earth turned out to be the motto for them to follow. It was autographed- the signature of God!

Channels of hope and compassion kept surfacing even amidst adversities. Syrian Catholics of Kerala called themselves Roman Catholics in those days. It was to distinguish themselves from the Latin Catholics. Since there were no other Syrian sections in the Catholic Church in Kerala the appellation did not sound odd. This was why it was commonly said that Ivanios Thirumeni had joined the Roman Church. The biggest support for the Reunion Movement in its infancy was received from the Changanacherry Diocese of Syrian Catholic Church. On October 2, 1930 Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilus were accorded a grand reception by the Changanacherry Diocese. In the Cathedral Church Holy Qurbana was solemnised according to Antiochal order of service. Bishop Mar James Kalassery presided over the felicitation meeting that followed. With overflowing warmth he welcomed the architect of Reunion and promised all help towards its development. It may be remembered that it was Kalassery Thirumeni who had discouraged affiliation with the Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and suggested direct talk with the Pope. The same helpful attitude continued even after the Movement had had its auspicious start. Bishop Kalassery's benevolence flowed through different channels: he encouraged aspirants for theological work from his diocese to serve Malankara Catholic Church, instructed his members to freely join in the holy rites of Malankara Catholic Church and generously helped the nascent movement with men and materials whenever it was in need.

Equally meaningful and substantial was the help rendered by the Archbishop of Ernakulam Mar Augustine Kandathil. It was he who influenced Ivanios Thirumeni to think in terms of a Malankara Hierarchy

and the establishment of Trivandrum Archdiocese. Mar Ivanios Thirumeni was primarily interested in the establishment of Adoor and Thiruvalla dioceses. But Kandathil Thirumeni gave him a better sense of direction. With hardly another believer or a cent of land to lay his head how would he think of a headquarters for the Hierarchy in Trivandrum, he wondered! The simple recipe prescribed by Kandathil Thirumeni read like this: "Wherever the Bishop is, there will be people and pelf."

He had prophetic vision. Had it stopped at Adoor, Reunion Movement would not have grown this big, influential or prestigious. Like Bishop Kalassery, Kandathil Thirumeni also took steps to delegate seminarians to serve in Trivandrum.

Constantly being greeted with barbs and brickbats from his own community he found solace in Archbishop Kandathil and Bishop Kalassery. The number of priests and believers swelled considerably. This included prominent priests and influential lay members in major centres of Malankara Syrian Church. Most of them were charmed simply by the charisma of Ivanios Thirumeni. They were certain that this skipper would take them safely to port. They found their community weakening itself with fights and dissension. The strength of faith was being eroded. Spiritual verve was on the wane. Unity, peace and progress ceased to exist even in dreams. The shepherd who tried to infuse spiritual strength through ascetic means was following the means of grace. This emboldened many to join the reunion course. Beautiful churches, property and possessions and thriving institutions were a plenty in Jacobite, Orthodox and Mar Thoma Churches. To reunite with the Catholic Church meant forsaking all this. There were no churches worth the name. In makeshift sheds and renovated houses they met to worship. Even to pray at the tombs when their dear departed ones were buried was proving difficult. More painful were the restrictions imposed, willy-nilly, by kith and kin.

Despite all this, prominent among the clergy and laity became proponents of Reunion Movement. The first two years were indeed a spell of sore trials. Even food was scanty. No official confirmation of its entity from Rome. Stray love channels were threatening to dry up. By providence, as it were, it rained keeping the rivulets running. It rained

again making the river swell. The rains came from the north, from Changanacherry and Ernakulam to be precise. Timely was the sustenance from the Carmelites which kept the reunion baby from being orphaned.

Mar Ivanios Thirumeni went round preaching the gospel at all the major Christian centres. He made it a point to witness the grace that he received in following the path of truth during the early years of reunion. Many followed him charmed by his linguistic felicity and firmness of faith. There was little to hope for in the near future. Yet they found inspiration enough in the master.

The background of a great movement was being defined in the early years of reunion. It marked a new spiritual surge in the Church. The social climate of Kerala was none too bracing those days. Casteism was still rampant. Dominance of the forward castes made life difficult. The weaker sections of society were denied use of public road and right to worship in temples. Social set up was so anarchic that the land of Malayalis came to be referred as a mad house (lunatic asylum). Mar Ivanios took a brave stand responding to the call of the underprivileged for a social order where their humanity was respected and their spiritual wellbeing ensured. Today we have reached a stage where the rights of the Dalits are sought to be upheld and Dalit literature honoured. But one should not forget that the basement for this superstructure must have been laid by Mar Ivanios whose bold and forthright stand on matters of social justice had an impact too strong to ignore. This was in the early decades of the twentieth century. Practitioners of untouchability were not confined to the upper castes alone. Even members of his own community branded him 'Pulayan Ayyappan' when Sahodaran Ayyappan made bold to eat with them besides working for their total liberation. Encouraged or enticed by the missionaries many of the lower castes were embracing Christianity. But the so called high caste Christians were scrupulously avoiding them. They were superciliously referred as 'Puthu Christhyanikal' - convert Christians. This was shocking disregard of Christian charity reflecting the hollowness of evangelization. Needless to say it severely dented the pride and self respect of the poor populace.

The approach of Mar Ivanios was totally different. The Bethany Ashram at Perinad was a veritable refuge for the weak and needy. By

and by when Reunion Movement gained strength he turned his attention to the emancipation of the dalits. He was committed to their empowerment. The writer B. C. Jacob reminisces '[Mar Ivaniosinte Anadha Balan]'

Knowing full well that building up a comprehensive movement was essential for the fulfilment of his dream, he started planning scrupulously for the development of Reunion Movement. His efforts were not proving easy in the face of strong resistance from the Jacobite brethren. It pained him sore when a few of even his Bethany colleagues stood against him. But not being discouraged, he determined to see the movement gain in strength at the cost of any sacrifice. A new path was cut open. He admitted backward castes to the reunion fold. It was quite an adventurous step at the time. It is difficult not to praise him who took the torch of Christian love to the underprivileged. Like Abraham Lincoln who fought for the liberty of the Negro slaves in America, Ivanios Thirumeni led a liberation movement in the name of Christ for the emancipation of the downtrodden in Kerala.

The Most Reverend Thirumeni started work among them in Pullad where the backward classes were living in large numbers. He baptised a few of the Pulayas and accepted them into his movement. Those were days when untouchability was rampant. This turned out to be a big relief for the backward classes who were virtually living like slaves under the overlordship of the upper castes. He accepted nearly 250 of them into his fold converting them into the faith.¹

Mar Ivanios turned out to be a liberator to the masses who were being bought and sold like slaves, being denied use of common streets and even right of worship. Chains of slavery were being snapped. Churches were thrown open to them for worship. They were prepared to follow him in numbers when they found their identity being respected and doors of light opened for them. Probably this daring step paved the way for the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936. Mar Ivanios indeed was a powerful force in the social reformation of Kerala.

1. Jacob B. G: Mar Ivaniosinte Anadha Balan pp.77-78

History records Temple Entry Proclamation as a testimony of the progressive outlook and nobility of the Travancore Royal family, which can never be gainsaid. It should also be remembered that the populace had determined by then to gain their basic human rights even by converting into Buddhism or Christianity. It is doubtful whether this basic fact is duly recognised by the following generations.

The fact that the lower rungs of society had given a strong underpinning to the movement when members of the Syrian Christian Community were dithering is scarcely recognised. It is sad that these pioneering members and their leaders were not given due recognition when the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church was establishing itself on a fairly strong foundation. That the convert Christians were being denied a fair deal by the Government of the time must have been a contributory factor. But then the Church was indeed wasting a chance to strike for justice and fairness in a big way.

The generation of leaders, both lay and clergy, who sacrificed much to steady the ship of Reunion Movement amidst the roaring breakers had started disappearing behind the thin veil of time. But their steadfast faith and trail of sacrifices should never be forgotten, because it was on that foundation that the basis of this great Movement was laid.

The 1930-32 period was indeed a spell of trial by fire. A period when nothing was certain, even the path to progress was far too indistinct. But steady as a rock with unwavering determination and unflinching faith Thirumeni led his fold. A commission reminiscent of Moses leading the Israelites from the bondage of the Pharaoh into the promised land!

IN THE THICK OF CRITICISM

In the hour of trial (1930-32) the speeches made by Ivanios Thirumeni were so crafted that they left no one in doubt as to the strength of his conviction. It was a decision absolutely well thought out, untouched by selfish ends and firmly founded on spirituality. He never expected power, position or pelf from the Catholic Church. Malicious propaganda on those lines was rife. Pamphlets, speeches, news items and the like were just storms in the tea cup. But attacks made through books remain cruel reminders of the unholy criticism which the movement had to endure throughout that period.

A book titled 'Periscope of the Malankara Church' had come out portraying the miserable condition the Malankara Syrian Church had descended into following faction feud which made Mar Ivanios Thirumeni embrace Catholicism with his followers. The book was noted for the simple and elegant style of Pulikottil Ouseph Ramban, the practical suggestions of Ivanios Thirumeni and the profound thoughts of Cheppad Philipose Ramban.

The book which pictures Malankara Church as a bark tossed about in the rough waters on a dark and stormy night begins thus:

Even strong bargemen tremble at the prospect of cruising through Vembanad lake. First its expanse. Second its waves and draughts. It is common knowledge that many lives have perished in it. They dread rowing through it even in summer not to speak of monsoon months like Mithunam and Karkidakam. One can imagine the trepidations of one called upon to go through it on a pitch dark night when it is raining cats and dogs.

We want the reader to picture Malankara Syrian Church as this bark now trying to negotiate Vembanad lake. It goes neither backward nor forward. Its just swirls in the waves. The people on board experience death in life. They don't cry. They don't seem even to think of saving themselves. 'If this is going to be the end, let it be so'; some seem to think. Who is responsible for this pass? Who is guilty? No point is served by such a discussion.¹

An apparent rejoinder to 'Periscope of the Malankara Church' came under the name of 'Magnifying glass of Malankara Church' by one P. John Mathew from Kottayam. Nothing of the linguistic beauty or the analytical skill of 'Periscope' could be found in the latter. Pure jibberish! See how it begins:

Many of you, members of the Malankara Syrian Church, may have known already that Mar Ivanios Metropolitan 'the ardent lover of the Church' who was the key culprit behind the raging faction feud in the Malankara Church and who was chiefly instrumental in inviting Abded Messia Patriarch to Malankara with the express intent of establishing the Catholicate in Malankara; and his puppet on the string Mar Theophilus Episcopa who got elevated to Metropolitan and their frenetic followers in saffron who are prepared to dance to any tune played by their masters, have left Bethany Ashram ready to jump the fence to the green pastures of the Roman Catholic Church. 'Ashramites practising self-negation, out of unbearable pain at the fall of the Church' are now enjoying themselves in a rented building near Thiruvalla their avid gaze focussed on Rome.

His dream shattered and falling away like a castle in the air, totally disillusioned and restless, wondering 'what-next', he was joined by Pulikottil Ramban. Like master like servant! Why trouble him for entertaining the hope that he can enjoy the fruits of Bishopric if he makes use of the opportunity jumping into the Catholic fold? Members of the Malankara Church are growing anxious only because they haven't come to grips with the fact that the two some -Panicker Methran and Pulikottil Ramban- have

1. Pulikottil Ouseph Ramban: Malankara Sabhayude Kuzhalkannadi pp. 1-2

started feeling miserable at the thought of Wattasseril Thirumeni's passing away. They depend entirely on his favour and are aware of a horrible change in their fortune in the event of his demise.

We shall conclude this portion after analysing the role of Mar Theophilus and Cheppad Ramban. There is nothing wrong in seeing Mar Theophilus as a parrot of Ivanios or just a lifeless puppet. Truly His Master's voice he had been even during his Serampore days. Now that he has been raised to the position of Metropolitan purely at the instance of Ivanios Metropolitan, how much more should he be obliged to him!

Nobody opposed his ordination as Episcopa because they were all convinced of his simple faith. But the potential danger of nominating 'innocents' with no will or strength of their own to position of power should at least be recognised by the Church at this late hour.²

The disgraceful approach of the book needs no reiteration. The big gains that the Malankara Church reaped out of Mar Ivanios' efforts have been clean forgotten. The writer who runs down Mar Ivanios' role in securing the release of disqualification for Wattasseril Thirumeni by establishing the Catholicate doesn't seem to remember that he is cutting the branch of the tree that he himself is sitting on. The shining stars of Malankara Church come in for shockingly shabby treatment at the hand of the writer. Instead if only he had been prepared for an open discussion on ways and means of maintaining peace and order in the Church, the history of Malankara Church would have been different. Unfortunately that was not to be. Result? The atmosphere of possible peace, truth and love was dispelled.

The work of M. M. Varkey, 'X-Ray of Malankara Church', countered the propaganda against Mar Ivanios Thirumeni effectively. He brought to light the eminent personality with the help of manifold references to articles that appeared in Dailies and Periodicals of the time. He enumerated the credentials of Thirumeni in some detail:

A pillar of pride of Malankara Jacobite Church, a leader of the community, a popular leader, a man of sacrifice, the strong man

2. John Mathew P: Malankara Sabhayude Bhoothakannadi pp. 1-2

of the Church who fought bravely to maintain peace, one whose close association with foreign Patriarchs like Abdullah, and Abded Messia and other Church heads helped him to expose the depths of depravity in the Church, the right hand man of the Bishops in 'Vattipanam Case', MA Achen, Panicker Achen, Head Master of MD High School, Abo P. T. Geevarghese, Professor of Serampore, well known scholar in Syriac, author of 'Raabinson Grammar' (a book on Grammar in Syriac), University Expert and Examiner in Syriac, founder of Bethany ashram, Balikamatom and Orphanage, a friend indeed, an excellent speaker, a man of deep concern, an authority on Church history, tradition, and constitution, a Satyagrahi who suffered for the cause of Church, a Church leader with worldwide renown...his appellations are endless.

A total stranger to Thirumeni may find this description a little too exaggerated or an apologia in the background of his recent change of faith. My humble feeling is that this is not exhaustive enough since all of it is based on observations made by Jacobite brethren from time to time. As a Jacobite who had a fairly long association with him and not a few years as a follower of his, I would still consider it a pale image of the glittering qualities that Thirumeni had possessed. I have been able to meet a number of Jacobites who still maintain the same respect for him in spite of his desertion of the Church. As for his Suffragan, Mar Theophilus not only Jacobites but people belonging to all communities vouch for his unalloyed faith and steadfastness of conviction. That even many reformists throng to him for his prayers and blessings is a little known truth. Even his latter day opponents have only one charge -if at all it is an allegation- that he has only been following his master like a shadow. And one need not be surprised if the present-day generation unused to obedience and respect to Church heads finds it a fault of his character.³

Mar Ivanios Thirumeni had astutely taken care to see that Reunion Movement did drive its roots deep in main Christian centres even

3. M.M. Varkey: Malankara Sabhayude X-ray p. 261

when they were blowing hot and cold. And he had little difficulty in convincing the Catholics of his bonafides.

His speeches, convention addresses and published articles all made his search for truth unambiguously clear in its motives. And his goal was as well defined as his determination firm. Undaunted courage in the face of adversities and the willingness to suffer in overcoming them remained sterling qualities of his rare personality: the quality which made him spurn the coveted position of Professor of Serampore to embrace asceticism in Bethany. 'Forsake everything that you have, take up my cross, whoever would wish to be my disciple' was the Master's injunction.

Ivanios Thirumeni's spell of activity coincided with the surge of dynamism and renaissance in Indian polity. An unusual zest for revolutionary changes was coursing through the social and educational spheres in Kerala. The struggle for independence was not confined to political arena alone. It became a clarion call for reformation all over. The emancipation witnessed in the socio-religious and educational spheres of Kerala was clearly on the lines of Thirumeni's vision. In effect it turned out to be a historical step forward.

Fr. Pakomios OIC who was one of the pioneers of Reunion Movement and the oldest member of Bethany ashram testifies to the fact that it was the spirituality gained through prayer and meditation that stood out as the most outstanding feature of Ivanios Thirumeni's personality.

"Lost in prayer he forgot himself. Dead to the world and lost in meditation he would take everyone else with him. Days began with Holy Qurbana. Prayer eight times a day. Stentorian voice clear as a bell. Unusual clarity of enunciation. He wanted Malankara (Syrian) Catholic Church to be an independent entity under the direct spiritual control of the Pope. Thirumeni's spiritual vision is gaining relevance with advancing times. [From an interview]

April 1932 saw the birth of a new era in the history of Reunion Movement. The sky was getting clearer. The world took note of Mar Ivanios' path. He was invited to attend the 32nd International Congress on Divine Grace in Dublin, Ireland. Invitations followed from many a European University. His scholarship, oratory and personal magnetism were by now well- acknowledged. Topics for his speeches ranged from Indian Literature, Malayalam Literature, Religion and Philosophy, Indian Sculpture, Adwaita Philosophy, Fine Arts, Ancient Indian Political Institution, Renaissance of Indian Arts, Kerala History, Economics and Culture.

Thirumeni was determined to make the best of this opportunity. He wanted, first to meet the Pope and gain some special privileges ensuring the smooth progress of Reunion Movement. Even though Pope Pius XI had extended to him a 'Welcome, a Big Welcome', a personal interview was yet to be granted. He wanted to express his gratitude and respect to the Pope at this meeting. It was essential to have a Hierarchy granted with Trivandrum as headquarters, to extend the Reunion Movement throughout Kerala.

Thirumeni was to sail from Bombay on April 11. Every possible step was planned to see the Movement did not suffer by his absence. He hired a big building in Kunnukuzhy, Trivandrum that belonged to Dr. Manuel on a monthly rate of Rs.15/- Bethany Ashramites, Fr. Joshua and Fr. Barsleeba were to stay there. A house was arranged in Thiruvalla for Mar Theophilus. Pulikottil Ramban and Cheppad Ramban were deputed to stay on in Thirumoolapuram. Fr. Mattom, the polyglot Professor

of SB College Changanacherry was asked to accompany him to help in his foreign journey and if needs be, to act as interpreter.

Little by little details of his Rome visit started flowing out. That he would meet the Pope to gain some special consideration and thereby strengthen the Movement was widely anticipated. Steps to scuttle that were also being planned behind the curtain. A criminal case was being pursued in the first Class Magistrate's Court, Alapuzha on Vanachira Church near Mavelikara. Mar Ivanios Thirumeni was first witness. Summons requiring him to appear in court had been returned twice. His opponents wanted to put a spoke in the wheel of his foreign trip by capitalising on this development. They hoped to get him arrested.

Luckily Thirumeni came to know that an arrest warrant had gone out against him. He knew he would be arrested if he didn't cross Travancore border at the earliest. So he preponed a programme at Vennikulam where he was to present vestments to some of the 'ashramites'. He went through this proposed programme the previous night, came back to Thirumoolapuram and left for Kottayam immediately by Melampampil Oommen's car.

By the time his opponents reached Thirumoolapuram with the court official to take him into custody he had already left the place. They followed him in haste. Meanwhile the car by which Thirumeni had proceeded to Kottayam developed engine trouble at Chingavanam. Arranging his brother Mathai Paniker to fetch a car from Kottayam aramana, Thirumeni went for a stroll with his trusted aide Kileeleth Chacko along a narrow by-road. The warrant peon and others found only the broken down car in the way. Disappointed they drove off to Kottayam where again the search was futile. They returned to Mavelikara via Thiruvalla, their mission unaccomplished.

When his brother returned to Chingavanam with the car from the aramana he was relieved to hear of the story. They proceeded to Kottayam where he had some hurried confabulations with Choolapampil Thirumeni. On his advice he left for Ernakulam by Bishop Choolapampil's car and stayed overnight at the Archbishop's house safely out of reach of the arms of the law before leaving for Bombay by train.

The ship left Bombay a week earlier than scheduled on April 4. But a few hours before he left a distressing news reached him in Bombay, his dear mother's demise. Postponing the journey would be a serious setback for the Movement, because a meeting with the Pope to secure some special privileges was high on the agenda. Returning to Travancore would be walking into the sure trap laid by his archrivals. So the deep distress caused by his mother's demise was borne manfully and he proceeded as scheduled to Rome. He sent a telegram to his brother instructing him to go ahead with the funeral.

This indeed was one of the most painful of personal crises that Thirumeni had to face. A high priest of the Church having to skip the funeral ceremony of his loving mother! But his implacable fortitude and composure rivalled the depth of the ocean he was traversing at the moment. Who knows the number of trials one has to face before reaching the port of eternity!

After spending seven days in the ship he reached Rome on 12th April. Thirumeni and Fr. Mattom were billeted in the Passionists Abbey. He spent two months and a half in Rome and had audience with the Pope five times. Strange and providential were most of his experiences. He exchanged views with Church Heads as well as diplomats. Spoke in Churches and Seminaries. He wrote in detail to Mar Augustine Kandathil, Metropolitan of Ernakulam Archdiocese;

I was invited to make a speech in Gregorian University last Thursday. A number of distinguished personalities including archbishops, bishops, priests and laymen had gathered there. The hall was packed to capacity. People were thronging around doors, windows and corridors. When the address was over, Msgr. Helbingi invited me to speak in Dublin at a meeting presided over by Cardinal Boon. Lord Toneti, Lord Miringnoni and the Vatican Ambassador for Britain were among the audience.

I spoke also in Beda College, Scottish College, English College and in Propaganda Seminary. I have been asked to speak in Irish College and North American College also. I had the privilege of offering the Holy Sacrifice in many of the reputed Roman Basili-

cas. I spoke also in St. Sylvester Church. Next week I'm to speak in St. Susannah's.¹

It was on April 26, 1932 that Mar Ivanios Thirumeni had his first audience with the Pope. Only cardinals, bishops, eminent anchorites and Heads of States are given a similar privilege of a personal audience. "Holy Father, I come to you like the prodigal son to his father." I said in all humility. But the Pope took me up and embraced me most warmly with the word, "You are my good son".

Inspired by the warmth of this 'welcome', I sought his blessings for the growth of the Reunion Movement. The Pope asked me to represent in writing my demand at the next meeting. So I presented all of it at my second meeting, the main thrust of which was official sanction for a Hierarchy with Trivandrum as an Archdiocese and Thiruvalla a Diocese. After perusing it closely he said: "It is granted" and handed over the representation to State Secretary Cardinal Pachelli (later Pope Pius XII).

Investiture ceremony of Mar Ivanios followed soon after. It is a symbolic rite of bestowing total episcopal right of authority. Six crosses are sewn on this two inch wide 'pallium' which is made out of immaculate white wool. It is worn around the neck.

With the pallium on his person, accompanied by Cardinal Pachelli Mar Ivanios left the Papal Chamber after thanking the Pope. Accepting representation straight from bishops and granting them instant sanction being a very unusual step, the State Secretary was a little flustered. The usual practice was to present the memorandum to the Oriental Congregation which passed it on to the Pope after careful scrutiny. And the State Secretary did hint that short-circuiting the routine was not proper. This was how the sharp-witted and sagacious Thirumeni responded to it:

I have heard of the noble discipline and distinguished routine of the Catholic Church. I do prize it, so much. As for me I am a Metropolitan of the Jacobite Church who has newly embraced Catholicism. I still have to come to grips with the different regula-

1. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios Vol. II p. 85

tions of the Church. I would request your Holiness to take it through the proper channel of Oriental Congregation. I would like it that way. Let me tell you one thing. I didn't personally present anything on my own. It was only after getting everything clear that Holy Father asked me to present my specific requests. I was bound to open up. And the Holy Father has blessed me granting all my requests.²

The State Secretary was dumbfounded. It all appeared divinely ordained. Probably the request for a Hierarchy with Trivandrum for a headquarters of an Archdiocese might never have been sanctioned had it gone through the Oriental congregation. In fact Bishop Benziger was leading a move to have a Latin Hierarchy established with Trivandrum as the Archdiocese headquarters. They had the support of the Carmelite Order for this demand. And it was just and fair in terms of either population or tradition. Divine will was otherwise. Undoubtedly it was its work with Trivandrum for an headquarters, that presaged the growth and development of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church.

But this decision of Rome turned out to be a big disappointment for the Latin Catholic Community because it had always been a source of great support for the Reunion Movement. And it took long for the rancour born out of disappointment to heal, before cordiality was restored.

Mar Ivanios visited the Pope again on May 6th, 11th and on June 2nd to expedite the steps he had in mind for the smooth progress of the Movement.

Mutual respect grew with every visit. And on the last meeting Thirumeni apprised the Pope of his intent to visit George V in Buckingham Palace on his way to attend the Congress of Divine Mercy. The Pope was pleased to send a message to the Royalty through Thirumeni. That he saw in him a special messenger bears testimony to the regard and respect the Holy Father had for Ivanios Thirumeni.

Thirumeni had planned to visit the Pope on his return from the Congress. And the Pope was only too pleased to grant him audience. "Son, you are always welcome, we are only pleased to have you any-time." But the visit didn't take place owing to a queer turn of circumstances.

2. Philip C. Pantholil: Mar Ivanios Ente Smaranayil p. 71

The communion of Christ in the Holy Qurbana is of vital importance to all ancient Churches. And the two or three days the pilgrims meet, they spend on partaking of it and meditating about it. This confluence of the faithful is known as the Divine Mercy Congress. The Congress was organised on a massive scale for the first time in 1881. Before that it used to be provincial in tone and scale.

It was in Lille, France that the first such Congress was held. It is believed that a noble lady called Martha Mariatta Wistar had a vision which demanded such a congress to enhance the significance of Qurbana. Charmed at this idea a French business magnate called Filibrette Vreue got the permission from Pope Leo to host this conference. And with substantial support from Bishop Gastell of Segur he organised it with great success. Since then the Congress has been held regularly in different parts of the world. The Congress was held for the first time in India in 1964 and the presence of Pope Paul VI at the Bombay session was pathbreaking.

It was the 31st Congress that Dublin hosted. Mar Ivanios and his associate Fr. Mattom stayed in Rate Ferner House as guest of the Society of Jesus Mendicants. And Ivanios Thirumeni had a chance to celebrate the Holy Qurbana in Malankara Rite at that Congress. Thanks to the organisational skills of the Jesuit Fathers, the Latin Church was made suitable for an Eastern service and a suitable choir got up. The impression that it created in the congregation was phenomenal, ethereal, rather. Only a few of them, used to the Western order of service, wondered whether the Qurbana took a little too long. Miss Gibbons, an Irish lady

who wrote a book named 'Mar Ivanios' has recorded the warm appreciation the grudging Westerners had for the Eastern Rite as presented by Thirumeni.¹

In an interview granted to the media after the Divine Mercy Congress Mar Ivanios said:

I see the Dublin Congress as a beautiful expression of strength and solidarity of the Catholic Church. And I consider Holy Qurbana as a visible symbol of the living faith which the Church upholds. The memories of the worship organised with the Catholic and non-Catholic people, the sanctity of the Qurbana, the procession held on the last day of the congress- all these will ever remain green in my memory. About a lakh of faithful followers expressed their deep reverence for the Holy Qurbana, standing in the form of cross along the four roads leading to the O'connel Bridge. The altar for the Holy Sacrifice was put up on a high platform. The benediction of the Holy Father also was given from there.²

In Dublin Mar Ivanios had occasion to meet and exchange ideas with the famous English writer G.K Chesterton. The two had much in common, scholarship, interest in Psychology and religious persuasion. Born non-Catholic both of them turned to Catholicism in later life. The impact of Mar Ivanios's reunion on the Jacobite Church was similar to the uproar that Chesterton's caused in the Anglican Church.

At the conclusion of the Congress, Chesterton published a series of articles entitled 'People I saw in Dublin' in 'Universe', a daily published from London. A very lively portrait of Mar Ivanios was prominent among them. A translation of it appeared in 'Dasan', a periodical published by M. M. Varkey. The renowned scholar I. C. Chacko was the translator. It ran like this:

Another rare figure. And a rarer name conjuring up still rarer images. Tell an Englishman, nay an Irishman that there is Jacobite priest in Ireland and he would recall a Patrick Sarsfield or another like him that the battles of Cork or Lemerick threw up during the

1. Margaret Gibbons: Mar Ivanios P. 74.

2. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios Vol. II p.103

time when Irish Catholics were 'Jacobite'. He might think that this Jacobite priest could be obsessed with the (none too memorable) past. There was nothing wrong for the Northern Irish to remember a Boyne, if a Southern Irish kept the memory of a Stuart close to his heart.

It would take sometime for them to see that a 'Jacobean' and a 'Jacobite' are not one and the same. This is something totally foreign, born, cradled and reared in a far-off land in far-off times. Infinitely older than the dark dark ages, steeped in the mysterious spirituality of a race that saw man as one, this spark of Christianity that lay dormant in some ancient church in inaccessible Asia was reaching its outstretched arms to embrace the Universal Church! Possibly this is what 'this 'Jacobite Priest' stands for.

This heroic figure of a lone Indian who has led his people to sacred reunion with the Catholic Church has recorded a resounding victory on this land where the sun never sets. But he looks implacable, beyond change. As though he has just stepped out of a Hindu pantheon or a Parsi vihara.....inscrutable scripts lending it an ethereal charm. In place of a mitre he had on his head a tall turban. His swarthy face behind the copious grey beard looked alert and intelligent. His robes were remarkably novel for a Westerner.

To a casual onlooker he could be anyone. A priest of Chenghizkhan, Hanuman or of a Serpent God. For, we Westerners are pretty hazy about the distinct roles associated with different ranks, ecclesiastical or otherwise. But he had on him something quite distinct from anything such priests normally carry. It had the shape of a Roman gibbet. Something that at once unified and separated him from the Roman Church.

It gave me goose pimples watching him, with a turban and a cross! To think that he had come from the land of wizards, that he looked like an Indian king, that he had been anointed a Christian priest! I wondered whether he was Prester John!

At that very moment 'Prester John' came to my side and told me in chaste English that he had read an article of mine in some En-

glish newspaper. That broke my reverie. Soon I discovered that he had the Jacobite converted through a very novel, intelligently appealing way. Even though he was a very scholarly person he used to read even my articles in the Dailies!

Meanwhile I had a faint sense of embarrassment that I had not thanked him fittingly enough for the kindness and courtesy which he wore effortlessly as a distinguished priest. I feel it still. Yet I could not but feel that there was a touch of indelicacy in showing off the cleverness of one's calling or of the position one holds. It is quite a common vanity which is almost universal, though.

That this unique priest from the East could inveigle me into a studied discussion on many a topic of vital importance was reflective of the spirituality of the region he came from. He was generous enough to offer me a chance to be photographed with him on the steps of the Viceroy's residence. I was surprised at this. We must have been interesting specimens of extreme disparity from different ends of the world. Did he want me to present a sallow background for his photograph, I wondered! But by the time he left me after his engaging conversation with a condescending bow, my feelings were entirely different. I had heard that the presence of a dunce was considered a mascot against evil spirits in some parts of Asia. Though it was wrong for me to see this supremely intelligent Catholic priest given to superstition, I must confess that this thought crossed my mind quite often.³

This elegantly scholarly description of Mar Ivanios by G. K. Chesterton reflects his rare personality. He was the cynosure of all eyes at all the programmes he took part in the West. Unusual robes, insignia and charming gift of the gab. Even the Pope must have been attracted - personal audience five times in a month, largesse unmindful of precedents. Sure enough it is the same halo that the Malankara Catholic Church still wears!

3. G.K. Chesterton: People I saw in Dublin [translated by I. C. Chacko in Dasan Newspaper]

Mar Ivanios left for England at the conclusion of the Dublin Congress. The two weeks spent there yielded lasting and fruitful acquaintances. In a meeting arranged in his honour he had occasions to plumb the depths of his conviction that opened up the vistas towards reunion. He visited George V and attended a garden party arranged in his honour where he conveyed the greetings of the Pope to Royalty. This assumes greater significance when one remembers that Thirumeni's mission was being fulfilled in a distant corner of his empire.

From England he left for Belgium where he could mobilise considerable resources for his mission. He spent a month in Belgium speaking at different centres and building up useful friendships. A shocking message from Pulikottil Ramban reached him in the meanwhile:

'Trivandrum Archdiocese has been given to the Carmelites-reliably learnt'.

The message left him sad and disappointed. Establishment of the Trivandrum based Hierarchy, a genuine largesse from the Pope. The application of the Latin Rites and the Carmelites was under consideration of the Congregation at that time. It was not impossible that they managed a Papal order too. Does it mean that the 'word' he received was nothing? All the same, he had received a communication from Mon. Chicognani, Head of the Eastern Congress, saying that the Apostolic delegate of India had been told of the creation of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum on June 11th. Was it a last minute conciliation? This was too much of an embarrassment and a possible setback to the Reunion Movement in its infancy.

Pulikottil Ramban would never jump the gun. He never acts unless utterly convinced. So Thirumeni sent an immediate message to Msgr. Chicognani. He decided to return home, cutting short his tour programme.

Mercifully the reply from Msgr. Chicognani brought him consolation even before he left Belgium. "Ignore the telegram. The 'Beula' sent from here to the Apostolic Delegate leaves no doubt that Mar Ivanios himself is the Archbishop of Trivandrum."

Relieved though, he wanted to come back to Trivandrum at the earliest. So he avoided a second visit to Rome. En route he enquired whether the rented building in Kunnukuzhy could be bought outright

for use of the Church. Since that did not work out, a two-storey building near Kanakakunnu Palace belonging to Dr. Raman Thampi was taken on a monthly rent of Rs.70/- for a period of six months.

Having reached Karachi by plane Mar Ivanios and Fr. Mattom left for Bombay by ship. They were accorded a warm welcome by the Archbishop of Bombay Dr. Delima. At Madras they visited the Archbishop of Madras and the Bishop of Mylapore. Proceeded to Bangalore to visit the Apostolic Delegate before leaving for Trivandrum by train.

Signalling the successful and an eventful foreign tour Thirumeni reached Trivandrum Central Station at 10.00 pm on October 30, 1932. A mammoth crowd that had gathered there to receive him made the whole station premises bright with lighted candles. The temporary power failure had been a blessing in disguise.

Taking part in this momentous welcome was Vallathol Narayana Menon who had responded to the personal invitation from Pulikottil Ramban. As soon as the train reached the Station lights came back. Joyful masses feasted their eyes on Thirumeni. Mahakavi Vallathol welcomed him with a couplet which ran like this:

O, golden star that to soothe darkling did appear
Shine thou in glory bright and brighter still we pray

Time did fulfil this benediction. Darkness of unease faded out of the Church firmament. The star of love rose high heralding unity and progress. Dawn of a new age!

HIERARCHY ESTABLISHED

Permission for the establishment of a Trivandrum Archdiocese under Malankara Hierarchy caused heartburn to the Latin Catholics. Even Bishop Benziger took it a personal affront. He had been ruling over the Kollam Diocese since 1902. And he had often tried to bifurcate the diocese which extended upto Cape Comorin with an ecclesiastical seat established with Trivandrum for its headquarters. He was convinced that this would have been a shot in the arm for the spiritual upliftment of the densely populated coastal villages. To have granted permission to Ivanios Thirumeni, whose hand he had helped strengthen, who had no claim over a single church, nay a single member, or paltry cent of land, to establish a Hierarchy with an archdiocese to boot, was painful enough to Benziger Thirumeni.

It was divine design, clearly, to help develop a mighty movement, out of nothing. And the chosen leader was Mar Ivanios. What blessing it was to have Trivandrum for a centre to organise his development activities! It was like the one who got the five talents by diligence and expertise making another five. God planted just a vine, but Mar Ivanios tended it well enough to make an orchard of it.

The Apostolic Delegate suggested March 12, 1933 for the inauguration of the Trivandrum Archdiocese and Benziger Thirumeni was to inaugurate it. The great anchorite was then enjoying his retired life after leaving diocesan administration in the Carmelite monastery in Trivandrum. It was only proper that he was chosen to inaugurate the Archdiocese because it was he who gave the lead in accepting Mar Ivanios

and his followers into the Catholic Church. It must also have helped clear the rancour that troubled him of late.

A grave problem was troubling Mar Ivanios and followers as the day of inauguration was drawing closer. The ordination of the Archbishop had to be solemnised in a cathedral. But the Malankara Hierarchy had not even a church in their charge! At that juncture they could do nothing but pray.

The tearful prayer was answered. A cinema theatre viz. Pompidore, in town at Palayam was up for sale. It was bought right away. But governmental sanction was required for converting it into a church. Rules specified that a decision had to be taken within ninety days of application. It was granted on the 88th day! And on the night before the scheduled inauguration the church had come into being, thanks to hectic diligent work of a huge band of loyal workers.

That building of St. Mary's Church at Palayam should have been preserved as a historical monument.

Inauguration of the Archdiocese over, Mar Ivanios set his mind on transporting the Bethany ashram and the convent to Trivandrum. Thirumeni bought a 12 acre plot in Nalanchira, a scenic locale in the outskirts of the city. There, accommodation for the ashramites was arranged. The hermits left Vennikulam for Trivandrum. They took care to see that the noble ideals of its founder were maintained, themselves maintaining the rigours and training the fresh entrants.

Another three years had to elapse before a set up got ready in Trivandrum for the Sisterhood. An eight acre plot in Nalanchira itself was acquired for the purpose in 1936. A building was put up and the sisters were brought from Thirumoolapuram to this new campus. Nalanchira was being converted into a haven of spirituality. For the question why Nalanchira was selected, Thirumeni's reply was interesting: "Let them, who come from the North, rest a while here in this village atmosphere before they enter the capital". Bethany, it should be remembered, was and is the resting place for the pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem.

Along with the Archdiocese of Trivandrum, Thiruvalla was made a Diocese. Mar Theophilus was installed Bishop. Owing to the indepen-

dent identity of Trivandrum as an Archdiocese, Mar Ivanios could not give enough attention to Thiruvalla as it had happened in the infancy of the Reunion Movement. He had to start from scratch, even finding a 'place to lay his head'. Situation in Thiruvalla was by far more stable. Mar Ivanios was a 'lone ranger', as it were, facing trials and hardships all by himself. Unfortunately Theophilus Thirumeni was taken seriously ill, rendering him incapable of diocesan administration. Owing to the alertness of Fr. Geevarghese, Vicar General, major crises were averted.

Sisters Saina, Huba, Danaha, Sulga, Maxa, Tibus, Basim, Zaibar, Hymenus and Thrysus were the members of the Sisterhood of Bethany who were reunited with the Church by Mar Ivanios on September 22, 1930. They along with fresh entrants chose to stay under the authority of Mar Ivanios, even after bifurcation of the diocese. But they continued to stay in the Thirumoolapuram convent and in the building attached to Nangiarkulangara Balikamatom school. Financial constraints made life really difficult for them. As soon as the convent was made ready at Nalanchira, the inmates were transferred to Trivandrum.

This inevitably led to some misunderstanding, for the services of sisters were essential in Thiruvalla. And soon it was decided to start a separate Order of Sisters under the Diocese. Services of a few sisters were requisitioned. Sister Huba offered to lend herself for that. Along with her Sr. Tybus and Sr. Brooksa went back to Thirumoolapuram. After a while when Sr. Brooksa returned to Trivandrum Sr. Thrysus replaced her at Thirumoolapuram. Bethany Order of Sisters thereafter developed as independent entities in Trivandrum and Thiruvalla. This arrangement continued till August 21, 1956 when they were raised to Pontifical status, directly under the Pope.

Mar Ivanios was equally keen in taking necessary steps to maintain the Bethany Order of Priests and Sisters as well as setting up Seminaries for the training of Priests. Priests were allowed to get married and lead a family life in the Syrian Church. Even though no significant change was effected in the rites by and large celibacy was insisted upon for priesthood. Though there was no dearth of Major Seminaries in and out of Kerala, Minor Seminaries were essential to train theological students. With this end in view Infant Jesus Minor Seminary in Thiruvalla and St. Aloysius Minor Seminary in Pattom were established in 1931 and 1934

respectively. Bishop Kalassery had given away the land which was bought at the instance of Fr. Dominic Thottassery, Mission Director of Changanacherry Diocese. It was there that Infant Jesus Minor Seminary was established. Fr. Jacob Vellaringatt was appointed Rector. Fr. Mathew Pothanamoozhy served as Rector of St. Aloysius Minor Seminary.

Initially only very few young men from Malankara had volunteered to take up theological training. But the void was more than filled by a number of people from Changanacherry and Ernakulam Dioceses. A number of eminent priests from Syrian Catholic Church lent yeoman service to the Reunion Movement in the form of Rector, Vicars General and Chancellors in Trivandrum and Thiruvalla Dioceses. The dedicated service which they rendered in nurturing the baby of the Reunion Movement in its neonatal problems has to be recorded in tender words of fragrant gratefulness.

It took four or five years for the Malankara Catholic Hierarchy to plant itself firmly after a spate of trials and tribulations. Thirty two prominent priests in Trivandrum diocese and twenty two in Thiruvalla reunited themselves with the new faith from the Jacobite Church in the initial four years. A number of churches and mission centres came up in different parts of Travancore. That numbered above 160. More than 20,000 believers followed Mar Ivanios. V. A. Varghese a relation and faithful of Wattasseril Thirumeni, Thirumeni's secretary K. V. Chacko, District Judge of Travancore, A. Philipose Maret and others deserve special mention among them.

Fr. Joseph Kuzhinjalil of Changanacherry Diocese gave commendable lead to the missionary services in South Travancore. Under his dynamic leadership a sisterhood named Daughters of Mary was established at Marthandam. Mother Mary was the co-founder of the Order. The Order was set up drawing on the young women from the Syrian Catholic Church who volunteered to serve Malankara Church. They carried forward the zealous efforts initiated by Mar Ivanios towards Church unity and emancipation of the underprivileged with education for a tool. Reunion lustre was spreading beyond the bounds of Malankara.

Mar Ivanios' vision was not confined to the routine steps of establishing churches, organising worship and enlivening the spiritual atmo-

sphere. Spirituality was his prime plank. He aimed at ascetic perfection, without forgetting social obligation. Fighting ignorance by establishing educational institutions was his life's mission. He spread enlightenment by starting schools and colleges, as many as the churches. The coping stone of his dream and ambition is found in Mar Ivanios College on the Bethany Hills.

It is not easy to record the history of Mar Ivanios College. It is a unique chapter in history. It is not just an edifice built of wood and stone, nor a factory offering job opportunities for many, nor even the haven of young minds seeking self-promotion basking in past glory. It is a dream fulfilled. Dream of a noble soul. If a Hierarchy materialised out of nothing, the birth of a seat of higher learning was no less magical.

"Who will come and study here?" many wondered. The place was so forlorn, almost, godforsaken. Man and nature not far from wild.

It indeed had a baptism of fire. Right from acquiring land for the institution problems started cropping up. Mainly opposition from powers that be. Incredible was the intensity of trial undergone. Young generations should not remain oblivious of the supreme imagination of Thirumeni backed by relentless perseverance and ruthless dynamism. Harder the struggle, sweeter the fruit of success. An epic struggle and a crowning glory.

STORY OF BATTLES FOUGHT

Near explosive was the period in Travancore's political history when Mar Ivanios took over as Head of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum and Malankara Hierarchy. He stayed in a rented building in Vellayambalam for about six months. Search for an ideal site to put up the headquarters continued. Killeleth Chacko, Manager was in charge of procuring the necessary land and putting up the buildings. And what dedication he evinced in fulfilling his duties!

Malancharuvil Mathai Sir was another who was attracted by the personality and vision of Ivanios Thirumeni. He left his teaching career and followed Thirumeni committing himself totally for the cause of the Reunion Movement. He was a teacher in Vilayadissery School in Ullannoor. He led the dalits in the neighbourhood to the world of letters, taking them through the early paces of letters and numbers in a shack built in his backyard. He used the magic lantern to project the story of Jesus through stills and led many to the Master. This paved the way for most of them to embrace the Catholic faith through Reunion.

Impressed by his efficiency, tact and dedication, Ivanios Thirumeni put him in charge of all land deals and construction work. He was given the power of attorney. It was then that they heard that a fairly extensive plot belonging to a widow was available on lease at Saravanakunnu, Pattom. It was on the MC Road, an elevated site, derelict with trees and plants growing wild, thick and fast. Tactful handling by Mathai sir won the land for the Movement. The whole area was cleared and temporary sheds were put up. Thirumeni and his aides moved in. The first Christian Church Head to stay in Trivandrum!

This was the time when the sharp, shrewd and sagacious administrator, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer came to Trivandrum. The one who turned the history of Travancore topsy-turvy. It must be remembered that the political storms of succeeding years have eclipsed to a large extent the administrative prowess of C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. It was his own making. His relentless lust for power had been his undoing. It was as the Adviser to the Sree Chithra Thirunal Maharajah that C. P. came to Kerala in 1934. Mar Ivanios went and paid his respects to him. A return visit was in order, but it did not take place. Naturally this disturbed Mar Ivanios who decided to give him a few lessons in courtesy.

Sir Austin, Dewan of Travancore was leaving for England on retirement. Mar Ivanios wanted to arrange a suitable send off to his best friend. Invitations were sent to all high-placed officials and prominent citizens; but not to Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer. An invitation sent through a special messenger on the same afternoon was not certainly meant to honour him. It also contained a note, adding insult to injury. "The invitations were sent to addresses whose names figured in the Visitors' Diary. Unfortunately Sir CP's address was not found there".

An unsigned reply came from Sir CP's end which carried no name either: "The letter reached Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer at 3.10 pm. Therefore he won't be able to attend the function. Moreover, he was to preside over a meeting at Arts College, Trivandrum at the same time."

Round one of a battle of attrition.

A number of restrictions were in force at that time on establishing churches and putting up cemeteries. And Mar Ivanios did make a mention of it in his address at the farewell meeting:

This was a period when concerted efforts were being orchestrated in different parts of the world to scuttle rule of law and snuff out religious belief.

Fear of God, reverence for the King and respect for the law of the land are factors that should be woven together. Therefore, it is the duty of the Government to ensure all freedom and encouragement to religious practices in the land. Such steps will only strengthen the social stability of a nation which in turn will make the polity stronger and more stable.

Therefore restrictions like the ones that still exist, some of which are carried over from the decadent past, on establishing places of worship for the living and cemeteries for the dead should find no place in the administrative machinery of an enlightened and progressive province like Travancore.¹

This provocative address applied salt to the wound already inflicted by the late invitation. Sir CP's wrath was kindled. He did not wait to initiate retaliatory steps against Mar Ivanios. To evict him and his followers from Saravanakunnu and drive them out of Trivandrum was his design. Soon he got in touch with the widow who owned the land and had her issue notice of dissolution of lease.

Knowing full well that it would be futile to fight a legal battle, Thirumeni arranged to leave the plot of land without offering any objection. Hearing that a ten acre plot was up for sale at Kattachakonam with a few buildings in it, a deal was immediately struck. They moved out of Saravanakunnu and occupied the newly acquired site. It is sheer divine design that the same Saravanakunnu became archdiocese property later were stands Archbishop's House.

To see Mar Ivanios unrelenting made CP furious. He initiated steps to acquire the Archdiocesan property at Kattachakonam in the name of some public facility proposed to be built there. He put pressure through revenue officials and the police. Thirumeni wouldn't budge. Revenue officials were asked to go ahead with the procedures with the police to back up. This was least expected. He was in his prayer chamber when he heard of the arrival of the posse of police and officials. He closed the prayer book and with a cane that he usually carried with him stepped out and ordered the armed police: "All of you will please go out". They tried to argue. To no avail. Came the shout: "Get out!" The power of the command was irresistible. The revenue officials and the backup slunk away.

Not to be outdone CP pressed on with acquisition procedure. Mar Ivanios had a brainwave. He informed Sir CP via a messenger that it needed the Pope's consent to transfer the land for Government's use because the land was bought with the money made available by the Pope.

1. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi; Archbishop Mar Ivanios, Vol. II p. 153

The underlying danger was not missed by the shrewd CP. Even though it was a ruse, to ignore it would lead to serious repercussions, he knew. And he also knew that Mar Ivanios was capable of creating problems, if nettled. So he decided to lie low for the time being.

But the flames of vengeance flared out in different ways in different places. Steps had already been afoot to acquire land under Trivandrum and Thiruvalla Dioceses to establish churches and put up cemeteries. In most prominent centres plots had already been bought. But the Government tightened the noose of sanction. This repressive step affected the growth of the Movement not a bit. Sir CP seemed to find a sadistic pleasure in putting pressure on the believers. Under his direction cases were filed on charges of organising worship or attempting to bury the dead. Many priests and lay leaders were hauled to the court.

Mar Ivanios sent a pastoral letter to all his parishes in the wake of this:

Government permission is required only for common worship. Three fold Qurbana, ordination and baptism are the only common worship rites. Holy Qurbana was not one. So attending it was not unlawful and the Government had no right to check it or disrupt it. Members of most other religions bury their dead in their own compound. Governmental permission is not required for it. So we reserve the right to decide where to bury our dead.

This evidently had no impact on the agencies enforcing law who went ahead with oppressive measures at the behest of Sir CP. Meanwhile a question was raised in the House of Lords on this. It sought for details of religious oppression in Travancore which was one of the provinces of Indian Union. Lord Fitzalen a noted parliamentarian and a friend of Mar Ivanios who had presided over a felicitation meeting in London during Thirumeni's tour of the West was behind this. "That the Government was not aware of any such development and that details would be tabled after an immediate and thorough enquiry" was the reply that Lord Fitzalen received.

The question and answer in the House of Lords shook Travancore. Sir CP was as agitated as he was angry since he knew the possible ramifications, Travancore being part of the Indian union. A similar question

raised in the House of Commons by Lordess Atwill also caught the attention of public media.

It was at this time that Abstention (Nivartana) Movement started in Travancore. It saw Christians, Muslims and Ezhavas joining hands against the barbaric administration of Sir C P which discriminated against these communities in the matter of appointment to Government service. Alongside a news appeared in 'Samadarsini', a daily that was published from Trivandrum.

"A memorandum from an Archbishop here to the Viceroy alleging that the Travancore Government is funding Hindu Mission to convert Christians into Hinduism has been sent by the Government of India to the political agent here for investigation. The political agent will shortly be taking the statement of Bishops and prominent Christians on this. Government is preparing a memorandum to be submitted to the Government of India on this issue.²

This news created a divide on the media front. *Newspaper Service*, *Malayala Rajyam* and *Malayali* put Mar Ivanios on the dock. The warning of 'Service' went like this:

It is the duty of the Government to bring to book, the Archbishop who is trying to malign the name of the Maharajah and run down the Government by spreading canards abroad. It is painful to hear that such disloyal people are there among the subjects. The land that put Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuran, a Kshatriya and a close relation of the Maharajah behind the bars should not allow an Archbishop, who has brought disgrace on the king and the land by indulging in calumny to go scot-free for another moment. He should be punished suitably. The Government should not be indifferent on any account. It is high time such insidious groups, which are already going out of control creating dissension and disunity among the subjects, are put down with a firm hand. We

2. Samadarsini: Meenam 20, 1110 (Malayalam Era)

strongly urge the Hindu community including the Brahmins to muster their whole strength to put down such anti-Hindu activities which might disrupt peace and order in the country.³

CP and his henchmen calculated that cashing in on this wave of rage against the Archbishop he could be incarcerated. He even encouraged newspapers to inject communal venom against the Archbishop by means of articles insidious and inflammable in tone and in content. In this context the editorial published by Malayala Manorama deserves attention.

History has proved that Christians in Travancore are every bit as patriotic and loyal as any other community. They have been recipients of royal largesse like any other community among the subjects. They are and should be equally open to all communities. Royalty here as anywhere else, is a noble power that works fairly and equitably above all other considerations. Christians in Travancore acknowledge with pride and gratefulness that it was with the generous royal support that they had been able to take forward their educational promotion so effectively. It is only the logic that imputes disloyalty when discrepancies and discriminations are pointed out to the Government in power, that defies reason. That such a stand is unprecedented in Travancore history needs no reiteration. That Christians in Travancore have often been at the receiving end of cruel discrimination is a fact too well known to be forgotten easily. The concerted action, initiated by three major communities in Travancore itself bears testimony to this unfortunate state of affairs. A number of examples, for instance, can be cited to bring out the difficulties faced by Christians in Travancore especially in regard to establishing of churches. In this background, if someone tries to bring to the notice of the authorities, the social ills they are subjected to, it need not be construed as an expression of disloyalty. Statesmanship lies in finding out the causes of discontent of some section of the subjects.⁴

3. Service: Meenam 30,1110

4. Malayala Manorama April 9, 1935

But such a balanced approach did not cut any ice with the prejudiced media, more than willing to toe the CP line. They continued such slanderous reporting for some more time till Mar Ivanios reacted. He made it clear that no representation was ever sent to the Viceroy maligning either the Maharajah or the Dewan. In the same breath he expressed chagrin at the rejection of 26 of his representations to authority seeking permission to establish churches, quite a lawful right: It was only natural that one found it discriminatory.

I met Mr. Kunjan Pillai, Chief Secretary to Government of Travancore in person and showed him the list of all applications rejected without sufficient reason. Further I met the Dewan also in person and explained to him the discrimination which the Christians suffered in regard to their demand for a place of worship. This was applicable not only to the members of the Archdiocese, but to Christians all over Travancore. I also implored the Dewan to peruse the representation and repeal the order seeking prosecution of myself and my Suffragan Mar Theophilus. The list included two other priests also. Failing to find any response from either the Chief Secretary or the Dewan I made bold to remind the Dewan about it.⁵

Mar Ivanios exposed the malafides behind the allegation against him. He had only sought redressal of the grievances suffered by his community. He informed the newly appointed Political Agent Col. Garsten about the needless controversies he was dragged into when he had not named either the Maharajah or the Dewan in his representation.

Either because he found Mar Ivanios too hot to handle or because he was unsure about the likely fallout of the developing communal tension, Sir CP started winding down his aggressive mode.

5. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios. Vol. II P.172

"Why spoil your peace of mind following a confrontational course with the scheming Dewan who was enjoying all the prerogatives under royalty?" His well wishers queried. It was not difficult for the authorities to corner him in his capacity of head of a minority community. Some well-meaning quarters even tried to locate some area of friendship to defuse the tension. Most of the Church Heads of Travancore and Cochin even advised him on these lines.

Mar Ivanios was simply not willing to compromise on self-respect. He was prepared to react favourably in case the authorities were willing to extend goodwill. Some influential Christian leaders in Trivandrum made some earnest efforts to create such an atmosphere. They tried to ameliorate the situation by organising a felicitation meeting under the chairmanship of Mar Ivanios on Sir CP's turning sixty. Such felicitation meetings were being held in different parts of Travancore.

Yielding to the pressure of his well-wishers, Mar Ivanios condescended to play such a role. On November 15, 1939 a gala meeting was organised on the premises of the Archbishop's House and a Scroll of Best Wishes was presented. Bishops of Ernakulam and Changanacherry, Administrator of Thiruvalla Diocese Mar Severios, Vicar Generals, Heads of Ashrams and Mutts, High Court Judges and prominent citizens from different walks of life took part in the superbly organised meeting. Mar Ivanios had succeeded in getting a High School sanctioned at Pattom in the name of the Sachivothama Shashtyabdapoorthy celebration. Kerala Varma Valia Koil Thampuram laid the foundation stone. Classes from

preparatory to sixth form were organised. That was the only school with seven standards to operate on the day of inception. It was the same school that was rechristened St. Mary's School on Sir CP relinquishing the office of Dewan and leaving Travancore.

It must be admitted that the Birthday Celebration did what it was -expected to do relieve tension, consequent upon the Dewan relenting on his mood of vengeance. In his reply to the felicitation Sir CP specially extolled the Pope and the Catholic Church. That the Vatican radio broadcast the speech made the Dewan especially pleased. But this cordiality did not last long. Sir CP prepared a blueprint that sought to bring the whole of primary education sector under the total control of the Government. Under the pretext of offering free and compulsory education to all boys and girls he was planning to nationalise all private sector schools. Suitable legislation to this effect was adopted by both the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha and the Sree Chithra State Council.

But the Christian community in Travancore was not prepared to surrender their schools. They opposed this legislation tooth and nail and organised defence committees for the different schools. The Heads of the Catholic Church in India met under the chairmanship of the Apostolic Delegate and passed a resolution against Sir CP's nationalisation move. Mar Ivanios was to present the memorandam to the Maharajah. In accordance with that decision a letter was drafted and submitted to the Maharajah on October 26, 1944. Totally ignoring this representation CP inaugurated New Education Policy on June 15, 1945. LMS and Salvation Army Section of the Church lent CP their support.

In his Inauguration address he implied that the Catholic Bishops were arrayed against him.

The public has asked me permission to present a Memorial before His Highness. Bishops have already made their representation. Such deputation, let me tell you, won't be accepted by His Highness. I appeal to my Catholic friends to approach the Government following accepted procedures. If the LMS Management can accept a few conditions on the running of Primary Schools why can't the Catholics do it after consultation among themselves. Let them not think that they can pressurise the Government to

change its policies. They will only gain more by following proper procedures. Let them bring forward their grievances the proper way. Or else it won't be heeded to. They seem to oppose the Government overtly and covertly. I hope they will realise that their efforts to replace the Dewan by levelling charges against him is just whistling for the wind. I once again appeal to my Catholic friends to follow accepted legal procedures to approach the Government.

All these demonstrations are aimed at driving the Dewan out. Don't be under any illusions. The Catholics claim that the responsibility of their children's education is all theirs. They seem to claim it as a right. Catholics all over the world agitate for this. Every community has a right to establish schools. But the Government cannot abdicate its duty in ensuring education for all the children in the state. Then the question arises whether the Government has to meet the expenses of running these institutions. If their demands are to be considered then they should show willingness to compromise.¹

Sir CP was preparing to face the storm brewing against him. His effort was to isolate the Christians against other communities and even to disunite them with a well-orchestrated propaganda that their allegations were false and personal. To an extent he was successful in his attempt.

Sensing the hidden dangers in CP's move, Bishop Mar James Kalassery took the battle to the enemy camp. With a strong worded pastoral letter exhorting believers to be prepared for any sacrifice for the sake of faith and criticising the move to nationalise primary schools he whipped up passions against the Dewan. The Dewan promptly asked Bishop Kalassery to withdraw the letter. He coolly ignored the warning.

Sir CP took steps to restrain the Bishop who openly defied his orders and even tried to get him arrested. It appeared that the police might break into the Bishop's palace at Changanacherry any moment. Thousands of believers thronged the streets in front and the Palace Compound. 'Over our dead bodies' only they would step in to arrest the Bishop! Tension mounted.

1. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios Vol. II pp. 203-204

Mar Ivanios visited Sir CP in the meanwhile and requested him to pacify the situation with a spirit of accommodation. Pastoral letters are sent from time to time by presiding Bishops to enlighten his congregation on different issues. It forms part of their mission. No Government has ever taken the cudgel against Bishops on the score. In the enlightened Syrian Christian community which occupies prime position in education and communal amity, attempting to arrest a Metropolitan would attract grave consequences, Thirumeni apprised the Dewan. It might even lead to strong opposition among Christians all over the world. He requested the Dewan to exercise more self-control to avoid such far-reaching consequences.

His meeting had the desired effect. Steps against Mar Kalassery were stalled. It was a clear victory for the diplomacy of Mar Ivanios. It was the same diplomatic skill which helped the establishment of Mar Ivanios College against mounting opposition.

He continued to set up ashrams for men and Mutts for women since his ultimate vision was the establishment of a Sanyasin Order on the pattern of Indian spiritual tradition. A refined culture that issues out of quality higher education was another passion. His unfulfilled dream of raising MD Seminary High School to the status of a College was getting close to realisation in Trivandrum. His eyes fell on a 200-odd acre undulating plain with seven hills reminding one of the city of Rome. It belonged to Devakotta Chettiar. It wore the look of a forest. The land was bought at the cost of Rs.500/- per acre. He dreamed of an institution of higher learning sprouting there.

Days of trials were not over. The land was bought and application for a college filed. But the visit of a few members of the Royal family to Nalanchira gave rise to some suspicion. Royalty was planning to establish a Children's Hospital to perpetuate the memory of Prince Avittom Thirunal who had died in infancy. Somebody had pointed out Nalanchira for an ideal site. Two birds at one shot! Dewan was mighty pleased. Sensing a move to acquire the land for Government use Mar Ivanios put up a few sheds over night and himself moved out to stay there. The board that hung in front of Archbishop's House at Pattom found its new site there. Then he wrote to Sir CP:

Archbishop's House
Trivandrum
May 21, 1945

Dear Sachivothama,

I have already informed you of my anxiety regarding the land I bought of Devacotta Chettiar. On the specific understanding given by you that the Government was not interested in acquiring the land and that I may proceed with legal formalities on the deal, I bought the land on full payment and have been staying there. I have also informed you that I was moving out of the Pattom campus for want of room, since the growth of the two schools, English and Malayalam medium, required all the available space and more. The land at Nalanchira was bought for the purpose of building the Archbishop's House and for a College for which application has already been submitted. I am sure you are aware of this development. Now that I have proceeded thus far, I am surprised to see that the Government is surveying the area and planning some construction there. It was on your assurance that I went ahead and got the Pope's permission, bought the land and took possession of it. It would be a great pity if the land is taken off me at this stage. I write this to inform you. It is in the light of a news that a Children's Hospital is proposed to be built there to perpetuate the memory of Prince Avittom Thirunal, that I am submitting this for your consideration.

Yours faithfully
(Sd)
Mar Ivanios

Still not feeling secure the far-sighted Mar Ivanios took upon himself the responsibility of finding an alternate site for the hospital because he knew nothing else would dissuade the Dewan who was the moving spirit behind the royal family in this venture. That was how Mar Ivanios pointed out the 100 acre plot where the present Medical College complex is situated. Convinced that it was a better site the concerned parties returned the land to Mar Ivanios.

By and by Mar Ivanios College was established there.

The lovehate relationship between Mar Ivanios and Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer occupies a prominent phase in the history of Travancore. A whole decade they spent in Trivandrum sometimes at loggerheads, sometimes on cordial terms. Astute administrator that Sir CP had been, his period recorded significant development in the educational sphere in Travancore. None too small was the boon that it turned out to be for the Archdiocese of Trivandrum.

It is sad to remember that the spirit of vengeance and power craze all but eclipsed his great administrative qualities. It was against this that the rage of the public was kindled and, the State Congress Movement for responsible government took shape. Striking a lonely furrow, though, Mar Ivanios' role in curbing this deleterious trend was significant. No less vital was the contribution of his shrewd mind in countering the ploy of setting up the major communities against the minorities.

Probably it may not be much of an irony that while the one name which the all-powerful Dewan wanted to snuff out- still echoes redolently in Trivandrum while his own remains shrouded in unholy mystery.

WINSOME
TENDERNESS

Building up a mighty edifice out of the void was a historical mission that Mar Ivanios took upon himself. After a few years of excruciating hard work he laid the foundation of the Trivandrum Archdiocese. Quite a bit of land and quite a few institutions cropped up in Trivandrum: Cathedral in Palayam, Archbishop's House and High School in Kattachakonam, an up-coming college in Nalanchira, Bethany Ashram and Convent. Reunion Movement grew by leaps and bounds outstripping time. Schools, convents and churches sprouted up at major centres of the Archdiocese.

Circumstances were far from favourable. Crisis after crisis. Threats from the royal seat of power and insults from Mother Church were taken in his stride. Timely sustenance from the Archdioceses of Ernakulam and Changanacherry and the Carmelite order proved a source of comfort. Many an eminent priest proved helpful. Fr. C. K. Mattom rendered yeoman service in the capacity of Secretary to the Archbishop. Among the others who contributed towards the building up of the Archdiocese Fr. Mathew Pothanamoozhy, Fr. Francis Salas CMI and Fr. N. A. Thomas Nangacheetil rank high. The cooperation of the Franciscan order was equally precious.

While Trivandrum Archdiocese was feeling its way confidently into the dawn, its twin Thiruvalla was still groping in the dark. Mar Theophilus who was enjoying indifferent health could not give sufficient attention towards the development of the diocese. Mar Ivanios was too engrossed with his own work to be of any help. It meant that one of the wings of the Reunion Movement lay limp. But a welcome way out

was opened when Ouseph Mar Severios, Metropolitan of Niranom of the Jacobite Syrian Church reunited with the Catholic Church.

Mar Serverios, as Ouseph Semmassan, was a dear student of Fr. P. T. Geevarghese at MD Seminary and it was he who opened the gates of higher education for the Deacon at Serampore. And it was during the tension filled days of Mar Ivanios' reunion with the Church that Ouseph Semmassan was ordained Achen and later elevated to the rank of Metropolitan. He used to shepherd the Niranom Diocese most effectively staying at Parumala Seminary. And under the influence of Wattasseril Thirumeni he used to address gatherings and conferences against Reunion. An avid reader of Church history and allied literature Severios Thirumeni found the material that he collected to counter the new Movement instead leading him apart towards a new light. He could no longer take cover under the position of power he was holding. It was only a matter of time before he chose to follow the new found light. Call of the conscience was answered.

He wrote a long letter to the Catholicose on October 31, 1937 explaining his well-considered decision. All the insignia of the Metropolitan were safely stowed away at Parumala Seminary. After arranging to hand the letter over to the Catholicose, he proceeded to Trivandrum. On November 23, 1937 he took his oath of faith before Mar Ivanios.

How relieved and encouraged Mar Ivanios felt at this is beyond words to explain. He felt genuinely strengthened. Mar Severios was immediately appointed Apostolic Administrator of the orphaned Thiruvalla Diocese. He was the motivating force of the Movement in North Travancore and later in Cochin. This also helped, in no mean way, to douse the fires of criticism rising in many centres.

It must be admitted that Mar Ivanios, almost fighting a lone battle was not able to make much headway in North Travancore. But one who has seen the severity of trials that he has undergone will never find fault with him. Mar Ivanios was a warrior in every sense of the word. He would fight to a finish when truth was on trial. His spiritual strength was phenomenal. The purity of spirit born out of prayer, meditation and sacrifice gave him an unmistakable aura of a sanyasin. It was only through him that the true genius of Indian Sanyas tradition rubbed off on Indian

Christianity. He was convinced of the role educated youth could play in social progress and transformation. His contribution towards women's emancipation through education was indeed unique. Many an institution remains living proof of his rare dynamism. Opposition died out, consumed by the fire of his blazing zeal.

His unique character and commanding stature drove a scare in many minds. Most of them bowed their heads in awesome respect. But those who had occasion to move with him closely were charmed by his simplicity, cheer and warmth of love.

The mien of a lion, intense eyes, stentorian voice, but a heart full of tenderness. Fatherly love overflowed. Blessed with prudent decision making and power of persuasion, he would still lend a patient ear to any opinion, be it for or against. He was remarkably tolerant. Service to Church, however small it might be, was prized by him. No distinction between clergy and laity, rich and poor, when it came to their contribution to the Church. One of the most illustrious souls of our era, a man of the ages, that was Ivanios Thirumeni.

– Fr. Philipose Medayil who worked like a shadow behind his every move records in his diary.

The reminiscences of Fr. Philip C. Pantholil who had worked long as Secretary to Thirumeni contain many interesting details. The winsome tenderness of the rough and gruff Thirumeni finds clear expression in many of his descriptions:

Thirumeni seemed to enjoy teaching Syriac. I joined Petty Seminary only two weeks after the session had begun. So he gave me special attention till I caught up with the rest of them. Reading, writing, grammar and translation were the components for Syriac study. The grammar text was prepared by Thirumeni. It was later published and prescribed as the text for college study. There was no fixed time for the lesson, sometimes during morning, sometimes in the evening, sometimes at night. 'Children!' At the call we would rush to him with books and pen or pencil. True 'gurukul' style. He would sit on the settee and we made ourselves comfort-

able on the mat. Being Prefect I had to see it by his side. It was an unmixed blessing at times. When some brother on a back row fails to answer, I get the spanking, accompanied by the query: "Why doesn't he answer?" But compensation would come in the form of sweets. There is no time limit. Either Thirumeni feels tired or we doze off. Sometimes some VIPs save the situation. Fired up, sometimes he changes subjects, sometimes delves into Church history or into personal experience. Once it was his first experience of offering Holy Qurbana on the plane. It was a KLM flight; from Karachi to Rome. Mind it was an old plane. Even when wine was poured into the 'casa' it started shaking. He was afraid whether it would spill. So most of the time holding the stem of the cup tight...

Normally Thirumeni would be with us for the 'Canona' worship. We took turns to assist him. He would correct slips as and when they are spotted. Anything improper would attract a hard gaze. Once in Adoor, Brother Geevarghese Panicker and myself were assisting Severios Thirumeni at a Grand Qurbana. Mar Ivanios Thirumeni was seated in the Holy of Holies. While repeating the creed when the Metropolitan came to wash his hand Brother Panicker by mistake poured out oil instead of water. We found our mistake only when the 'karmikan' started smiling. Ivanios Thirumeni gave a stare. Instantly the giggle stopped. Soon basin, soap and water were brought and things were set right.

Sometimes Thirumeni would join us in the evening for badminton on the Archbishop's House courtyard. Always lost in thought or engaged in discussion he was least bothered about food. Four hours sleep was a regimen carried on from the time he became deacon. Twenty working hours, mostly drafting letters or replying to the heavy mail. Nothing put off for another day.

A stroll along the backyard was his chief physical exercise often accompanied by some one who came calling. If he was close to him his hand would rest on his shoulders. The ongoing discussion will have yielded some positive conclusion in the meanwhile. Nero, his jet black labrador would always be piloting him along the

walk. He was so well trained that Thirumeni would make it do a few chores like fetching him his walking stick. He had a trainer's manual brought from America for this purpose. Nero used to be sent to the neighbouring post office- then Anchal office - to hand over and bring back mail in his specially made coat with a big safe pouch stitched into it. Often when we were being given Syriac lesson, Nero would be warmly cuddled on a nearby sofa. Once Severios Thirumeni who had come from Thiruvalla, spying the dog among the students asked: "Why, are you planning to ordain him too? "We, indeed had a hearty laugh.¹

Mar Ivanios had a very rare and significant role to play in the unfolding drama of the nascent Archdiocese. And how well he played, flawless, meticulous and complete in every respect! Without getting trammelled by past traditions, imbibing whatever was useful and acceptable with a clear vision of his present goal he directed his calculated steps along the unswerving course he had charted for himself.

1. Fr. Philip C. Pantholil : Mar Ivanios Ente Smaranayil pp. 47-50

Nalanchira Hills safely whisked away from the scheming hand of the Dewan, Mar Ivanios moved ahead with his carefully laid plans for the establishment of a college. His clear vision about the institution is reflected in the letter he sent to the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University:

Sir,

I have been deeply involved in educational activities for the last thirty seven years. About 3600 children, boys and girls, are pursuing their studies in 70 primary schools under my supervision. Five English High Schools, two Malayalam medium High Schools, six English and five Malayalam Middle Schools are being efficiently run under my management. I believe that my participation in the realms of Higher education is now overdue. For this I would very much desire to raise the High School in Pattom to the status of a first grade college. And I intend to run it on a slightly different line from the present-day colleges. I whole-heartedly subscribe to the view that University Education should be limited only to a deserving few who are selected on merit. At the same time some vocational training should be organised for the rest of them, lest they should fall off ill-equipped to face life. Most of the children who pass out of the schools in our state including the ones under my management belong to communities who are prepared to send them abroad for profitable employment. They should certainly be interested in furthering their education so that they are better off in life. I believe that I can offer them courses different from the conventional ones which our present-day colleges

usually offer. For instance, none of the colleges under the University offers a degree in Commerce. I would like to open up new path in offering such courses. Economics, History and Geography give a basis for the study of Commerce. A study of the Commerce curriculum in other Universities would reveal this. A study of the Geographical factors would normally lead to a study of Trade and Commerce. Most of the practical aspects of everyday life require a basic study of Economics. Study of History is a stepping stone to Sociology and and the rest of Humanities. Sociology, to me, would be a vital discipline especially in the present times when antisocial trends tend to creep into the intellectual and social spheres of life of the young generation. Study of Sociology would throw immense light on the structure, history and aims of human society.

This college would prove an unqualified boon to the youth, especially of my Archdiocese, if it would offer courses in Hebrew and Syriac with Scholastic Philosophy, Psychology and Eastern and Western Philosophy for other optionals. As far as I understand, a chair for Scholastic Philosophy is not there in any Indian University. Its significance to Politics and Ethics is beyond question. To start a course in that would give Travancore University a definite edge over any other Indian University. The college I propose to establish would offer courses in Economics, History, Commerce, Sociology, Cooperation, Syriac, Hebrew, Scholastic Philosophy, Eastern and Western Philosophy and Psychology. The regulations in force in Travancore University would be followed in toto, in respect of academic, instrumental and infrastructural norms. Limitations in terms of practical study will not be a constraint since the college focuses on study of Humanities.

An extensive location, breathtakingly beautiful and salubrious is already in my possession. Away from the din and bustle of the city, the place offers all the advantages a city might boast of. The college will provide sufficient residential facilities for the staff and students as well as all the avenues for co-curricular activities. I am happy to inform you that an earnest money of Rs. one lakh is already deposited in the bank.

In the light of this I would request you to grant permission to raise the High School in Pattom to the status of a first grade college.

Yours faithfully
(sd)

Mar Ivanios, Archbishop
Pattom, Trivandrum
February 22, 1945

This document proves the clear futuristic vision Thirumeni had on higher education even in the first half of the twentieth century. He was genuinely concerned about possible dropouts. He had envisaged avenues for vocational training for such people who could not cope with purely academic pursuits. The same intense ascetic fervour which characterized his spiritual vision he imparted to his social concerns too. An assimilation of astoundingly divergent concerns.

Even as thoughts of establishing a college were growing strong, he started picking up the right talents from his clergy who impressed him with capability and commitment commensurate with the demand of higher education. They were deputed for higher studies. Fr. Benedict OIC, a member of Bethany ashram who was sent to St. Joseph's College, Trichinopoly (Thiruchirapally) was one of them. He did his Honours in Economics there.

When affiliation for the college seemed fairly assured, he concentrated his attention on resource mobilisation. Residential facilities had to be provided for students who might come from the northern end of the diocese. To put up the hostels, college buildings and library required huge investments. A daunting challenge.

Providence appeared in the form of an invitation to attend the Divine Mercy Congress at Ottawa. Prospects of a lecture tour of the United States loomed bright and clear, with promising possibilities.

May 26, 1947. Thirumeni embarked on another foreign tour. Four days in Bombay. And off to the USA by TWA on 5th June. Reached New York at the end of a 50-hr flight covering 8240 miles. He was guest to Cardinal Spellman there. And he left for Ottawa, 800 miles away by train.

The Congress which started on June 9, lasted three days. Christians from all over the world had gathered there. Holy Qurbana was celebrated for 72 hrs without break. The rare spiritual experience that he assimilated there flowed out in the form of addresses of ethereal charm at many centres in Canada and the United States. He visited the UN General Assembly and Secretariat in New York. Fr. N. A. Thomas Nangachi-veettil records the experiences:

I too accompanied Thirumeni along with the representative of the Indian Delegation to the U. N. who took us there. As Thirumeni was entering the Assembly Mr. Grarico, Russian delegate, was pouring out his invective on Britain and America on the question of Czechoslovakia. All eyes turned to Thirumeni. At the end of the Assembly all the delegates were vying with one another to take his photograph. They requested a statement from him on his visit to the UN and the US.

Meanwhile a message from Mr. Noel Baker, Minister for Commonwealth Relations reached Thirumeni expressing his desire to meet Thirumeni. The meeting took place and photographs of it appeared on the next day's papers. Mr. Baker invited Thirumeni for a visit to England.

The photograph of Thirumeni appeared in 'The Daily News' (which has a readership of nearly two crores) with the caption 'The Most Photographed Person of the Year'. Well known periodicals like 'Life', 'Time' etc. carried news about his visit. It was common that people greeted him with respectful words : "Oh, we have read about you, seen your photograph in the papers". Some addressed him, "the greatest missionary of the 20th century" and "a very great man from India". "We never dreamt that we would ever meet the proponent of the Reunion Movement which thrilled the whole Catholic world in 1930;" said many.¹

Thirumeni also had occasion to visit President Truman and hold a discussion with him. Fr. Inchakalodi refers to one of the topics that came in for discussion at the meeting:

Thirumeni had engaged in a scholarly study on Numismatics a few years earlier, which helped him hold forth with President

1. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios Vol. II pp. 216-217

Truman and Asaf Ali who remained absorbed listeners. Let me just mention one of the points. Thirumeni could impress upon them with solid proof that trade relations had existed between the Travancore coast and the Mediterranean even in times of yore. The first ones to visit the Travancore ports were Phoenicians. Then the Jews, during the time of King Solomon. It is recorded: "He had naval centres in Tarsis and Heerath, where gold, silver, ivory, monkeys and peacocks were traded." Thirumeni contented that these merchandise could only have come from Travancore. Further, he contented that the gold used in Solomon's temple was procured from a place near Mavelikara and that 'Ophir' referred to in the Bible is 'Poovar' on the coast of South Travancore. It is said that Solomon's mariners had visited this place circa 1000 BC.

He enthused his hosts with stories concerning the pearls, ivory and silk which bedecked the holy of holies in the Temple of Jerusalem. It was indeed an absorbing session.²

Before departing he presented a rare memento to President Truman, an album containing 48 silver coins, one for each of his 48 states. Himself a numismatist Truman was mightily pleased at the present. It was an instant friendship struck between two great people who swore by informality.

The bitter winter in New Year took its heavy toll on Thirumeni's health. He was admitted to Providence Hospital. Two weeks of rest was ordered. His active mind wouldn't rest. Convalescing he started learning Hebrew, at the age of 66!

When the midnight star of Indian independence rose in the sky, Thirumeni was away in a far-off continent savouring the nostalgic moment. Immediately he sent a message to free India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He also found time to greet Mrs. Vijayalekshmi Pandit in person. And the day he left hospital the news broke his heart, that a fanatic assassin had pierced the innocent heart of Mahatma Gandhi! 'My God', he sat with both his hands clutching his bowed head. His thoughts

2. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios Vol. II pp. 218-219

flew to Sabarmati Ashram, one of the two ashrams that had kept his ashram dream always green [the other being Gurudev Tagore's Shanti Niketan]. How cordial was the reception he enjoyed of the two noble souls! The one who presented the National Anthem for the country didn't see the dawn of freedom in his country and the other couldn't enjoy the fresh breath of freedom for long.

Like a statue he sat in his hotel suite and wept. Fordham University people came to Thirumeni and invited him to make a Memorial Address. Mar Ivanios spoke.

Mahatma Gandhi was born of and nurtured by parents who were steeped in the culture and traditions of the ancient country. He lived and died a true Hindu. Unalloyed urge to follow the ultimate truth and a life dedicated to the rigours of discipline, as he himself once said, made him a Mahatma. Many were his experiences as a student in England. Equally inspiring were his efforts to unify the fighting factions in South Africa. He would never hold a brief, as an advocate, where truth or equity was compromised. It was the same weapon of nonviolence that he fought with whether it be against casteism or other social evils. These experiences gave him the strength and courage to be at the vanguard of the Independence Struggle. On the strength of love that truth and justice begat, on the same Christian fortitude, he based himself in infusing spiritual strength into the Indian people.

Christ said in his Sermon on the mount: "Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you love your enemy, Turn your left cheek also if he smites you on your right". Gandhiji showed great enthusiasm in reading the Bible regularly. As a result the teachings of Christ had a profound influence on him.

Unusual fortitude is required to love your enemy and desist from acts of vengeance. Gandhiji tried and succeeded not only in absorbing the essence of this teaching but also in practising it in the social and political realms of his country.

The truth of this great teaching of Christ had indeed made him free. He, therefore, had no difficulty in surrendering himself to the noble cause he had espoused. He followed this teaching every

inch of the way. Being a true believer he could not stand inequality. He believed in the basic oneness of all religious teachings. So he found pleasure in addressing thousands who thronged at his prayer meetings. They belonged to different faiths and belief systems. But the depth of understanding of the underlying truth was so convincing that his audience lapped up all that he offered laced with quotations from the different scriptures. This was his life's mission and he strove till his last breath to drive home this cardinal point that all Indians are one. Naturally the truth of Christ's teachings and his life inspired him no end in formulating and following high ideals in his life. Even during the last days of his he reiterated the worth of the life of sacrifice which Christianity espoused.³

It was with deep respect that Mar Ivanios spoke about Gandhiji and the cultural heritage he imbibed. He himself was another. Hence the identity of interests.

That the University of San Francisco awarded him an LL.D. during his visit to the States is worth mentioning. The Chancellor of the University introduced Mar Ivanios with the following words at the convocation:

"Celebrated Son of India, great descendant of the generation of Christians who takes lineage from St. Thomas the apostle of Christ, seeker after the visionary wisdom of a great country, avid scholar, the burning lamp of eastern culture, ideal seeker after the light of the world, pilgrim whose search took him from the Saffron hued temples on the banks of the sacred Ganges to the domes of Peter on the Tiber, capable college Professor who taught Economics and Syriac [the spoken language of Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ] at Serampore after taking a covetable MA from the University of Madras, founder of an ascetic order that is committed to following Christ, Head of the Malankara Rite that has approval of Pope Pius XI the Supreme Head that occupies the throne of Peter in Rome, apostle who has knit the East and the West with

3. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi : Archbishop Mar Ivanios Vol. II pp. 240-422

the chain of love, bosom friend of Rabindranath Tagore the poet of the sunny East, revered leader who serves God and man with a burning zeal and unwavering fortitude backed by nobility of character and insatiable thirst for scholarship born out of deep acquaintance both spiritual and material with pandits of the East and the West, heir to the sacred reputation of Robert d'nobali and Francis Xavier who find a noble place both in the history of India and in the Jesuit order, unqualified patriot, renowned scholar, Eastern visionary, Christian philosopher, Chief Priest and Metropolitan of Trivandrum, we are thrilled to welcome you to our midst."

The plaque of honour reveals how well-honoured Mar Ivanios was in international fora. He was honoured by all for his scholarship, gift of the gab, diplomacy and decorum. Even casual acquaintances felt the magnetism of his personality. That was how he happened to attend the Jubilee of the Melbourne Archdiocese, when he was all set to return to India at the end of the European tour. Archbishop Manix expressed sincere desire to have him as the guest of honour. Accepting his invitation he left for Melbourne in the glorious company of the celebrated writer Fulton J. Sheen and Cardinal Spellman.

He spent a month and a half touring Australia giving speeches. That indeed was a golden opportunity because the resource mobilisation for the new college turned out to be a great success. When he returned after the tour on June 8, 1948 even the girders for the new college building had been shipped from America. The enviable skill of Mar Ivanios to prise open any cornucopia yielding an unceasing store of love and charity made sure that the Malankara Hierarchy and Trivandrum Archdiocese had established themselves so quickly.

Because he was yet to regain his health in full he returned to India by ship. On his way he visited Candy Papal Seminary in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). And he reached Trivandrum by plane via Madras. It did not take long for the inauguration of the college. The construction of the main building and the hostels had been completed under the supervision of Fr. Seraphion. Thirumeni went round and saw everything with a heart overflowing with gratitude. Fr. Benedict was appointed Acting Principal.

Eminent and experienced teachers including the famous man of letters and progressive thinker M. P. Paul were appointed. On July 27, 1949 Mar Ivanios College was formally inaugurated.

To begin with, Intermediate and first year BA classes were started. In two years, students were presented for the University examination. As per the University stipulations, Fr. N. A. Thomas Nangachiveetil took over as Principal. Fr. Benedict continued as Vice- Principal.

Dreams were being fulfilled, one by one. All the Grace of the Almighty. Parched lands yield fruits, dry streams run silent and deep. The walk through the dimly lit valley was bracing; steady footed and clear minded.

Mission of life fulfilled; almost.

Thirumeni was quite fagged out when he returned from America. The investigations at Providence Hospital, New York did not throw up any alarming prognosis. He attributed his lassitude to general weakness owing to lack of rest. Sleep at least eight hours, eat at regular times, have some minor exercise....ran the instructions from the doctors.

But it was not rest, but a spell of challenges that waited for him back home. First it was the hectic inauguration of the college. He was used to overseeing even minor details. Felt cool when things went off well. But another disquieting development was brewing elsewhere. The democratic Government of the unified Travancore-Cochin was preparing a new educational policy. It was to ensure quality and fair remuneration for secondary teachers that Panampilly Govinda Menon, the Minister and educational expert charted this programme. The Secondary Schools Reforms Project insisted on Private School Managements to select teachers from the panel prepared by Public Service Commission. It was made mandatory to remit eighty percent of revenue from fees as Managements' share to the Government. Private Managements rose in revolt against these two provisions. Christian Managements were, as usual, in the forefront, and the leadership naturally fell on Mar Ivanios. His views were highly respected since he had already established himself as an educationist. He issued a statement questioning the bonafides of the move:

If the Honourable Minister were interested only in helping the teachers and ensuring decent and regular payment of their sala-

ries, the Government could rectify the grave irregularities in the proposed projects and help the private managements to defray the salary expenses for their employees. The scheme can be prepared afresh ensuring regular payment of teachers, at the same time respecting Managements' rights without sacrificing the democratic character of the project.

The right to appoint teachers and headmasters should continue to be an inalienable right of the Management. This is essential to maintain the integrity and ideals of the schools. We have spent a very huge amount in establishing secondary schools in the Archdiocese during the last few years. This is done without any profit motive whatsoever. We haven't collected any contributions from the public or any grant from the Government. The whole amount has been collected from the generous and munificent Catholics all over the world. And all the schools are owned by the Church. We do not intend to run the schools sacrificing the proprietorial rights of the Church or the high ideals of education we cherish.¹

As usual responses from the media differed violently in character. And a pastoral letter followed clarifying his stand. Some of the teachers in the Archdiocesan schools themselves supported the Government stand. But Mar Ivanios stood his ground. He even closed down three schools: English Middle School, Eerezha, Mavelikara; Middle School, Nemom; and English High School, Nellimood.

Even though Panampilly conceded some of the Management's demands in the end, the toll the struggle took on his health was rather heavy. No one took note of it in the absence of any apparent manifestations. He was growing increasingly tired. He spent a month in Devikulam recuperating. A slight swelling was noticed above the stomach. It kept growing. Even Dr. Kesavan Nair, Superintendent of the Medical College could not diagnose it properly.

It was decided to take him to Madras for proper diagnosis and advanced treatment. Fr. Francis Sales CMI, Administrator of the Archdiocese, Fr. Seraphion and Baby, a cousin of Thirumeni's accompanied

1. Fr. Thomas Inchakalodi: Archbishop Mar Ivanios: Vol. II pp. 258-259

him. Dr. Masilamony recommended instant surgery. It was done in Dr. Pandala's private clinic. Mar Severios joined him in Madras as the surgery was fixed for July 7, 1952.

The nodules on the liver could not be removed by surgery. The heat in Madras remained oppressive as ever. So Thirumeni was moved to St. Martha's, Bangalore for better rest. Nobody expected any change for the better even by the stay in Bangalore. To reach Trivandrum at the earliest was the immediate concern.

With the help of Fr. Sales and Fr. Seraphion, Thirumeni was brought to Trivandrum on August 10, 1952. Mar Severios could not join in the flight. "Kochu Thirumeni will come by car. Malankara has only two shepherds. In case something happens to the flight, people will snigger. Church would be in difficulty too". Thirumeni's brain retained its sharpness. The waiting ambulance took him to the Ashram in Nalanchira. He stayed there till September 14, under utmost medical care. A stream of eminent personalities visited him, expressing their concern and praying for his recovery. They included the Catholicose and Metropolitans of the Orthodox, Mar Thoma and Jacobite Churches. It must have been painful and heart-rending the meeting between the Catholicose and himself. A flood of memories must have swelled up.

It was decided to solemnise 'Kantheela', the rite performed prior to a church head's departure. It was solemnised by Mar Severios in the presence of Mar Augustine Kandathil of Ernakulam. In all alertness Thirumeni took part in the rite to the full.

He continued his stay in Nalanchira Ashram for two more weeks. Koshy Achen, another prominent ashramite was his chief aide. Sisters from Nalanchira promptly brought him what little food he required. Then on Thirumeni's own suggestion he was removed to the Archbishop's House where C. T. Kuruvila Achen gave him all care.

The 19th centenary of St. Thomas' entry into Kerala and the 4th centenary of Francis Xavier's demise were to be celebrated in Ernakulam in December 1952. It was announced that Cardinal Tiserang, Prefect, Eastern Congregation would take part in the celebrations. But an

unfortunate divide between the Latin and Syrian rites spoiled the party. A rapprochement came too late. Finally Cardinal Gilroy of Australia came as Papal representative. Being a close friend of Mar Ivanios he came to Trivandrum before going to Ernakulam, visited Thirumeni and attended a reception organised on the floor of the Cathedral at Pattom. Mon. Martin Lukas, newly appointed Papal Nuncio to India visited Thirumeni and stayed with him for a week. Before leaving he conveyed Pope's blessings which Thirumeni received with an aside "What a privilege!"

"Your Grace deserves it"; Inter Nuncio responded.

Fr. Mathew Paret was one of his trusted student-friends whom he took to Serampore for higher studies and in preparations for church service. The relationship had started in MD Seminary High School. Even the rift caused by Reunion did not sever the bond of love. When the Orthodox Synod chose him to be a High Priest, like his master, Mathew Achen also hesitated. Mar Ivanios who came to hear of it encouraged him to accept the offer. And the dear disciple took his Master's name when he accepted the office of Metropolitan of Kottayam Diocese. He was deeply cut up to hear of his mentor's ailment. He stayed with Thirumeni for a week. Solemnised divine services. The prayer for recovery stuck in the throat. As he could not complete it, it melted into a tender hug.

One more emotion-charged meeting. That was a master visiting his favourite disciple. Or, was it a dear son meeting his spiritual father? They had parted ways, sadly, after fighting many a battle of faith shoulder to shoulder. But the love and respect which were mutual continued unabated. K. C. Mammen Mappilai visited Thirumeni on appointment. It was evening. There were a few prominent people from Kottayam along with him. Later when they were about to leave Fr. Philip C. Pantholil handed over a slip to K. C. Mammen Mappilai. Thirumeni wanted to see him alone, in person.

Mammen Mappilai met Thirumeni after dinner. Thirumeni was on bed, not asleep yet. Mammen Mappilai went and knelt facing Thirumeni. The old shrivelled arms went up and around Mammen Mappilai's neck. Getting his face close to his he kissed him a number of times. "Forgive me if I have done anything amiss".

And embarrassed Mammen Mappilai checked him and said: "It must be me who is guilty. Thirumeni must forgive me".

Another emotional farewell was gone through. It was sundown. Thirumeni once in a while used to say that he wanted to be taken to Shankumughom beach. They would take him there in a car. By then the beach would be quiet, almost untenanted. He would relax in a canvas chair, eyes dimly fixed on the far horizon, all quiet.

Yes, the sea of his mind was also getting calm. Sometimes it was the vast courtyard of Mar Ivanios College that beckoned him. An inexorable sense of wish fulfilment. He had two more dreams, putting up churches for the reunited and the Cathedral. He put off the latter in preference to the former. The establishment of mission centres and churches yielded him indescribable satisfaction. And he was not too disappointed that the Cathedral was not completed.

"The bear wouldn't wait for the moon to rise... I want the vault to be finished". Thirumeni instructed. The construction of the tomb was hastened, below the Sacristy. He checked it and said: "No, no it must be under the main altar, below the 'madbahah'." When the construction of the vault was over, Thirumeni was taken there as he wanted to see it. There he prayed: "Oh, my little house of rest, let me come to you soon and sleep in peace, only to rise again to enjoy eternal pleasure."

Thirumeni wanted his successor to be ordained. Discussions and consultations were in progress. The name of Fr. Sales, the efficient administrator came up from many quarters. But doubts were raised whether the elevation of this Carmelite from Malabar Rite would serve to maintain the Syrian Christian traditions of his Hierarchy. At the crucial moment the beulah from Rome (Papal sanction) came through the Apostolic delegate nominating Fr. Benedict, a Bethany ashramite and Vice-Principal of Mar Ivanios College to be his Auxiliary Bishop.

Thirumeni's health condition was not stable enough to solemnise an ordination ceremony. It was thought that the function could be organised with Mar Severios serving as High Priest in charge. January 29, 1953 was chosen as the date for ordination. A two-tier pavilion came up on the floor of the Cathedral, still under construction. An ordination

ceremony lasting two hours and a half. Was it superhuman will power or pure Grace from God? Thirumeni got up on the day of ordination and saw through the whole sacred ceremony and Fr. Benedict was anointed Auxiliary Bishop assuming the name Benedict Mar Gregorios.

Mother Basim of the Bethany Convent requested Mar Ivanios:

"Teach us a new prayer to chant every day".

With eyes closed and lost in meditation Thirumeni reeled out:

Holy Mary, Virgin mother of God, we pray that you never stop pleading for us with your son, so that He shows kindness to us all the time. Amen.

All wishes fulfilled. His flock won't be scattered. They will be kept safe in their pen. They will be led to green pastures..."I have run my race. And waiting for the crown of life"....He closed his eyes and prayed: "Father, I haven't lost one of the sheep you gave me. Have not been slack in caring for the souls. Yet I have erred. My actions were just, yet they might have been painful for others. I regret about them. If I have pained or wronged anyone by word or deed let them forgive me. I have only hoped for the good. The most merciful Father will not forsake me". With tear-filled eyes he consoled those who stood by.

"Children, my time has come. Don't weep when I leave. Nor should your heart be disturbed. I will keep praying for you in Heaven."

It was time for final farewell. Rain drenched July. Thick dark clouds floated around, sometimes too thick. It kept off sunlight. July 14, feast of 'Karmala Matha'. The condition of Mar Ivanios had grown suddenly worse the previous night. Every one expected the worst. On the fifteenth, close to midnight his hoary head tilted a little to the left and lay still. 'Jesus, Mary, Joseph, be with this soul...' the chain of prayer ascended to Heaven. Sobs in between, pulling heart strings sore.

Church bells tolled. News spread. Head of the Malankara Syrian Catholic Church, Mar Ivanios had passed away. It was on the feast of Mary that the morning star rose. On the day of Karmala Matha it went back to Heaven. Virgin Mary, whom Thirumeni styled 'Second Heaven' chaperoned him back.

There were no traditions to guide the funeral ceremony. He was the first Head of the Malankara Catholic Church to pass away. Muted discussions followed. A final programme was charted out.

On conclusion of the farewell prayers according to the custom of the Eastern Churches the body was seated on a high-backed chair in full regalia and moved to St. Mary's Cathedral the same night. It was placed in the madbahah facing the congregation.

All the Church Heads and Metropolitans in and outside the state were immediately informed. It was decided to start the funeral service with Holy Qurbana at 8.am on July 17. Mar Mathew Kavukattu, Metropolitan of Changanacherry was to give the funeral oration. The cortege

was to be taken around the city from Palayam to Pattom. The second half of the service was to be solemnised at the pavilion put up on the floor of the new Cathedral.

All the newspapers carried extensive reports of the demise and the details of the funeral ceremony. It was a stream that flowed thick and fast from all over Travancore-Cochin. Cathedral premises overflowed with masses, mostly priests and nuns. Prominent citizens and Church Heads queued up to pay respects. Condolence messages poured from all over the world. The Pope, Inter Nuncio, Cardinal Valerian Gracias of Bombay and a good many others praised the spiritual grace of the noble soul and recorded their heartfelt condolences.

The city turned to be an ocean of humanity. Wails rising to a crescendo like the hum of the far receding waves. The ceremony started with the offering of Pontifical Qurbana by Bishop of Palai, Mar Sebastian Vayalil. Three-fold Qurbana followed, led by Mar Severios and assisted by Mar Gregorios and Msgr. Philipose Ramban Cheppad. Funeral oration by Mar Mathew Kavukattu followed.

Great souls live on in their actions, even after death. The many institutions stand mute testimony to his noble service. How can Thirumeni be forgotten when from the churches prayers of praise waft to the skies in interminable succession and when educated youth stream out of colleges, generation after generation? Will the members of the ashrams and convents, dedicated to a life of self-abnegation and service ever forget their spiritual father? Never! their life and services will ever be a paean of praise for the fame, fervour and finesse of the departed soul.

So this Great Shepherd has left us in peace and content; having finished his God-given assignment. He who won the love, respect and admiration of all of us has entered the blissful Heaven meant for the chosen. We will continue to pray for the peace of his soul.

Procession of state followed. The ceremony of leave taking, of the city which was his scene of action, of the Church where he offered divine oblation, of the people to whom he was the chosen Shepherd.

Chief Priest Chants:

"May the city and the people thereof remain in peace".

Tear drenched response from a thousand choked throats:

"Blessed Father, leave in peace".

The farewell words could not be more meaningful! The noble soul had poured itself out as a humble oblation. That would face the truth unflinchingly, unmindful of consequences. He marched on boldly ignoring the sneer, scorn and threats. His faith solid as a rock, faith in the crucified Master.

He bequeathed the divine virtue of loving man and winning God for the spirit of the times. He knew for certain that a branch had no existence of its own without the tree. He dreamt of unity of the church and oneness of humanity as an evergreen tree growing by the river. In a way the seed of ecumenism was sown in the field prepared for reunion.

Tens of thousands lined the street from Palayam to Pattom, his final resting place. An experience never seen before in Trivandrum. The cortege rolled on softly. Among them were Mar Joseph Attipetti, Archbishop of Varapuzha, Mar Severios, Metropolitan of Thiruvalla, Mar Gregorios, Auxiliary Bishop of Trivandrum and a host of distinguished priests. Thirumeni's car followed, but without its precious occupant. He had been called of the Master to receive the victor's palm.

The state police band struck the last post.

The solemn procession reached Pattom by 12 noon. It was not easy, controlling the milling crowd. The dead body was lowered from the chariot and taken to the vault in the seated position. The funeral service reached its last part. The silver crosier and gold cross were replaced by wooden ones. The face was covered, body anointed with myrrh and vault filled with incense before it was closed.

The star faded out, its lustre totally spent over seventy two years. But the holy aura would remain for ever. And the resurrected soul attending on the Master.

He was a rare phenomenon, Mar Ivanios. He worked in his Master's vineyard tirelessly to fulfil his mission. Christ's mission of seeking the

lost and the least was entirely his. His sacrifice was invaluable, his love divine.

He was a Man of God. Came into a world of unease and disquiet. Lived like a prophet of peace, accord and love. Left a message for the sick and palsied world and went back to his Master.

His name is indelibly inscribed in the Book of Life.

APPENDIX

With divine grace and acceptance of the throne of faith, Cyril Mar Baselios, Metropolitan Archbishop of Malankara Catholic Church sends his peace and blessings to all Priests, Brothers, Sisters and Believers.

Respected Priests, Brothers, Sisters and dear Believers in Christ,

The Holy Church has always tried to present people who have lived heroic and sacrificial lives in the cause of Christian spirituality and fellowship of the Church as models for the people of God. The tradition of the Church of naming people who have reached the pinnacle of faith in life as saints is a case in point. When the faithful, whatever rank or order they may belong to in the Church are declared saints, the Church is officially acknowledging that their lives have been truly Christian. So it becomes solidly acceptable to the flock. This practice opens up a sure and well-laid path for humanity in general and Christians in particular to move on toward a life of fulfilment. Thus a beacon of light is raised amidst encircling gloom in crisis-ridden lives.

Children of Malankara cannot forget the significant contribution that Mar Ivanios has made to the Church through his sterling life of faith and sacrifice. The heroic leadership that he gave to the Church remains a sure guide to his successors. The depth of faith, the nobility of his Christian life, the perfection of his devotion, the zeal of his commitment to Church life and the daring gamut of spiritual exercises that he initiated present glorious object lessons to the faithful flock. His noble life of sacrifice was a handiwork of the Almighty that lit the lamp that kept burning till the Malankara Church had left the tortuous maze they had been traversing and entered the highway of Church unity. The life and vision of the revered Thirumeni is an illustrious model to all of us in our Church life. So it is our duty to highlight the memory of this great soul which sacrificed itself for the cause of Church unity, in the present time when the spirit of ecumenism is on the rise and steps for unification of

the whole Church are being seriously pursued. By getting this acknowledged and promulgated through our authority of persuasive instruction in our shepherding role, we would definitely be encouraging and fortifying our faith as a community. Our Priests, Brothers, Sisters and lay believers have represented to the Church authorities requesting that the beatification process of our spiritual father and blessed leader be taken up without further delay. The members of the Congregations founded by our revered and bemoaned Thirumeni have taken special interest in this.

Taking into consideration all these we are proceeding with the Beatification process of Mar Ivanios Thirumeni. And we have appointed Fr. Antony Valiyavilayil, as Postulator to head the canonical proceedings. We call upon every member of the Church to give all assistance possible to help him discharge his duties. For the success of this we will have Holy Qurbana at 8.am at our Cathedral on 25th February 1998, followed by 'Dhoopa Prarthana' at the vault of the reveredly remembered Thirumeni. We call upon the prayers and presence of all of you Priests, members of Congregation and others for the success of these divine sacraments.

May the Almighty shower his abundant blessings on all our endeavours which redound to his honour. And this with the prayers of our Blessed Virgin Mary, all the Saints and our spiritual father St. Thomas the Apostle.

Most Rev. Cyril Mar Baselios (sd)
Metropolitan Archbishop, Trivandrum
Metropolitan, Malankara Catholic Hierarchy

Trivandrum
February 2, 1998.

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